



**Government
of South Australia**

Department of the Premier and Cabinet Circular

**PC036
BEST PRACTICE COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT**

2013

Best practice community and stakeholder engagement

September 2013

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DEPARTMENT OF THE PREMIER AND CABINET

PREMIER AND CABINET CIRCULAR

SEPTEMBER 2013

PC036 – Best practice community and stakeholder engagement.

Purpose

This DPC Circular outlines the approach that government agencies and public servants should address when engaging with the community and stakeholders. The circular directs public servants to the state government's foundational policy for high quality engagement, *Better Together: Principles of Engagement*, which provides more detailed information on the government's approach. *Better Together* is available at:

www.yoursay.sa.gov.au/bettertogether

Better Together was developed under the auspice of the Senior Management Council (SMC), and approved by all Chief Executives on SMC in September 2012.

Vision for engagement

The state government's vision for engagement is for government to make **better decisions** by bringing the voices of communities and stakeholders into government's decision making processes. To make this happen, we want to nurture a public service which has the **skills to engage** with the community and **drive a culture** which **respects** and **welcomes** community input.

The vision is underpinned by a **presumption to engage**, with an expectation that public servants will engage communities and stakeholders in decisions that **affect** or **interest** them. Engagement is therefore a starting point to inform decision making rather than an optional element of the process. Only in rare circumstances will engagement at some level not be required and in these circumstances public servants must be able to clearly articulate why engagement is not required.

Engagement occurs in order to bring the voices of communities and stakeholders into decision making which is relevant to them. This relevance might be because they are directly affected by the decision being made, or they might have a personal or professional interest in the issue. Regardless of the motivation for being part of it, the key to good engagement is giving people who want to contribute, positive opportunities to do so.

Six principles

Better Together identifies six values-based principles that signify what high quality engagement practice looks like. Public servants are asked to use these principles as a foundation for the development and implementation of engagement strategies, supporting project and program management, policy development and service delivery.

The principles recognise and promote the breadth and variety of engagement opportunities across government and acknowledge that each engagement has a different purpose, with different people involved, undertaken in different places, with different outside influences shaping them. If the principles are followed and fulfilled, both participants and practitioners can have confidence that the engagement process has been well-executed:

The six principles are:

Principle 1: We know why we are engaging and we communicate this clearly

Principle 2: We know who to engage

Principle 3: We know the background and history

Principle 4: We begin early

Principle 5: We are genuine

Principle 6: We are creative, relevant and engaging.

A detailed description of each principle with advice on their application is detailed in the policy document *Better Together: Principles of Engagement*.

It is recognised that community and stakeholder engagement is a very complex area that does not lend itself to a one-size-fits-all approach. The engagement strategy developed for any given situation should be cognisant of the topic/question being addressed, the level of influence being bestowed and the nature of the community or stakeholders that need to be involved. The principles-based approach outlined in *Better Together* has been established to enable this flexibility, establishing a broad framework that provides guidance but not prescriptive, mandated approaches for community engagement practice.

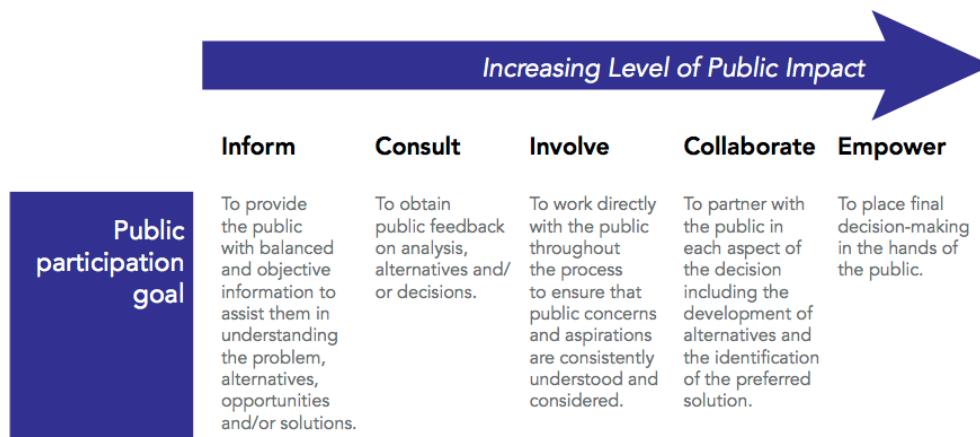
Public servants are encouraged to trial new approaches to engagement, working in partnership with key stakeholders including peak bodies, community groups, local councils and Members of Parliament, to identify the methodologies which best suit a particular community or issue. For example, town hall meetings commonly used by government may be appropriate in some specific circumstances but perhaps not in circumstances where a representative sample of a community is needed, where complex problems and solutions need to be explored.

Choosing the right engagement strategy and facilitation methodologies will be central to a successful engagement outcome.

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

This policy is underpinned theoretically by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation.

The spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of engagement that defines the community's or stakeholders' role. The spectrum shows that differing levels of engagement are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, most importantly, the spectrum sets out the commitment being made to the public at each engagement level and this helps us to be transparent about the level of engagement being used.



Governance

The Participation and Partnerships Team within Cabinet Office is responsible for implementing *Better Together*. Implementation includes raising awareness of the importance and benefits of engagement; delivering skills development activities and leading demonstration projects to showcase leading-edge engagement techniques.

The Participation and Partnerships Team is also available to provide advice and support regarding engagement strategy development and in applying the principles of *Better Together*. The Team manages the *Your SAY* online consultation hub and associated social media platforms, these can be used by government agencies to broaden the reach of engagement activities. *Your SAY* can be viewed at www.yoursay.sa.gov.au

The Community Engagement Board provides expert advice to government on engagement and will be involved in any reviews and updates of *Better Together*. The Community Engagement Board is made up of individuals with skills in the areas of community engagement strategy development; social media; community capacity building; marketing; research; business and community sector relations; local government; regional engagement and multicultural engagement.

You can contact the Board through the Participation and Partnerships team.

Further information

Queries regarding this work should be directed to:

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