



Strategy selector table

A wide range of strategies are available for involving consumers. When planning for consumer participation, organisations may select among these strategies according to the type of service provided, the dimension and degree of participation desired, the resources available, and other characteristics of the agency and consumer group.



No matter what strategy you choose, acknowledging input and providing feedback about the impact and value of each person's contribution is essential.

The table below lists 47 types of strategies for increasing consumer participation, organised into 10

sections: Organisational development, Information, Everyday practice, Research, Groups, Consumer groups, Deliberative processes, Employment, Consumer representation, and Consumer Control.

The 'Ref.' column indicates where further information may be available. The abbreviation IS# refers to Information Sheets in this Kit, with further detail on strengths, weaknesses, resource requirements and implementation tips. The abbreviation RG followed by a page number refers to the Resource Guide document *Improving health services through consumer participation: a resource guide*, available online at: <http://www.participateinhealth.org.au/clearinghouse/#1>.

A. Organisational development

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Input into needs assessment process	Info seeking / consultation	Input may be requested by organisation using any of the info-seeking or consultation strategies listed here. If part of a regular cyclical planning process, can use standing committees with consumer reps.	IS#13 RG p.65
Networking	Consultation / partnership	Informal relationship-building with people or organisations who have common interests or goals. Build links to consumer organisations and advocacy groups.	IS#13 RG p.90
Negotiated partnership	Consultation / partnership	Consumers and providers work together to develop a written agreement as a basis for future CP processes. May be initiated by consumers. Requires clarity of objectives and good communication skills.	IS#13 RG p.88
Partnership of consumers and providers	Partnership	Structured cyclical planning process with specified role for consumers in collaborative decision-making with providers. Process and outcomes are a shared responsibility. Usually the result of years of development of CP and a strong consumer focus and culture in the organisation.	IS#13 RG p.92
Consumer input into organisation / team policy	Consultation	Formal and informal methods. Includes consumer representatives, management committees, planning groups, planning processes, policy development process. Includes consumer advocacy as 'outsiders' to a policy development process.	IS#13 RG p.83
Consumer participation policy	Supports CP / consult'n / partnership	CP policies provide an organisational context to support greater consumer participation and guide the development of a CP Plan.	IS#13 RG p.78
Evaluation of services	Supports CP / info seeking / partnership	Consumers are involved in evaluation of services, as members of evaluation reference group, as interviewers, analysers and co-authors.	IS#11 RG p.31
Human resources development	Supports CP	Job design (include CP in position descriptions); recruitment (include consumers on interview panels); staff orientation and training to support consumer participation.	IS#13 RG p.27
Complaints handling	Info seeking / consultation	Actively engages consumers who have identified possible areas for service improvement. Requires easy to use complaints process and staff understanding of value of complaints. Response to consumer essential.	IS#13 RG p.50
Access and equity policies and processes	Consultation	Catalyst may be lack of use of services by particular groups of consumers. Consultation techniques may be used to include consumers in planning or resource allocation.	IS#13 RG p.82

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B. Information

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Publications, media releases and displays	Supports CP	Written materials provide information on issues and how consumers can participate. Can also provide feedback on outcomes of participation.	RG p.23
Promotions	Info to support CP	Can be innovative and creative and can involve consumers in planning and implementation. May include consultation and/or partnership.	RG p.56

C. Everyday practice

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Customer service	Info giving and seeking	Include standard questions re: quality of service. Provide consumers with information about opportunities to participate.	IS#14
Information to consumers about services and options	Supports CP	Strengths-based approach. Written and oral information to consumers presented in an accessible and understandable way, explaining service choices and likely outcomes, with pathways for asking and getting answers to questions.	IS#14 RG p.25
Consumer friendly admin procedures	Supports CP	Review and reform administrative communication with consumers to encourage participation. Ensure papers are available before meetings and consumers are able to make comments after meetings.	IS#14 RG p.29
Responding to consumer initiatives	Info seeking / consultation	Clear policies, processes and skills to respond to inquiries or requests initiated by consumers.	IS#14 RG p.53
Consumer anecdotes / informal feedback	Info seeking / consultation	Recording, summarizing, analysing, reporting consumer comments into organizational decision making processes. Report back to consumers and organisation.	IS#14
Consumer charters	Supports CP	Written consumer rights and guarantees that specify service conditions and provide pathways for complaint and possible redress for consumers.	IS#14 RG p.26

D. Research

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Individual research	Info seeking	Different methods depending on approach: outcomes research, qualitative research, action research that overlap with consumer participation.	
Peer to peer methods	Info seeking	Consumer to consumer (or consumer consultant to consumer) methods of consultation minimise power imbalances, increase the richness of information gathered and add perceptive insights to analysis of findings.	RG p.33
Surveys	Info seeking	Gathers quantitative or qualitative data. Agenda set by organisation. Scope of information limited. Variations include snapshot, feedback and exit surveys.	IS#15 RG p.34
In-depth consumer interviews	Info seeking	Extended, semi-structured (usually face-to-face) interviews. Provide rich information from selected consumers. Useful follow up to surveys to further explore issues, or for specific population groups. Time consuming.	RG p.36
Hotlines and phone-ins	Info seeking	Relies on publicity and consistent phone number as well as phone being attended. Works best with skilled staff or trained volunteers to answer. Attracts respondents fairly indiscriminately.	RG p.49
Suggestion boxes	Info seeking	Easy to implement, but limited in obtaining useful input unless backed with feedback strategy. Limited to consumers with time and literacy skills. Always use in conjunction with other strategies.	IS#16 RG p.47

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E. Groups

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Focus groups	Info seeking	Semi-structured group interview. Consumers invited on basis of who they are and what they can contribute to discussion. Interactions among participants can help explore issues rapidly and in-depth.	IS#17 RG p.40
Regular consumer meetings	Info giving & seeking / consultation	Regular meetings (e.g. house meetings) to seek feedback on service, input on improvements and provide a forum to raise other issues.	IS#18
Nominal group method	Info seeking	Small group process, useful for consumer involvement in identifying priority issues and allocating scarce resources. Does not allow for in-depth exploration of issues.	IS#18 RG p.46
Workshops	Info giving & seeking / consultation	Working meeting usually of 8-12 consumers, maybe with providers, to share information and develop a shared approach to a specified issue. Participants selected on basis of skills, knowledge or experience.	RG p.54
Meetings and forums	Info seeking / consultation	Bigger audiences. Meeting structured to canvass views, debate an issue. Reps may be nominated by consumer groups / associations.	RG p.60
Seminars and conferences	Info seeking / consultation	Instigated by organisations to explore issues. Audiences of 20 plus people. Structured format. Informal or spontaneous input may be restricted. Be wary of tendency to give more time to professionals than consumers, who may require support to present their perspectives.	RG p.66
Social events; meet and greet	Info seeking / consultation	Organisations or consumers hold social events (e.g. BBQs, morning or afternoon teas) that provide opportunities for consumers to meet and talk with consumer reps, staff, Board members and others.	
Policy round tables	Consultation	Structured meetings convened to advise on the development of specific policy. Consumers / consumer reps invited.	RG p.69
Submissions	Info seeking / partnership	Oral and written presentation of consumers' views to government inquiries or to an organisation. May be written by consumers, or can include consumer input in organisation's submission. Support necessary to allow participation of less articulate, CALD and/or socially disadvantaged consumers.	RG p.44

F. Consumer groups

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Consumer advisory groups	Consultation	Up to 15 members. Provides input on specific issues / subjects on the basis of expertise or experience in relation to those issues. Members can be appointed or elected. Requires clear terms of reference.	IS#19 RG p.75
Consumer councils and reference groups	Consultation	Structure and role prescribed by organisation. Input to whole of organisation. Made up of consumers who advise the organisation. Need to support consumer reps maintain links with constituency. Reps need to have tenure long enough to have an impact, but not so long they become part of organisation.	RG p.67
Project groups	Info seeking / consultation	Time limited group initiated by organisation to advise on specific issues or to guide a project. May be used to demonstrate the value of CP to key players.	RG p.32
Consumer forums	Consultation	Like focus groups but include larger number of consumers, may include a small number of staff. Useful to educate people, share information or develop appreciation of different views. One-off or a series of meetings.	RG p.76
Participation support groups	Supports CP / consultation / therapeutic partnerships	Support to assist consumers on their issues on their own terms, may include support to participate. Groups can be consulted about service improvement. Workers may enter partnership with groups as advisers.	RG p.86

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G. Deliberative processes

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Consumer feedback panels	Consultation	A pool of potential respondents is established and maintained over 2-4 years. Can be called on to deliberate on issues and inform decisions.	IS#20
Citizens' (consumers') juries	Delegated power	Consumers brought together to deliberate in an informed way on a complex issue. Structured process including expert involvement to assist participants to understand the issues.	IS#20
Deliberative poll	Consultation	Participants selected randomly, receive information, engage in discussion and vote. Preceded by baseline poll in order to measure change.	IS#20

H. Employment

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Consumer consultants	Info seeking / consultation / partnership	Organisation employs past consumer(s) to consult with consumers and advocate on their behalf for service improvement and systemic change.	IS#21 RG p.55
Staff: Volunteers and paid	Supports CP	Organisation recruits unpaid workers who are either consumers or have close contact with consumers and the opportunity to get consumer feedback. Training, supervision and support required as for paid staff. Volunteer-trainee-employee pathway developed.	IS#22 RG p.30

I. Consumer representation

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Consumer representatives on committees	Consultation	Consumers representing other consumers on committees / Board of Management. Usually unpaid positions. Need to ensure they have a strong relationship with their constituency. Consumer reps require clear role description, information, training and support from organisations.	IS#23 RG p.70
Recruitment processes for consumer reps	Consultation	Clarify objectives for having consumer representatives. Develop clear, effective processes for recruiting reps.	RG p.72

J. Consumer control

Participation strategy	Degree of participation	Key attributes	Ref.
Consumer-run organisations	Consumer control	Consumers elect board of directors. Management reports to board. Consumer-run organisations often focus on social justice advocacy as well as service delivery.	IS#24 RG p.100
Community development	Partnership	Community development approach to program / project development. Focus on process as well as outcomes. Scope for creative ways to facilitate consumer participation. Support and partnership with consumers about their own issues.	RG p.98

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