



# Preparing for consumer participation

**To have the greatest chance of successful implementation**, consumer participation activities should be thoroughly planned and prepared.

Preparing for consumer participation will generally include a number of phases: understanding the context; engaging stakeholders; building capacity; assessing the extent and nature of existing consumer participation within the organisation; and consulting with stakeholders including consumers, workers, management and the Board.

These steps are key foundational activities which lead on to the formation and implementation of a written consumer participation plan (see Information Sheet #7: Writing a consumer participation plan). However, note that these phases of preparation and planning (followed by implementation and evaluation) are not mutually exclusive and may overlap or be repeated in a planning cycle.

This framework has been adapted from a CP planning guide for health services.<sup>1</sup> Refer to the original guide (available online) for tips and resources.

## 1. Understand the context

Determine where your CP plan (policy and strategies) will fit within the organisation's overall policy, planning and development work.

CP is a significant element of the HAS Standards, and should be embedded in organisational quality cycles. Consult your service's quality and planning framework to help understand how the CP plan might be implemented.

During this phase, preliminary conversations will also be needed with key executive

staff (including the CEO) and Board members. These conversations should aim to:

- Give you a sense of the degree of participation potentially available to consumers within your organisation;
- Consider what resources (time, financial and other) may be available to support CP activities within the organisation;
- Identify who in the organisation has the authority to 'sign off' on a consumer participation plan or strategy;



Beware of CP being isolated from the core business of the organisation. Embed CP throughout the organisation's policies, as well as in a dedicated CP policy or strategy.

- Identify any other political or strategic factors (internal or external to the organisation) that may have a significant impact on planning and implementation of consumer participation strategies.

On the basis of these considerations, develop a project plan and budget. Allocate a timeline and resources to subsequent stages of preparation, planning and implementation.

## 2. Engage stakeholders

Involve consumers, carers and organisations representing consumers, as well as staff and board members. A group of consumers to provide advice on the development of your consumer participation plan is a good place to start. This group might be expanded to include staff at a later date. Let them know in advance the length of the project and develop with them terms of reference including their degree of participation in the development of the plan.

## 3. Build capacity

Participation capacity is your ability to 'do' participation and to understand what participation can achieve. Building capacity enables wise decisions to be made in your CP plan about how participation will be used strategically to improve the quality of housing and homelessness services provided. Building capacity is part of developing your CP plan and can also be an objective of the plan.

To build capacity:

- Develop an understanding of what participation means;
- Consider the benefits and challenges associated with participation, and the requirements for authentic and effective participation;<sup>2</sup>
- Become familiar with a range of participation strategies, their advantages and disadvantages;
- Identify what participation already occurs in your service.

Use the information sheets included in this Kit to inform staff and consumers or to brief discussion groups. Build further capacity within your organisation with the development of a training strategy.<sup>3</sup> Share learnings with other housing and homelessness services through network meetings or other forums. See what participation is achieving in other areas at Our Community's website.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Assess existing consumer participation

Focus your thinking with an understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of your organisation around consumer participation.

A preliminary step is to identify what participation means for your organisation through discussion with consumers, staff and Board members. You could distribute and discuss a definition of participation and use this as a starting point. Provide consumers of your services with the opportunity to decide on the term they want to be used when referring to them.

Based on the definitions you have developed, undertake an assessment of consumer participation in your organisation. Involve your consumers in this project. Review the signposts of good practice for the HAS Standards, and the HASS self-evaluation developed by the Peer Education Support Program (PESP) of the Housing Advocacy Service - for information on PESP see: [http://www.chp.org.au/has\\_pesp.shtml](http://www.chp.org.au/has_pesp.shtml). Make a record of the information collected so you can use this to monitor and report on the plan and to report on trends in participation in the future.

Your self-assessment will guide the development of objectives within your CP plan by identifying areas of strength and potential areas for improvement.

## 5. Consult stakeholders

Find out what your consumers need in terms of participation. Listen to people from diverse groups within your consumer population including people with disabilities; people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people; indigenous Australians; and young people. If you have a consumer advisory group, they will also be a key source of information for identifying need.



Peer-to-peer consultation is a powerful way to gather information on need and preferences. Consider training consumers to ask other consumers about their participation needs. Consider involving Peer Educators from the Homelessness Advocacy Service in consultation processes.

Speak to consumers and carers who have used your service for the first time and to those who use your service often and over a longer term. You might use the PowerPoint Presentation (or slides from it) included in this Kit to guide the process. Give examples of participation to

help people understand. Talk about the ways people already participate in different areas and programs of

your service as well as ways they might like to.

Workers, management and the Board or Committee of Management should also be consulted about what approaches they feel will be feasible and effective. Listen to staff about their needs and concerns in relation to CP processes.



## Endnotes

1. *How to develop a community participation plan*. Published in 2006 by the Regional and Rural Health and Aged Care Services Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne. Viewed October 2007 at: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/consumer>
2. A list of common 'participation enablers' can be found in Appendix 1 of *How to develop a community participation plan* at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/consumer>. For challenges, see 'Managing challenges' in *Improving health services through consumer participation* viewed October 2007 at <http://www.participateinhealth.org.au/clearinghouse>
3. See the Banyule Nillumbik Primary Care Alliance (BNPCA) *Consumer Participation Resource & Training Kit for Service Providers* (2003) at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pcps/publications/banyule.htm>
4. <http://www.ourcommunity.com.au>



# Writing a consumer participation plan

**Consumer participation is most effective and sustainable** when it is implemented in a planned way. A documented consumer participation (CP) plan can be the expression of an organisation's commitment to consumer participation, can guide the implementation process and provide a starting point for evaluation of consumer participation initiatives.



Development of a consumer participation plan is best steered by a consumer advisory mechanism.

To develop an effective consumer participation plan, a range of preparatory activities should be undertaken including understanding the context, engaging stakeholders, building capacity, assessing existing participation and consulting stakeholders (see Information Sheet #6: Preparing for consumer participation).

holders (see Information Sheet #6: Preparing for consumer participation).

Writing the plan should lead on into implementation of the plan (including a communication strategy) and evaluation.

This planning framework has been adapted from a CP planning guide for health services.<sup>1</sup> Refer to the original guide (available online) for tips and resources.

## 1. Set priorities

Ideally, priorities should be set based on information gathered through previous phases of self-assessment and consultation.

Sort through the information you have gathered on participation needs, and compare this with what you know currently happens at your service. Make a list of priorities based on what consumers have said is needed and where participation is currently low within your service.

Consider your organisation's broader strategic plan and priorities. The resources required for various participation activities may also help prioritise them.

Consumers, together with trained staff and the people who collected the information, can help. This process will help to develop the objectives for your plan.<sup>2</sup> Let the people who provided the information know how you have used it to develop your plan.

Consider the following key areas when developing the objectives of your plan:

1. How the service has identified and assessed its strengths and limitations in consumer participation and how it plans to address the limitations;

2. How the service will provide education and training to facilitate staff support of participation;
3. How participation will be used to improve service planning and development to meet the needs of consumers;
4. How service delivery to communities identified as being hard to engage will be enhanced through participation;
5. Where enhancement of service can be facilitated through involving people in decision making about their own housing and support;
6. How participation will be used to improve the quality of service provided by your organisation.

Consider implementing a range of different CP mechanisms which address different aspects of the organisation's practice. For example, while some objectives might be to establish specific consumer forums or feedback mechanisms, others might concern incorporation of CP principles into everyday practice or into the organisation's policy framework.

One Victorian organisation developed a CP plan that required each of its service areas to adopt two participation strategies and report back on both the impact and process of the participation.



Consider a variety of feedback strategies that allow for one-off focused consultation, cyclical consultation (e.g. regular surveys), and ongoing feedback mechanisms (e.g. complaints processes). For examples of possible strategies and mechanisms, refer to the Strategies section of this Kit.

Remember to keep your plan realistic, given your organisation's resources and starting point. It may be worth considering a staged approach to implementation. Test ideas or strategies out on a small scale and reflect on the results before committing to them across the entire organisation.



## 2. Write the plan

The following headings may be useful to guide key areas to be addressed in the CP plan. Refer to the Resources section of this Kit for examples.

### A. Background

- Provide a brief description of your organisation/service and the community it serves. Clearly say why it is important to have a consumer participation plan for your organisation / service. Indicate where the plan sits within the organisation / service's strategic plan and quality framework.
- Summarise the participation needs identified. Briefly discuss any barriers and enablers to participation in relation to the identified needs.
- Indicate who participated in developing the plan. Create an appendix to identify individual people, if they are happy to be recorded.

### B. Aim / Purpose

Clearly state what the organisation wishes to achieve through consumer participation.

### C. Definitions, Principles and Framework

Clearly describe the meaning of consumer participation for your organisation/service. This could include definitions, principles and a theoretical framework / approach for Consumer Participation which has been discussed and adopted by the organisation.

### D. Objectives and strategies

Develop a series of objectives which indicate what you intend to do to achieve your aim. Under each objective, outline how you will achieve it. Identify actions and tasks, allocate responsibility, specify resources and timelines, and set targets or performance indicators that will show whether you have achieved your objective.

Where there are a number of distinct sub-groups within the organisation's consumer population, identify the primary target group/s for each objective or action, so that each is tailored to meet particular needs.

### E. Evaluation

Identify how implementation of your CP plan will be evaluated.

Depending on the strategies you plan to adopt, additional documentation may be required. For example, a consumer advisory group will require terms of reference; a consumer survey will require a questionnaire; a consumer representative will require a position description; and so forth. Refer to the Resources section of this Kit for some examples of documentation.

Circulate your draft document to relevant stakeholders (consumers, staff, Board) to get feedback and ensure you have the "buy-in" of the people who will be affected by the plan. Get the document signed off by the Executive and/or Board.

## 3. Communicate, implement and evaluate

Go for it! Remember to promote the CP plan widely within your organisation, to staff, consumers, carers and the broader community. Identify leaders of participation within the organisation and the consumer group to help implement and promote the plan.

Remember to evaluate your CP plan after it has been in action for a while.

Involve consumers and carers, staff and community members in the planning and implementation of your evaluation. See Information Sheet #11: Evaluating consumer participation for more information and ideas on evaluation.



## Endnotes

1. How to develop a community participation plan. Published in 2006 by the Regional and Rural Health and Aged Care Services Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne. Viewed October 2007 at: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/consumer>
2. A checklist for prioritising objectives is contained in Appendix 2 of *How to develop a community participation plan* available at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/consumer>



# Principles and ethics

**While consumer participation activities can potentially be empowering** for consumers and beneficial for organisations, there are also risks associated with implementing such activities, especially where vulnerable consumer populations are involved. It is therefore important to ensure that organisations' consumer participation strategies are based on a firm foundation of values and principles that will support good practice.

The following principles are suggested as a basis for inclusive, meaningful and effective consumer participation strategies:<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Make it timely

Participation should not be so late in the life of an issue that it is tokenistic or merely confirms decisions already made. Consultation should occur when consumers have the best chance of influencing outcomes. People should be given enough time to express their views.

## 2. Make it inclusive

Consumer participants should be selected in a way that is not open to manipulation and should include a cross-section of the organisation's consumer population. Random selection might be considered to achieve this.

## 3. Make it consumer focused

Ask participants not what they want personally or what is in their self-interest, but to consider what is appropriate for all consumers.

## 4. Make it interactive and deliberative

Avoid reducing questions to a simplistic either/or response. Allow consideration of the bigger picture, so people can become fully engaged.

## 5. Make it effective

Be clear on how decisions will be made so that participants know and understand the impact of their involvement. Make sure all participants have time to become well-informed about and to understand material they are unlikely to have a prior familiarity with.

## 6. Make it matter

It is important that there is a strong likelihood that any recommendations which emerge from the process will be adopted. If they are not, it is important that an explanation is provided. Faith in the process is important for both the power holders in the organisation and the consumers.

## 7. Make it well facilitated

A skilled and flexible facilitator with no vested interest in the outcome is essential in order to

give the process credibility.

## 8. Make it flexible, open and fair

A variety of participation strategies exist. Choose those that best suit the circumstances, including the target group and the degree of participation offered. Think how to reach all your consumers, including those with special needs. Feedback to consumers afterwards is essential.

## 9. Make it cost effective

Costs will vary and are adaptable, but the process must be properly resourced.

## 10. Make it subject to evaluation

Decide how the 'success' of the strategy will be measured. Include factors beyond the adoption of the recommendations. Evaluation questions should be formulated in advance.

## Research ethics

Whenever you gather information about consumers – for example, whenever you conduct a survey or hold a focus group – you are conducting research, and it is important to ensure you do so ethically.

Research ethics are important for a variety of reasons; they help to promote the aims of quality research, promote values essential to collaborative work, help to ensure that researchers can be held accountable, and ensure that the research process is consistent with other important moral and social values, such as social responsibility and human rights. In the context of consumer participation, research ethics also help to prevent exploitation of consumers.

The following ethical principles guide the collection of information about and from consumers:<sup>2</sup>

### Honesty

Strive for honesty in all communications. Ensure participants are fully informed of the purpose of the research and how the results will be used and made public.

### Confidentiality

Protect confidential communications, personnel records and consumer records. Ensure participants are not identifiable in any reports of the research.

### Objectivity

Strive to avoid bias in design of the research, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, and other aspects of research where objectivity is expected or required.

### Integrity

Keep your promises and agreements; act with sin-

cerity; strive for consistency of thought and action.

### **Carefulness**

Carefully and critically examine your own work and the work of others. Keep good records of research activities, such as data collection, research design, and correspondence.

### **Safety**

Minimize harms and risks and maximize benefits to participants; take special precautions with vulnerable populations.

### **Respect for consumers and colleagues**

Respect your colleagues and consumers and treat them fairly. Respect human dignity, privacy, and autonomy. Ensure any costs incurred by participants are covered and that they feel comfortable and safe during the process.

### **Social Responsibility**

Strive to promote social good and prevent or mitigate social harms through research, public education, and advocacy.

### **Non-Discrimination**

Avoid discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, or other factors that are not related to competence and integrity.

### **Competence**

Maintain and improve your own professional competence and expertise through lifelong education and learning; take steps to promote competence in your area of expertise as a whole.

## **Endnotes**

1. Adapted from Carson & Gelber (2001) *Ideas for Community Consultation*. NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.
2. Adapted from Shamoo, A and Resnik, D (2003). *Responsible Conduct of Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.



# Authentic and effective participation

**Both consumers and service providers** want the experience of participation to be meaningful and not tokenistic. Perhaps more important than the strategy chosen to engage consumers is the underlying approach to consumer participation. Authentic and effective participation requires capacity building, resourcing and reliable feedback loops so that participants know they are making a difference.

## Authentic participation

**Authenticity: The form that participation takes is less important than that people see and feel a direct connection between what they do and what is subsequently achieved.**<sup>1</sup>

When asked what makes participation meaningful, consumers tend to identify receiving feedback on their input, and being able to see changes that have resulted from their input.

*"[Participation is meaningful when] they ask for input and we get results of feedback; instead of input disappearing into a big rubbish bin in sky—the dump".<sup>2</sup>*

For participation to be authentic:

- The process of participation must be transparent;
- Consumers require information about the organisation's decision making processes;
- The organisation must acknowledge the input it receives and provide feedback about the impact and value of the consumer's contribution;
- Feedback to consumers has to be clear and timely (with pre-determined time lines);
- Issues that are raised that are outside the organisation's area of responsibility must be acknowledged and some alternative strategy considered.

To avoid tokenism all parties need a clear and shared understanding of what is meant by consumer participation. Organisations need to approach consumer participation with an attitude of flexibility, but also communicate very clearly about what aspects can (or cannot) be changed; what action can be taken; and when advocacy for change needs to be mobilized.

## Effective participation

Effectiveness is vital to sustaining consumer participation. It is important to visibly document and represent success that will maintain the momentum that participation creates.<sup>3</sup>

To be effective, both consumers and organisations need to have the capacity to participate. Consumers need to be supported to participate, and organisations need the commitment, resources and skills to share decision making with consumers and to support their participation.

### Organisational capacity building

Organisations need to build their capacity to facilitate and support consumer participation.<sup>4</sup> This requires development of:

- Transparent participatory policy and processes. These should include a standard and equitable means of identifying stakeholders in the participation process, and open and accountable processes for integrating consumer perspectives into organisational planning and evaluation. Staff require clear information about consumer participation
- A supportive organisational culture. Consumer participation should be embedded in the way everyone works, not the responsibility of one member of staff. It needs to be part of all roles, and all position descriptions. Any lack of trust between consumers and the organisation must also be addressed in order to build an organisational culture that supports consumer participation.
- Information and expertise to support consumer efforts. For staff to engage effectively in consumer participation strategies, training is recommended.<sup>5</sup>
- Dedicated resources to support consumer participation.

### Consumers' capacity building

People who have been homeless or have been in insecure housing do not necessarily have the capacity required to participate within organisational decision-making processes. They may need to be supported in acquiring social and other skills and resources that are a precondition for full participation (Demos p43).

Organisations can support this process by providing:

- A safe and positive environment (environment and peers matter, especially to people abstaining, withdrawing and or rehabilitating from substance abuse)
- The ability for consumers to choose the extent to which they participate
- Confidentiality
- Transport (taxi vouchers, met cards, petrol vouchers, community buses)

- Recognition (e.g. a movie voucher or other method of regular recognition)
- Authority - participation needs to be seen to have some influence. Consumers are wary of wasting their time
- Encouragement - staff members encouraging consumers to participate is especially important
- A learning outcome for consumers – consumers want to learn something during and from the (participation) process
- Training: knowledge and skills development. Consumers require skills to participate and to



Ensure that training is in a form appropriate to consumers. One consumer commented that "You can do more training at a BBQ than in a formal training session".

effectively represent other consumers. This might include e.g. a knowledge of meeting procedures, or public speaking training.

*"Informed and skilled representatives are able to interact on more equal, 'professional' level with representatives of the organization"*

- Refreshments
- Opportunities for socialising and networking. *"To know what is happening in other areas, [participants need] opportunities to get together; to see whether they have got same problems; to compare areas; to learn solutions"*
- Childcare continues to be necessary to ensure parents can participate

### Payment and reimbursement

Whether payment for participation is appropriate depends on the context. If in receipt of Centrelink benefits, consumers may prefer to be 'reimbursed' for the costs incurred rather than 'paid'. Tenant representatives may argue that it is important NOT to be paid for their representation, in order to be seen to be independent. Consumer consultants on the other hand are often paid a wage in recognition of their contribution to the organisation.

In general, reimbursement of expenses is essential and acknowledgements are appreciated. A budget for this must be part of a CP strategy.

### A shared vision and empowering collaborative action

Successful participatory processes have been found to be dependent on the early identification and articulation of an agreed vision and goals. This visioning process must seek to promote a balance between

self-interest and the common good (Cuthill and Fein 2005). Collaborative action is the visible expression of a participatory relationship between consumers and organisations. A collaborative approach promotes dialogue where stakeholders come together 'to deliberate about and decide together'<sup>6</sup> on matters that affect them.

The relationship between consumers and organisations in collaborative initiatives can be most transparent where a distinction is drawn between the 'empowerment' and 'betterment' approaches<sup>7</sup> to collaboration, and stakeholders agree on which is being used. The betterment approach involves community being 'invited into a process designed and controlled by larger institutions', whereas the empowerment approach 'begins with the community itself' and involves other stakeholders as the collaboration evolves (Morse 1996:10).

In this framework, facilitating collaboration requires stakeholders to negotiate up front about who is driving the collaboration, thereby establishing an appropriate locus of control for that collaboration. This approach acknowledges the pragmatic reality in that the power within any collaboration will depend on factors such as the abilities, commitment and intention of those people involved, the nature of the collaboration, the issues to be addressed and the time and resources available to stakeholders (Morse 1996).

### Endnotes

1. Skidmore, P & Craig, J (2005). *Start with people: How community organisations put people in the driving seat*. Demos, London. p.41. Viewed October 2007 at <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/startwithpeople>
2. Consumer quotes in this section are from consumers present at focus groups during the consultation phase of the Consumer Participation Resource Kit project.
3. Skidmore & Craig (2005) p.42.
4. Cuthill, M & Fein, J (2005). Capacity building: Facilitating citizen participation in local governance. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 64(4) pp.63-80: December 2005. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
5. See the Banyule Nillumbik Primary Care Alliance (BNPCA) *Consumer Participation Resource & Training Kit for Service Providers* (2003) at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pcps/publications/banyule.htm>
6. Morse, S (1996). *Building Collaborative Communities*. Leadership Collaboration Series, Pew Partnership for Civic Change.
7. Himmelman, A (1995). *Collaboration for Change*. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.



# Overcoming barriers to participation

**There are a range of barriers to authentic and effective participation.** Some of these relate to consumer diversity; for example, organisations may face challenges in facilitating the participation of consumers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Others relate to the culture and resource limitations of organisations. This section suggests ways to tackle some of these barriers.

## Consumer diversity

### Cultural background

Providing any service in a manner that is responsive to the needs and requirements of people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds can be a challenge. The federal government has produced a useful document, a 'Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society' (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 1998). This sets out a comprehensive framework for best practice in culturally responsive service delivery. It details principles and gives practical strategies for achieving them.<sup>1</sup>

Key considerations include:

- Ensuring that information on participation opportunities is available to consumers in multiple languages;
- Ensuring that interpreting services are available to support consumer feedback wherever necessary;
- Ensuring that participation processes are culturally sensitive.

Building relationships with ethno-specific organisations or with ethno-specific workers in mainstream organisations can often be a key source of information and advice, and can lead to the development and implementation of longer-term strategies.

In Victoria, Prioletti Consultants assist services to work with and consult people from diverse cultural backgrounds – for more information, refer to Resources section of this Kit.

### Youth

Brophy Family and Youth Services (based in south-west Victoria) conducted a project in 2005 that explored models for strengthening and guiding young people's participation in decision-making.<sup>2</sup> The young people who were consulted identified tokenism (i.e. lack of impact or follow-through) as one of the main barriers to their willingness to participate:

*"The thing that would make it worthwhile would be if there's a legitimate suggestion made, it was actually followed through, there was feedback, and why not – pros and cons – and if the pros outweighed the cons, and they keep going with it, then why not, what's the point . . . ? Yes definitely, you've got to follow through."*

Three key lessons from the study, in regard to engaging the participation of young people, were:

- Most young people recognised and spoke positively about the value of decision-making in consultation with their worker, and such opportunities should be encouraged.
- It is important to devise multiple strategies of engagement to ensure a broad spectrum of participation, however these strategies may not be significantly different to those used for older consumers.
- Adequate resources (time and money) as well as careful planning are required for participation to be valuable for the program/organisation and the young people themselves.

### Disability

Many consumers of housing and homelessness services have one or more forms of disability. Physical, intellectual or psychiatric disabilities, or simply poor health, can be significant barriers to participation, especially when combined with poverty and poor access to transport.

Organisations need to ensure that consumer participation opportunities are accessible to consumers with a wide range of physical and intellectual abilities. Ensure that venues for meetings or focus groups are accessible to those with limited mobility; provide transport or reimburse transport costs as necessary. Be aware of literacy limitations and ensure that verbal as well as written channels are used to provide information and gather feedback.

Consumers with disabilities may require focused individual support to maximise their ability to participate in structures such as committees, advisory groups, Boards of Management or policy review processes. In Victoria, DASSI's Active Participation Service is a key resource providing individual support to people with disabilities to actively participate in decision making and/or advisory roles. For more information, refer to the Resources section of the Kit.

## Service culture

Consumers consulted in preparation of this Kit strongly stated that organisational culture was a key element in facilitating consumer participation. An “us

and them” culture with staff expressing fearful or judgmental attitudes towards consumers is a barrier to participation; on the other hand, a welcoming and respectful culture encourages participation. When



Relationships between staff and consumers are important to consumer involvement. One consumer commented: “An example of effective contact is a Team leader—when she hears of a death, sickness or birth—she sends a card to the tenants. She lets the people know that she cares.”

asked what enables participation, consumers commented:

*“Tell housing workers not to look down on us.”*

*“Welcome consumers as equals.”*

*“Sit around the table, at the same level, talking.”*

*“...go into a social event and listen. Meet the people you are dealing with on a one to one basis. In this situation people are relaxed... They don't feel threatened”.*

Changing organisational culture takes time. Learning and growth may often follow the implementation of change, as the organisation comes to terms with and integrates new processes and policies. It is also important to:

- Provide staff at all levels of the organisation with clear, timely information about consumer participation, including the organisation's expectations of staff in this area. Where significant changes are occurring, training should be provided.
- Provide opportunities for staff participation and for staff to express their ideas and concerns about consumer participation and any changes occurring. Ensure the feedback loop is complete and that staff know their concerns have been heard.

## Resource requirements

Implementing authentic and effective consumer participation strategies require significant resources. Smaller organisations are especially aware of financial constraints in this area. While consumer participation activities must ultimately fit within the scope of available resources, there may be ways to expand the pool of resources available:

- Pool and share resources across geographical locations and/or service types. Participate in quality networks or regional networks to share ideas and strategies. Form a partnership with other agencies to develop and implement a joint CP strategy, for example a joint Consumer Advisory Group.
- Use existing resources. For example, in some regions of Victoria, public housing tenants are already engaged in the Office of Housing's Tenant Participation Framework. All tenants are encouraged to participate in local tenant groups that elect a representative onto a regional tenant council which is represented at the State Tenant Council. Tenants can influence policy and service delivery and engage in discussion with decision makers up to the responsible Minister. There may be the potential for housing/homelessness organisations to consult these tenant representatives in the process of developing strategies with their own consumers. However, issues of the resourcing of these representatives to respond to agencies would need to be considered.
- Consider forms of consumer participation that have the potential to add resources to the organisation, for example engage consumers as volunteers or trainees.
- Seek additional funding. Prepare a budget based on the costs of engaging consumers in participation and negotiate with DHS around this. Join with other organisations to lobby for adequate resourcing for consumer participation. Approach philanthropic organisations for funding to assist implementation of CP strategies.

## Endnotes

1. Viewed November 2007 at <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/charters/culturally-diverse/index.htm>
2. The full report viewed November 2007 at [http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/saap2/\\$file/brophy\\_family\\_report.pdf](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/saap2/$file/brophy_family_report.pdf)

# Evaluating consumer participation



## The evaluation cycle

The evaluation cycle starts when an organisation begins planning to engage with consumers.

The planning process should include an assessment of present conditions, which provides baseline data for the evaluation. During the planning process, develop indicators which will let you know whether you have achieved what you planned to do. After implementing consumer participation strategies, reflect on them and their outcomes, measuring success against the indicators. Then start the cycle again, assessing present conditions and considering where you want to go.

## Indicators

Indicators should be included in the evaluation framework to enable you to assess whether the strategy you use has been successful in achieving the objectives you have set. Where possible, ensure baseline data is available around each of the indicators to enable later impact evaluation.

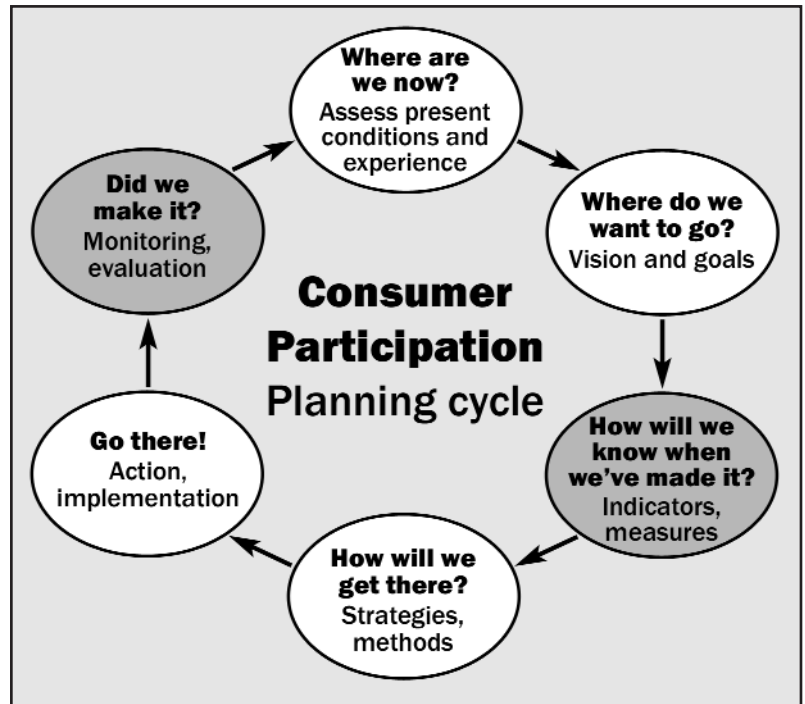
Indicators of process, performance, impact and outcomes need to be considered. For example, evaluation of the process of consumer participation "starts at the point that the organisation begins to plan their involvement in supporting participation".<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a process indicator could be that consumers are involved early in the planning process.

Impact and outcome indicators look for evidence of short and long term effects of a CP strategy; in particular, evidence that the CP activity resulted in change for the better for consumers as users of housing and homelessness services. For example, an outcome indicator for CP could include evidence of shared decision making and collaboration; improvements in housing outcomes; an increase in consumer satisfaction; increased participation of those traditionally marginalized; and/or active involvement of consumers at all levels of the development, implementation and evaluation of the service.



Consumer participation is about the complexities of human relationships and power sharing. Evaluation tools and processes need to be robust enough to inquire, but also sensitive and respectful to those involved.

Figure 1: Evaluation in the consumer participation planning cycle



## Consumer participation in evaluation

Consumer involvement is critical throughout the evaluation process. Consumers should be involved in designing the indicators and other aspects of the evaluation process. Evaluation mechanisms should seek consumer input on the success of particular CP strategies, and the CP plan as a whole.

Evaluation that encompasses effective consumer collaboration challenges some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the traditional role of the evaluator, who must now take on new roles:<sup>2</sup>

- The evaluator must move from the role of controller to that of collaborator;
- The evaluator must assume the role of learner and teacher rather than that of investigator; and
- The evaluator gets rid of the role of passive observer and recognises the role of change agent.

*"Collaboration by providers and consumers is the methodological route to both more effective service provision, and more valid and trustworthy service evaluation."<sup>3</sup>*

## Evaluation framework for public participation

There are few evaluation tools designed specifically for consumer participation. However, general evaluation methods and frameworks are very useful.

An evaluation framework for public participation is in the process of being developed by the International

Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2) and may be adapted for use in evaluating consumer participation.

The table below summarises the core principles and indicators from this draft framework. For more information (including the rating scales and guide questions) refer to the framework document, available online.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1: IAP2 Core principles and indicators

Principle	Indicator
Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Openness and honesty about scope and purpose</li> <li>Appreciate respective roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely expressed and heard</li> <li>Representative of the population</li> <li>Appropriate and equitable opportunity for all to participate</li> </ul>
Deliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sufficient and credible information for dialogue</li> <li>Space to weigh options, understand and reframe issues, movement towards developing shared understanding, identifying common ground and shared values</li> </ul>
Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People have input in how they participate</li> <li>Policies and services reflect their involvement, and their impact is apparent</li> </ul>
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address barriers</li> <li>Build capacity and confidence of people to participate meaningfully</li> <li>Develop confidence in the process and the value of their participation</li> <li>Engender a shared sense of ownership and commitment to the process and outcome</li> <li>Adequately resource Indigenous peoples and the poor and marginalised to participate meaningfully in the broader community</li> <li>Ensure that they have a stake in the outcome and benefit equitably as a result of being involved</li> </ul>
Sustainable decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparency</li> <li>Subject to evaluation</li> <li>Recognise and communicate the needs, interests and values of all parties, including decision makers</li> <li>Decision makers find the output useful and have sufficient confidence to act on the community's recommendations</li> <li>More cohesive and informed communities and governance result from the process</li> </ul>

## Practical tips

- During the planning process, assign resources and responsibility for evaluation of the CP Plan and strategies. Ensure that evaluation is explicitly included in your CP Plan.
- Use whatever CP mechanisms you have in place as part of the evaluation process. If you have a consumer advisory group, ask them to reflect on the organisation's progress with consumer participation and what could be improved. If you have a regular consumer survey, include questions about how to improve the effectiveness of the survey, and how else consumers' input could be gathered.
- Report on and publicise the results of the evaluation to all stakeholders. Let consumers and staff know how the evaluation results have made a difference.
- Refer to the Resources section of this Kit for more information and examples.

## Endnotes

1. Department of Health, Flinders University & SA Community Health Research Unit (2000). *Improving Health Services Through Consumer Participation: A Resource Guide for Organisations*. Consumer Focus Collaboration, Department of Health and Aged Care, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
2. Guba & Lincoln (1989).
3. Wadsworth, Y. *Everyday Evaluation on the Run*.
4. For more information visit: <http://www.iap2.org.au> or email Allison@darzin.com.