



# 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).

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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>