

# 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.

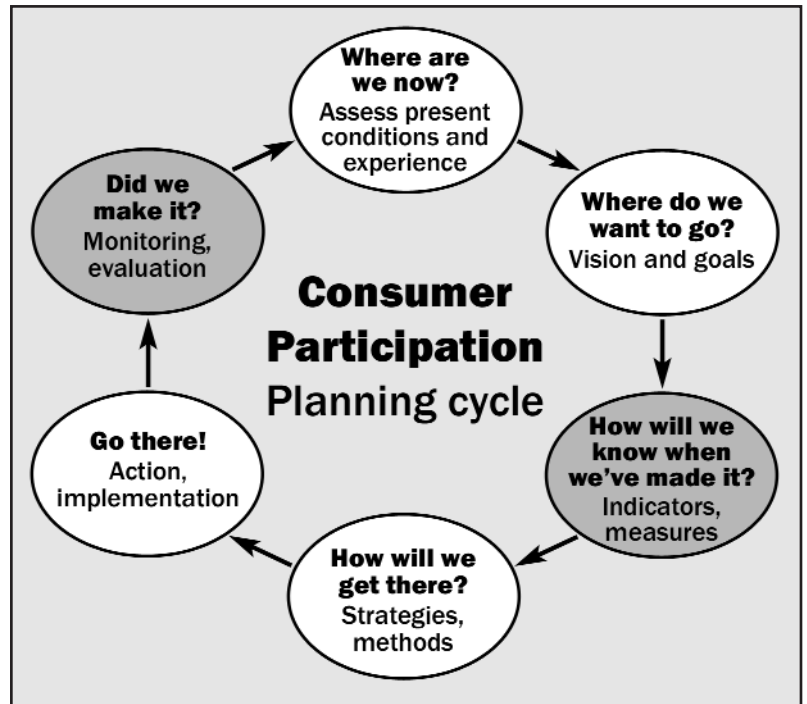
Indicators of process, performance, impact and outcomes need to be considered. For example, evaluation of the process of consumer participation "starts at the point that the organisation begins to plan their involvement in supporting participation".<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a process indicator could be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

- 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.
- Guba & Lincoln (1989).
- Wadsworth, Y. *Everyday Evaluation on the Run*.
- For more information visit: <http://www.iap2.org.au> or email [Allison@darzin.com](mailto:Allison@darzin.com).