COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE NSW PLANNING SYSTEM


PlanningNSW

in partnership with

NSW Department of Local Government
Lgov NSW
Institute of Public Administration Australia (NSW Division)
Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division)
International Association for Public Participation
NSW Premier’s Department

Prepared for PlanningNSW by Elton Consulting
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Minister’s Foreword

Building vibrant and sustainable communities is a complex, multi-layered process but at its heart is one critically important component – the views of the community itself.

There is growing recognition both in Australia and internationally that engaging the community in both plan making and development assessment processes results in better planning outcomes.

That is why one of the key principles of planFIRST – the biggest reforms to the NSW planning system in more than two decades – is greater community engagement in the planning and development system.

This handbook and its companion website (http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement) has been designed with that aim in mind. It seeks to describe, in simple language, the best practice community engagement principles, techniques and tools by providing practical examples and stories from the field.

It is the result of a unique collaboration with our partners who are leading community engagement practitioners – Lgov NSW, the Institute of Public Administration Australia (NSW Division), Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division), NSW Premier’s Department, NSW Department of Local Government and the International Association for Public Participation.

In addition, all local councils in NSW were invited to contribute stories and experiences for inclusion in the handbook and on the website.

This co-operative approach has resulted in a single, comprehensive, and easy to read practical resource for practitioners.

I would like to thank all of our partners for their contribution and welcome that effort continuing as this resource grows through the addition of new stories and developments from the field.

It is my pleasure to present the Community Engagement handbook to you on behalf of the NSW Government and our partners.

We look forward to receiving your contributions to the website and your on-going support in working to improve our planning systems – making them more accessible and responsive to community views and, as a result, delivering better communities across NSW.

The Hon. Andrew Refshauge, MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Planning
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Minister for Housing
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PART A
Setting the context
sections 01–04
A practical resource for all parties

The Community Engagement Handbook and its companion website (www.planning.nsw.gov.au/engagement/) has been developed by a unique partnership of practitioners and advisers as a single, comprehensive, easy to read resource for practitioners in the NSW planning and development system.

The planning system can involve competition and confrontation as it impacts on the value of land and quality of life, and is often the intersection between public and private sector interests. In the face of diverse views and interests it is difficult to achieve universal consensus, however, it is widely acknowledged that early engagement with the community in both plan making and development assessment offers considerable benefits for all parties involved. It can ensure better planning outcomes as a result of taking account of a wide range of views, increasing the integrity and quality of decisions.

This handbook and website is a starting point in fulfilling the need for practical guidance on how to conduct quality processes of community engagement. Hopefully they represent a solid foundation for developing leading practice through feedback and adding success stories to those already collected from the survey of all councils in NSW and from the partners in the project. Designed with local and State government environmental planning practitioners in mind, the handbook and website are also useful for others who use the planning and development system, including the development industry, businesses, residents, interest groups and community organisations.

Consultation was of prime importance in the development of this resource. The views of local and State government practitioners, key stakeholder groups and public participation practitioners were sought during one-to-one sessions and workshops held by Elton Consulting, the authors of the handbook.

The handbook’s content builds on the publication, Ideas for community consultation, issued for comment by the then Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (now PlanningNSW) in February 2001. The feedback received on that document from planners around the State has been informative and helpful in shaping content and emphasis.

The handbook and its companion website are initiatives of PlanningNSW in partnership with:
- NSW Premier’s Department
- NSW Department of Local Government
- Lgov NSW (formerly the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW)
- Institute of Public Administration Australia (NSW Division)
- Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division)
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Reference
Ideas for community consultation.
See Section 8, Stories, Item 37

Website URL
An independent analysis of submissions on planFIRST White Paper,
What's included in the handbook:

- a guide to NSW plan making and development assessment processes, including the planFIRST reforms to the planning system
- leading practice principles that underpin successful engagement processes
- descriptions of commonly used engagement techniques
- a step-by-step model for designing, planning, organising, implementing and evaluating any process
- current practice examples for some of the most common techniques
- guidance on the resource implications of each technique
- sources of further information and resources to support engagements.

This handbook is a companion to the internet site at www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/. You are encouraged to visit the website because it has a number of links to useful resources unavailable in the handbook. The interactive nature of the website also offers a forum within which ideas and experiences can be exchanged more easily.

What this handbook aims to achieve

The handbook is intended as a source of reference for anyone keen to improve the quality of community engagement in the NSW planning and development system. Understandably, there are often limits on time, money and staff skills to plan, design and review your engagement processes.

This handbook is designed to be:
Adaptable: useful if you work at State, regional or local level
Relevant: applicable to everyday experience in the NSW planning system
Accessible: easy to use, written in non-technical plain English
Useful: no matter whether your budget is $500 or many times that amount
Updatable: easy to update via the website.

How to use this handbook

The Contents at the front of the handbook show what is covered in each section. The margin within each section makes two types of cross-reference, to:

- further information contained within the handbook, such as stories or engagement techniques
- references for further information.
If you are planning an engagement process, the following sequence will help you navigate the handbook.

1. Check whether a certain kind of engagement is required for the process you are undertaking in the summary of minimum consultation requirements, Appendix 1.

2. Review the leading practice principles in Section 5. These provide a framework within which to plan.

3. Visit key steps in Section 6 where you will find a five-step checklist to community engagement.

4. Opportunities for engagement in the NSW planning system are profiled in Section 4. Sections 7 and 8 provide a guide to engagement techniques and offer stories that illustrate how techniques are being applied in the field around NSW.

Give us your feedback

You can help us to improve the handbook and website for future users by telling us what you think. This handbook and its companion website are a foundation that will be built on over time. It will be updated as legislation or practice changes, as well as through your comments.

You are encouraged to share your community engagement experiences and stories since they are essential ingredients to the handbook and website. We welcome your own practical examples as a source of inspiration in terms of what works and what doesn’t and we appreciate contacts for further information.

You are also invited to participate in the discussion forums on the Premier’s Department 'communitybuilders' website to share learning and enrich the dialogue.

Just as every engagement process should be evaluated, so should this handbook and website. It will help us to move along the path of continuous improvement if you send your feedback to:

Email: engagement@planning.nsw.gov.au
Street address: PlanningNSW
Henry Deane Building
20 Lee Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Post: GPO Box 3927 NSW 2001

Website URL
A definition

The term community engagement broadly captures public processes in which the general public and other interested parties are invited to contribute to particular proposals or policy changes. Community engagement has the potential to go beyond merely making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes. It entails a more active exchange of information and viewpoints between the sponsoring organisation and the public, however this public is defined.

Community engagement covers many types of exchange between organisations and the public. The most commonly used terms are:

- **Consultation** – refers broadly to the way in which organisations seek the views of particular stakeholders or the wider public in order to improve a project or outcome.
- **Participation** – refers generally to more active processes in which the public is given a greater role in formulating plans or influencing development outcomes.

This spectrum of engagement has been depicted in many ways over the years. A continuum presented in the table below has international recognition through IAP2 – the International Association for Public Participation, one of the partners in the development of this handbook and website. IAP2 is a not-for-profit organisation established to advance the practice of public participation. Each of the five categories of engagement contains an objective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public and private concerns are consistently understood and considered</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IAP2 International Association for Public Participation.
Each of the five categories of engagement also contains a commitment to those involved in a process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promise to the public</td>
<td>Promise to the public</td>
<td>Promise to the public</td>
<td>Promise to the public</td>
<td>Promise to the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision</td>
<td>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible</td>
<td>To place final decision making in the hands of the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IAP2 International Association for Public Participation.

These IAP2 categories are used throughout the handbook to describe relationships between processes and techniques. However, local government in NSW commonly clusters the techniques of engagement into four categories:

- Information giving
- Information seeking
- Information sharing
- Participatory decision making.

The importance of defined community engagement processes

Community engagement is not a magic wand that can be waved to make all parties happy. If community engagements are not conducted in good faith and do not fully engage the community, they can be perceived as cynical and manipulative exercises. They may also be seen as tokenism responding to dominant voices and ignoring the broader community, as a means of co-opting groups or defusing opposition, as falsely raising public expectations, or as substitutes for good government and sound policy making.

This is why community engagements must be conducted in a clear, transparent manner that provides the public and all participants with a realistic understanding of the policy and decision making process and the range of possible outcomes. Part of this approach is clarifying the limits of the community’s influence in the process. This is particularly necessary when the decision making power ultimately rests with government. Without a clear definition of the realities of a particular situation, it is inevitable that a sense of distrust will be generated about the engagement process.

Consulting the public does not mean that we have to follow, literally, what is said. Councils need to lead public opinion as well as react to it – otherwise we would never have made progress on equal opportunities or environmental issues.
Benefits of community engagement

Working closely with communities is becoming ever more integrated into the day-to-day planning operations of government and the private sectors. Increasingly there is an expectation and recognition that the community should have greater involvement in decision making processes. Governments’ recent emphasis on community engagement is partly a response to the community’s apparent apathy and cynicism, arising from a perceived lack of opportunity to influence the decision making process. Healthy democracies must continually promote opportunities for people to be involved in decision making in matters of public interest.

There are potential benefits for all parties through engagement with communities. For those in policy, plan making or development processes – for the sponsoring organisation, for major stakeholders and for members of the broader community, the process promises successful outcomes. Better ways of working with communities should lead to good government, good management and good business.

Value to communities

- Increased access – accessibility needs to be considered in its broadest sense. This implies the physical accessibility of meetings and engagements, and access to information so that involvement is well informed. People are more able to take part in decisions and processes which interest or affect them. Appendix 3 provides information on groups that require special consideration.
- Better information and understanding – opportunities are open for people to make informed input to a plan, policy or proposal. At the same time, decision makers and service providers may find they have a more effective means to give an account of the reasons for their policies and proposed actions.
- Sense of involvement – the mutual sense of ‘ownership’ for all parties is enhanced through processes which encourage sharing responsibility in planning, development, management or evaluation of proposed policies or developments. This should increase the chance of better outcomes being reached through more collaborative processes that build the capacity and sustainability of communities.
- Better outcomes – outcomes can be achieved that more fully reflect the aspirations of the affected community.

Value for proponents

- Better ideas are brought to a project.
- Conflict and delay are minimised.
- Relationships are established in the local community that can benefit current and future projects.
- Priorities are tested in the market place.
- Value for money is optimised by enabling more efficient use of resources.
- Reputation in the community is enhanced.

Reference
Adapted from Landcom’s Stakeholder consultation workbook.
See Section 8, Stories, Item 60
Value for government

- Credibility/accountability is increased for government.
- Provides an opportunity for involving the broader community and satisfies community expectations/desire/demand for involvement. Findings are available from a community about how a proposal will affect them and what measures might be appropriate to address impacts.
- Avenues are opened for the community to raise issues incorporating local knowledge, expertise and ideas.
- There are savings in time and money by addressing community concerns early in the process.
- Community values and priorities are expressed.
- Opportunity for capacity building in local communities.
- Development is more sustainable.
- A deeper understanding is developed around an issue or problem through public information sharing, discussion and deliberation.
- Improving democratic outcomes, or the equity or fairness of a policy or proposed project.
- Provides an active means for researching the community impacts of policies, services, education campaigns and the like.
- Better decisions are more likely through less duplication and more rational use of resources.
- More acceptable decisions lead to more effective policies/programs/services.
- Networks and sustainable processes can be developed to ensure the continuation of engagement in the future.
- Statutory requirements are fulfilled.
Introduction

Within the NSW planning system, various State and local government agencies have particular roles and statutory obligations in managing the diverse expectations of the wider community. Community engagement occurs in different ways and with varying levels of community involvement on issues of environmental protection, natural resource management, planning and building system reform, integration of transport and land use, industry investment, urban form and design.

These issues often intersect at local, regional and State levels.

The NSW planning system is based on the legislative framework provided by the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). The EP&A Act provides the legal basis for both plan making and development assessment.

The Act is based on a number of broad objectives that cover matters such as:
- land use and resource management
- promoting social and economic welfare
- protecting the environment
- sharing responsibility for planning between different levels of government
- providing opportunities for public involvement and participation.

The planFIRST reforms (described below) are initially being implemented within this legal framework.

The current scope of plan making and development assessment in NSW is depicted in this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan making</th>
<th>Development assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State environmental planning policies (SEPP)</td>
<td>State planning policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional environmental plans (REP)</td>
<td>Regional strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local environment plans (LEP)</td>
<td>Local plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of these plans or assessments have their own processes, many of which are complex and differ according to the scale of development proposed, or the type of plan being prepared.

Current legislated requirements for community consultation are not extensive, and are described in Appendix 1 in summary form for your reference. This handbook explores the options for engagement beyond the minimum requirements.

**planFIRST**

planFIRST is the reform of the NSW planning system. It will make the system simpler, more strategic and effective, and will result in major efficiency improvements, increased certainty for investment, and reduced costs.

One of the key principles of planFIRST is of enhanced community consultation in the plan making process. This is part of an international cultural change in planning practices that acknowledges that meaningful community engagement can achieve better planning outcomes. This is partly through achieving ownership of a clearer strategic direction that ensures that there is better co-ordination between agencies and communities in seeking to achieve these aspirations.

The simplified and strategic structure of planFIRST seeks to implement this cultural change in planning practice.

Key elements of planFIRST include:

- better strategic planning
- coordinated responses to environmental planning issues in the preparation of plans and strategies
- enhanced community engagement in the plan making process
- planning that is tailored to the characteristics of individual regions and places
- plans being kept up to date and their effects monitored
- better use of information technology to provide planning information and communicate with stakeholders.

This proposed framework for planning was described in a Government White Paper released in March 2001. The implementation of planFIRST is underway and will roll out across the State over the next few years. planFIRST will be the NSW planning system by July 2007. The implementation of planFIRST will require changing plan making practice initially within the existing legislative framework provided by the EP&A Act.

planFIRST embraces State, regional and local plan making. By developing plans at each of these levels through a collaborative and inclusive approach between government and the community, outcomes and decisions are intended to contribute to a more sustainable future. Central to planFIRST is the development of strong partnerships with communities and other interested parties in setting the direction for a place. Effective community engagement is a critical requirement of the new system.

The main components of planFIRST at the State, regional and local levels are:
State planning policies

State planning policies under planFIRST will be prepared by State Government and will:

- bring together State level planning policies in a single document that is easy to read and understand and accessible electronically
- include relevant policies from various State government agencies that affect planning
- focus on the key intended outcomes and priorities for planning in NSW, providing a clear framework for regional strategies
- provide a framework and direction for regional strategies, which then interpret and apply the policies to each region.

Regional strategies

Regional strategies under planFIRST will be prepared under the guidance of a regional forum and made by the Minister for Planning and will:

- provide a framework for delivering a sustainable future in all regions across NSW, that considers economic, social and environmental issues together from the outset
- incorporate relevant State planning policies
- involve State and local government, business and communities working together to develop a vision and prepare a strategy that gives clear direction for the region
- develop outcomes for the region and the strategies and actions necessary to achieve that vision
- provide indicators of success in achieving these outcomes and processes for evaluation, review and change
- link together other planning and management processes relevant to the region like catchment planning, regional service delivery planning and economic development planning
- guide proactive decision making across the region
- provide a clear framework for local planning in the region
- be available electronically and regularly monitored and reviewed.

Local plans

Local plans under planFIRST will be prepared by councils and will:

- be a single plan for the local area that will be easy to read and understand, available electronically, and will be regularly monitored and reviewed
- develop the vision with the community and the strategies and actions needed to get there
- include a single, comprehensive planning strategy for a local government area which considers the key social, economic and environmental issues together from the outset
recognise the special characteristics of neighbourhoods within the council area by adopting a locality approach to planning the future
implement the regional strategy that has been prepared in collaboration between local government, State Government and the community at the local level
include all the planning controls that apply within the local government area.

Ideas for community consultation

The planFIRST White Paper proposed inclusive engagement processes and aspired to ensure ‘...community involvement happens earlier in the process by notifying people of the intention to prepare a local plan, so that they can help set the agenda and not just comment when a draft local plan is on exhibition.’

Ideas for community consultation was released as a companion to the planFIRST White Paper to illustrate some alternative techniques for community involvement. Reactions to both the planFIRST White Paper and the draft Ideas for community consultation made it clear that those involved in the current NSW system supported the general approach and its emphasis on community engagement. The following paraphrased comments about consultation reflect concerns that are addressed in this handbook:

- consultation needs to be more effective than it has been in the past
- engagement should occur in the preparatory phases of plan making, or pre-lodgment in the case of complex development applications
- an open, collaborative, interactive process needs to be established to enable community values, aspirations and needs to be identified and brought into the plan making process
- the processes should be inclusive, and not geared in favour of the ‘usual suspects’
- consultation should be a continual process
- community involvement should be as important in State and regional planning as it is in local plan making
- planFIRST and any community engagement guide should be mindful of the resources that currently exist to support consultation.

Comment
As can be seen in the examples of guidelines throughout this handbook many councils already take this approach when preparing their plans.
See Section 8, Stories, for examples
Discussions with practitioners during preparation of this handbook also highlighted a number of key messages and lessons:

- The purpose of community engagement and the constraints need to be explained in an honest and clear manner so that the community understands the process and purpose, while it may disagree with the content matter.
- It is important to be clear about cost and human resources before planning in order to avoid creating high expectations in the community that cannot be met.
- More time needs to be spent up front to save time later (it takes more time to deal with oppositions after submissions are made, but taking time to plan better may reduce the possibility of having unnecessary confrontations).
- The history of consultations in the community as well as the stakeholders must be researched and analysed before starting to plan approaches or methods.
- It is vital to have strong communication strategies to work with other agencies to create solid groundwork.
- It is critically important to be clear about who is representing who in public forums and ensuring a diversity of views are represented.
- Capacity building requires a long term commitment otherwise it may be perceived as patronising.

**Principles being put into practice**

A number of the community engagement principles on which planFIRST is based are already being put into practice around NSW by State and local governments, as well as parts of the development industry. Some examples follow.

- Many councils have comprehensive community consultation policies that embrace a range of techniques including the establishment of precinct committees, adopted engagement guidelines, conflict resolution policies.
- A number of developers, including Landcom, have developed community engagement guidelines that are implemented prior to those parts of the development process that require consultation.
- PlanningNSW has incorporated the ideas of community capacity building in engaging with project partners in the work of both the Living Centres teams and in Urban Improvement Program projects.
This section identifies a range of community engagement opportunities in plan making and development assessment processes. While drawing on current State and local government practice, particular emphasis is given to opportunities afforded by planFIRST.

It also looks at how community engagement and sustainability objectives are being brought together in the development assessment system.

Opportunities for community engagement within these processes have been simplified as shown below.

**>> Plan making**
1. Pre-plan phase
2. Plan making phase
3. Ongoing monitoring and review phase

This simple framework applies to both regional strategies and local plans.

**>> Development assessment**
1. Pre-lodgment
2. Pre-determination
3. Post-determination

**>> Plan making**

Plan making provides a platform for a rich variety of community engagement processes. A one-off consultation event is rarely enough. The entire process involves an exchange of information over time, each exchange building on the other, to increase professional and public knowledge and understanding of the future for a place.

Community involvement in plan making is essential to develop ownership of strategic objectives, understand the value of the planning process, and deliver better outcomes for the future of those communities.

Plan making is important to government at all levels and critical for a number of communities of interest. Community engagement techniques that recognise multi-disciplinary approaches and planning as a process require a diversity of approaches if plan making is to measurably achieve the objectives sought.

See Section 2, Engagement Essentials – Value for government
Opportunities for community engagement through planFIRST

A number of key characteristics of planFIRST revolve around community participation and engagement, including:

- enhanced community engagement in the plan making process
- stronger partnerships
- creating a regional focus for planning by involving local councils, State agencies, business and the community in regional forums, working together on regional issues
- collaborative ‘place-based’ plan making through regional forums and local plan making to implement a whole of government, collaborative approach, with a strong focus on community involvement
- local councils and communities involved in creating new, regional solutions to community problems
- ensuring all strategies and plans are founded on the principles of sustainability
- effective consultation will help to deliver more effective State planning policies that are clearly focused on the outcomes they are intended to achieve, easily understood by the community and provide consistent whole of government guidance to regional forums.

At both regional and local levels a clear framework will be delivered (a regional strategy and a new local plan) to guide productive decision making.

Effective community engagement will be central to:

- developing a vision at both local and regional levels
- identifying the environmental, social and economic issues together from the outset
- assisting in determining strategies and actions to achieve sustainable outcomes.

These outcomes will need to be monitored for their success. This can be done using sustainability indicators established by the same partnerships that were formed during engagement and strategic planning processes.

Questions to start a plan making process

At both a local and regional level, use the following strategic planning framework to ask:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- What will we achieve?
- Where, when and how will we achieve it?
- How do we get there?
- How are we going?

What shall we do about it?

Source: Adapted from the Development Assessment Forum, Good strategic planning guide (DAF December 2001).
1. Pre-plan phase

There are opportunities for engaging with the community at both local and regional levels in preparing regional strategies and new local plans. Information on regional strategies, regional forums and local plans can be found in Section 3.

It is important to involve the broader community at this early stage. This is when a vision is created and values and criteria established for measuring success. Early involvement helps build ownership of the plan and understanding of the planning process.

Listed below are some ideas on ways to proceed. As planFIRST is implemented and practitioners provide feedback on their learning and experience through the website these methods can be substantially expanded.

**State level**

Early consultation in the development of new State planning policies can help ensure that new policies are more effective and better understood.

A State planning policies committee representing a whole-of-State government approach will be established to provide partnerships between relevant government agencies. Its aim is to bring together policies relevant to planning at the State level and facilitate early discussion of State planning policies before they are prepared. The community's views may be sought using whatever method(s) are considered appropriate for the new draft State planning policy.

**Regional level**

- Begin with a visioning exercise that:
  - identifies regional aspirations and needs with the broader community (business, peak groups, culturally diverse groups, councils and State agencies)
  - engages local government in a region to profile and scope the issues for a regional strategy.
- Commit to effective consultation and build trust between communities, business and government agencies. This may be achieved by reporting back to everyone what the consultation process found and what will happen next.
- Allow where possible for local plans to develop tailored policies, actions or controls to implement proposed regional strategies.
- Identify and explore cross boundary and regional issues.
- Develop indicators of engagement (process) and content (output) success.

**Local level**

- Begin visioning by:
  - actively involving the community in developing a local profile
  - identifying local aspirations and needs.
- Build skills and community understanding in planning by linking neighbourhoods to places with distinctive local character – a key component of a new plan.
- Tap into the regional strategy process to identify State concerns and issues that need to be addressed in a new local plan.

Reference

*State planning policies guide*
PlanningNSW (coming soon)

See Section 8, Stories, item 51

*Ideas for community consultation.*
See Section 8, Stories, item 37

Website URL
www.aberdeenfutures.com/community.asp
- Ensure that all sectors of the community are actively involved including women, children and young people, people with disabilities, older people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the local business community.
- Commit to effective consultation and build trust between communities, business and government agencies.
- Develop indicators of engagement (process) and content (output) success.

>> 2. Plan making phase

There are a number of statutory requirements under the EP&A Act for consultation for both local and regional planning. See Appendix 1. Some opportunities for greater community engagement are described below.

State level
The community and key stakeholders may be involved in the development of new State planning policies in a variety of ways. This will include reference to the State planning policy committee, and might include key reference groups and/or various community involvement techniques, depending on the nature of the new policy.

Regional level
- Involve the community in identifying the intended outcomes, actions and sustainability indicators. Use existing networks and mechanisms to capture the community's input.
- Consider how State planning policies will apply to the situation and inform the community about them.
- Consider environmental, social and economic issues together from the outset through the regional forum and the regional strategy teams in collaboration with key interest groups and the community.
- Develop actions and strategies to achieve the outcomes identified earlier in the process. Work in collaboration with key agencies and individuals across business, community and environment.
- In developing a regional strategy, provide a framework for local planning in the region.
- Develop alternative scenarios and graphically illustrate these to show how policies, controls and actions can influence outcomes.
- Resolve cross regional, State policy and local plan implementation issues.
- Test the draft strategy against the values and aspirations identified in the earlier visioning phase.
- Widely notify groups within the region and place the draft strategy on public exhibition.
Local level

- Where regional strategies are being developed concurrently with a local plan, dovetail community engagement exercises and use joint resources creatively.
- Where possible use the opportunity to structure engagement to integrate with councils’ consultation processes on social/community plans and management plans under the Local Government Act.
- Use the combined skills and expertise under social/community and cultural planning processes to tap into a wider community sector. Gather and use data to assist in defining localities for the local plan.
- Develop actions and strategies to achieve the outcomes identified earlier in the process. Work in collaboration with key agencies and individuals across business, community and environment.
- Depict (visually) the likely built form that will be generated. Show how the standards and controls put in place will achieve the outcomes of the plan within the locality.
- Test the draft plan against the values and aspirations identified in the earlier visioning phase.
- Check indicators of engagement (process) and content (output) success.
- Widely notify groups within the community and place the draft plan on public exhibition.
- Ensure the plan incorporates relevant State and regional policies, plans and strategies.

The process of engagement is not linear and therefore the points above are not necessarily sequential.

>> 3. Ongoing monitoring and review phase

Indicators developed through the previous two phases will be used to monitor and review the success of policies, strategies and plans.

Both regional and local levels need to establish ongoing monitoring and review systems. For councils this will be tied to whether or not identified actions are achieved. It will be reported on annually either through council’s annual report, state of the environment reporting or management planning process. Key indicators are a valuable method of measuring achievements. A local plan needs to be reviewed every five years in order to respond to the changing needs of the community and any regional strategy changes.

Once a regional strategy is in place, the regional forum will need to meet annually to discuss the performance of the strategy. Regional strategy teams will monitor the progress of identified actions and strategies throughout the year. This will require close liaison among those with identified responsibilities.

The regional forum must review the strategy every five years, and report to the Minister. All strategies will be approved by the Minister.

State planning policies are also to be reviewed every five years with input from regional forums and councils.
Development assessment

Community consultation is often the most challenging form of community engagement in the development assessment process. This is true whether it is for State significant developments or a development application for relatively minor work, like an extension to an existing dwelling.

Local communities and interest groups are increasingly knowledgeable about the planning and development system and well equipped to comment on development proposals. Communities expect that proponents of development, and consent authorities alike, will take consultation seriously and commit to providing information on and consultation beyond the minimum requirements. This challenge is being met by public and private sector organisations.

Public participation is an important aspect in developing large infrastructure projects based on sustainability or for projects requiring environmental impact assessment.

PlanningNSW’s Sustainability in EIA guidelines (2003) states ‘...the community has an important role to play in the early stages of a project’s formulation, particularly with respect to testing the validity of the identified needs/demands for the project and identifying and evaluating alternatives to meet needs/demands.’

In 2000–01, 111,567 development applications were processed by councils in NSW under Part 4 of the EP&A Act. Two recent surveys of local government have both revealed that local government is aware that effective community engagement can play an important contribution in the development assessment process and ultimately produce better and more acceptable development outcomes.

It is important to note that many councils and PlanningNSW encourage the development industry and its professional advisors to embrace community and stakeholder consultation. Their emphasis is on the pre-design phase (before the applicant fixes on a design) or before the development application is lodged with council (pre-lodgment).

The benefits of continued consultation through pre-determination to post-determination are equally important as outlined below. Even when community engagement does not result in collaborative and cooperative processes, it may identify competing interests that need to be acknowledged throughout a project.

Generally, consultation will be the responsibility of a proponent, especially prior to a development consent or approval being sought. The role of local government or PlanningNSW is to encourage an appropriate level of engagement rather than undertake community engagement directly. Various methods can achieve this such as providing guidelines or practice notes and offering guidance or advice to proponents.

In seeking to achieve best practice in community engagement important issues to consider are resources, timeliness and certainty of the process for the proponent.
The following sections make an arbitrary distinction between ‘local government’ and ‘other consent authorities’ projects from the community engagement viewpoint. Generally ‘other consent authorities’ are projects that local government does not process since they fall within Part 5 of the EP&A Act or for various reasons (such as State significant development) are Part 4 activities that require the consent of the Minister for Planning.

>> 1. Pre-lodgment

Local government
Councils are signalling their desire for applicants to seek the views of potentially affected communities prior to development application lodgment. Some councils have adopted development control plans that provide guidelines to applicants on issues like:
- notification and advertisement of proposals
- who should be consulted
- matters that should be discussed with stakeholders
- what evidence of the consultation process and its outcomes should be submitted to council with the development application
- how council will use the information submitted during the assessment stage.

Other councils are conveying the message about the importance of pre-lodgment consultation in various ways, including:
- advice provided at pre-lodgment development advisory panels or similar process
- production of development advisory panel practice notes
- advice during preliminary assessment meetings
- information contained in customer service charters/guarantees
- ‘how to’ explanatory forums for potential applicants
- general development assessment kits, including requirements for specific development application types
- web-based guides to development application processes
- development application information checklists.

Where place managers are employed, they are a valuable resource in facilitating discussion on key issues including large or controversial development applications and are often involved in pre-lodgment meetings.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in the Interim May 2002 report *Taking the devil out of development* favoured the idea of a model policy for development notification. This would assist in ensuring a minimum standard for notification throughout NSW and provide some guidance to the community as to what is perceived as being reasonable. PlanningNSW is working with the ICAC and others to address this and other matters raised in the report.

**Website URLs**

- www.idetermine.nsw.gov.au (Penrith Council)
- www.parracity.nsw.gov.au (Parramatta City Council)

**Website URL**

Other consent authorities

Like councils, PlanningNSW has been active in encouraging proponents to implement effective community engagement. PlanningNSW has also produced a series of environmental impact assessment (EIA) guidelines that encourage proponents to incorporate community engagement throughout the life cycle of a project.

Typical projects in the category of ‘non-local government’ include:
- coal mines
- major industrial developments, both examples of Part 4 projects
- roads
- transmission lines and sewerage schemes, examples of Part 5 projects.

Much of the community engagement for these types of projects revolves around the environmental impact assessment process. The EIA would be in the form of an environmental impact statement (EIS) for many projects, particularly those which would be facilitated by effective community engagement. Engagement with the local community, industry, councils and government agencies early in the EIA process can be very helpful in making a preliminary assessment of the potential viability of a proposal at a particular site. It can also ensure that issues of concern are addressed as they arise and that the EIA focuses on those matters that will add value to the decision making process.

Early, effective consultation should enable a proponent to:
- clarify the project’s objectives in terms of community needs and concerns
- identify feasible alternatives (in particular alternative locations) and examine their relative merits in terms of environmental, social and economic factors
- identify and prioritise environmental issues, and establish the scope of future studies
- identify processes for continued community involvement.

Community engagement at this stage extends across the first four parts of the IAP2 spectrum – inform, consult, involve and collaborate. Techniques used in the processes are project specific and depend on the project type, location, community characteristics and environmental issues.

Planning focus meetings are a formal technique used to facilitate consultation with relevant government agencies prior to commencing the environmental assessment. Planning focus meetings tend to involve only government agencies or peak community groups. A similar type of meeting (a community focus meeting) can be held to involve the wider community.

Appendix 2 identifies in summary form the procedures and processes for consent and approval under Part 4 and Part 5 of the EP&A Act.
Infrastructure projects – developer

Private developers and also government bodies may be proponents for infrastructure works so the following discussion refers to both groups.

In recent years many proponents have recognised the substantial benefits of involving the community at the earliest stage in their planning processes. It is now common for proponents to incorporate time for community engagement in the pre-lodgment, pre-determination, post-determination and construction phases of their project plans. For example, the RTA has produced a manual for community involvement. This document aims to achieve effective community involvement in individual projects and also facilitate community involvement in the RTA’s broader responsibilities.

From being fearful of community engagement and generally reluctant to consult, some proponents have become advocates of community engagement. This change has been facilitated by their experience of effective community engagement and its positive outcomes for the project and the community.

Positive outcomes include:

* enhanced working relationships with community members and local and State authorities
* improved community understanding of proposals
* avoiding predetermined solutions through constructive debate and generating community identified alternative solutions
* valuable outcomes in the design process based on local inputs of knowledge and expertise
* reduced conflict between the organisation and community interests
* potential for speedier development determination.

Proponents also acknowledge the risks. Community engagement can be resource intensive on highly contested development proposals and may slow an intended development program. The advantages gained by incorporating community knowledge and expertise early in the process will, however, assist the project’s overall management and outcome.

Community engagement is not about arriving at a consensus, but more importantly, about giving information, listening and discussing in an iterative process to shape the final product. It is also about acknowledging that the community will not make the final decision which will be made by a council, or a State authority or a Minister.

>> 2. Pre-determination (exhibition, assessment and decision phase)

Local government

The minimum requirements for consultation on a development are summarised in Appendix 1 of this handbook. Many consent and approval authorities are doing far more than the minimum. They are undertaking a wide variety of strategies and techniques to obtain community input at the pre-determination phase of the development assessment process.

Reference

RTA community involvement practice notes and resource manual,
RTA (1998)

Reference

Local Government Information Unit, UK
Some effective techniques

Effective techniques include:

- broad public notification and advertising of development application receipt and opportunity to comment through:
  - onsite notices
  - extensive newspaper advertisements
  - notices in mayoral columns
  - letters to an extended area around the subject site
  - posting of information on council websites
- referral of applications to precinct committees and place managers for comment
- onsite inspections with the proponent and community members
- public display/exhibition of the proposal incorporating plans and drawings, master plans, models, artists impressions and computer modelling with an associated opportunity for community feedback verbally or by feedback forms
- small public meetings or forums about the proposal with presentations from the proponent and professional advisors and an opportunity for public discussion
- independently facilitated meetings between the applicant and community members; and, in the case of highly contentious proposals – formal mediation conferences conducted by a council appointed external mediator.

Other consent authorities

PlanningNSW uses similar techniques in obtaining community input at this phase of the development assessment process. The project’s proponent is also responsible for handling the community engagement process.

Techniques used by PlanningNSW include:

- establishing a project ‘shop front’ in the local community. This would contain details of the proposal including the basic development application material but may also involve additional information such as models and more detailed or larger plans. Representatives of the proponent would also be available to discuss the proposal with individuals
- distribution of a newsletter describing the proposal and the environmental assessment process. Several thousand newsletters may be distributed through a mailout to a wide section of the community.

At this stage of pre-determination the aim would be to inform and consult the community. Appendices 1 and 2 of this handbook summarise the minimum consultation requirements for development.

Comment

From University of NSW surveys –
Best Practice in Development Assessment for Local Government Project and a local government survey for this project.
See Section 8, Stories, item 3

>> 3. Post-determination

Local government

Opportunities for engagement do not finish with the determination of the application. The practice of facilitating post-determination engagement is variable but our survey has identified examples of the steps taken by some councils. These include:

- persons or organisations who made submissions are advised of the decision
- minutes of council panel/committee meeting that made the decision are posted to council’s website
- the use of dispute resolution methods to facilitate after decision review.
In addition to council required processes, a number of major residential developers are committed to continuing community engagement through the construction phase and are putting in place mechanisms for engagement with residents post-occupancy.

Other consent authorities

For larger projects whether private development or public infrastructure, it is important to involve the public during the construction and operational phases. Even the best planned projects may have unforeseen consequences. Often it is not until work begins on the ground and the project begins operating that some members of the community really notice what is occurring in their local community.

It is common for the community engagement at this stage of a project to be specified in a project’s condition or approval.

The following table has been developed as a helpful cross-reference for practitioners in the plan making or development assessment process. Use it with the IAP2 spectrum (pages 6 and 7) and Section 7 - Community Engagement Techniques and Tools, to decide which techniques are most suitable.

Source: Adapted from IAP2 spectrum.
PART B
How to engage
sections 05 – 07
The nine headings listed below acknowledge that effective community engagement is built on trust, goodwill and respect. It should be driven by a set of principles not shaped by particular techniques. Consistent application of these principles may not guarantee a successful process in all circumstances, but it will help you avoid the most common mistakes.

These principles should be understood in the context of the NSW planning system. The fact is that the community is not the decision maker in most of the processes under discussion. There are going to be limits to what the community can and cannot influence. Unless the extent of the community’s influence is clearly spelt out in the design and implementation of a process there is a risk that the essence of good community engagement – trust, goodwill and respect – will be lost in the early stages.

The principles are clustered under nine headings:

1. Clarity of purpose
2. Commitment
3. Communication
4. Evidence
5. Flexibility and responsiveness
6. Timeliness
7. Inclusiveness
8. Collaboration
9. Continuous learning
1. Clarity of purpose

- Understand clearly why the engagement is occurring, and its context, in order to plan and resource an effective process.
- Ensure the choice of engagement techniques is suitable for the objectives of the community engagement process, the target community and the time and resources available.
- Be clear about how participants can influence the decisions that may be made and, equally important, what cannot be influenced.
- Be clear about the desired outcome.
- Be clear about who should be engaged with to achieve the purpose.

2. Commitment

A demonstration of commitment is important to establishing and maintaining credibility. Without adequate demonstration, the whole process can be undermined.

- Show commitment by allocating sufficient time and resources to the community engagement processes.
- Ensure senior level commitment is visible, that commitments given can be achieved and that those responsible for the process or parts of the process are adequately skilled and prepared.
- Provide and encourage feedback during the process.
- Properly record and document the process and feedback so that participants (and others) can see if and how their input has influenced the process and its outcomes.
- Make community engagement integral to your normal development assessment and plan making practices and operations.

3. Communication

Community engagement is primarily about communication, the two-way process of providing accurate and timely information, and demonstrating that feedback is being heard.

- Communicate openly, honestly and accountably with those you are seeking to engage.
- Ensure that the team engaging with the community is well informed so that it can answer questions during the process.
- Remember that communication is multi-faceted. It does not just include information giving but information gathering, information sharing, collaborative discussion and decision making.
- Clearly communicate the purpose and limitations of the community engagement process at the outset. Agree to the basic procedures and mechanisms at the planning stage.
- Avoid creating false expectations about what community engagement can achieve.
- Acknowledge community input and the time and resources people put into the process.
- Communicate well with your peers and avoid duplication of process. Many communities, particularly those that require special consideration, are faced with an ongoing stream of agencies aiming to consult with them, often on similar matters.
4. Evidence
Good engagement practice is based on sound research and quality information.

- Use latest available research and a sound understanding of history in order to plan the process, and who should be involved.
- Provide quality information to the participants at different stages during the process.
- Ensure accuracy and consistency of information throughout the engagement.

5. Flexibility and responsiveness
Engagement plans have to be flexible during the course of a process; timetables may change, comments may require change, the political environment may change.

- Be flexible at both the planning and implementation stages.
- Be prepared to continually review and revise the way you engage the community during the process.
- Select a range of techniques that enable different communities or sectors to participate effectively.

6. Timeliness
It is important that participants know how long an engagement process is expected to last, and when feedback is expected at each stage of the process.

- Be clear about the time you have for the task.
- Ensure participants receive information in enough time to make effective contributions.
- Inform participants as to when they can expect feedback on their contributions.
- Make sure that feedback is given to participants on time.

7. Inclusiveness
Being inclusive means understanding who is likely to be interested in, or feel the impact of, a particular plan or development.

- Aim to be as inclusive as possible but accept that in few circumstances is it feasible to involve everybody.
- Get to know and understand the communities you want to engage.
- Acknowledge and respect their diversity.
- Accept different agendas, but ensure that dominant special interest groups are not the only voices heard.
- Choose a variety of engagement techniques that offer the widest possible opportunities to participate.
- Avoid jargon and technical language.
- Aim for accessibility. Consider the timing, location and style of engagement events and strategies, as well as the support available to participants (such as translators, childcare, out-of-pocket expenses).
- Pay particular attention to the needs of groups that tend to be under represented in an engagement associated with development assessment and plan making.
8. Collaboration
Leading practice processes require early involvement of community interests at a level that is appropriate for their involvement.

- Adjust for scales of involvement – different interests require different involvement along the engagement spectrum.
- Aim for a participatory approach to development assessment and plan making, particularly in larger, more complex processes.
- Involve the community as early as possible in the process.
- Seek community input at the planning stage of a community engagement process, particularly in the selection of engagement techniques.
- Work with other agencies operating in the area to avoid repetitive consultations with a community on the same or similar subject matter.

9. Continuous learning
See Section 6, Step 5

- Monitor and evaluate as you go – modify your approach as necessary.
- Encourage community feedback on the process itself as well as the subject of the engagement.
- Build on past experience – acknowledge mistakes so that you can learn from them.
- Find out what has happened before in an area relevant to the engagement process subject matter – past consultations may have occurred with or without success.
- Report back within your organisation to ensure the organisation learns from the process.
The five engagement steps

This section suggests a five-step process because plan making and development assessment in NSW takes on many forms from the simple (the basic notification process for a development application) to the more complex (e.g. master plans, State significant developments). It is presented as a cycle because in most of the processes discussed here, engagement with the community is on-going. Also the path of continuous improvement is necessarily circular.
>> Step 1. Design and plan

1. What are the objectives of the planned engagement?
2. Stakeholder analysis – who should be consulted?
3. What are the constraints and opportunities?
4. What resources are available?
5. What will be the indicators of success?
6. Deciding on techniques

>> Step 1.1 What are the objectives of the planned engagement?

Clear objectives are essential to an effective community engagement process. They will shape the process, influence community expectations and form the basis for its outputs and outcomes as well as later evaluation.

At the end of the process the objectives will be reviewed so that a clear statement can be made about what the community has been asked to consider. The statement should contain a definite indication of how much influence the community has in the matter and describe the decision making process.

Likely objectives of the engagement might be to:

- determine community and agency planning and development priorities
- choose between different planning, development and policy options
- set performance standards and targets
- evaluate the performance of an existing policy, strategy or plan or develop a new one
- identify reasons for good or bad performance
- assess the suitability of current plans, policies and services
- generate ideas for future planning purposes
- help pinpoint planning and development problems quickly, so things can be put right before they escalate
- find solutions to planning and development problems
- review progress of a policy, planning or development process
- work towards continuous improvement
- strengthen local democracy by showing people they can make a difference
- build capacity of individuals, organisations and communities
- fulfil statutory requirements (see Appendix 1 for a summary of these requirements).

Objectives of the different phases of the process (e.g. pre-lodgment, post-lodgment, post-determination) should also be considered against the IAP2 spectrum. A range of techniques can be employed to achieve good outcomes.
Developing a range of objectives
Community consultation for the Liverpool–Parramatta Rapid Bus Transitway aimed to:
- inform the community about Transitway concepts and invite feedback pre-feasibility study (information giving/gathering)
- design and implement an appropriate consultation program to operate for the duration of the Transitway feasibility process
- identify key stakeholders and understand their interest in the project (information gathering)
- liaise as required with community groups, industry groups and other stakeholders on matters which arose during the project (information sharing/participatory decision making)
- build awareness and understanding of the consultation and assessment process being adopted for the Transitway (information giving/sharing)
- provide opportunities for the community to raise issues for consideration during the investigation process (information gathering)
- develop appropriate material and aids to adequately communicate issues and design options associated with the Transitway to all interested audiences (information giving).

>> Step 1.2 Stakeholder analysis – who should be consulted?
A number of factors will influence decisions about who should be consulted. These can be summarised as:
- scope of the proposed plan, policy, strategy or development
- the nature of the proposal
- statutory notification/consultation requirements associated with the proposal
- other notification/consultation requirements set out in development control plans (DCPs), council or State government policies and protocols
- who is likely to be directly affected by the matter
- the resources available to the community engagement process
- who is likely to be interested in the matter
- whose involvement is likely to be important to this matter
- level of complexity of the overall process or the issues concerned.

Aim to be inclusive
Many engagements can attract individuals or groups who are organised, knowledgeable, politically connected and articulate. While adding value to the process, their voice can be loudest and care should be taken to ensure that it does not dominate. They have the potential to disenfranchise others who are less articulate or who, for various reasons, do not participate in a public process. If they claim to represent the views of the community or a group it is important to clarify their position before the engagement process starts.

Reference
Liverpool – Parramatta Rapid Bus Transitway Environmental Impact Statement; Sinclair Knight Merz, Roads and Traffic Authority, NSW Department of Transport, August 2000

Comment
Newcastle City Council’s Consultation policy (June 2000) considers different levels of consultation based on the level of complexity of the process or project. There are three categories – simple, intermediate and complex consultation strategies which are used to guide the extent and nature of community engagement. See Section 8, Stories, item 20
With increasing emphasis on place based planning, bear in mind that different places (or local communities) within the target geographic area may have different characteristics. It is important to be inclusive.

**Parramatta City Council approach**

Before a formal ‘Place Plan’ process commences in any area, Parramatta City Council reviews its Strategic Framework and Management Plan. It aims to identify particular strategic issues that may be relevant to the ‘place’ or specific community. The council also reviews previous processes carried out in the ‘place’ that identify local needs, issues and aspirations. The information from these sources helps to facilitate the communities’ and other interested parties’ involvement in gathering and evaluating current needs, issues and aspirations of the ‘place’.

Inclusive engagement means ensuring that everyone who may have an interest in the outcome has an opportunity to participate. Apart from institutional players or spokespeople for specific interest groups, consider those who:
- may be affected by the proposal
- have previously been involved
- may be aggrieved if their views are not considered
- may be able to contribute local knowledge or expertise.

Also consider groups who may have been excluded or under represented such as:
- children and young people
- women
- older people
- people with disabilities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- homeless people
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- the local business community and property owners.

**Know the community**

When selecting prospective participants for engagement processes, it is vitally important to have information about the community, generally defined by geographic area. Knowing the community is a prerequisite to applying the ‘representative’ and ‘inclusive’ principles. This requires a comprehensive analysis of who has a stake in the outcomes of a project and finding ways to involve them in the engagement. These may be individuals or groups, locals or those outside the area who have an interest in the plan, for instance, road users.

Learning about the history of community engagement within the community is also very valuable. There will be a range of bodies that have already conducted consultations in the area. A common complaint is that there has been ‘over consultation’ in localities; the result of a lack of coordination between different agencies when engaging with communities. This is why local knowledge of any consultative structures is useful in creating initiatives that ensure minimal duplication and take advantage of any history of consultation.

**Reference**

From Telopea Place Plan, Parramatta City Council. See Section 8, Stories, Item 56

See Appendix 3, Groups that require special consideration

**Website URL**


**Comment**

Useful contacts include local council social planners, Regional Organisations of Councils, area consultative committees, economic development organisations, precinct committees.
Analyse available data

Use demographic and other available data to help build an accurate picture of the relevant community or communities. Data provides a starting point for deciding who has or may have an interest in the issue. Sources of information include:

- local councils’ social planners; social plans require extensive consultation about community values and issues of concern
- social, community or population profiles
- other survey results
- research reports
- census data
- community, business and government directories
- records of those previously involved in similar processes
- lists of individuals and groups who want to be advised of, or involved in, particular issues and processes
- other agencies’ mailing lists
- statistical or trend information from client feedback, complaints handling and dispute resolution mechanisms
- observations and informal conversations with users.

Before analysing the data, get agreement on why certain data should be in the process. For example, it may be as simple as including all documents going back ‘x’ number of years. Whatever is agreed, document the reasons why.

Councils regularly update their community profiles which include demographic information on:

- age group populations or gender by age groups
- population trends
- workforce/industry
- educational attainment
- population groups, such as indigenous Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse groups and people with disabilities.

This information can guide the selection of participants who are broadly representative of the local government area. If there is inadequate information it may be necessary to do some original research.

Comment
Newcastle City Council’s Consultation Policy (June 2000) provides detailed guidance on stakeholder scoping.
See Section 8, Stories, item 20

References
From Dr Lyn Carson, Consult your community: a handbook – a guide to using the residents’ feedback register.
See Section 8, Stories, item 17

See Social and Community Planning and Reporting Manual, Department of Local Government 2002 for guidance on developing a demographic profile.
See Section 8, Stories, item 59

Reference
Eurobodalla Shire Council’s Draft Policy on Methods of Consultation with the Community

Comment
Parramatta City Council’s 2001 Community Survey – a Powerpoint presentation.
See Section 8, Stories, item 52

How some councils consult

Eurobodalla Shire Council has an independent, statistically reliable survey carried out in the first year of each new council term. It seeks community views about council performance and identifies issues for council to address. It is followed up in the third year of each council term by workshops with focus groups, representative of a wide range of interests in the community. The workshops identify values the groups consider important to continue living in the shire and the issues to sustain those values.

Since 1995, Parramatta City Council has run four community surveys, the last in 2001.
Know the interested and affected parties

Consider these points when identifying the appropriate people and organisations to consult:

- land owners who may be affected
- neighbours who may be affected, e.g. next door, those in the visual or noise catchment
- those who might have a cultural, heritage, environmental, recreational, social or economic interest in the proposal
- those who might bring expertise to the process, e.g. agricultural scientists, stormwater consultants, landscape designers, community/health workers
- representatives of those Groups that might tend to be excluded or under represented (see 'Inclusiveness' in Section 5, page 31 and Appendix 3, 'Groups that require special consideration')
- 'communities of interest' whose activities might be affected by a proposal, e.g. cyclists, retailers, banana growers, road users
- representatives of those with local or regional interests or likely to be beneficially or adversely affected, e.g:
  - council(s)
  - precincts
  - local agencies
  - local business community
  - indigenous organisations (local land councils, elders' groups)
  - regional consultative forums and networks, e.g. planFIRST regional forums
  - local government associations (the various regional organisations of councils, local government association, shires association)
  - business and tourist organisations
  - community organisations
    - (environmental groups, school committees, community service organisations)
  - industry groups
  - infrastructure authorities
  - water catchment, biodiversity or vegetation committees.
- representatives of those with a State or national interest, e.g:
  - Sustainable Energy Development Authority (SEDA)
  - Premier's Department
  - PlanningNSW
  - departments of Housing, Community Services and Aged, Disability and Home Care
  - peak environmental groups
  - State and national industry associations
  - regulators, e.g. NSW EPA and Department of Agriculture
- people who have already expressed an interest in the matter
- council community committees e.g. disability access committee
- community activists
- media
- local, State and federal elected representatives.
>> Step 1.3  What are the constraints and opportunities?

An appreciation of the constraints and opportunities associated with the planned engagement will aid the development of realistic objectives and the selection of suitable techniques. It will also help avoid creating high expectations in the community that cannot be met.

Key constraints and opportunities include:

Organisational support

Institutional support is crucial to the long term success of community engagement. Local government and State agencies sometimes do not understand the realistic time and resources needed to deliver successful and comprehensive processes. They may also have an exaggerated sense of the potential for disaster.

It is important to 'sell' the benefits of community engagement 'upwards' when they are being prepared and designed. You can build support among councillors and managers through involving them in the early stages. Early briefing also helps to educate organisational players of the processes and their benefits.

Some suggested strategies include:

- writing reports on the issues raised for senior executives, with examples or stories of some of the interesting ideas or issues that have emerged
- writing short summaries of the outcomes indicating why the process proved to be good news for your council or agency
- displaying enthusiasm for the process with peers and involving key staff
- making a good news media story from the process of ‘good engagement’ for the agency.

Is there a statutory requirement?

Check what statutory requirements apply to the planning or development assessment process in question. Depending on the process, statutory requirements may stipulate time limits or timing in relation to other activities.

Know the history of the issue

Valuable information about the history of the issue can be used to shape the engagement process and avoid duplication. Such information might include:

- previous development proposals for the site
- previously published plans
- nature and outcomes of previous community engagement processes associated with the existing plan (e.g. local environmental plan (LEP), rural lands strategic plan or master plan for urban redevelopment)
- inter and intra government community engagement that has initiated current proposal
- previous consultation on related or unrelated issues or on aspects of the current proposal by other agencies.

See Appendix 1 for statutory consultation requirements in summary form
Know the environment
Establish the current political, cultural and social context which may relate to locality or time. Some examples follow.

- The social upheaval caused by the closure of a major source of employment or seasonal changes in population related to tourism or tertiary education may influence the nature and timing of the engagement process.
- Council or State government elections, local, regional or State government policy development processes or imminent decisions about major developments may influence the timing of individual engagement strategies and the overall timeframe available.
- Local conflicts may influence the type of techniques selected.
- Relevant religious holidays or cultural traditions may have a similar influence.
- Relationships between key interested parties and the sponsoring agency (e.g. Do they have good working relationships or are they characterised by conflict or mistrust?) will influence the engagement process, particularly the selection of techniques.

What is the timing?
Ideally, the objectives of the engagement process should influence the timeframe. However, time constraints include limits set by external factors or by statutory requirements. Other timing issues include events in the area that may adversely impact on the engagement, and the preparation time required for certain techniques (such as the lead time for letters of invitation to events).

Is there a time limit?
The length of time available for community engagement will influence the extent and style of engagement. Be realistic about what is achievable in the available timeframe. An agenda that is too full either for the overall engagement process or for an individual event or strategy, leaves little scope for flexibility. Allocate time for review during the process.

How Waverley handles timeframes
Waverley Council considers different levels of community engagement based on the available timeframe, ranging from urgent to long term (three years or more). For projects with timeframes of six months or less the policy states:

‘When something needs to happen immediately, it is challenging to consult with the community on a large scale. As with short-term project consultation, it should be made clear what has already happened and why, and what is still negotiable. In this instance it is unlikely that more than one round of consultation will be undertaken. It is therefore very important to ensure that:

a) everyone who will be affected is aware of the issues
b) there are several ways for the community to be consulted (e.g. precinct meeting, public meeting, submissions, survey)
c) information available is summarised and put out in Plain English, so that the community can contribute in a meaningful manner.

If nothing is negotiable, then the community needs to be told that and they need to be given detailed information about what will happen and when so that they know what to expect.’
When in the process should engagement occur?

Carefully consider when to commence community involvement. Generally, the earlier the better. It is important to make an informed decision about a starting date and also when particular types of engagement are appropriate within the process. The right time to start depends on the objectives of the process and the opportunities and constraints that you have identified.

Place Managers’ approach

According to PlanningNSW’s Urban Improvement Program Place Managers,

‘Timing is one of the most important considerations when seeking to engage the community.’

Most place managers said community engagement needed to begin early in the project to help gain support through the life of the project and make it clear that the community can help generate ideas for their neighbourhood, rather than just provide comments on ideas drawn up by outsiders. They also noted the need for timing to be flexible as in the example of planning for the future of an old road reservation. In this case, they decided to delay engagement until the road reservation had been lifted, as they considered any uncertainty about this critical aspect would affect the process.

Involving the community at the planning stage will help create a sense of partnership and ownership of the issues, problems and outcomes associated with the development assessment or plan-making process. Working together at this stage will help determine the most suitable engagement techniques.

Pittwater Council’s development application process places greatest importance on pre-design and pre-lodgment community engagement. It encourages the prospective applicant to consult with adjacent land owners and other property owners who may be affected by the proposal. It also encourages the applicant to check with the council about which community groups or associations should be consulted at this stage. The council sees this early engagement as a vital procedure to assist in achieving a development that will:

* reflect the character of the area
* satisfy the community’s development expectations
* provide council with full information to assess the application.

The council may facilitate a mediation process where there are differences of opinion between neighbours during the pre-lodgment or pre-determination stages. The council fast-tracks applications that show specific evidence of pre-lodgment consultation and agreement with the proposal by relevant affected parties.

Reference

Place managers and their consultation experiences, PlanningNSW Urban Improvement Program.
See Section 8, Stories, item 71

Reference

Development Control Plan No. 24 – Notification, Pittwater Council
**>> Step 1.4 What resources are available?**

Inadequate resourcing can undermine the engagement process. While there are significant costs associated with community engagement, including money, expertise, staff or support materials and equipment, consider these resources in the context of the possible costs of proceeding without community involvement. It is also important to match engagement techniques to available resources.

**What’s the budget?**

Limits on budget and time may constrain community engagement. The range of available techniques, however, should enable the selection of lower-cost alternatives that take the engagement process beyond compliance with statutory requirements. A guide to selected techniques and their resources is included in Section 7.

Consult your community: a handbook – a guide to using citizens’ juries, shows how, even with limited time and budget, Wollondilly Council used a modified version of its preferred engagement technique, a citizens’ jury, to gain input into the social vision for the district.

Budget allocations for more routine development assessment processes may not give much scope to go beyond compliance with statutory requirements. Some councils have introduced simple enhancements at little cost, such as onsite notices of DAs, or as off-shoots of their in-house management of the DA process, for example, allowing the public to track progress of DAs via the council website.

**Public notification**

Leichhardt Council has adopted a threefold notification system:

- broader community involved in the process by newspaper notice
- local community through sign on site
- immediate neighbours notified by letter.

Photographs are taken of notification signs at time of installation and a copy put on the DA file. There are also online DA tracking systems.

Penrith City Council has an online DA system. Council’s DA system can be viewed through the ‘idetermine’ website.

Lane Cove Council, in its brochure Development assessment information (October 2001), advises applicants and other interested parties that they can track the progress of development applications on council’s website.

Woolahra Council is able to track the progress of all applications electronically, including both internal and external referrals as well as construction certificates, Form 7s and all notices and orders. Council has a seamless transition in its information system from pre-DA, DA, construction certificate to Form 7. Applicants and residents can track applications through council’s website.
Ideas on reducing costs

- Avoid duplication of engagement exercises through collaboration with other organisations. Spread costs by consulting jointly with other organisations where possible.
- Use members of the community to carry out the community engagement. For instance, encourage community centres, special interest group representatives or shopkeepers to pass on information, raise awareness, discuss issues of concern.
- Encourage comments and suggestions on an ongoing basis. For example, send out a comments slip with public documents, have comment/feedback forms at exhibitions, displays and open days.
- Seek opportunities to engage special interest, community and business groups and other government agencies at their own premises as part of their regular activities.

What staff and skills are available?
The availability of staff with suitable skills will influence the decision to run the process in-house, in partnership with other agencies or with consultants.

Staff will usually need to have been involved previously in a similar activity if the engagement process is run in-house. Depending on the process, staff might need training in:
- presenting
- facilitating
- interviewing
- negotiating
- conflict resolution
- preparing and using surveys and other information gathering or evaluation methods
- preparing advertising and promotional materials
- handling the media
- recording activities and decisions, preparing reports.

Staff will need to allocate sufficient time to preparing and implementing the engagement.

At this stage, consider the need for a project management team, a steering committee or advisory committee to oversee or advise on the process.

Depending on the nature and scope of the process, it may be necessary or desirable to engage other government agencies as partners.

Quote
‘Staff training was essential to ensure the Urban Design Workshops, which were both intensive and time constrained, reaped the greatest outcomes possible.’ Lifestyle 2020 – A Strategy for Our Future, Lake Macquarie Council

Comment
Identifying the interested parties and taking into account the policy framework will guide this decision.

Reference
Adapted from West Berkshire Council (UK) Consultation Strategy and Baulkham Hills Council ward briefings
Consider the need to engage consultants to run all or part of the process, particularly for complex or controversial proposals where independent facilitation may be desirable.

**Using a facilitator**

Facilitators should ideally have a neutral role in relation to the matters being discussed so consider using someone from outside the sponsoring organisation.

It is often helpful for facilitators to work with organisers to plan the community engagement process, including preparing the agenda and deciding on forms of participation.

When working with specific population groups, such as people with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities and young people, try to use facilitators who have previous experience working with these groups.

For some groups, such as Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, consider using facilitators who are members of these groups or co-facilitating with members of these groups.

During the pre-determination stage of the DA process, Baulkham Hills Shire Council uses external facilitators or mediators to try and resolve issues where more than eight objections are received to a development proposal. (Where between five and eight are received, facilitation is provided in-house.)

>> **Step 1.5 What will be the indicators of success?**

**What outcomes are being sought?**

The outcomes will depend on the purpose and objectives of the engagement. For example, if the broad objective of a regional strategy is coordinated environmental planning for a region – vision, policies, framework for local planning – that identifies and addresses community expectations, the desired outcome will reflect the objective. Other more specific outcomes, such as clear articulation of agreed social, environmental and economic sustainability measures, may also satisfy the objective.

**Can success be measured and, if so, how?**

Success depends on the objectives of community engagement and will be measured by the indicators.

‘Indicators serve different purposes. Performance or outcome indicators measure whether outcomes satisfy objectives. Input indicators measure resources applied to the project (money, time, materials). Output indicators measure some immediate product of a project. Outputs are not the same as outcomes, although output measures can sometimes serve as an indicator of outcomes.’
Consider the broader outcome

Baulkham Hills Shire Council sets out to achieve an overall outcome from its DA processes for 'development which meets community needs and expectations, legislation, adopted planning instruments, development controls and policies'.

There are, however, more specific desired outcomes for community engagement activities within the process. At the pre-determination stage, the outcome sought for conciliation conferences might be that parties were satisfied that their concerns and responses were heard, issues appropriately resolved and agreement reached. The indicators would be the percentage of parties satisfied.

>> Step 1.6 Deciding on techniques

The final task in the planning and designing step is to decide which techniques to use. Techniques are simply tools and there will always be more than one tool that can do the job. For example, the first thought when it comes to community engagement is often the public meeting. Even though this technique is one of the most frequently used, there are very few occasions when it is the best tool for the job.

Answers to the questions posed here will help determine which engagement techniques to use. The most important criteria are:

- Does it match the objectives of the engagement?
- Will it contribute to the desired outcomes?
- Does it take account of the history?
- Does it suit the political, social and cultural environment?
- Can it be run properly with the resources available?
- Can it be achieved in the time available?
- If it is being run in-house, will staff have the necessary skills and experience to run it well?
- Is it the best way to involve the target community or other interested parties?
- Is it suitable for the stage in the process (e.g. pre-plan, plan making, ongoing monitoring and review)?
- Does it contribute to the overall process (e.g. will the outcomes inform the next action or engagement strategy)?
- What other techniques does it depend on? (Apply the same criteria to their selection.)

Section 4, page 25 suggests categories of techniques that may be appropriate to specific phases of plan making and development assessment processes. Section 7 uses the same categories, and offers long form descriptions of a selection of techniques under each category.
>> Step 2. Preparation and organisation

1. Prepare an action plan
2. Where will community engagement events be held?
3. What publicity is needed?
4. What information should be given to participants?
5. Privacy and information management
6. Who will run the community engagement events?
7. What are the measurements of success?

>> Step 2.1 Prepare an action plan

Once the planning and design step has been completed, a practical action plan and timetable needs to be prepared.

In this phase it is important to:
- develop a realistic timetable that takes account of the process and techniques selected, and avoids shortcuts
- allow the community sufficient time to become involved and to comment effectively.
- allow (where necessary) adequate additional funding for:
  - interpreters and translators
  - reimbursement of participants
  - travel costs
  - other costs associated with enabling people to participate such as child care, carers’ support, food, religious/cultural needs
- establish/confirm who has overall responsibility for coordinating the community engagement
- establish/confirm who is responsible for individual events and strategies
- aim for consistency with community engagement principles
- identify at the beginning how you will assess success.

The action plan should formalise the outcomes of the planning and design step. It provides a framework to keep the process on track, however, this does not mean sacrificing flexibility. The plan should be reviewed periodically during the process to accommodate changing circumstances. For example, delays in meeting a key milestone may affect the timing of engagement events. Or the outcomes of a key event may necessitate changes in the approach to community engagement.

Some councils provide guidance on consultation plans. Newcastle City Council, Consultation Policy 2000, proposes a consultation plan that includes timelines, selected tools and links consultative strategies with all activities within the overall project. Leichhardt and Waverley councils provide detailed guidance on consultation plans.

The following questions will help to prepare, organise and evaluate your planned community engagement event or process.
>> Step 2.2  Where will community engagement events be held?

For events designed to bring people together in one location, e.g. a forum, workshop, focus group, meeting or exhibition, consider:

- the need to select, book and prepare suitable venues
- the lead time needed to achieve this.

The appropriate environment to conduct community engagement will depend on each event’s purpose, the associated issues and the needs of the desired participants. When choosing venues, consider:

- convenience for participants (easy-to-find, parking, night safety)
- accessibility by public transport
- access and facilities for people with disabilities
- size/layout of the venue
- venue availability at appropriate times
- the need to be on ‘neutral territory’
- availability of amenities/refreshments
- the need for access to technology and resources such as data projector, microphones, video.

Consider venues where target groups congregate to help ensure representative participation. For example, consider visiting participants and running surveys or informal discussions rather than inviting them to a formal event at a prearranged venue. The effectiveness of these approaches depends on:

- finding out when people are most likely to be available to participate
- making arrangements with the venue owner, if it is a public place such as a shopping mall or sports centre.

>> Step 2.3  What publicity is needed?

Consider the need to prepare publicity material. All community engagement events and strategies need some form of publicity to encourage the target community or communities to take part. Check that all publicity needs are satisfied by the information giving techniques selected at the planning stage. Consider:

- the need for different publicity strategies for different types of events. As Warringah Council suggests, ‘a targeted meeting will not require broad promotion. Instead promotion is via telephone contact to one representative (who will then arrange the meeting) or by writing to the participants. Larger meetings, workshops, displays and exhibitions on the other hand will require a commitment of resources to broad promotion.’
- how the style of publicity might appeal to different groups, e.g:
  - should publicity material be produced in appropriate community languages or in
    large text format?
  - will the material appeal to young people?
  - using a mix of strategies, e.g:
    - advertisements
    - letterbox drops
    - letters to ratepayers
    - mayor’s column
    - public noticeboards
    - community organisation clients/members
- timing the publicity and information to ensure the best response by giving people enough
time to arrange to attend or to read background material.

Also think about:
- how much lead time is needed for preparation, translation, distribution, booking
  advertising space etc.
- who will be responsible for tasks associated with publicity?

>> Step 2.4  What information should be given to participants?

Effective engagement is informed engagement. Information should be accurate, accessible
and timely. It should create an understanding of the issue/s and be clear about the
engagement process.

In refining the outcomes of Step 1, think about any further material required to support other
community engagement techniques, such as:
- information packages for the community or participants in a deliberative forum or
  workshop – they could be paper-based, electronic, CD or audio tape
- discussion papers for general distribution, advisory committee members or participants in
  planning sessions
- exhibition material for an exhibition or to support an open day
- web-based information prior to a public meeting or to track progress of the process
- videos or slide presentations for community information and feedback sessions.

What other material may be needed?

Depending on the techniques selected, a community engagement process may need additional
support material. Some examples are:
- questionnaires/surveys
- speakers’ notes
- feedback/evaluation forms
- web-based feedback sites
- attendance sheets
- name tags
- worksheets.
Also think about:
- how much lead time is needed to prepare, print or arrange for other material to support community engagement
- who will be responsible for these tasks.

**Step 2.5 Privacy and management of information**

The Privacy Act 1988 and the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 impose limitations on the way in which personal information can be collected, used, shared and published. Any community engagement should therefore strictly adhere to the privacy policy of the organisation that is undertaking the engagement process. Amongst other things, this policy should include a statement that informs participants of a process how their personal details will be used and if the information they supply will be shared with third parties. If a consultant is conducting the engagement process, ‘third parties’ include the client who may be a council, a State agency or a developer.

Information collected, particularly personal information, should be stored in a locked filing cabinet or electronically in a secure server. In most cases, once an engagement process is completed personal information should be destroyed, or made anonymous. An exception to this rule may be when a subsequent round of consultations is set to occur. In this case participants should be informed that their details will be kept securely and may be used to inform them of subsequent processes around the same issue.

**Step 2.6 Who will run the community engagement events?**

Whether community engagement events are run by staff or independent consultants such as facilitators, or a combination of both, they will need to:
- know enough about the proposal and the purpose of the community engagement
- clearly articulate everyone’s role and ensure they understand each role
- be suitably skilled (trained and experienced).

Consider the need to:
- select staff for both lead and support roles e.g:
  - chairing
  - presenting
  - welcoming participants
  - answering questions during the engagement
  - recording proceedings
  - interviewing participants
  - liaising with the media
  - writing reports
  - evaluation planning and implementation

[Website URL](http://www.elton.com.au/policy.htm)

See also Section 8, Stories, item 74
See ‘Using a facilitator’ in Step 1.4
- select and engage an independent consultant or facilitator. There are advantages to involving a third party who is not associated with the issues under consideration and whose role is to maintain the integrity of the engagement process. When selecting a facilitator consider a person who best fits the audience. For instance, there will be times when it is necessary to take into account gender, language and cultural background as well as experience and reputation
- invite expert presenters
- arrange catering, considering the religious and cultural values of the attendees.
- engage interpreters (or translators for written information or reports)
- prepare background material for staff/facilitators/presenters
- arrange aids for people with disabilities e.g. hearing loops.

Also think about:
- What lead time is needed to achieve this?
- Who will be responsible for these tasks?
- How and when will feedback be provided to participants?

See ‘Follow up and feedback’ in Step 4

See Step 5 – Evaluation

>> Step 2.7 What are the measurements of success?
- Is there a record of the rationale for engaging the participants?
- Is there a process for checking whether others need to be involved (phone calls, questions, research)?
- Did the process enable everyone involved to have their say?
- Was accurate, timely information provided to the participants and did it obviously inform the process?
- To what extent were the views of those engaged considered/acted upon?
- Has accurate, comprehensive and timely feedback been provided to the participants both after their involvement and at the end of the process?
- Were adequate steps taken to make the records and outcomes of the process available to the public?
- Are the next stages of the process being communicated?
>> Step 3. Implementation

1. What is meant by implementation?
2. Have arrangements been confirmed?
3. Do presentations need to be rehearsed?
4. What difficulties might be faced during community engagement?
5. What strategies are there to deal with difficulties?
6. Ideas for maximising success

>> Step 3.1 What is meant by implementation?
Implementation is the culmination of sound planning and design, thorough preparation and good organisation. It is the point at which an organisation demonstrates its commitment to the engagement process and objectives.

Even with the best planning and preparation, unforeseen outcomes may need to be dealt with during implementation. Be flexible and prepared to review and modify the plan during the implementation process.

The techniques described in this handbook contain some information about implementation. The following questions will help you successfully implement them.

>> Step 3.2 Have arrangements been confirmed?
In the time just prior to an event or strategy it is important to confirm all arrangements, as overlooking even one component can undermine success.

For an event such as a workshop, forum or focus group, the following might need checking:
- confirmation of venue bookings
- access to the venue at appropriate times to meet the needs of participants
- refreshments, considering the religious and cultural values of the attendees
- audio equipment and staff
- visual presentation equipment (and backups in case of technical failure)
- room layout appropriate - people can see and hear
- sufficient chairs available
- staff at the door to welcome participants/answer queries
- appropriate direction/information signs at entrance
- attendance sheets with space to record contact details, pens
- notetaker recording equipment where appropriate
- visual material prepared
- agenda confirmed
- presenters aware of start time/agenda
- make sure presenters and facilitators arrive early to check arrangements.
>> Step 3.3 Do presentations need to be rehearsed?
A rehearsal of the presentation is a valuable exercise in preparation, particularly if it involves several people, such as technical experts. Also prepare to be asked broader context questions that may overlap with other agency work or expert areas. Consider role playing telephone and face-to-face surveys and interviews to iron out any ambiguous or ‘difficult to understand’ questions.

>> Step 3.4 What difficulties might be faced during community engagement?
No community engagement process is without hurdles, but thorough planning helps to avoid disasters.

Common problems include:
- self interested or aggressive participants
- participants with unrealistic expectations or inaccurate information
- participants who dominate and don’t allow others to speak
- dealing with the ‘usual suspects’, active participants who may not be representative of the broader community
- assessing the views of the silent majority
- participants who digress from the issue
- participants challenging the constraints of the process i.e. wanting to have more influence on decision making
- distrust/cynicism towards the consultation process
- managing conflicting views within the community
- continued opposition to a proposal
- managing large numbers of responses
- managing negative/inaccurate media coverage
- demands for further consultation/extensions of timeframes; budget constraints that limit the scope of the community engagement
- gaining staff support
- technical equipment problems
- inappropriate venue (size, location, climate)
- participants unable to attend due to other commitments.

>> Step 3.5 What strategies are there to deal with difficulties?
By developing strategies to deal with anticipated difficulties and challenges you will enhance the smooth running of a community engagement. Many problems can be prevented in advance by selecting the correct techniques to make sure everyone is properly engaged. The following approaches will help minimise conflict in difficult situations.
- Decide on strategies to deal with potential conflict, such as:
  - reaching consensus
  - convergence of what can be agreed upon
  - presenting a diversity of viewpoints.
- Keep the program as informal as possible
- Build trust.
- Develop an understanding that the process is not necessarily about consensus.
- Don’t be defensive or judgmental about any views or opinions.
- Begin with tentative ideas/strategies.
- Take an interest in community views.
- Avoid an ‘us versus them’ approach.
- Recognise that conflict is healthy and creative.
- Encourage ownership of the project by all parties.
- Allow enough time - do not rush a process.
- Express honesty/openness – make it clear nothing is being hidden.
- Provide alternative methods for people to have their say.

>> Step 3.6 Ideas for maximising success

Good communication
- Appreciate the context.
- Ensure all those identified as having an interest are given an appropriate opportunity to be involved.
- Respond to the audience.
- Use audio and visual presentations.
- Have open and honest language and manner.
- Use language and material appropriate to the audience.
- Minimise the use of jargon and technical terms.
- Use concise language.
- Ensure that resources are available for groups requiring special consideration (see Appendix 3).

Techniques for meetings and other engagements
- Use facilitators.
- Formulate appropriate meeting agendas.
- Use a variety of strategies to enable participants to articulate their perspectives.
- Encourage the development of an informed understanding of issues and how they can be realistically negotiated.
- Establish a clear timeframe for each community engagement event and process.
- Make an accurate record of the process and ensure that this record is signed off by key parties prior to circulation.
- Provide adequate information to support informed engagement.
- Ensure closure by:
  - providing feedback on meeting outcomes
  - circulating, collecting and analysing evaluation sheets
  - making sure people know what the next step is going to be and let them know of any subsequent changes.

Reference
Resource Consultation, Kennedy, NSW Government (1993)

Website URL
Lgov provides useful tips on communicating, including dealing with difficult people, on their e-learning site www.lgov.org.au/docs/servicesforcouncils/training/elearning/index.html

Comment
Strategic questioning, Fran Peavey, (ed. Vivian Hutchinson) describes a process of asking open-ended strategic questions to create change. It is a non-adversarial approach that can be used for issues identification, visioning exercises, identifying options, as well as in conflict resolution and negotiation. See Section 8, Stories, item 61.
Conflict resolution

Should:
- adopt an appropriate framework
- analyse the conflict
- respond to conflict effectively.

Conflict may be able to be handled on the spot or through a more formal process. For example, councils adopt a variety of strategies, including conciliation conferences and mediation, to resolve conflict that can occur during the development assessment or planning process.

Hawkesbury Council key principles

Hawkesbury Council has a comprehensive conflict management policy that describes a range of methods (including conciliation, negotiation, facilitation and mediation) for managing conflict. The principles that the council applies in identifying matters suitable for conflict management include:
- maintaining relationships and community cohesion as a priority
- time to identify the issues, even if the matter is not ultimately resolved
- understanding that a strict application of the law won’t necessarily resolve the issues.

The council aims at consensus.

Negotiation

Should involve:
- preparation
- clarifying objectives
- clarifying roles of participants
- making proposals
- bargaining
- agreeing
- evaluating.

The Bureau of Rural Sciences cites *Getting to yes* by Roger Fisher and William Ury which outlines a method of negotiation that relies on:
- separating the people from the problem
- focusing on interests, not positions
- inventing options for mutual gain
- insisting on objective criteria.

Very contentious proposals may need skilled mediation to find areas of common ground or mutual interest from which to develop options and reach agreement. However, the points above are a useful framework for guiding the negotiation process.
>> Step 4. Feedback and follow up

1. Why give feedback and follow up?
2. When should feedback and follow up occur?
3. How should feedback be given?

>> Step 4.1 Why give feedback and follow up?
Providing feedback to participants following an engagement event or process reassures them that their views and concerns are being heard and considered. The level of trust and cooperation between the organisation and the community is likely to increase through appropriate feedback. It is particularly important to give timely and accurate feedback after a decision has been made on an issue.

According to the ACT Government, one of the most common complaints from the community about consultation has been the lack of feedback on outcomes and decisions. The outcome of community engagement processes can be jeopardised by failure to provide adequate acknowledgment and feedback. It can also harm future processes by creating cynicism.

>> Step 4.2 When should feedback and follow up occur?
Timely and informative feedback should be given at each stage of the process. Decide when feedback will be given at the planning and design stage. Depending on the nature of the engagement, feedback might be offered at regular intervals, or within a pre-determined period after each engagement activity.

Throughout the community engagement process, let participants know what the next step is. Also tell them when and how they will be advised of the outcomes from any activity or event.

If the outcomes are delayed keep participants informed about progress.

Follow-up should also be timely. Keep promises to follow up particular issues or matters of concern. Follow-up may also be a critical part of the evaluation process. So it is particularly important that it happens when planned.

>> Step 4.3 How should feedback be given?
A range of feedback techniques should be employed because some methods will work better for some participants. Some techniques to consider include:
- write letters to all participants
- provide summary reports of meetings/workshops
- acknowledge written submissions
- provide telephone hotlines
- hold meetings to relay findings following surveys/polls
- offer discussion/issues papers

Reference
From ACT consultation manual,
Hands on help for planning effective consultation strategies.
See Section 8, Stories, item 35
A Five-Step Engagement Planning Cycle - Step 4

- publish newsletters
- use a dedicated community engagement project email group
- establish an interactive website
- use informal communications
- issue final reports.

Leichhardt Council suggests that media coverage does not constitute feedback to key stakeholders and requires that all key stakeholders are notified in writing of the outcome of the community engagement process.

Work out how to provide feedback at the planning and design step.
- Establish what type of feedback to provide to which participants. This will ensure adequate resources are available.
- Consider the needs of the participants. For example, should information be available in community languages?
- Aim to provide feedback in various ways to maximise accessibility.
- Include relevant details on feedback in the action plan.

You should write reports detailing consultation outcomes in plain English. Reports may include:
- acknowledgment of the participants' contribution
- a record of the consultation process
- demonstrated evidence that participants have been heard (this may take the form of a document which lists the participants and records their views stated in their own words)
- an outline of the decisions made
- a record of how final decisions were reached
- a statement of the next stages or steps in the process
- a report of the evaluation outcomes.

Reference
Consultation guidelines, Leichhardt Council
See Section 8, Stories, Item 42

Reference
See Section 8, Stories, Items 11 and 35
>> Step 5. Evaluation

1. What are the benefits of evaluation?
2. What might an evaluation consider?
3. Have evaluation techniques been selected?
4. Developing and implementing an effective evaluation strategy
5. Further reading

>> Step 5.1 What are the benefits of evaluation?
Evaluation is an important tool in determining whether a community engagement program has achieved its objectives, and whether the most effective and suitable techniques were used. It is also a useful learning and organisational development tool. As can be seen from the list below, evaluation can be a complex process that requires significant thought during step one of the engagement planning cycle.

Evaluation can be valuable in a number of ways to:
- know what works and why
- provide input to the current process and how it should be adapted to be more effective as the process unfolds
- assist planning for future community engagement programs
- improve effectiveness of community engagement techniques
- develop appropriate techniques for particular objectives
- develop appropriate techniques for participants with differing needs
- increase community engagement skills of staff
- provide information to encourage organisational and senior manager support for community engagement and outcomes
- ensure mistakes are not repeated and successes are built on
- record the process and outcomes of the community engagement
- provide information on a range of issues that will be valuable to others working in those communities
- review overall processes as well as their components
- assess how community engagement affects the issues and processes central to its concern. This may require measuring attitudes or levels of knowledge ‘before and after’ the community engagement.

>> Step 5.2 What might an evaluation consider?
At its simplest, evaluation is about finding out if the community process, strategy or event was a useful thing to do, what it achieved, how it could have been done better and what might be done next. One way of doing this is to break down the evaluation under the following headings:
- participation level
- influence of engagement
- evaluation of individual activities.

Reference
Resourcing consultation, Kennedy, NSW Government publication (1993)

Website URL
More specifically, an evaluation might consider:

- whether the objectives of the engagement were achieved
- how well they were achieved
- which engagement techniques drew the highest response rates and also the highest level of satisfaction from which participants
- to what extent target groups participated in the community engagement, e.g. in terms of numbers and the range of views expressed
- which techniques were most effective in clearly conveying information and the adequacy of the information
- to what extent participants expressed their views
- how useful was the information obtained
- the impact community engagement had on decision making
- adequacy of the timing, funding and other resources
- cost effectiveness of the engagement
- if participation was representative of a diversity of views; particularly those affected by the issues. If not, why not, and what can be done about it
- if participants from all target groups were adequately represented, including those identified as having special needs (e.g. people with disabilities, from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, women, young people, homeless people)
- whether there was an even gender mix
- whether people with special needs (e.g. disabled access, interpreters, child care) considered that their needs were adequately met
- whether people from all participant groups feel that they were listened to and their views adequately recorded.

>> Step 5.3 Have evaluation techniques been selected?

An important part of planning and design is determining what mechanisms will be used to evaluate the community engagement program. Various methods can be used to gather material for an evaluation, including:

- informal discussion
- interviews
- questionnaires
- tear off forms with tick box answers
- observations to assess the quality of participation
- reviews of process documentation including records of events, issues raised, decisions made, submissions, feedback forms
- process evaluation forms designed to be filled in by key informants in the process
- self administered testing at the time of engagement i.e. pre- and post-tests to measure changes in responses, knowledge, values.
Examples of evaluation in action

The EPA commissioned an independent evaluation of the consultation program associated with water quality and riverflow to assess its effectiveness. The evaluation involved:

- every participant who attended a community discussion meeting was asked to fill in an evaluation form, which was independently assessed.
- all community input on the objectives, including written submissions and transcripts recording participants’ comments at the community discussion meetings, was also independently analysed.

The evaluation report identified what people thought about the interim environmental objectives for water quality and river flow and what they thought of the consultation process including the most and least useful aspects.

Sutherland Shire Council asked for responses (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to the following statements in an evaluation form for a range of community, precinct residents’ associations and citizen panel workshops held as part of the development of a ‘Blueprint for Action’:

- The background information helped me to be prepared.
- It was made clear what the group was going to be about.
- There was adequate opportunity for discussion and input.
- I felt that my views were listened to.
- I was comfortable in the group.
- The sessions were conducted at the right pace.
- All topics raised were relevant to the issue.
- The venue was appropriate.
- The facilitators were clear in their explanations.
- Overall, I was satisfied with the group process.

Participants also gave demographic details – suburb, age group, employment status. Analysis of the information was recorded in an evaluation report.

>> Step 5.4 Developing and implementing an effective evaluation strategy

An effective evaluation strategy will be one that is tailored to the planned engagement process. Evaluation will be more effective if it is an integral part of the community engagement plan. For all but the simplest engagement processes, evaluation should be built into each step. By evaluating as you go, the engagement process can be modified and improved and so deliver better outcomes.

Identify evaluation objectives

The first and most important step is to be clear about the outcomes you are seeking from the process. Once this is determined, a written statement should be prepared against which to evaluate the process.
For complex or lengthy engagement processes there might be a hierarchy of objectives. These may range from the broad measures of success to details, including:

- collaborative development of a local plan
- change in community attitudes towards rural residential development
- assessing the level of participant satisfaction
- presenter performance
- publication quality
- exhibition or focus group suitability
- venue accessibility for a particular event.

An evaluation framework might be needed. This will help focus on the different objectives and outcomes the evaluation aims to measure.

Consider the need to:

- identify indicators of success for the process
- measure progress against indicators
- identify weaknesses in the engagement process
- assess the benefits of engagement events and strategies compared to the resources allocated, and identify more efficient and effective engagement techniques for achieving the desired outcomes
- assess the value of publicity and information supporting engagement activities, by assessing participation levels and feedback.
- gain feedback on the engagement process, and individual events or strategies, through personal contact with members of target groups
- obtain the views of relevant government and non-government organisations about the effectiveness of the engagement process.

**Identify and design the evaluation techniques**

This should be done at the planning and design stage using the same criteria as the selection of engagement techniques. Some evaluation mechanisms can be integrated with particular engagement techniques, such as using feedback sheets at focus groups, workshops and exhibitions, others rely on good documentation of engagement events and their outcomes. Others, such as review sessions, are evaluative in their own right.

**Prepare, distribute, publicise techniques**

Resources are often focused on primary engagement techniques with evaluation given lower priority. Adequate attention needs to be given to preparing evaluation processes if they are to enhance the engagement process.

**Implement in accordance with the community engagement plan**

As much attention should be given to review an evaluation in the community engagement plan as to the primary engagement techniques. This will ensure that evaluation is integral to the engagement process.
Analyse and report results
Careful analysis against objectives, outcomes and indicators will ensure evaluation messages are accurate and useful.

Evaluation results should be reported to participants and the broader community so that people understand how their input has been used.

Use information to improve future engagements
Document the process, particularly issues or problems and how these were addressed since this will be a useful resource for future community engagements.


>> Step 5.5 Further reading

- A review of community consultation. A booklet produced by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) reviewing a large-scale consultation program that formed part of the process for producing Guidelines for river, groundwater and water management committees, NSW EPA (2000)
- Assessment of evaluation strategies and tools for place management and community renewal projects, NSW Premier’s Department (May 2002)
PART B
section 07 Community Engagement Techniques and Tools

Matching technique to process

You will find suggestions in the chart at the end of Section 4, ‘Opportunities for engagement in the planning system’ on clusters of techniques that best suit each phase of plan making and development assessment processes. The same categories are used here, together with a long form description of a selection of techniques available in each category.

You should select techniques to suit a specific planning process during the design and planning phase of an engagement (Step 1) or at one of the points when progress is reviewed against objectives.

It is difficult to produce a guide in which techniques are matched to type of process because the final choice will depend on a number of factors, including:
- the purpose of engagement
- legal requirements for engagement
- who is to be consulted
- the environment in which engagement is being carried out (political, social, cultural)
- money, time and skills available.

The number of techniques available may also be a complicating factor. Selecting techniques for councils will often depend on the resources available. For instance, Newcastle City Council and Waverley Council use the same method to categorise techniques, but end up with different selections. A review of their respective consultation policies shows that Newcastle Council has a wider and more varied range of techniques than Waverley Council’s shorter list which reflects the resources available.

The menu of techniques will change according to the process, as well as the resources available. For instance, if the goal is to create a profile of a community’s sustainability, the tools and sequence of an engagement may appear as follows:
- scan the plans – review of existing plans and data
- community survey – seek the views of the community about itself
- business survey – businesses’ views on their role in sustainability
- key interviews – gather perspectives of key people
- organisation map – map relationships between organisations
- assets map – community infrastructure, people, places, things
- focus groups – gain views of specific groups who may not participate in other techniques such as public meetings or surveys

Reference
Strengthening rural communities: resources kit, NSW Premier’s Department (2001). This is a ‘how to’ kit that includes action planning templates as well as descriptions of techniques. See Section 8, Stories, Item 62
- community profile – consolidation of information gathered so far
- public meeting – report to the whole community
- decision making workshop – creating vision for the future.

The IAP2 Participation spectrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public and private concerns are consistently understood and considered</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution</td>
<td>To place final decision making in the hands of the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promise to the public</th>
<th>Promise to the public</th>
<th>Promise to the public</th>
<th>Promise to the public</th>
<th>Promise to the public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed</td>
<td>We will keep you informed</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision</td>
<td>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible</td>
<td>To place final decision making in the hands of the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IAP2 International Association for Public Participation.
Profile of techniques adapted to the NSW planning system

The techniques described here are grouped under five types of engagement and follow the International Association for Public Participation Spectrum of Participation (see previous page). Descriptions of each technique vary in format depending on source material. Where there is a comprehensive guide to a particular technique, a direct link has been made to that resource. In all cases a rough assessment is given for time and costs.

### Highlighted techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Inform** | 1. Meeting  
  2. Public notice  
  3. Website  
  4. Written |
| **2. Consult** | 1. Citizens' panel  
  2. Community information and feedback session  
  3. Facilitation  
  4. Focus group  
  • Meeting (see 1.1)  
  5. Public hearing  
  6. Questionnaire  
  • Website (see 1.3) |
| **3. Involve** | 1. Facilitation (see 2.3)  
  1. Planning focus meeting  
  2. Precinct committee |
| **4. Collaborate** | 1. Advisory committee  
  2. Charette  
  • Facilitation (see 2.3)  
  3. Policy round table  
  4. Regional forum  
  5. Search conference |
| **5. Empower** | 1. Citizens' jury  
  • Search conference (see 4.5) |

### Some other techniques

- Discussion paper
- Exhibition
- Promotion
- Community needs analysis
- Networking
- Strategic questioning
- Networking
- Review session
- Strategic questioning
- Strategic questioning
- Joint venture

Source: Adapted from IAP2 spectrum.

Comment
See Section 8, Stories, item 61 for information on strategic questioning.
A-Z guide to techniques

Advisory committee ........................................... >> 4.1 page 94
Background papers see Written information .................... >> 1.4 page 72
Charette .......................................................... >> 4.2 page 96
Citizens’ jury ..................................................... >> 5.1 page 104
Citizens’ panel ..................................................... >> 2.1 page 76
Commission of inquiry see Public hearing ....................... >> 2.5 page 84
Community information and feedback session ................. >> 2.2 page 78
Consultative committee see Advisory committee ............... >> 4.1 page 94
Design workshop see Charette ................................ >> 4.2 page 96
Discussion forums see Website ................................... >> 1.3 page 70
Discussion papers see Written information .................... >> 1.4 page 72
Face-to-face interview see Meeting ............................. >> 1.1 page 66
Facilitation ................................................................ >> 2.3 page 80
Feedback see Written information ................................ >> 1.4 page 72
Focus group ........................................................ >> 2.4 page 82
Inquiry by design see Charette .................................. >> 4.2 page 96
Meeting ............................................................. >> 1.1 page 66
Mediation meetings see Meeting ................................... >> 1.1 page 66
Newsletter see Written information ............................. >> 1.4 page 72
Open day see Community information and feedback session >> 2.2 page 78
Planning focus meeting .......................................... >> 3.1 page 89
Policy round table see Planning focus meeting ............... >> 4.3 page 98
Precinct committee ................................................. >> 3.2 page 91
Pre-lodgment meeting see Meeting ............................... >> 1.1 page 66
Post-determination meeting see Meeting ......................... >> 1.1 page 66
Public forum see Public meeting ................................. >> 3.1 page 89
Public hearing ...................................................... >> 2.5 page 84
Public meeting ...................................................... >> 3.1 page 89
Public notices ....................................................... >> 1.2 page 68
Research panel see Citizens’ panel ............................... >> 2.1 page 76
Questionnaire ...................................................... >> 2.6 page 87
Regional forum ..................................................... >> 4.4 page 99
Search conference .................................................. >> 4.5 page 101
Threaded discussion groups see Website ......................... >> 1.3 page 70
Website ............................................................. >> 1.3 page 70
Workshop see Focus group ....................................... >> 2.4 page 82
Written information ................................................ >> 1.4 page 72
1. Inform

1.1 Meetings

This is a cost-effective, relatively informal technique for information sharing that can be a good alternative to public meetings.

**Where** in spectrum  >> 1. Inform, 2. Consult

**Description**

Small or one-on-one meetings and interviews are a popular way to inform or consult with interested parties and members of the community. Being less formal than large meetings, they are a way to engage those who may be under-represented in public forums. They offer a more focused opportunity to discuss a planning issue or project with an individual or group.

This type of meeting is one of the most common forms of consulting during the development assessment process and includes:

- pre-lodgment meetings with prospective applicants
- meetings with neighbours or other interested parties about issues that need to be addressed at the pre-determination stage
- negotiation meetings between interested neighbours and developers to discuss proposals
- confidential mediation meetings
- facilitation meetings to try and resolve concerns about proposals; Gosford Council holds facilitation meetings where more than three objections are received
- post-determination meetings to discuss conditions associated with approvals.

**Tips for meetings**

Meetings are useful at the planning stage of an engagement process, for example:

- as part of a needs analysis process
- to identify relevant issues
- to brainstorm ideas
- to help identify who will need to be involved and how the target groups might best be engaged.

As a useful means of networking with different community sectors and groups, small meetings provide an alternative to large public meetings where only the strident may be heard.

They can supplement other engagement strategies that tend to exclude groups with special needs and provide a way to address the communication needs of people with limited concentration and comprehension.

They also suit people who find public forums uncomfortable or intimidating, such as:

- those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- people who find group processes threatening including those with a psychiatric disability.
Even in small meetings be prepared to manage situations where one person dominates discussion. This can overcome by explicitly inviting individuals to add their views.

Although the meeting or interview might be informal, ensure people are clear about its purpose and constraints.

Bear in mind that informality can increase the risk of making promises that cannot be kept. Take time at the end of the meeting to briefly recap and confirm the purpose, constraints, outcomes and next steps.

Take care to record your meeting’s discussion and outcomes and to give copies to all participants. This reduces the likelihood that misunderstandings will develop.

Avoid overly long meetings; about two hours is a good limit.

When you arrange small meetings, consider the target group. For instance, during the Urban Improvement Program, breakfast meetings with business owners were well attended.

Consider travelling to the participant or participants, perhaps visiting them in their own home where they feel most comfortable. This is particularly useful for participants from groups with special needs such as people with disabilities.

Advantages for participants of meeting in their own environments include:
- reduced costs
- no transport difficulties
- no alternative care arrangements
- relaxed setting and timing encourage openness and flexibility in the way issues are discussed.

One weakness of this method is that it can be resource intensive to reach a number of people.

**Checklist**
- Clearly establish the purpose of the meeting or interview, at the outset.
- Identify who should be involved.
- For pre-arranged meetings contact participants by phone or through a third party such as a community representative, as appropriate.
- Preferably confirm arrangements in writing including the purpose of the meeting and any useful background material.
- Prepare for the meeting if possible, by:
  - developing a set of questions
  - anticipating questions that may be asked
  - deciding whether to use a facilitator
  - preparing presentation aids.
Outline the purpose and constraints of the meeting – what decisions have already been made, what is negotiable.

If the meeting is confidential such as with mediation, ensure participants understand what that means.

Ensure people know where the consultation fits into the process, tell them about any other consultations, and how the information collected through consultation will be used.

If a meeting or interview is about a contentious issue, ensure another staff member is present.

Ensure the venue is accessible and free from interruption.

Let people know about other opportunities to become involved in the plan making or development assessment process.

Ensure meeting/interview notes are prepared and circulated to participants.

Ensure a permanent record is maintained and that outcomes inform other engagement strategies, as appropriate.

Similar techniques
Face-to-face interview

Further reading
- Inclusive consultation, disability programs, Department of Family and Community Services, www.facs.gov.au
- Community consultation toolkit, Warringah Council
- Best practice in development assessment for local government, University of NSW & Landcom

1.2 Public notice
This is one of the least expensive information giving techniques, although costs will vary according to the methods used.

Where in continuum >> 1. Inform

Description
A public notice is a means of providing information to the public about a proposal or key community engagement activity associated with a planning or development assessment process. A public notice usually appears:
- in a local or national circulation newspaper
- as a sign in a public place
- on land or buildings that may be affected by a planning or development assessment process
- on a public notice board.
A public notice describes the proposal or event, for example, local environmental planning process, public hearing, exhibition. Its purpose and objectives are stated briefly, including:

- the name of the authority or organisers for an event
- the place, time and date of the event
- the timeframe for the process.

It may also state that the public can make submissions during a specified submission period.

Public notices are mandatory for specified steps of some statutory planning and development assessment processes. In some cases not only the contents, but the size of the notice is specified.

**Tips for public notices**

Consider including a map, photo or sketch to supplement the text if the site or area is not easily described.

Make sure signs or notices in public places are reasonably weather and vandal resistant. Unsupervised locations may need checking from time to time during the notification period.

Use plain English, avoid jargon, spell out acronyms and simplify technical terminology. Indicate the availability of translation services in different languages on the notice.

Depending on the demographics of the target community and the nature of the proposals, consider placing copies of public notices in:

- community/council newsletters or websites
- libraries
- community and health centres
- government shopfronts and registries
- the ethnic media
- shopping centres
- tertiary institutions
- clubs and sporting venues.

For example, where a development application is lodged for a site next to a school, consider placing a copy of the relevant public notice in the school’s newsletter.

Also think about supplementing a public notice with other methods of drawing people’s attention to proposals or events. A public notice is not always the best way of getting attention. Public notices tend to be formal and official and are not accessible to all sectors of the community.
Checklist

- Who is responsible for preparing and arranging publication and placement of the public notice?
- Does the public notice meet the relevant statutory requirements?
- Does it contain adequate information:
  - description of proposal, process or event
  - time, place, date of event
  - timeframe of process
  - authority or organiser
  - statement about submissions.
- Is the public notice in a form that is accessible to the target community/ies?
- Will the publication date give the public sufficient notice of the proposal or event?
- Allow adequate time to:
  - meet newspaper and other publishing deadlines
  - laminate signs
  - arrange placement of notices with relevant public and private venues.

Similar techniques

Advertisement, poster, postcard, letter-box drop, webcast, newsletter, street stall, pamphlet

>> 1.3 Web-based consultation

At its most straightforward, this is an inexpensive, resource efficient technique. Costs will vary, however, with the purpose of the consultation. There are also significant resource implications in setting up a new website.

Where in spectrum >> 1. Inform, 2. Consult

Description

The Internet provides engagement opportunities for interested stakeholders. A website offers the following potential uses:

- timely, accurate information on site plans, opportunities, constraints, commissioned studies.
- a platform on which organisations can respond to issues known to be of community concern
- information about the community consultation process and an historical record of what has happened so far
- a way for organisations to invite stakeholders to comment on the specific proposals and a means of receiving feedback
- an interactive medium allowing discussion and debate.
Technically, the potential tools that organisations have at their disposal should be:

- HTML web pages with links to documents, pictures/graphics (moving or still) and sound bites
- dedicated email address to which non-structured submissions can be sent
- survey forms that elicit community response on particular issues (HTML or PDF to be faxed/mailed back)
- moderated bulletin boards that allow 'threaded' discussions about a range of issues
- virtual meetings using a chat room facility on specific topics
- webcasting of meetings and events
- content management tools and training for authorised staff to update the site.

**Tips for web-based consultation**

The Internet can enhance traditional techniques but it cannot replace them. Because not all stakeholders will have access to the internet, it should not be used at the expense of traditional means of consultation.

The purpose of the website should be clearly articulated and information should be accurate and timely. The resource implications of maintaining the site need to be carefully assessed and budgeted for before it is established. Decide:

- whether to manage in-house or to outsource
- what management tools to use
- what staff training is needed.

Be aware that most people connected to the Internet have 28 or 56 kbps connections. Large files should be avoided wherever possible, particularly when communicating essential information.

Once a web strategy has been agreed, the website address should be promoted widely. It should appear on all correspondence and publicity materials and all enquirers should be told of its existence as a matter of course.

**Checklist**

- Clearly describe the purpose of the web-based consultation, and the issue to be considered.
- Describe where in the spectrum the web-based consultation sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
- Agree the purpose of the site, the information to be posted on it and tools to be used to meet the site's objective.
- Establish a draft timetable for the site.
If part of an existing site, discuss the web-based consultation plan with the site administrator:
- what tools are available on the website (see ‘description’ above)
- is there a content management tool that will allow the consultation team to update the site, or will the site administrator update the site?
- can the administrator set up a simple URL and e-mail address that will be easy to remember?
- will there be costs attached to establishing and maintaining the site such as new software, sub-contracted designers?

Agree who will maintain the site.

Write a marketing strategy for the site including tactics to ensure it will be publicised cost effectively.

Establish a process for collecting and organising information posted to the website or the email address. Estimate the number of responses received, and the time it will take to order the information.

Similar techniques
Tele-democracy, web-based feedback, discussion forums, threaded discussion groups, webcasting

1.4 Written information

The written word is a widely used and cost effective method of providing information and encouraging input. Costs will vary depending on the nature of the written information.

Where in spectrum  >> 1. Inform, 2. Consult

Description
Written information is a widely used, traditional consultation method. When associated with consultation on plan making and development proposals, it takes many forms. These include:
- discussion, issues and background papers
- reports on processes
- records of meetings
- questionnaires
- articles
- advertisements
- media releases
- brochures and newsletters publicising planning proposals and associated community engagement strategies.

Written material is used to:
- provide information about policies, strategies, services, plans, proposals and forthcoming events
- encourage broad discussion and response to policies, strategies, plans and proposals
- provide feedback to participants in the consultation process or the community generally.
**Tips for written information**

Set aside time at the planning stage to properly design written material. If the aim of design is to generate submissions, allow reasonable intervals for responses and their analysis.

The target audience will influence the form, design and tone of the written information as well as how it will be distributed. Some points to consider:

- Should a forthcoming event be advertised by public notice, poster or newsletter?
- Should a discussion paper be available in community languages and/or a translation service be provided?

Decide how information will be gathered and make arrangements well in advance. This is important when sending invitations to events or receiving submissions in response to discussion papers.

To help manage expectations for issues and discussion papers:

- provide a concise description of the nature of the proposal and, as far as possible, its likely impact
- briefly describe the history of the process including extent of consultations
- outline decisions already made and what is still negotiable
- indicate what further consultation will occur – for a master plan process this is the first opportunity to be involved, but there will be further opportunities following lodgment of the development application.

Discussion or issues papers are useful because they consolidate and summarise issues and ideas that emerge from other engagement strategies. If they are released part way through the overall process discussion papers can:

- provide feedback
- keep participants involved
- stimulate debate and further response allowing refinement and integration of various strategies and priorities associated with the plan making or development assessment process.

Written feedback may be required after various engagement events or in response to issues and discussion papers. Feedback needs to include:

- adequate information describing the process
- the participants’ or submitters’ input; suggestions, concerns, ideas, responses to questions
- analysis of the input and how it has or will be used
- what the next steps will be.

A good way to show your commitment to participants’ input is to include a list of people or groups who participated or made submissions in a feedback report. It is important, however, to consider the impact of privacy legislation on such a strategy.

One advantage of inviting written responses such as submissions is that you are able to incorporate considered and detailed viewpoints.

<Comment>
See Section 8, Stories, item 74, What does the law say about community consultation?
Also Privacy Statement at www.elton.com.au/policy.htm
The weaknesses of inviting written responses include:
- it may be a lengthy, resource intensive process
- there may be a poor response rate
- submissions tend to favour articulate people, those from an English-speaking background and those with sufficient resources to prepare detailed response
- those opposed to a proposal are more likely to take time out to prepare a submission.

Another disadvantage of relying on printed text is that people with a print handicap can effectively be excluded from accessing the information.

To meet the information needs of these people, consider using:
- electronic disks
- the Internet
- large print, audio and Braille formats.

Many people who are blind or have a vision impairment now have access to computers which translate electronic information into ASCII format on disk, to voice, into Braille or large print.

**Checklist**
- Clearly describe the purpose of the name event, and the issue to be considered.
- Describe where in the spectrum the event sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
- For written information promoting consultation events:
  - be clear about the purpose of the information and its main message
  - decide on the key points to get across.
- Clearly outline information about the event including:
  - why it is being held
  - who should attend
  - when and where it will be held
  - what is involved in participating
  - how to indicate attendance or get further information.
- Keep it short, to the point and plainly put.
- Consider linking it to a website with further background information.
- For written information that seeks responses make clear in the document:
  - who is being consulted
  - what the questions are
  - what the timescale is
  - what the purpose is.
- Documents seeking responses should be as simple and concise as possible. Include a two page summary of the main questions and make it easy for readers to respond, make contact or complain.
- Allow sufficient time for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Suggested minimum response periods vary from 6 to 12 weeks.
Analyse responses carefully and with an open mind, and make the results widely available. Give an account of the expressed views, and provide reasons for decisions.

For written information providing feedback:
- make clear in the document who was consulted, what questions were asked, what timescale was used and what was the purpose
- also preferably, who participated or responded
- make it simple and concise with a summary in about two pages, of the nature of comments and their analysis
- include details of the next steps in the engagement process
- make it widely available, using electronic means fully though not exclusively, to effectively draw the attention of all interested groups and individuals, especially those participants and submitters. Consider translation services and relevant languages.

Similar techniques
Public notice, web-based consultation

Further reading
- Community consultation toolkit, Warringah Council
2. Consult

2.1 Citizens’ panel

Although this technique is costly to establish in both time and money, it offers ongoing value as a resource for a range of engagement techniques.

Where in spectrum >> 2. Consult

Description

Standing citizens’ panels, research panels, or similar techniques have been widely used in the UK. They are large scale consultative groups (1000–2500 participants) weighted for gender, age, ethnic background and occupation to be representative of the community. This technique provides a relatively permanent forum that can be surveyed on a regular basis about issues or services. One advantage is that it provides a large sample from which it is possible to gauge changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviours over time.

Participants normally serve on a citizens’ panel for a period of two to four years.

A citizens’ panel is a ‘deliberative’ form of participation. Deliberative participation differs from normal public consultation or public participation because it does not seek ‘snapshot’ answers on predefined questions framed by policy makers. Instead the emphasis is on getting citizens to think about their experiences and priorities, to look at the problems of providing public services, and to frame their own suggestions and recommendations for policy makers to consider. In short, people are asked to deliberate, listen to evidence, and get involved in a far more extensive way with the issues under consideration. The motivation for establishing a citizens’ panel comes from several sources:

- the intelligence of the electorate should not be underestimated
- it is difficult for public officials to have as much information about citizens’ situations as the citizens do themselves
- the interconnections between problems from the citizens’ point of view are often subtle and yet very important for the way that policy decisions work or do not work.

Tips for citizens’ panels

Panels can be called on for a range of quantitative research methods such as:

- telephone surveys
- face-to-face interviews
- self completion of postal questionnaires
- to participate in important qualitative consultation such as a citizens’ jury, deliberative poll or consensus conference.

Reference

Innovations in democracy.
See Section 8, Stories, item 81

Reference

Adapted from UK Parliament Select Committee on Public Administration Sixth Report, Innovations In citizen participation in government

Reference

Ideas for community consultation – a discussion on principles and procedures, PlanningNSW. See Section 8, Stories, item 37
Panels can be used:
- as a sounding board to test ideas
- to identify attitudes to various options being considered, say with regard to the proposed redevelopment of a park
- to assess satisfaction with local services
- to examine the needs and aspirations of the community at the pre-planning stage of a plan making process.

Decision making is not the task of a citizens’ panel. The feedback from the panel participants may help to:
- inform better decisions
- provide data to help with decision making
- help to identify important issues that require more intensive research and consultation.

Panels can be conducted in partnership with other connected organisations/ agencies.

The advantages include:
- citizens gain a better understanding of local government and this has the potential to deliver greater satisfaction about local government decision making
- views can be tracked over time
- particular targets can be examined
- access is opened to a wide range of people including minority groups.

Weaknesses include:
- the risk that panel members will lose interest
- some may pull out before their term expires, compromising the ‘representativeness’ of the panel
- having to replace members throughout the process
- initial stages are resource intensive.

**Checklist**
- Clearly describe the purpose of the citizens’ panel, and the issue to be considered.
- Describe where in the spectrum the citizens’ panel sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
- Use the local community profile or other information on the community held by a council or other relevant agency as a basis for selecting participants.
- Recruit and select panel members by either:
  - self-nomination where individuals respond to a general invitation via letterbox drop, newspaper insert, flyer in rates notice, by returning a form
  - random selection process via direct invitation to people selected randomly from the electoral roll, random digit dialing, or phoning, say, every tenth number in the phone book.
- Invite prospective panel members to participate, clearly explaining the panel’s purpose and benefits as well as the commitment required.

**Reference**
Adapted from *Consult your community: a handbook – a guide to using the residents’ feedback register*,
Dr Lyn Carson (ed.)
See Section 8, Stories, item 17
Collect participant information for the panel. Basic information should include:
- name
- address
- gender
- age
- occupation
- ethnicity
- rural or urban if non-metropolitan
- special needs for instance if assistance is required for hearing impaired, or for people with a mobility disability — in case they are invited to participate in a focus group or jury/panel at some stage.

Set up a management strategy for the panel.

Conduct surveys or more deliberative engagement techniques.

Evaluate the register periodically.

**Similar techniques**
Research panel, residents’ feedback register or panel

**Further reading**
- *Ideas for community consultation: a discussion on principles and procedures*, Planning NSW
- *Consult your community: a handbook – a guide to using the residents’ feedback register*, Dr Lyn Carson (series editor)

**>> 2.2 Community information and feedback session**
This technique itself takes little time yet requires significant expenditure of resources to prepare.

**Where in spectrum**  >> 2. Consult

**Description**
A community information and feedback session is usually a day on site at a nominated venue where participants will:
- view plans for a proposed development
- discuss issues with the sponsoring organisation
- provide comments or written feedback about the project.
The session gives members of the public opportunities to gain information and offer input to the planning process informally on a one-to-one basis. Everyone gets a turn to talk and to focus on the particular issues that interest them. In particular, the session presents and tests a draft plan or an option and seeks feedback from the broad community before it is finalised. The problems inherent in large public meetings are avoided – key opinion formers cannot dominate and there is no set format. The presentation is predominantly graphic material, using a series of display panels. Participants are notified through a letterbox drop to all residents in the area, by advertising in local media, and through sending notices to ratepayers to engage property owners.

**Tips for community information and feedback sessions**

The technique is best used to identify key issues or options in specific situations such as a master plan or development application.

The sessions are also appropriate to engage the wider community where specific stakeholders are unavailable.

Sufficient time should be allowed to prepare good quality, predominantly graphic based presentation material.

Ensure that relevant consultant staff are at the session to effectively engage the community.

The advantages include:
- encouraging feedback from those not comfortable expressing their views in public and those that might not otherwise be contacted
- publicising and building credibility of the plan making or development assessment process.

The method's weaknesses include:
- response rates and opinions given through feedback do not always correspond to the concerns of the general community
- all groups may not be reached unless particular attention is given to special needs groups.

**Checklist**

- Clearly describe the purpose of the community information and feedback session, and the issue to be considered.
- Describe where in the spectrum the community information and feedback session sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
- Allow an appropriate period of notification — 10 days minimum.
- Ensure that the venue is accessible for all and reasonably close to the notification area.
- Ensure adequate staff are available and well prepared.
- Allow significant time for preparation of the display material.
☒ Prepare fact sheets and feedback forms. Feedback forms should closely follow the presentation material. They should also include relevant questions for general identification of respondents such as location of residence. This enables later analysis to correlate types of feedback with certain respondent groups.

☒ Ensure translation services are provided if required.

☒ All information should be marked as 'Draft for Consultation'.

☒ Report the summary of feedback received in a table form without elaborate analysis.

Similar techniques
Open day

Further reading
- Community planning handbook

>> 2.3 Facilitation
This technique involves some additional expenditure of preparation time and money to cover the cost of the facilitator but can deliver outcomes that would not be possible without facilitation.


Description
Facilitation is a technique used to enhance the effectiveness of other community engagement techniques. It involves a neutral person, or facilitator, steering an event such as a forum, workshop or public meeting to ensure that all views are voiced and heard and that the environment is conducive to the open expression of needs and concerns. A facilitator’s role is also to lead participants towards identifying common ground and mutually acceptable options. Facilitation is a vital tool when dealing with contested issues or where there is potential conflict between parties over outcomes. This can occur in almost any issue. Cole-Edelstein (2001) has identified some of the fundamental principles of facilitation:
- trust and integrity
- transparency and accountability
- flexibility to reflect the directions of the process
- responsibility to process, not outcomes.
Tips on facilitation

Using an experienced independent facilitator can greatly increase the chances that a community engagement will successfully achieve its objectives. A facilitator can add integrity and objectivity to a program by:

- having no vested interest in the outcome of a process
- focusing on the management of the meeting while the presenters can concentrate on presenting material and responding to specific questions
- managing large public forums where many viewpoints need to be considered and close attention has to be paid to ensure that objectives of the consultation are achieved
- having expertise in specialised or structurally complex community engagements such as focus groups, deliberative forums or citizens juries
- managing heated discussion and antagonistic behaviour, allowing presenters to focus on specific material
- interpreting the mood of a consultation process and advising appropriate ways to conduct future meetings
- maintaining the fairness and equity of the process so that all voices can be heard and none is allowed to dominate.

The engagement of a facilitator also provides community representatives with a contact they can approach about issues of concern.

Facilitation at work

A facilitation session is held to receive a number of objections to a development application. Attendees include objectors, developers and council officers. This type of session often results in issues being resolved, speeding up the approval process by allowing the application to be determined by delegation rather than considered by council.

Facilitation is useful in engagements with groups that require special consideration, such as Aboriginal people or young people.

During consultations about controversial redevelopment and regeneration proposals, facilitation can be used particularly at the pre-lodgment and master planning stages of a development assessment process.

Facilitation can help at the broad strategy development stage of a planning process when visioning workshops, search conferences or forums are held to consider community concerns and hopes for a place.
Checklist

☑ Consider whether to use a facilitator based on the tips and examples shown here and the nature and history of the issue or proposal in question.

☑ Carefully establish the objectives of an event where you plan to use a facilitator as well as the facilitator’s role in the event.

☑ Select a facilitator who has no interests that might compromise independence.

☑ Provide the facilitator with adequate background information on the issue or proposal, the objectives of the event and the facilitator’s role.

☑ Involve the facilitator in the design of the engagement process.

☑ Explain the facilitator’s role and background to the participants at the beginning of the event.

Further reading

• *A guide to facilitation*, Gosford City Council (October 1999)

• *Reaching common ground*, M. Dugdale, Open Government Community Consultation and Public Participation Conference, NSW (October 1996)

2.4 Focus group

This technique can be relatively resource intensive, especially when a wide range of special interest groups are targeted, however, it is an effective way to engage groups who may be under represented in larger forums.

Where in spectrum  >> 2. Consult

Description

Focus groups can help develop a program or consider a proposal by incorporating views from groups that have a specific interest or concerns. Focus groups target members of a specific population or special needs group.

It is useful to seek advice from individuals or organisations with local expertise when selecting appropriate groups. Because focus groups tend to involve small numbers, around eight to twelve, all participants have a chance to contribute.
Tips for focus groups

Focus groups are useful in identifying potentially polarising conflict and finding consensus solutions. They supply detailed and relevant information on how particular groups may be affected.

A skilled facilitator is needed and groups should last no more than two hours without a break.

Focus groups should not be used for issues that are too simple to warrant a number of people, or for questions that are too complex for a one-off discussion.

Several groups may be needed to investigate views from different perspectives and the input and commitment of group members should be valued.

The advantages of focus groups are that they:
- allow for brainstorming ideas
- can include those who may usually be excluded
- allow in depth discussion.

Weaknesses include:
- possible cost
- lack of confidentiality
- qualitative information only
- difficulty in prioritising issues.

Checklist

☑ Describe what will happen to the views expressed and how they may influence the matter under consideration.
☑ Clearly define objectives and measurements for success.
☑ Choose a location which is suitable – comfortable, accessible, private, and a safe place to talk.
☑ Make sure that refreshments are available.
☑ Provide and agree on the consent and information sheets, and confidentiality agreements.
☑ Make group members aware of ethical issues especially their own confidentiality.
☑ Reassure participants that views will not be linked to individuals’ identity.
☑ The facilitator should set the ground rules around the discussion and introduce themselves and the notetaker.
☑ The facilitator should have a list of questions or topics to help guide the process.
☑ Get someone to record or to take notes about the discussion.
☑ Use a flip chart to help people see the issues while they are talking.
☑ Researchers should write up their notes, the flip chart notes, and check the tapes at the end.
2.5 Public hearing

Description
A public hearing is held in response to a submission for a hearing to discuss concerns about a draft local environment plan. A council has the discretion as to whether or not to hold a public hearing.

The Minister for Planning may arrange a public hearing to enable the community to comment on a particular aspect, or on the entire draft of a State planning policy.

Tips for public hearings
A public hearing may be appropriate if it is considered in the public interest. This is sometimes the case if the council thinks the issues raised in a submission are significant enough to be the subject of a hearing.

Public hearings are best used in conjunction with other methods of engagement such as informal meetings and facilitation.

Some advantages of a public hearing are:
- the public is allowed, by prior arrangement, to speak without rebuttal
- available evidence can be worked through systematically
- comments are put on record.

Weaknesses include:
- it does not foster dialogue
- an adversarial mood can be created
- minority groups and those who do not like public speaking are not easily included
- people with the confidence or resources to make a case tend to be favoured.

Checklist
☐ Clearly describe the purpose of the public hearing and the issue to be considered
☐ Describe where in the spectrum the public hearing sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
☐ Decide whether a public hearing is appropriate when you receive a request for one.
☐ Advertise the public hearing by public notice in a locally circulating newspaper.
☐ Send the notice to each person who requested a public hearing.

Further reading
- Consulting our community: a short guide, Waverley Council
- Community consultation toolkit, Warringah Council

See Section 8, Stories, item 24
See Section 8, Stories, item 13
Carefully schedule presentations by interested parties.
Ensure presenters can speak for their allotted time without interruption.
Furnish a report of the public hearing to council or commissioning agency.
Make the report public.
A decision on the issue is made by council or commissioning agency.

Similar techniques
Commission of Inquiry

Further reading
- Fact sheet 10 – Commission of Inquiry, Environmental Defender’s Office Ltd (July 2000)

2.6 Public meeting
This is a relatively low cost technique that may need expert facilitation to fully exploit its usefulness.

Where in spectrum >> 2. Consult

Public meetings present information and proposals within a framework that enables immediate discussion and feedback. Public meetings should be used in conjunction with other techniques and not as the only consultative tool as they often attract the vocal minority.

Tips for public meetings
Public meetings are suitable for an open discussion about a particular issue or plan. They can be used to capture community feedback and may include a wide range of people who have an interest in the topic.

Public meetings need an experienced facilitator, particularly if a large group is expected and the meeting is the primary consultation mechanism in the process.

The disadvantage of public meetings is that they are prone to be dominated by special interest groups and so are not a representative forum. Consider alternative techniques first when dealing with contentious issues as holding a public meeting can often backfire.
Checklist

☑ Describe where in the spectrum the public meeting sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.

☑ Be clear in the publicity about the purpose of the meeting, location, how to get there, and who the presenters are.

☑ Stakeholder analysis will assist with marketing for the meeting. This can include:
  - advertising in local papers
  - letterbox drops
  - mayoral column
  - letters to particular groups and individuals
  - websites.

☑ Give at least two weeks notice of meeting whatever notification techniques are being used.

☑ Consider a day and a time that will best suit the invitees. Avoid holidays, days of religious significance, normal working hours.

☑ Book a venue that is large enough, has good acoustics and is suitable for people with disabilities.

☑ Ensure presenters are well briefed on their role and their maximum speaking time.

☑ Ensure presenters, or the facilitator, understand place-based issues and is prepared to answer difficult questions.

☑ Ensure audio visual aids are booked and supplied for the event.

☑ Make sure presenters/facilitator arrive early enough to meet each other, for a pre-meeting briefing, and to test equipment.

☑ Ensure presenters have name tags.

☑ Have an attendance sheet available at the entrance(s) to the venue.

☑ Ensure language translation facilities and aids for people with disabilities (i.e. hearing loops) are available.

Similar techniques

Public forum

Further reading

- Community consultation toolkit, Warringah Council
- Resourcing consultation: a manual to assist consultation by government agencies, Office of Social Policy (November 1993)
- Lgov e-learning site www.lgov.org.au/docs/servicestocouncils/training/elearning/index.html useful tips on communicating, including dealing with difficult people, meeting techniques

Reference

Inclusive consultation: a practical guide to involving people with disabilities, Department of Family and Community Services. See Section 8, Stories, Item 39
2.7 Questionnaire

This technique can be a valuable way to obtain information that will inform the engagement process although it takes significant resources.

Description

A questionnaire or survey is a face-to-face, postal or electronic set of pre-determined questions designed to obtain information, views and concerns associated with a planning or development process.

Tips for questionnaires

A questionnaire is generally used in conjunction with other engagement techniques and is useful for:

- assessing community needs at the planning and design stage
- gaining feedback about a current plan or policy or after an engagement event or strategy
- gauging public opinion about a draft proposal.

Questionnaires can be used periodically to measure:

- changes to community perceptions
- concerns over time
- the performance of a process or program
- the effectiveness of other community engagement techniques.

Ensure that you will achieve statistically valid results before investing in a questionnaire.

Independent expertise in developing and administering the questionnaire will be needed to avoid bias.

Questions should be straightforward, unambiguous and free of jargon. 'Closed' questions (tick box) are easier to collate, but opportunities should also be given for comment.

Depending on the demographics, consider the need for questionnaires to be available in community languages, or for targeting some people by telephone as an alternative to paper based or electronic versions.

Unless essential, do not ask for identifying details. Anonymity can increase response rate and encourage more honest answers.

Obtain basic demographic information to establish patterns for different groups in the community and to assess whether the respondents are representative.

The advantages of a questionnaire include:

- those who might not attend meetings are engaged
- statistically valid results can be more acceptable to the public and decision makers.
Weaknesses include:
- resource intensive
- low response rate
- limited detail.

Checklist
- Describe where in the spectrum the questionnaire sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
- Carefully establish the objectives of the questionnaire:
  - Why is it being undertaken?
  - What information is sought?
  - Who should the questionnaire target?
  - How will the information be used?
- Consider whether to engage a specialist contractor to develop and administer if professional skills are not available in-house.
- Develop appropriate questions.
- Pilot the questionnaire with people in the target group and amend its structure if you need to.
- Decide the best way of distributing the questionnaire:
  - mail out
  - telephone
  - face-to-face.
- For mail out or telephone questionnaires, obtain details that will provide a representative sample of the target community:
  - service user records
  - community group membership records
  - electoral roll
  - rate payers list.
- For mail out questionnaires, prepare letter and reply paid envelopes.
- Print and distribute questionnaires and supporting material, as required.
- For telephone or face-to-face questionnaires, prepare guidelines for staff or contractors who will carry out the interviews and ensure they have the necessary specialist skills.
- Analyse the questionnaire responses. Consider using a data collation company for large numbers of questionnaires.
- Prepare a report on the results of the questionnaire and publish if appropriate.

Similar techniques
Opinion poll

Further reading
- Community consultation toolkit, Warringah Council

Reference
Adapted from Community consultation toolkit, Warringah Council.
See Section 8, Stories, Item 13
3.1 **Planning focus meeting**

This technique is a cost effective way of resolving issues at the pre-lodgment stage and involves relatively few resources.

**Description**

The planning focus meeting includes one or more meetings between the development proponent and authorities. It provides a forum for proponents to introduce projects and explain various components and considerations. It also acts as a contact point for various government agencies including councils in those areas the development will be, to identify key issues of concern. From this point, the authorities are able to advise on which key issues the proponents should analyse and assess.

Planning focus meetings are valuable because they deal at an early stage with matters that might otherwise hold up the assessment process. They help clarify the main standards, criteria and guidelines that will be used by authorities in assessing and determining projects.

Their purpose is to establish a sound basis that ensures projects are adequately described and their implications are properly identified and addressed. It is not a forum for making decisions about whether a project can be approved or for setting conditions.

**Tips for planning focus meetings**

These meetings are recommended for State significant development that is also 'integrated development', and for major infrastructure projects where the Minister for Planning is the consent authority.

They are also suitable for local developments that are complex or controversial or that require an environmental impact statement.

Ensure that the chairperson is familiar with the planning focus process, understands the nature of the development being considered, and has the ability to involve participants effectively. The chairperson should also negotiate to resolve any overlapping, inconsistent or conflicting requirements of various agencies.

Use the meeting to:

- clarify the objectives for the proposal in terms of community needs and concerns, and the relationship of the proposal to any relevant strategic plans, government policy directions and statutory or planning constraints
- identify feasible alternatives and clarify their relative merits
- prioritise issues and identify those that are key to the decision making
- establish the scope of the studies for key issues so that there will be adequate information for decision making
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- identify performance objectives for key issues where possible
- identify government and other experts who can guide the assessment of a key issue or peer review the assessment
- identify processes for continued community involvement.

The main advantage of a focus meeting is that it identifies clearer, more comprehensive and consistent requirements that can lead to more efficient processing and decision making.

**Checklist**

- Clearly describe the purpose of the planning focus meeting, and the issue to be considered.
- Describe where in the spectrum the planning focus meeting sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
- Initiate planning focus as early as possible in the preliminary stage of formulating each project, either pre-planning or pre-lodgment.
- Identify participating agencies.
- Arrange the planning focus meeting in liaison with the proponent.
- Give a minimum of three weeks notice of a planning focus meeting.
- Forward agenda and project information provided by the proponent at the time of giving notice.
- Arrange a suitable venue and ensure relevant equipment is available such as data projector, screen, whiteboard.
- Hold a site inspection as part of the planning focus meeting.
- Identify relevant contact details so the proponent and authorities can liaise during project preparation.
- Make sure that refreshments are available.
- Record or take minutes of the meeting including key statutory requirements and environmental issues and a timetable for further action.
- Forward the minutes or a record of the meeting to participants for confirmation and action as required.

**Similar techniques**

Policy round table

**Further reading**

- *Planning focus: good practice guidelines*, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (2001)
3.2 Precinct committee

This technique is a low-cost, resource efficient way to engage the community. However, councils need to allocate adequate staff resources to service and attend committee meetings.

Description

Precinct committees provide a forum for residents to actively participate in council decision making relevant to their area. Residents from local areas make up the committees and meet regularly to discuss issues which affect them. Precinct meetings are organised by volunteer local residents elected by members. Meetings are open to any person living within the precinct boundaries.

Precinct committees discuss matters of local relevance and may make recommendations to the council. Among other things, they discuss development applications and planning issues.

Precinct committees may have the right to address the relevant council committee about any aspect of their recommendations relating to items on the agenda of the council committee meeting.

Tips for precinct committees

Precinct committees offer a two way flow of communication and information between the council and residents. They work best when seen to be broadly representative of the views of the residents of the precinct area.

The formation of precinct committees can be encouraged by publicising their mutual benefits to council and residents.

Where there is interest by residents or councillors 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 council community services to have precinct/resident representation
- provide advice and support to committees; some councils do this through their community liaison officers or place managers.

Advice might include:

- the extent to which the committee’s views can influence council’s decisions
- hold meetings on a fixed day of the month, say the first Monday, to make it easier for people to remember when their meeting will be held and allow them to plan ahead
- prepare agendas and consider the order of items such as early discussion of development applications, particularly if the architects of the proposal are present so that they can leave the meeting after the item
- limit agenda items so that all business can be completed within a reasonable time – lengthy meetings discourage people from attending
- allow people to have a 'say' – there should be discussion on a matter before someone moves a motion
- where necessary limit the length of time and the number of times a particular person can discuss a matter. This allows everyone a 'fair go' at expressing their point of view and avoids the meeting being dominated by an individual. This should also apply to any guests at the meeting; aldermen and council officers
- maintain a balance between being too formal so that people may feel restricted and afraid to speak, or too informal where people lose interest because discussion is not going anywhere.

Support might include:
- training for committee members, particularly office bearers (treasurer, chairperson, secretary)
- typing and printing notices the committee wants distributed to residents
- advertising meeting dates in the council's regular newspaper entry
- referring relevant matters to the precinct committee in time for them to consider the matters and make useful comments or recommendations
- giving the committee timely feedback about their input and the outcomes of the relevant process
- making minutes available to the community, for instance via the council website
- translation services.

Checklist
A precinct committee should:
☑ Hold precinct meetings, including an annual general meeting, at regular intervals, say monthly or bi monthly. Supply council with timely input on issues affecting the amenity of the local precinct and the needs of local precincts.
☑ Encourage all residents in the precinct and councillors to attend meetings by:
  - ensuring meetings are well publicised with adequate notice at least seven days in advance
  - setting agendas which are relevant to local needs, stimulate interest in both local issues and issues of broader concern
  - ensuring meetings are conducted in a well organised and open manner at accessible venues.
☑ Keep attendance sheets at all meetings so that attendees' eligibility to vote can be checked.
☑ Use attendance registers to record the name, address, contact phone number and signature of those people present who agree to supply this information. Totals of all people attending must be shown.
☑ Keep an accurate record of voting at meetings and ensure that only those eligible to vote take part in the procedure.

Website URL
Record minutes of decisions and views expressed at meetings.

Forward a copy of the minutes and attendance sheets to council as soon as possible. Some councils put precinct committee minutes on their websites.

Ensure annual general meetings are held which incorporate annual elections of precinct executives.

List and table all correspondence received at each precinct meeting and allow time for discussion.

Further reading

- *Precinct system: valid model of public participation or relic?*
4. Collaborate

4.1 Advisory committee

This technique requires ongoing commitment and resource support.

Description

Advisory committees generally comprise members of community groups and government or non-government agencies with expertise in a specific field. They can be formed to monitor issues in relation to:

- various government programs such as Living Centres
- planning processes – place-based strategic planning or development of DCPs in a specific local government area
- specific issues – advising on Aboriginal peoples’ needs/concerns
- specific matters such as access for people with disabilities, and community safety.

In a consultation process, they can offer advice on appropriate changes to programs, policies or plans or recommend the introduction of specific services. Advisory committees can help produce more appropriate policy and reduce criticism from interest groups.

Although similar to task forces, advisory committees function as an ongoing structure while task forces tend to be formed on a short term basis to focus specifically on the development of a particular proposal.

Tips for advisory committees

Advisory committees are particularly useful for involving community representatives, especially people with required expertise, in complex, controversial or significant planning and development assessment processes.

Be aware that committees are not lobby groups – they have an important public function beyond individual members’ own interests. Care needs to be taken to establish, manage and monitor their ongoing operation.

Committees are more effective if their roles and terms of reference are clearly established before deciding on membership. Also establish a selection criteria for membership.

Membership is often drawn directly from targeted groups and agencies, however, consider calling for expressions of interest and interviewing potential members. This method is helpful for controversial proposals or where there is not scope to have representatives of all relevant groups on the committee. An open selection process will increase the committee’s credibility.
Manage conflicts of interest that may occur during the life of the committee. Ask members to declare interests at the time of selection or to let the committee know as soon as a potential conflict arises. Note, management does not mean simply recording members’ disclosures. The committee will need to decide how to deal with a member’s conflict of interest. One option is to exclude them from discussing or making recommendations on a particular issue. Alternatively, they can be asked to resign from the committee.

An advisory committee demonstrates a commitment to participatory engagement and suggests to the community that they will be able to influence decisions and outcomes. The boundaries of this influence need to be clearly defined.

Time and resources must be committed to supporting the committee during the life of the project or the committee.

Where there are divergent views or where members have unequal status, knowledge or expertise, facilitation may be needed.

Keep the committee informed of progress, especially:
- the results of community consultation
- decisions by the sponsoring agencies
- policy changes/emerging issues that will influence the committee's advice/role.

Encourage members to keep their interest groups informed about committee deliberations. The public may not support the committee's recommendations, especially where consensus is the result of compromise.

Explain the reasons for not following a committee's advice or recommendations – because of their 'official' status, ignoring their advice can be politically costly.

**Checklist**
- Clearly define the role of the committee including the timeframe and the sphere of influence.
- Develop terms of reference.
- Determine the membership selection process and criteria.
- Obtain approval from the council, government agency or Minister, as required.
- Select members and advertise for expressions of interest where appropriate.
- Determine responsibilities and desired outcomes.
- Hold meetings in accordance with terms of reference or agreed arrangements.
- Schedule meetings for times that suit members.
- Ensure the venue is suitable – accessible with necessary equipment.
- Make sure refreshments are available.
- Ensure the meetings are recorded or notes taken and permanently documented.
- Circulate records of meetings to participants.
- Establish sub-committees to undertake specific projects and tasks as required.
- Ensure the committee reports on outcomes and recommendations.
- Keep the wider community in the loop to encourage ownership of the outcomes.
- Monitor the committee to ensure it remains representative for the program, process or issue.

**Similar techniques**
Consultative committee, taskforce

**Further reading**

See Section 8, Stories, item 57
- *The seven habits of highly effective stakeholder advisory committees*, Bruce Turner, Phoenix Facilitation
- Course notes from the Community Engagement: Consultation and Participation in the Public Sector training program delivered through the Institute of Public Administration Australia NSW Division (IPAA NSW), www.nsw.ipaa.org.au by Elton Consulting

See Section 8, Stories, item 13
- *Community consultation toolkit*, Warringah Council (December 2000)

**4.2 Charette**

This is a resource intensive technique that can deliver concrete outcomes very quickly and cost effectively.

Where in spectrum  >> 4. Collaborate

**Description**

A charette or ‘inquiry by design’ workshop is an intensive workshop where stakeholders are brought together to suggest solutions for complex planning issues. Such solutions include trying to balance planning, economic and social factors as well as urban design and sustainability considerations. A charette should include representatives from interest groups although it is not limited to these groups. It involves a rapid and dynamic interchange of ideas between planning practitioners, stakeholders and the general community. Concrete results are produced rapidly with meaningful and well placed involvement of the community. It is a cost effective means of envisioning the outcomes at an early stage and assessing the planning proposals at the final stage. It is important that both the consent authority and the participants in the charette understand its role in decision-making.
Tips for charettes

A charette can be used when some community consultation is desirable for a plan that has to be drawn up in a short time for a region or particular site. New technologies may be used to assist with sketch design and production of presentation materials for the charette. Prior community agreement that something should be done is essential for a charette to succeed.

The advantages of a charette include:
- promoting joint problem solving and creative thinking
- creating partnerships and positive working relationships with the community.

Weaknesses include:
- that participants are unlikely to be representative of the community
- it is difficult to involve groups usually marginalised from the consultative process.

Checklist

☑ Clearly describe the purpose of the charette, and the issue to be considered.
☑ Describe where in the spectrum the charette sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
☑ Publicise the issue under discussion widely.
☑ Book venues for large public meetings.

A process for a charette could be:

**On day one**
☑ Draw up some preliminary issues for discussion.
☑ Hold a public meeting in the evening to allow the general community to identify options and desired outcomes from the planning process through discussion collectively and in smaller, facilitated groups.

**On day two**
☑ Meet with stakeholder groups, including landowners, developers and those with an interest in the region at issue such as environmentalists. This allows for ‘expert’ input into devising planning options.

**On day three**
☑ Draw up a list of options using the combined understanding of community concerns with the preferred outcomes of the interest groups. These options are produced in a format which is open to public inspection by the community and the stakeholders concerned. If the convenors feel some of the options suggested are not viable or conflict with community values, they can incorporate this into the planning options. Focus meetings are held with stakeholders and interested community members.

**On day four**
☑ Hold a detailed and intensive workshop to formulate the preferred outcomes from the previous day into concrete planning proposals.
On day five

- Complete the process, including the production of sketches and materials for presentation if applicable.
- Hold another public meeting in the evening to present the planning proposals to the general community. If there is strong public opposition to the proposals, an extra day may be necessary to respond to this criticism.

Charettes may be split over two weekends, or held on consecutive days. The actual number of days may vary.

Similar techniques
Inquiry by design, design workshop, design day

Further reading
- Ideas for community consultation: a discussion on principles and procedures, PlanningNSW

>> 4.3 Policy round table
This technique calls for thorough planning and a commitment to follow up, but does not need extensive resources.

Where in spectrum  >> 4. Collaborate

Description
A policy round table is a joint planning/decision making forum, generally a short term or one-off arrangement, between government agencies and key consumer groups with expertise about a specific issue.

Tips for policy round tables
Policy round tables help to establish a collaborative approach at the outset. They are used to identify key issues and methods of engaging the community at the pre-plan stage of a plan making process.

The approach ensures that participants clearly understand the scope of the planning process so that expectations are realistic.

Gather and circulate available information well in advance of the session to get most benefit from the policy round table.
Checklist

☑ Clearly define the objectives of the policy round table.
☑ Describe where in the spectrum the policy round table sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.
☑ Decide whether to use a facilitator – if it is a complex or contentious issue or proposal.
☑ Should you engage a facilitator, ensure the issue or proposal is understood along with the objectives of the policy round table and their role in the process.
☑ Determine who will be invited to participate and their roles.
☑ Give selected participants adequate notice of the forum.
☑ When you give participants notice, also supply adequate information about the objectives of the policy round table and their own roles. Include background information on the proposal or issue to be discussed.
☑ Schedule the policy round table for a time that suits participants.
☑ Check that the venue is suitable – accessible, and complete with necessary equipment.
☑ Make sure refreshments are available.
☑ Ensure the policy round table deliberations and decisions are recorded or notes taken and documented.
☑ Circulate a report of the policy round table to participants.
☑ Make the results publicly available.
☑ Let participants know how the outcome of the policy round table will influence the process and what the next steps will be.

Further reading

- Course notes from the Community Engagement: Consultation and Participation in the Public Sector training program delivered through the Institute of Public Administration Australia NSW Division (IPAA NSW), www.nsw.ipaa.org.au by Elton Consulting

>> 4.4 Regional forum

This technique is an important way of promoting cooperation and coordination in regional planning. It requires ongoing commitment of resources and is an implicit component of planFIRST.

Where in spectrum >> 4. Collaborate

Description

A regional forum promotes cooperative and coordinated regional planning and provides comprehensive advice to the Minister for Planning. It brings together key government and community based interests in a region and coordinates preparation, maintenance and implementation of regional strategies in NSW. This task also includes:

- streaming information management
- developing consistent, whole-of-government guidance to local councils on implementing regional strategies.
The members of the forum meet regularly to discuss and review the performance of the regional strategy. The size and make up of the forum varies, depending on the region. Generally it includes:
- representatives from State agencies
- elected representatives from councils in the region
- non-government representatives.

**Tips for regional forums**

Ensure that members are from the region and represent community, business and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests.

Consistent with the Government's policy regarding representation on boards and committees, nominations for membership will be encouraged from women, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with a disability and young people.

Nominations for non-government interest are sought through advertisements in newspapers and on the PlanningNSW website. They must be in writing and provide details of qualifications, experience or expertise that would enable the person to effectively contribute to a regional forum.

A regional forum may establish subcommittees as it considers necessary to provide advice on particular issues.

**Checklist**

- Identify terms of reference.
- Ensure members are aware of and declare (in writing to the chair of the forum) any conflicts of interest that may arise between their duties as a member to the Forum and their other interests or other duties. In the event of a conflict of interest, the chair will need to consider a course of action to deal with the matter.
- Ensure members are clear on the role of the forum and its relationship to the Minister for Planning and the regional strategy planning team in PlanningNSW.
- Determine responsibilities of each of the members and the desired outcomes of the forum.
- Conduct meetings in accordance with the terms of reference.
- Develop strategies to develop and maintain a dialogue with the community, particularly in effectively involving the community in identifying the vision, intended outcomes, and actions.
- Develop communication networks with bodies like the Regional Organisations of Councils, Regional Economic Development Boards, Catchment Management Boards, etc. to seek advice on specific technical matters and to disseminate information through these organisations.
- Ensure the venue is suitable – accessible with the necessary equipment.
- Make sure refreshments are available.
Ensure the meetings are recorded or notes taken and permanently documented.

Circulate records of meetings to members of the forum.

Establish sub-committees as the forum considers necessary to support the work of the forum and provide effective feedback loops.

Review on a yearly basis the performance of the regional strategy.

Once the regional strategy is made, ensure it is reviewed and reported on to the Minister once in every five-year period.

Monitor the representativeness and effectiveness of the forum, including the sub-committee.

Further reading

- *Regional forum handbook*, PlanningNSW (coming soon)

>> 4.5 Search conference

This technique is a resource intensive, effective means of creating a partnership with the community. It can be used for developing and gaining broad commitment in a strategic planning process. Its success depends on a strong commitment to follow through with conference outcomes.

Where in spectrum  >> 5. Empower

Description

Search conferences were pioneered in England in 1959. They are usually held early in a planning process to develop a broad vision for a particular project or organisation. Search conferences focus on first identifying desirable futures and then concentrating on ways to achieve them. Search conferences are intensive events, usually taking place over two days and two nights (Roulier 1997). Sometimes called future search conferences, they involve a large group of people, selected because they have power or information on the topic at hand or are affected by the outcomes. The ideal number is considered to be 64 people, as 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 done about them.
   - Groups share what they are proud of and sorry about in their community.

3. Create ideal futures
   - Mixed small groups develop visions.
   - Barriers to 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
     - identify any unresolved differences.

5. Make action plans
   - Self selected action groups plan projects and publicly commit to their action.

**Tips for search conferences**
A search conference is more suited to dealing with broad place based strategic issues than specific developments.

Ensure there is strong support for the search conference approach within the sponsoring body for example, a local council or PlanningNSW. A low level of support may jeopardise associated engagement events and strategies.

At least one experienced facilitator is essential to guide the process. Neither experts nor members of the sponsoring agency should take a lead role in a search conference as the emphasis is on equal partnership amongst the participants. The aim is for participants to determine the outcomes.

Plan the event in partnership with the community to build trust and reinforce the agency commitment to the process.

The search conference should be part of a wider and longer process.

If particular interest groups are under-represented at the conference, consider following up with specialised focus groups to bring in their ideas and perspectives.

Discourage non-participating observers. All those present should take an active part. This encourages a more candid, inclusive approach.

Encourage openness by using flip charts and displaying outcomes.

Strengths include:
   - good method for developing a vision for a project or an organisation
   - involves a broad range of relevant stakeholders
   - can create support across stakeholders early in planning process.
Weaknesses include:
- difficulties in reaching consensus
- capture by large interest groups if not carefully planned and facilitated
- can be logistically challenging.

Checklist

☑ Describe where in the spectrum the search conference sits. Be particularly clear about the extent to which input provided can influence the outcome of the process.

☑ Clearly identify the objectives of the search conference and confirm support within the agency.

☑ Involve a steering group of local people representing all parts of the community in planning and in identifying suitable participants.

☑ Allow plenty of time to prepare for the event especially to recruit participants.

☑ Engage an independent facilitator and ensure that they understand their role and the search conference process.

☑ Find a suitable venue that is:
  - accessible
  - large enough to hold 64 people in tables of eight or more
  - have room for presentations and plenty of wall space for displays
  - preferably with natural light and good acoustics.

☑ Offer suitable refreshments.

☑ Have suitable equipment available – note pads, flip charts, markers, tape or clips for displaying mind maps and time lines.

☑ Explain how the outcomes of the conference will be used, what the next steps in the process will be and how participants will be provided with feedback via a report.

☑ Ask participants to complete evaluation forms.

☑ Prepare a report on the conference and make it available to the participants and the wider community.

Further reading

- Future search, www.futuresearch.net (guidance on running a search conference)
- Community planning handbook
- Byron Shire Sustainable Agriculture Strategy, Byron Shire Council
- Coffs Harbour Rural Lands Strategic Plan, Coffs Harbour City Council
- Coffs Harbour Strategic Planning Workshops, Coffs Harbour City Council (the workshops illustrate a search conference type approach)
5. Empower

5.1 Citizens' jury

A citizens' jury is a time, labour and cost intensive exercise that requires expert facilitation.

Description

In a citizens' jury, a randomly recruited and demographically representative panel of citizens meets for three to five days to carefully examine an issue of public significance. The jury usually consists of 12 to 20 individuals, and serves as a microcosm of the community. Jurors are often paid a stipend for their time. Childcare, specialist support and travel expenses should also be offered to jurors. They hear from a variety of expert witnesses and are able to deliberate together on the issue. On the final day of their moderated hearings, the members of the citizens' jury present their recommendations to the public.

The 'charge' is the task facing the jury. It typically takes the form of a question or series of questions that the jurors address and answer during deliberations.

A citizens' jury is a transparent process that involves experts, ordinary citizens, service providers, interest groups and the decision makers on a specific topic of community concern.

Tips for citizens' juries

A citizens' jury needs high level facilitation, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. It also takes significant lead time, particularly to organise the survey or telepoll that randomly selects a demographically representative panel. Expert witnesses need to be found, and generally paid.

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 they should balance each other for jurors' consideration and deliberation.

By its nature, a citizens' jury will often attract media attention. A media strategy should be developed from the outset.

If jury recommendations are not followed you should be prepared to explain why not.

The advantages include:

- good opportunity to develop deep understanding of an issue
- informed feedback is provided
- public can identify with those participating.
- It can go beyond 'the usual suspects' because it offers an opportunity for non-traditional stakeholders to hear expert testimony, deliberate together and produce recommendation to inform decision making.

Website URLs


Bronte Catchment Project

Wollondilly Shire Council
Weaknesses of a citizens' jury include:

- it is expensive
- in many cases, there is no guarantee that the jury's decisions will be taken into account
- it does not suit all issues
- extensive preparatory work is needed
- it may not be representative.

Checklist

- Clearly describe the topic that is to be deliberated; usually takes the form of a question or series of questions
- The sponsoring organization should be clear about how the deliberations may influence policy and practice

Initiating the project

- Identify whether a citizens' jury is appropriate.
- Secure funding and set the budget.
- Appoint a project manager.

Setting up the project

- Define roles and terms of reference for all parties involved.
- Appoint an advisory committee.
- Appoint an evaluator.
- Appoint the chair and facilitator.
- Prepare terms of reference and the charge/question for the panel.
- Develop a media strategy.

Stakeholders

- Identify and invite stakeholders to participate in an advisory capacity and as presenters.

Recruiting and selecting the panel

- Choose the panel selection method.
- Select the panel.

Developing background information

- Provide objective and balanced background information on the topic to panel members.
- Provide logistical information to all participants.

Organising event logistics

- Organise event logistics and running the event.
- Carry out publicity.

Communicating outcomes and next steps

- Make recommendations.
- Evaluate the process.
- Communicate outcomes and next steps.
Similar techniques
Consensus conferencing, citizens’ panel, advisory group

Further reading
See Section 8, Stories, Item 37
- *Ideas for community consultation: a discussion on principles and procedures*, PlanningNSW

See Section 8, Stories, Item 82
PART C
Resources
sections 08 – 09
During the development of this handbook every council in NSW was asked to supply policies, guidelines and stories of particular plan making or development assessment processes. The views of planners, consultants and other State government departments were also sought directly through one-to-one exchanges, or small group sessions.

The resulting stories represent a first step towards building a database that illustrates the reality of community engagement on the ground at a State, regional or local level. A story may be a report of an engagement process, or it may simply provide an example of a plan or policy. The term ‘case study’ is not used because the stories are not presented in a uniform format and few have been evaluated against established criteria.

These stories are only available on the internet or, in some cases, by contacting the author/publisher.

Also see Section 9, where you will find a list of councils that responded to the questionnaire, and the submissions they made.

As a user of the handbook, you are encouraged to submit electronic versions of your stories to engagement@planning.nsw.gov.au.

Key to table
The stories are sequenced alphabetically (except for late inclusions, after item 77).

Tips for accessing URLs with your browser
Occasionally when you type in a URL into your browser a note will appear stating that the page you are seeking is unavailable. If this occurs it is suggested you take the following steps:

1. Check that you have typed the URL correctly.
2. Click on the ‘Refresh’ button on your browser’s task bar.
3. Type in the address of the site’s home page, and try searching for the document from there.
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<th>Keywords</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Best Practice in Development Assessment for Local Government</td>
<td>DA process; leading practice; case studies</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Boomanulla Conference for Country</td>
<td>Aboriginal; land; sustainability; environment; workshop</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Bronte Catchment Project. Innovative community engagement – institutional interaction, integration and coordination</td>
<td>Participatory; collaborate; empower; citizens’ jury; telepoll</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Can a practitioner get in the way?... and what do they do anyway</td>
<td>Information; participation; facilitator</td>
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<td>Children and Young People’s Participation, Part 1: Participation Principles and Resources</td>
<td>Participation; young people; special interest; resources</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Children and Young People’s Participation, Part 2: Techniques, Activities and Games</td>
<td>Participation; young people; special interest; techniques; games</td>
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<td>range of evaluation strategies, tools and outcomes that have been</td>
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<td>highlighting examples of such practice.</td>
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<td>process. Volume 1 details the consultation techniques used, provides</td>
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<td>an assessment of the consultation objectives, recommends potential</td>
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<td>vegetation in 2001–02.</td>
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<td>narrative of the author's experience in a difficult engagement where</td>
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<td>consequently managed to alter the behaviour of the proponent/client.</td>
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<td>involving young people in conferences and events. Written in simple</td>
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<td>Consult Your Community: A Handbook – A Guide to Using the Residents’ Feedback Register</td>
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<td>Disability; evaluation; Department of Community Services protocol; social justice</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Consultation from the contractor’s experience</td>
<td>Participation; brochure; surveys; letterbox drop; street notice; liaison group; information and feedback session; call centre; newspaper notices; reference group</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Consultation Policy and Guidelines</td>
<td>Guidelines; techniques; principles</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Consultation summary: inventory of activities in the Northern Rivers Region since 1995, prepared for the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Board and DLWC</td>
<td>Techniques; futures workshop; community workshop; charette; summit</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Consulting Citizens: A Resource Guide</td>
<td>Consultation; techniques; checklists; evaluation</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Consulting Ethnic Minority Communities: An Introduction for Public Services</td>
<td>Ethnic; culturally diverse; principles; techniques</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Consulting Our Community: A Short Guide</td>
<td>Guideline; consultation framework; techniques</td>
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<td>A guide produced by NSW Health that particularly explores engagement techniques and case studies. Also has a section on evaluation.</td>
<td>NSW Department of Health June 1999 (but site is updated)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.asnsw.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/crcp/nh/p/publications/community.html">http://www.asnsw.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/crcp/nh/p/publications/community.html</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>This guide includes a matrix that cross-references techniques to the level of real or perceived impacts that a plan, assessment or project will have on the community.</td>
<td>Warringah Council 2000</td>
<td><a href="http://www.warringah.nsw.gov.au/community_consultation.htm">http://www.warringah.nsw.gov.au/community_consultation.htm</a></td>
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<td>A Victorian council’s guidelines that pay particular attention to the ‘how to’ of engagement. Includes the strengths and weaknesses of various techniques, checklists for engaging with groups that require special consideration, and a worksheet for a consultation project plan.</td>
<td>Maribyrnong City Council July 2000</td>
<td><a href="http://infowest.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/council/publications/publications.htm">http://infowest.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/council/publications/publications.htm</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>An excellent guide to principles, tools and techniques of engagement. Includes examples of techniques (53) and useful forms. Focuses on ways of involving people in the planning and management of the environment.</td>
<td>Nick Wates, Earthscan Publications 2000</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wates.demon.co.uk/cph1.htm">http://www.wates.demon.co.uk/cph1.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A guide to a technique called the residents’ feedback register which claims to offer an affordable and representative way for local government to obtain input and feedback concerning a broad range of issues and concerns. It is a method that has much in common with people's panels, citizens' panels and ‘quick response citizens’ panels.</td>
<td>Lyn Carson, Max Hardy, Mary Hutchison, copyright June 2002 Dr L. Carson</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>A report that argues that successful consultation springs from the treatment of people with disabilities as active citizens. The result of research with people who have disabilities, the report makes a number of recommendations that aim to improve the performance of government.</td>
<td>Disability Council of NSW January 1997</td>
<td><a href="http://www.discoun.nsw.gov.au/Downloads/Publications/Consultation_Report.doc">http://www.discoun.nsw.gov.au/Downloads/Publications/Consultation_Report.doc</a></td>
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<td>This paper argues that community consultation from a constructor’s viewpoint has moved beyond merely one of compliance or democratic process. Walter Construction has entered a new plane which this paper refers to as ‘community and stakeholder partners’ which is underpinned by a process of open democracy. Includes two case studies.</td>
<td>Tim O’Hearn, Walter Construction Group, IAP2 Conference 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>A concise (18 page) guide that covers principles, processes, levels of consultation and techniques. It reflects a council that has a commitment to participation, but in many cases limited resources.</td>
<td>Waverley Council 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Consulting with Social Justice Target Groups, Appendix C, Social and Community Planning and Reporting Manual</td>
<td>Social justice; checklists</td>
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<td>Participation; arts projects; youth</td>
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<td>Five Examples of Innovation that Engage the Community</td>
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<td>Getting it right ; a journalists’ guide to working with Aboriginal communities during the Sydney 2000 Olympics</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; social justice</td>
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<td>Guideline for the consideration of sustainability in EIA</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Guidelines for the development, implementation and evaluation of National Public Health Strategies in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; social justice; health</td>
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<td>Hands On Help for Planning Effective Consultation Strategies</td>
<td>Guidelines; evaluation; checklists; budget</td>
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<td>Helping Trees and Jobs Live Together</td>
<td>Participation; assessment council; working group; committee; negotiation</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Ideas for Community Consultation</td>
<td>Consultation; planFIRST; techniques; checklists; evaluation</td>
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<td>Describes a number of barriers faced by a range of social justice target groups during consultation processes and offers guidance and checklists to assist community engagement planning and implementation.</td>
<td>NSW Department of Local Government December 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au">http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au</a>, see under Information - Local Government Publications</td>
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<td>In 2000, Tamworth PCYC, in country NSW wished to refurbish the club to incorporate a new youth space which was attractive, appropriate and accessible for young people. A creative consultation process was designed to enable the input of young people and artists into the design of the new space. It involved an artist residency program in three stages spanning approximately fourteen weeks. Artists were employed to work with young people developing skills and exploring issues of public space through a variety of art forms.</td>
<td>Meg Simpson, (PCYCNSW), IAP2 Conference 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au</a> /engagement/stories/</td>
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<td>An invitation to residents to attend a seminar for potential applicants and owners wishing to develop properties in the council area.</td>
<td>Leichhardt City Council 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au</a> /engagement/stories/</td>
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<td>Published to assist journalists understand and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during the Olympics.</td>
<td>NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs and SOCOG 2000</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au</a> /engagement/stories/</td>
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<td>Includes a Sustainability Framework demonstrating to proponents how project development and management, the EIA and approval process, and public participation interrelate to provide sustainable outcomes.</td>
<td>PlanningNSW 2003</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au</a> /engagement/stories/</td>
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<td>The report describes the findings of a literature review and Australia-wide consultations on issues related to the development and implementation of national public health strategies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Recommendations are made on the content of guidelines and these will form the basis of the second phase of the project; the preparation of guidelines.</td>
<td>Report for the National Public Health Partnership 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au">http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au</a> /php/natstrat/atsi/guidelines/</td>
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<tr>
<td>The project shows the NSW Government working with the whole community to fundamentally change the way we conserve and manage our forest resources. By bringing together the key stakeholders in the NSW forest debate, the project turned around decades of forest conflict to stabilise and invigorate the timber industry; to help arrest decline in regional communities; to put government decisions about forests on a scientific and rational basis; to establish a coherent and accountable system of reforms based on ecologically sustainable forest management, and to create on the eastern coast of NSW a world class reserve system of forests.</td>
<td>Resource and Conservation Assessment Council 2001</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au</a> /engagement/stories/</td>
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<td>In Focus – A gender analysis of NSW Local Government Social Plans</td>
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<td>Issues to consider when approaching ethnic communities for consultations</td>
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<td>Local Development Advertising and Notification Policy (DCP No. 8)</td>
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<td>Participation sharing the stage</td>
<td>Participation; young people; special interest; resources</td>
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<td>Techniques; consultation</td>
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<td>Precinct System – Valid model of public participation or relic?</td>
<td>Technique; precinct committee</td>
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<td>Project based community consultation guidelines</td>
<td>Guidelines; engagement processes; questionnaire; advisory group</td>
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<td>Protocols for Consultation and Negotiation with Aboriginal People</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; social justice</td>
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<td>Public Notification DCP</td>
<td>Information giving; public notice; advertisement; exhibition; Commission of Inquiry</td>
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<td>Public Participation – communitybuilders toolkit</td>
<td>Guidelines; techniques</td>
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<td>This report applies gender analysis to a representative sample of 50 NSW local government social plans and seeks to answer three questions: how councils approached the needs of women, what issues and strategies were identified for women in the plans, and the extent to which the needs of women were incorporated into strategies for other target groups.</td>
<td>NSW Department of Women 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/pdf/infocus.pdf">http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/pdf/infocus.pdf</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Inclusive Consultation Guide was developed to provide practical information and advice to members of the Australian Public Service and other interested parties to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in all types of consultations. The guide includes information on:  - responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992  - understanding different terms used in relation to disabilities  - deciding who to consult  - consulting across the disability community  - making your consultation accessible  - including people with disabilities at every stage in the consultation  - contacts in the disability area.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services 1999</td>
<td><a href="http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/disability-inclusive_consult.htm">http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/disability-inclusive_consult.htm</a></td>
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<td>This consultation was planned in order to conclude a project and to conclude it as well as is possible, with integrity. An analysis of end-of-project consultation is described including an outline of the process adopted and the lessons learnt.</td>
<td>Alison Ziller (Australia Street Company), IAP2 Conference 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>A paper that provides a list of things to consider or be aware of when engaging with ethnic communities and individuals.</td>
<td>Janet Cousens (Ethnic Communities Council of NSW Inc.), IAP2 Conference 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>A plan that provides the public, industry and council with procedures to be followed to ensure appropriate notification takes place for local development.</td>
<td>Gunnedah Shire Council August 2000</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>Originally designed for mining and extractive industry projects, this is a preferred technique of engagement early in the process of many styles of project. The guide is primarily targeted at major development and infrastructure projects of State and regional significance where the Minister is decision maker.</td>
<td>PlanningNSW 2001</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>This conference paper looks at some of the main criticisms that have been leveled at the precinct system of engagement. It responds to these and proposes some key ingredients to a successful precinct system.</td>
<td>Martin Bass (North Sydney Council) IAP2 Conference 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>Written to provide assistance to staff undertaking community consultation. Provides five levels of consultation from 'non required' through to 'full participation' for major shire or regional issues.</td>
<td>Mornington Peninsula Shire Council October 2000</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>A resource kit developed from the postings to a topic on the communitybuilders' discussion forum about public participation in the planning process.</td>
<td>communitybuilders, NSW Premier's Department 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/builder/participation/pp_toolkit.html">http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/builder/participation/pp_toolkit.html</a></td>
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<td>Regional Forum Handbook (coming soon)</td>
<td>planFIRST; regional forums</td>
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<td>Report to Council Outcomes Committee on 2001 Community Survey</td>
<td>Information gathering; community survey; telepoll</td>
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<td>Participation; urban renewal; sustainability; social capital; capacity building</td>
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<td>Resource Book for Chief Executive Officers and Senior Managers; ethnic affairs in the NSW Public Sector</td>
<td>Ethnic; culturally diverse communities; standards framework; ethnic affairs program</td>
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<td>Rural lands strategic plan, Coffs Harbour</td>
<td>Information giving; strategic plan; sustainability; place management; partnership</td>
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<td>Sample Place Plan: Telopea Place Plan (Waratah Shopping Centre Telopea)</td>
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<td>Seven Habits of Highly Effective Stakeholder Advisory Committees</td>
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<td>Social plan; access; equity; cultural diversity; plan format</td>
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<td>Strategic Questioning</td>
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<td>Strengthening Rural Communities Resource Kit</td>
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<td>Successful approaches by government land management agencies to involve the community in protected area planning and management</td>
<td>Legal frameworks; capacity building; accountability; indigenous</td>
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<td>A support package for regional forum members, including advice on the role and responsibilities of regional forum members and how to prepare a regional strategy.</td>
<td>PlanningNSW</td>
<td><a href="http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/planfirst">http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/planfirst</a></td>
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<td>Presentation that describes how a community survey helped a council better understand community needs so that it could address those needs more effectively.</td>
<td>Parramatta City Council 2001</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>Overview and context for a study exploring the critical role played by effective community participation in ensuring the long term sustainability of urban and neighbourhood renewal programs.</td>
<td>Wood W., Randolph B. Et Judd B. (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute) 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ahuri.edu.au/">http://www.ahuri.edu.au/</a> (see publications – positioning papers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a Standards Framework which builds on the implementation of the ethnic affairs program in 1997. It is designed to help all NSW agencies ensure that their ethnic affairs activities are integrated into their core activities. In providing a series of graded steps in five activity areas, the Framework is a tool which helps agencies monitor and further improve performance in the ethnic affairs program.</td>
<td>NSW Community Relations Council 1998</td>
<td><a href="http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/publications/resourcehandbook/contents.htm">http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/publications/resourcehandbook/contents.htm</a></td>
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<td>Preliminary draft of plan which follows good practice principles: community involvement, holistic, place based, key strategies cover economic sustainability, social sustainability, environmental sustainability.</td>
<td>Coffs Harbour City Council November 2001</td>
<td>Contact Coffs Harbour City Council</td>
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<td>Describes how through partnerships between council, the local community, businesses and other stakeholders local needs, issues and aspirations are captured to develop a place based plan that includes Place Outcomes and Tasks to monitor and manage the delivery of a higher standard of living for the area. Describes four phases; Preliminary Consultation, Communities Needs and Issues, Preparation of Place Plan, Implementation of Place Plan.</td>
<td>Parramatta City Council 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>Includes a five step planning process, sample format for plan, and sections on implementation of the plan and reporting of access and equity issues.</td>
<td>NSW Department of Local Government December 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au">http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au</a>, see under Information - Local Government Publications</td>
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<td>A workbook in two parts. The first provides answers to the why, who, where, what and how of engagement; the second provides checklists, case studies and procedures.</td>
<td>Landcom 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>A package designed to support rural communities involved in managing change. The package is comprised of a theoretical framework, a how-to guide, community tools, templates and spreadsheets.</td>
<td>NSW Premier’s 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/rural_regional/resources/srctoc.html">http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/rural_regional/resources/srctoc.html</a></td>
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<td>Range of techniques; futures workshop; community workshop; charette; summit</td>
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<td>Why did Shelly Beach work? – a paper from three perspectives – Client, Contractor, Community</td>
<td>Early community consultation; appropriate team; time; assessment; community; learning planning; alliance; Sydney Water; Northside Storage Tunnel</td>
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<td>Abstract</td>
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<td>Describes how, for $3920 per partner organisation, the project collected the community's oral and written history about Toongabbie Creek and produced a visual tool that portrayed the community's stories, photos and memories of how they used to interact with the creek. The objectives were to raise community awareness through distributing the booklet in the community, and to incorporate the lessons into the production of a 'Restoration and Maintenance Plan' for the Creek.</td>
<td>Parramatta City Council 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>The Barwon Water Resources Development Plan aimed to identify actions needed over the next twenty years and beyond to provide a secure and sustainable water supply for Barwon Water’s existing and new customers. The Barwon Region is south–west of Melbourne and extends from Greater Geelong to Colac and Apollo Bay. This paper describes the engagement process used, the things that worked and explores what could have been done differently.</td>
<td>Janet Rice (Context Pty Ltd), Paul Northey (Barwon Water), IAP2 Conference 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>The Shelly Beach Project was undertaken by an alliance comprising Sydney Water and three private sector companies. The project involved the connection of a sewage pumping station to the Northside Storage Tunnel at the North Head Sewage Treatment Plant, Manly. This paper looks at the process and lessons leaned from client (Sydney Water), contractor and community perspectives.</td>
<td>Susan Love (Sydney Water), Bernard Clancy (Montgomery Watson Harza), John McDermott (Precinct Community Forum), IAP2 Conference 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>Winner of the 2002 Lgov award for the Built Environment, this paper describes how Manly Council revised its Residential DCP to integrate the principles of environmentally sustainable development, partly as a result of extensive consultation with stakeholders. The review took two years and had a budget of $10,000.</td>
<td>Manly Council 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<td>This practical guide outlines the steps involved in running a citizens' jury (also known as a citizens' panel). Highlighting a case study of a citizens' jury, the guide shows how this technique can be used to provide informed and considered public opinion in an unbiased and transparent manner.</td>
<td>Lyn Carson, Carolyn Hendriks, Jane Palmer, Stuart White, Jesse Blackadder (Dr Lyn Carson ed.) June 2002</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/">http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/engagement/stories/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>A practical guide written for government employees to assist them in increasing effective consultation with rural and regional communities. Building on existing resources available on methodologies of consultation, this guide specifically places consultation within a rural context. This guide complements the NSW Premier's Department, Strengthening Communities Unit, Resource Kit available at <a href="http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au">www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au</a>.</td>
<td>Regional Communities Consultative Council 2002</td>
<td>Contact NSW Regional Communities Consultative Council</td>
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### Sources of reference
See also Section 8, Stories (for references of other useful resources.)

### Respondents to NSW council survey

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<td>Snowy River Shire Council</td>
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<td>Sutherland Shire Council</td>
<td>Blueprint for Action: Towards Our New Local Environmental Plan – Consultation Report</td>
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Training resources

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
IAP2 offers a Certificate Course in Public Participation. There are four modules:
- The IAP2 Foundations of Public Participation (1 day)
- Planning Effective Public Participation Programs (1 day)
- Tools and Techniques for Public Participation (2 days)
- Effective Communication for Public Participation (1 day).

Institute of Public Administration Australia (NSW Division)
- Community Engagement: Consultation and Participation in the Public Sector course
Credits

Partner agencies

- NSW Department of Local Government
  - Karen Paterson
  - www.dlg.nsw.gov.au
  - karen.paterson@dlg.nsw.gov.au

- NSW Premier’s Department
  - Gary Moore
  - gary.moore@premiers.nsw.gov.au
  - Carolyn Leigh
  - carolyn.leigh@premiers.nsw.gov.au

- Institute of Public Administration Australia (NSW Division)
  - Margi Hill
  - margi@ipaa.org.au

- Lgov NSW
  - Carina Gregory
  - carina.gregory@lgov.org.au

- Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division)
  - Cinnamon Dunsford
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This appendix provides a summary of the minimum statutory requirements for community consultation under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&AA Act) and Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000. The summary is not intended to be exhaustive – it does not deal with consultation with public agencies or consultation required under any other legislation, nor does it reflect any changes in legislation since this version of the document was written in January 2002.

It is vital that, in each case, the Act, Regulation or environmental planning instrument be checked to ensure compliance with the legal requirements of community consultation.

Contents

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act

Environmental planning instruments
- State environmental planning policies
- regional environmental plans
- local environmental plans

Other plans
- model provisions
- development control plans
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- contribution plans

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- designated development
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Commission of Inquiry

Local Government Liaison Committee

Section 22 committee
Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (EP&A Act)

Section 5 of the EP&A Act states that one of the objects of the Act is:

To provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment.

The requirements for community consultation set out under this Act should be read in light of this object. The courts have made many comments in planning law cases on the public purpose served by engaging the community in environmental planning and development assessment. The consultation requirements are treated very seriously and breaches of the legislation often lead to the legal invalidity of determinations and decisions made under the Act by councils and other public bodies.

The courts have made clear that consultation must be a genuine two-way process where members of the public are given an opportunity to fully understand proposed action or options and where real consideration is given to any responses or submissions.

Environmental planning instruments (EPIs)

Part 3 of the EP&A Act deals with the process for making EPIs – State environmental planning policies (SEPPs), regional environmental plans (REPs), and local environmental plans (LEPs).

State environmental planning policies (SEPPs)

- There is no express requirement under the Act that draft SEPPs be advertised or for the community to be consulted.

- Depending on the circumstances, either the Director General or Minister has a discretion as to which other public authorities or Ministers he/she consults with prior to a draft SEPP being prepared (s. 37). In certain circumstances there will also be a mandatory requirement to consult with certain agencies (s. 34A).

- But once the draft SEPP has been prepared and forwarded to the Minister, the Minister has a discretion to take such steps as are considered appropriate or necessary to publicise the draft and seek and consider submissions from the public on the draft (s. 39(2)).

Regional environmental plans

- In preparing a draft REP, the Director General must first notify each council in the region, the Local Government Liaison Committee, and such other public authorities, other bodies and other persons as the Director General determines (s. 45).

- Once the draft has been prepared, the Director General must then give public notice of the exhibition of the draft in a form and manner determined by the Director General (s. 47(a)). The notice must state the place/time where the draft REP and environmental study (if applicable) will be exhibited, and then the study and draft REP must be publicly exhibited s. 47(a)). No minimum exhibition period is prescribed.

- Anyone may make written submissions to the Director General and the Director General shall cause submissions to be considered (s. 49(1)).

- Director General may direct a Commission of Inquiry (COI) to be held with respect to any matter under the draft REP (s. 49(1)(a)). See COI comments.
Both the Director General and the Minister may (but need not) re-exhibit an amended draft REP before the Minister makes the REP (s. 49(1)(c) and s. 51(4)).

While the decision to re-exhibit or not is a discretionary one, the REP must be a direct result of the whole plan making process under Part 3 of the Act, of which consultation is an integral part. That is, the plan when made must not differ significantly from that which was exhibited.

Note: In addition to the discretionary consultation for both draft SEPPs and draft REPs, the Director General must consult with Director General of National Parks and Wildlife and the Director of Fisheries if any critical habitat or threatened species, populations or ecological communities, or their habitats, will or maybe affected by the draft instrument (s. 34A).

Local environmental plans

In the preparation of a draft LEP (i.e. before or as the draft is being prepared), council must notify:
- any public authorities/bodies that council thinks will be affected by the draft LEP
- adjoining councils (where draft LEP will apply to boundary areas), and
- any other person(s) the council determines ought to be consulted.

After a draft LEP has been prepared, council must give public notice in a form and manner determined by the council stating the place, date and time in which the environmental study and draft LEP will be exhibited and stating the time in which the public can make written submissions to the council (s. 66).

Draft LEPs must be exhibited for a minimum of 28 days (cl. 13 of the Regulation).

The council must exhibit other relevant instruments which substantially govern the operation of the draft LEP when exhibiting the draft LEP and environmental study and a statement of how those instruments govern the draft LEP (s. 66(1)(b)(iii)).

Any person may make written submissions to the council within the submission period (the submission period is the exhibition plus any further period that council may grant) (s. 67).

While there is no requirement that a public notice contain an explanation of the purpose or content of the draft LEP, if such an explanation is provided it must be accurate and not misleading.

In making a submission, any person may request that a public hearing be held (s. 68). Council has discretion as to whether or not to hold a public hearing.

If a public hearing is held, council must give public notice of the time and place of the hearing in a locally circulating newspaper. The notice must also be sent to each person who requested a public hearing be held (cl. 14). There are no further provisions relating to how a public meeting is to be conducted.

A report of the hearing is to be furnished to council and made public (s. 68(2)).

Council may (but need not) re-exhibit a draft LEP that has been altered since public exhibition. Such re-exhibition may be either wholly or in part (s. 66(3)). Again, there may come a point where the alterations result in a final instrument that is significantly different to that which was exhibited and consulted upon, and such an instrument may be declared invalid upon legal challenge.
- The Minister may make any alterations to the draft LEP relating to matters of State/regional environmental planning significance (s. 70(1)(a)(ii)). The Minister may (but need not) direct council to re-exhibit the draft LEP if he or council have made any alterations since public exhibition (s. 70(3)).
- Section 66(3) of the Act recognises that councils may choose to use additional consultation mechanisms but that any such consultation that the council may engage in is no substitution for the statutory consultation process. It is in addition to the statutory requirements and any draft LEP or similar document that is consulted on must include a statement to that effect.

Other plans
There are other types of plans and provisions, not classified as EPIs, which are subject to consultation requirements either under the Act or Regulation or under an EPI.

Model provisions
Under s. 33 of the Act, an EPI may adopt wholly or in part model provisions published by the Minister. The Minister has a discretion whether or not to publicise and seek submissions on any draft model provisions (s. 33(3)).

Development control plans (DCPs)
- DCPs may be made to supplement REPs or LEPs with more detailed development controls. The procedure for exhibiting draft DCPs is governed by Part 3 of the Regulation and is similar to the procedure for exhibiting LEPs.
- Draft DCPs must be exhibited for 28 days, public notice given in advance, and a period provided in which to make written submissions.

Master plans
Procedures for the making of master plans are not set out in either the Act or Regulation but are found in EPIs. While procedures may vary under different EPIs, they generally include a period of public exhibition and opportunity to make written submissions. Using Sydney Regional Environmental Plan No. 26 – City West as an example, the draft master plan must be exhibited for a minimum of 21 days and the views of affected councils sought. The Director General must also seek the views of any public authorities and community organisations that the Director General considers relevant.

Contribution plans under s. 94 EP&A Act
Draft s. 94 contribution plans must be publicly exhibited in a manner similar to LEPs. Part 4 of the EP&A Regulation deals with how contribution plans are to be made and provide for public notice, written submissions and public exhibition for 28 days.
Development assessment

Parts 4 and 5 of the EP&A Act deal with assessment of applications for development consent or approval. This summary focuses on the community consultation aspects of the assessment process.

Designated development

- The consent authority must give at least two separate public notices of exhibition in a locally circulating newspaper (s. 79(1)(d) and cl. 80). The consent authority must also notify owners, occupiers of adjoining land, and, if practicable, users of adjoining land (s. 79(1)(b)).

- A public notice of the exhibition of a development application for designated development must contain a statement that any person may make written submission to the consent authority; that any written submission must set out the grounds for any objection to the proposed development application (cl. 78(1)(f)); and a statement that any person that makes a written submission during the submission period may appeal to the Land and Environment Court if they are unhappy with the consent authority’s determination (s. 98 of the Act and cl. 78(1)(i)).

- The development application and EIS must be exhibited for minimum of 30 days (cl. 78(2)).

Advertised development

- The Regulations identify certain development as advertised development (cl. 5(2)). In addition, an EPI or a DCP may identify development as ‘advertised development’ (s. 4).

- Procedures for advertising are similar to those for designated development except that no legal rights attach to third parties who make written submissions, so the public notice does not need to set out those rights. The minimum exhibition period is 30 days for integrated and threatened species development and 14 days otherwise (cl. 89(3)).

Local development

- In addition to identifying development as designated or advertised development, DCPs may identify certain development as specified development and set out the procedures for notification or advertisement to the public (s. 72(1)(c)).

- Beyond this, there are no further statutory requirements for community consultation. However, where councils have a standard practice of notifying adjoining landowners of development applications and inviting comment, the court has found in certain circumstances that adjoining landowners have an enforceable legitimate expectation that they would be notified.
Part 5 development

- Where a Part 5 activity requires an environmental impact statement (EIS), the EIS must be publicly exhibited in accordance with Part 5 of the Act and Part 14 Divisions 3, 4 and 5 of the Regulation 2000.

- Under s. 113, the determining authority must give public notice of the place and time where an EIS can be inspected. The public notice must be given on at least two separate occasions and in a local newspaper and a statewide newspaper. The public notice must be of a certain size and contain a statement that written representations may be made to the determining authority. The EIS must be made available for inspection for a minimum of 30 days (cl. 234).

- Any person may make written representations to the determining authority with respect to the activity/EIS (s. 113(2)). The determining authority must examine and consider any representations made (s. 112(1)(b)), and in certain circumstances the Director General must do so too (s. 113(5)). If the Director General does examine and consider representations made regarding the EIS, the Director General may report to the determining authority and make recommendations to the determining authority. Such a report is to be made public (s. 113(6)).

- In cases where a Part 5 activity required the Minister's approval, proposed modifications to that approval must also be exhibited, either in accordance with the above procedures or in accordance with Part 14 Division 5 of the Regulation.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

- Both the Director General and Minister have power to direct that a COI be held. Under s. 49(1)(a), the Director General has a discretion to make such a direction with respect to any matter relating to a draft REP. The Minister may direct that a COI be held under s. 119 in relation to a broad range of matters and, specifically, under s. 89(3) the Minister must direct that a COI be held if a Council so requests (s. 89 deals with the Minister calling in prohibited development).

- A COI may be held with respect to any matter relating to the administration and implementation of the provisions of the EP&A Act, any EPI, or any environmental aspects of a proposed development (Part 4 or Part 5).

- In the case of a COI held pursuant to a direction under s. 89(3) and a COI in relation to s. 88A development (called-in State significant development), the council, applicant, approval body and any person who made a written submission during the advertising/submission period are entitled to be heard at the COI (s. 89(4) and s. 88A(5)).

- Otherwise, the degree of community involvement in a COI will depend on the Commission’s terms of reference or the Commission’s discretion.

- A consent authority cannot determine a development application until it has considered the findings and recommendations of the COI (s. 80(6) and (7)).

- If a COI has been held in respect of a development application for designated development or State significant development, there are no applicant appeal rights and, in the case of designated development, no third party appeal rights (s. 89A(2)).
Local government liaison committee

The LGIC is established under s. 20 of the Act. It is composed of people nominated by officers within government agencies, statutory bodies and other interest groups (unions, industry) for the purpose of advising the Minister on specified matters.

Section 22 committees

The Director General may establish committees under s. 22 of the Act with the function of investigating or advising the Minister on matters referred to it by the Minister or Director General. In addition, the Minister and Director General both have power to delegate certain functions to a s. 22 committee (s. 23(1)(c)). The Act and Regulations do not specify the composition of, or any limitation on the terms of reference of a s. 22 committee.
Part 3 plan making under the EP&A Act

State environmental planning policy (SEPP)

1. Step 1: SEPP proposed (by Minister for Planning or Director-General of Planning NSW)

2. Step 2: Preparation of draft SEPP

3. Step 3: Consultation on draft SEPP

4. Step 4: Consideration of feedback

5. Step 5: Draft SEPP finalised

6. Step 6: Approval of SEPP by Minister and State made by Governor (planning policy becomes law)

These steps are indicative of the process but are not the formal requirements as set out under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and Regulation. Refer to the EP&A Act for the statutory steps to make a State environmental planning policy.
Regional environmental plan (REP)

1. Step: REP proposed
   (by Minister for Planning or Director-General of Planning NSW)

2. Step: Regional environmental study by Planning NSW

3. Step: Preparation of draft REP

4. Step: Notification, consultation

5. Step: Consideration of comments

6. Step: Draft REP finalised by Planning NSW

7. Step: REP made by Minister
   (plan becomes law)

These steps are indicative of the process but are not the formal requirements as set out under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and Regulation. Refer to the EP&A Act for the statutory steps to make a regional environmental plan.
Local environment plan (LEP)

1. **Step** LEP proposed
   (by local council or Minister for Planning)

2. **Step** Local environmental study by council

3. **Step** Preparation of draft LEP

4. **Step** Public exhibition, notification, consultation

5. **Step** Consideration of comments

6. **Step** Draft LEP finalised

7. **Step** LEP made by Minister
   (plan becomes law)

These steps are indicative of the process but are not the formal requirements as set out under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and Regulation. Refer to the EP&A Act for the statutory steps to make a local environmental plan.
Opportunities for consultation in Part 4 and Part 5 development assessment under the EP&A Act

Assessment required under Part 4 of the EP&A Act

**PRELIMINARY PHASE**

Consent authority consults Schedule 3 and other relevant SEPPs and planning instruments

- Not designated development
- Designated development

**EXHIBITION AND DECISION PHASE**

Consent authority notifies neighbours and exhibits DA/SEE for minimum 14 days (or 30 days if State significant or integrated development)

- Statement of environmental effects (SEE) prepared by applicant
- Environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared by applicant
- Pre-lodgment review by consent authority or peers

Consent authority notifies neighbours and exhibits EIS with DA for minimum 30 days

- Submissions considered by consent authority
- Submissions considered by consent authority

Council is consent authority if local development

Planning Minister is consent authority if State significant development or COI held

Preparation of assessment report based on s. 79C considerations. If integrated development, approval authorities provide input and, if relevant, general terms of approval

Decision by council. Assessment report and decision made public

Decision by Planning Minister. Assessment report and decision made public

**POST APPROVAL PHASE**

**APPEAL RIGHTS**

- If breach of the Act – appeal under s. 123. If objector of designated development (and no COI) – appeal under s. 98 on merits. If applicant, appeal under s. 97 against the determination

**IMPLEMENTATION OF APPROVAL CONDITIONS**

- Preparation and approval of environmental management plans (EMPs) and community consultation program
- Approval of construction certificate
- Preparation and approval of EMPs and community consultation program
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE NSW PLANNING SYSTEM

**Preliminary consultation or planning focus meeting organised by lead authority/council**

**Consult Director-General of PlanningNSW for requirements for EIS (or SEE if State significant). If integrated development, include requirements of other approval authorities**

**Proponent consults with council, community and government agencies**

**Opportunity for public review and comment. Approval authorities may request additional information**

**Minister may call a Commission of Inquiry (COI). Commissioners make recommendation to Minister**

**Preferred activity report made public**

**Independent PlanningNSW assessment report**

**Planning Minister makes a determination. The decision and assessment report made public**

**Decision by proponent to proceed or not in accordance with the approval. Decision made public**

**Construction phase**

**Operational phase**

**Compliance audit, Monitoring, Reporting on performance**

**Assessment required under Part 5 of the EP&A Act**

**No development approval required**

**Preliminary assessment submitted to determining authority to determine likely significance of any potential impacts (based on PlanningNSW guideline Is an EIS required?)**

**Likely to significantly affect the environment**

**EIS prepared by proponent**

**Pre-lodgment review by approval authority or peers**

**Exhibit EIS for minimum 30 days**

**Director-General’s examination report may be prepared**

**Submissions must be considered and any Director-General’s recommendations following an examination, or Minister’s recommendations following COI**

**Where government authority is the proponent**

**Proponent requests approval from Planning Minister**

**Where council or private proponent**

**Possible exhibition of REF**

**Submissions considered by determining authority (if relevant)**

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CONSTRUCTION PHASE

OPERATIONAL PHASE
Groups that Require Special Consideration

Some groups of people are traditionally under represented in community engagement and local decision making processes. They include women, young people and children, older people, people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. People from these groups may lack experience or confidence to speak in front of an audience, where their views can be drowned out by competing voices. There may also be other practical barriers to their effective participation.

Additional initiatives or effort may be needed to promote equal opportunity and access in any consultation process to ensure that people who are traditionally under represented are involved and heard.

In promoting the involvement of people from under represented target groups in community engagement processes, consider whether:
- they can effectively participate in a generic process which adopts an inclusive approach to overcome many of the traditional barriers to their participation
- to separate community engagements for the specific target group
- to provide a better opportunity for effective involvement
- different resources or approaches are required.

How intensively you should target special needs groups will be influenced by the specific issues and how much the target group will be affected, or by their interest in those issues. You should explore these questions with representatives from the target group. Often people may wish to participate as members of the general community and not as representatives of a ‘special needs’ group. Alternatively, they may feel more comfortable about expressing their views in a separate process where they do not have to compete to be heard.

In planning and designing community engagements which aim to maximise inclusion of traditionally under-represented groups in decision making, consider these principles:
- Engage with representatives of the target group about:
  - the most appropriate methods of consultation
  - who to consult with
  - how to go about organising the process.
- Involve members of target groups in planning, designing and organising the community engagement process
- Choose a process that is least threatening and will encourage active participation from people who may not be confident, skilled or articulate in public speaking before a large audience. Think about:
  - a series of small group meetings rather than a single large meeting
  - individual interviews
  - written surveys.
Choose a community engagement format and environment that makes people feel most comfortable and encourages them to participate. Avoid unnecessary jargon, formality and long meetings and adopt a style that fits in with the target groups’ ways of doing business.

Choose a facilitator who will encourage the involvement of people from the target groups and support inexperienced participants. People from these target groups may feel particularly intimidated if they are the only representative present, and may need to be specifically invited to contribute.

Consider producing background information and promotion material that will facilitate understanding by members of the target group. Additional lead times or resources may be needed.

Arrange the time and location of meetings to suit the needs of participants from the target groups.

Consider strategies to overcome practical barriers to participation by target groups:
- availability and cost of transport
- safety around the venue
- cultural factors
- motivational issues.

Recognise that a diversity of values, interests, viewpoints will exist within target groups. Don’t stereotype them.

Seek representation from various sources, not token representation. In particular, recognise that opinions may differ according to the age and gender of members of the target group.

Make sure best practice principles are applied, with clear and simple explanations about:
- the purpose of the community engagement
- the process to be followed
- what can and can’t be influenced
- what will happen next.

Further reading

- Social and community planning and reporting manual, Appendix C, NSW Department of Local Government (December 2002)

Also consider the following checklist for specific groups:
Women

- When planning a time for community engagements, consider concerns for safety and security and attitudinal barriers associated with going out at night.
- Consider the most suitable time of day for women with family and childcare commitments and work commitments.
- Consider the need to provide childcare to enable women with young children to participate.
- Consider the need for gender analysis in assessing and reporting the outcomes of community engagement processes.

Further reading

- In focus: a gender analysis of NSW local government social plans, NSW Department of Women, (in print)

Children and Young People

- Seek to involve children and young people not only through schools, but also through:
  - youth organisations
  - youth networks
  - local sports and activities clubs
  - major employers of young people.
Contact them directly through ads and posters in places where they gather.

- Provide support for the participation of children and young people by people who know them and have a strong relationship with them (e.g. youth worker, teacher).
- Make background information clear and interesting and community engagement events informal and fun.
- Provide presentations in formats that create interest. Have regular breaks and create a social atmosphere, with appropriate refreshments.
- Ensure the venue, time and transport arrangements do not present barriers to young people’s participation.
- Avoid venues with gambling activities or serving alcohol.

Further reading

- Youth consultation checklist, NSW Department of Local Government (May 1999)
- Children and young people’s participation, Part 1, Participation principles and resources, NSW Commission for Children and Young People
- Children and young people’s participation, Part 2, Techniques, activities and games, NSW Commission for Children and Young People
- Participation sharing the stage; a practical guide to helping children and young people take part in decision making, NSW Commission for Children and Young People
Older people

- When planning the time for community engagements, consider concerns for safety and security and attitudinal barriers associated with going out at night.
- Ensure community engagement is promoted through networks.
- Choose a venue with comfortable seating and temperature level.
- Some of the next section contains further tips for considering the needs of older people such as access and transport.

People with a disability

- Ensure the venue and its associated facilities are accessible for people with a disability. Consider not only people in wheelchairs or with mobility problems but also:
  - people with hearing aids who may need a hearing loop installed
  - appropriate facilities for people with vision impairment
  - choosing a venue that enhances ability to listen and concentrate, and is free of features that might trigger particular conditions.
- Allocate resources and allow sufficient time to meet any specific needs, such as:
  - providing information in alternative formats (Braille, Plain English, audio)
  - signing or interpreting services
  - support workers.
- Hold small gatherings rather than large meetings to enable greater participation by people with communication or cognitive difficulties.
- Be sensitive to language when referring to people with disabilities and avoid words and phrases that stereotype, stigmatise or demean individuals with a disability.
- Allow enough time for people with communication or cognitive difficulties to express their views.
- Community engagement events need to be short for those who need care and for carers who usually have only limited time away from their responsibilities.
- Consider the need for help with transport or other support and allow extra time. For advice on consulting with people with a disability, contact the Commonwealth Office of Disability, NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home care or peak disability consumer organisations.

Further reading

- Inclusive consultation: a practical guide to involving people with disabilities, Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, Disability Programs. Includes a comprehensive checklist in Appendix C
- Consultation and people with a disability: issues for public sector managers in NSW, Disability Council of NSW (January 1997)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

- If you think that the planning issue or process may be of interest to or impact upon Aboriginal people, contact them specifically to ask if they wish to be involved.
- Identify the traditional owners and other indigenous people with rights and interests in the area, discuss with them the most appropriate means of consulting with Aboriginal people and agree with them on a process for engagement.
- If necessary, seek advice from the local Aboriginal Land Council or ATSIC Regional Office on how to identify relevant traditional owners or authorised community representatives with an interest in the area.
- Ensure both men and women are included as they may be responsible for different places and spheres of interest.
- Identify and adhere to any process or protocols that indigenous people have established for community engagement.
- Allow time for leaders to consult with their communities.
- Consider whether people might feel more comfortable being consulted by others of the same gender.
- Respect indigenous people's rights to choose the time, location and format of the consultation.
- Recognise that some communities may have different approaches to authority and the appropriateness of sharing personal information or opinion. It may take some time to build up trust.

Further reading

- Guidelines for the development, implementation and evaluation of national public health strategies in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Report for the National Public Health Partnership (2002)
- Protocols for consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal people, Queensland Government (1999)
- Getting it right: a journalist's guide to working with Aboriginal communities during the Sydney 2000 Olympics, NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs and SOCOG (2000)
- Boomanulla Conference for Country 2002. This conference was attended by approximately 55 natural resource representatives from Aboriginal communities in NSW, assembled to prepare a statement about Aboriginal people’s expectations of the NSW Government’s planning process for water, catchments and native vegetation in 2001–02.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

- Identify representative bodies to contact for advice, depending on the ethnic composition of your area. If in doubt, contact the NSW Community Relations Commission, Ethnic Communities Council or nearest Migrant Resource Centre.
- Use appropriate methods to publicise community engagement events, such as:
  - ethnic media
  - existing community networks
  - multicultural organisations.
Community engagement needs to be conducted in a language that people can understand. This includes written and spoken language. Consider the need to provide:

- translations of publicity
- written information
- surveys and reporting in languages other than English
- interpreters for presentations and input from participants.

Allow resources and time for the translation and interpretation of publicity, background and presentation material and reporting of outcomes.

When translating material into different languages, make sure the style and content are culturally appropriate.

Use accredited interpreters and avoid relying on family members and friends.

Be familiar with established protocols when working with an interpreter.

Consider whether people might feel more comfortable being consulted by others of the same gender, or from the same community.

Recognise that some people may be illiterate in their own language as well as English. They will require verbal communication strategies, not formats that rely on literacy such as surveys.

Avoid venues that could cause offence to certain groups for example, licensed clubs with alcohol or gaming machines, church halls.

Make allowances for cultural practices or events that may reduce attendance. Avoid conflicts with festivals and holy days.

Consider culturally appropriate dietary requirements for refreshments. If possible use caterers from the ethnic community.

Wear appropriate clothing that does not offend any group.

Be aware that some cultures have different commitments to time and do not consider it important to arrive at the time specified.

Be sensitive to rifts and rivalries within and between cultural groups. In these cases consider the need for separate processes.

Consider any specific cultural patterns of relating. It may not be culturally appropriate for women to speak out in front of men. Consider the need for seating and speaking protocols and for separate consultations.

Be sensitive when asking for some types of information. The concept of community engagement may be unfamiliar to some people who may not trust the process. They may be cautious in providing information or expressing a personal viewpoint. Seek collective, rather than individual views, for instance through focus groups rather than individual survey, to help allay these fears.

Be sensitive to the particular needs of new migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants, who may have:

- additional fear of authority
- concerns about confidentiality
- an eagerness to please
- a poor understanding of what is expected of them in the community engagement process.
Further reading

- *Issues to consider when approaching ethnic communities for consultations*, Janet Cousens, Ethnic Communities Council of NSW Inc, prepared for IAP2 Conference, October 2002