Community Engagement

Our vision is for the local government sector to be agile, smart and inclusive.

Our objective is to reform local government so that it is empowered to better deliver quality governance and services to their communities now and into the future.

A new Local Government Act will be drafted, Transforming Local Government.

Inclusive includes topics that focus specifically on how local governments represent and involve their communities in decision-making. As the tier of government closest to the community, there is an expectation that local governments represent the whole community, recognise diversity within their district and are responsive to community needs.

The topics addressed in this theme are:

* Elections;
* Community engagement;
* Integrated planning and reporting; and
* Complaints management.

**Have your say!**

We need your input to inform how local government will work for future generations.

**Submissions**

The simplest way to have your say is to answer the questions via the online surveys.

The survey questions relate to the matters discussed in the papers and we encourage you to read the relevant paper before completing the survey.

While you may lodge multiple written submissions via email at [actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au](mailto:actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au), you will only be able to complete each online topic survey once. The public submission period closes on 31 March 2019. This is the last day that you will be able to respond to the surveys.

**Note**: Unless marked as confidential, your submission (including survey responses) will be made public and published in full on the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries’ (the Department) website. Submissions that contain defamatory or offensive material will not be published.

Introduction

Local governments often need to make difficult decisions. Matters such as planning, whether to invest in a project, or the future direction can divide communities. While local governments are tasked with providing for the good governance of their district and council members with representing the interests of their community, it can be a challenge balancing the community’s competing priorities.

Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to provide input that enhances decision making processes on issues that may impact on their well-being or interests. It can be used as a key method for local government to navigate community priorities. It encompasses the way in which local governments inform, consult, engage and empower activity by the community.

Effective community engagement contributes to building trust between the community and the council and raises the quality of decision making which reflects the needs and aspirations of the community. Community engagement works best where it is an ongoing process enabling relationships and trust to build and strengthen over time, and strengthens representative democracy while building community capacity.

|  |
| --- |
| **IPR and community engagement**  In 2011, the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) framework was introduced with a focus on community involvement through strategic community planning. This was the first time in Western Australia that community engagement was formally required of local governments by legislation. IPR is the subject of a separate consultation paper. This paper focuses on community engagement that extends beyond IPR. |

What makes good community engagement?

Currently, local governments are required to engage with the community when creating their ten year Strategic Community Plan. The community must also be consulted on such matters as local laws, differential rates, planning and other matters and aspirations that are relevant to the diverse needs of individuals within a community. The current extent of community engagement simply stops at inviting submissions but engagement should be more than that.

Best practice in community engagement goes beyond the requirement to simply consult and can be more impactful when decision making is done in conjunction with the community from the beginning of a project proposal. Establishing effective partnerships between local government and communities results in a greater sense of ownership, greater take-up of services and initiatives, and better outcomes for all community groups, reducing the chances of marginalisation while encouraging unified community outcomes.

Community engagement also needs to allow for socially disadvantaged groups within a community to engage and highlight the important issues that may not be captured by traditional amenities, for example no disability access in some shopping mall entries. There is a need for local governments to have systems in place to help identify how to adequately engage different stakeholders in the community, such as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD), Aboriginal people, youths, children, seniors, and people with disabilities. Identifying how to best engage diverse communities across Western Australia in a meaningful way is an important step in community engagement.

Community engagement can be done in many effective ways to allow participation in decision making of projects that impact members of the community. Due to the diverse needs and requirements of local governments in Western Australia, methods of community engagement should be scaled to best reflect their community. It could be something as simple as going door to door to engage with community members in relation to plans for a local park.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has produced a public participation spectrum that provides guidelines on the different levels of public participation. The IAP2 structure outlines what it looks like to inform the public compared to empowering the community in decision making. The level of participation varies depending on the situation. If a local government needs to close a bridge or road to carry out repairs, informing or consulting may be all that is necessary. Alternatively, by involving, collaborating or empowering the community in decision-making, it can help create community ownership of projects and build relationships between the community and local government.

Below are some innovative ways showing how local governments can and have engaged their community.

Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a process in which the community can contribute to decision-making over part, or all, of a government budget. There are a number of methods that can be utilised to engage in participatory budgeting as can be seen on the table below.

| **Year and city** | **Budget area and outlook** | **Proportion of budget available for PB** | **Key methods used** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2012 Canada Bay, NSW | All services and operating — 4 year period | Dollar amount not stipulated (2013/2014 budget of $72 million) | Deliberative community panel |
| 2012 Melville, WA | Community grants budget — 1 year | $100,000 (Of total operating budget of $87.3 million in 2012/2013) | Workshops  Online budget allocator tool to vote |
| 2013 Geraldton, WA | All capital works —  10 year period | $68 million (Total capital works budget) | Deliberative community panel |
| 2014 Geraldton, WA | Services and operating — 1 year | $70 million (Total services/operating budget) | Deliberative community panel |
| 2014 Darebin, VIC | New community infrastructure capital budget — 2 year period | $2 million ($1 million per year) (Total capital works budget of $40.3 million in 2014/2015) | Public submissions Deliberative citizens’ jury |
| 2015 Melbourne, VIC | All services and operating — 10 year period | $5.9 billion (Total budget) | Deliberative community panel |

Like any venture that requires genuine and transparent engagement, this process can be resource-intensive to set up. [Participatory budgeting](https://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/Profiles/cgg/Assets/ClientData/Community_Summit_Final_Report_-_23_March_2015.pdf) helps the community get involved in what they expect to see from their local governments, and provide a priority list of what is important to them. It also helps them understand the complexities that lie in resource allocation, providing an opportunity to appreciate the work their local government has to go through to provide appropriate services.

Citizens’ juries

There are no shortages of innovative ideas to engage communities across Australia. The use of [citizens’ juries](https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/docs/activeprojects/geelong2016/GeelongCitizensJuryFinalReport_21Jan17.pdf) is an example of one such innovation. Citizens’ juries provide the opportunity for randomly selected members of the public to deliberate thoroughly over an issue. This process creates a balance between experts and the public and gives elected members’ confidence that public judgement can contribute to better decision making. The juries differ in their scale, size, scope and resource level but are all used to improve the complexities surrounding the decision-making process of local governments.

A citizens’ jury can be created by sending out invitations to a randomly selected group of rate-payers, or asking community members who are interested to respond to an expression of interest on a matter that affects the entire community. The final panel is usually selected based on the responses received, diversity and representation of the larger community. The process is enabled by a skilled facilitator, and the panel on the citizen jury are provided with expert help throughout the deliberation process to ensure they have the best tools available to make a decision.

At the end of the process, the jury will issue the findings to the council who will then determine how to implement the proposals. Like participatory democracy, this process can be resource-intensive, and as such has associated risks attached. A jury is especially useful when a council wants to know what an informed, representative group of people think about a particular issue that will affect the entire community such the development of a new large scale community facility such as a recreation centre.

In the age of technology, there is no shortage of innovative ways to encourage civic engagement by members of the community. The South Australian government has created a website known as **yourSAy** that is an online consultation hub where members of the community can register their interest and actively contribute in a variety of projects and initiatives. Through this platform, government agencies across the State are able to run consultation on matters that affect the community in various forms. Citizens’ juries are one of the methods used. The City of Perth also uses a dedicated website known as **Engage Perth** to allow engagement on projects and important decisions.

Community engagement across Australia

| **Jurisdiction** | **Policy or Legislation** |
| --- | --- |
| Western Australia | * Local governments must plan for the future. * Regulation requires local governments to have a Strategic Community Plan that together with a Corporate Business Plan forms a plan for the future of a district.   \*The Strategic Community Plan is in relation to IPR requirements under the *Local Government Act* *1995* (the Act) which is a theme of another paper. |
| New South Wales | * Each local government must prepare and implement a community engagement strategy for engaging the local community for the development and review of the Community Strategic Plan. A community engagement strategy must be based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the community strategic plan. * Needs to provide time for the community to actively engage. * Local governments utilise up-to-date demographic data that assists them to identify specific groups in the community which may be useful to target. |
| South Australia | * Must have a public consultation policy. * Use a Community Engagement Charter (to ensure the community is at the forefront of the planning process). * Activities covered by the Charter are State Planning Policies, Regional Plans, Design Standards, Re-zoning, and Infrastructure and Delivery Scheme however development assessment is not entirely covered. * The State Planning Commission has the authority to: * Give directions; or * Step in if it considers the entity has failed to meet the standards set in the Charter. * The Commission is responsible for establishing and maintaining the Charter, reviewing it every five years, with subsequent amendments subject to change at any time by the Commission. |
| Victoria | * Councils must comply with a good governance guide. This clearly sets out the role each party plays in consultation and community engagement. The guide covers areas in the *Local Government Act* on which good governance will have an impact (http://www.vlga.org.au/News-Resources/Resources/Good-Governance-Guide). * A Bill is currently under consideration which extends community engagement. This is discussed in greater detail below. |
| Tasmania | * Councils must adopt a strategic plan with a statement of procedures to be carried out in relation to consultation with the community. |
| Queensland | * Local governments must abide by five principles to ensure that they are accountable, effective, efficient and sustainable. These principles are: * Transparent and effective processes, and decision-making in the public interest; * Sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services; * Democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement; * Good governance of, and by, local government; and * Ethical and legal behaviour of councillors and council employees. |

Community Engagement Charter and policies

South Australia has created a Community Engagement Charter to change the way planning interacts with the community by inviting community members to provide input on planning policies that will shape the places they value.

The charter must be used to guide public participation in the preparation and amendment of designated policies, strategies and schemes.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The charter creates a flexible, effective and meaningful framework for engagement that aims to:

* Foster better planning outcomes that take account of the community views and aspirations;
* Establish trust in the planning process; and
* Improve the community’s understanding of the planning system.

This could be used as a model for other aspects of a local government’s activities.

The Victorian Parliament is currently considering a new local government Act which legislates community accountability as part of the overarching principles that support council governance. Under community accountability, councils will be required to adopt and maintain a community engagement policy. This must be done in consultation with the local community. The proposed Act then goes on to set out what a community engagement policy must have, the principles that guide the policy and what matters require engagement.

In Queensland, to ensure that local governments are accountable, effective, efficient and sustainable, any action that is taken under their local government Act needs to be consistent with the local government principles listed in the table above. Local governments must be socially inclusive and undertake meaningful community engagement.

What are the opportunities for reform?

There is currently nothing in Western Australia to guide community engagement although some local governments undertake community engagement very well. A charter allows a streamlined opportunity for local governments to communicate when, how and on what matters the community will be engaged. A charter can help councils identify the importance of matters to engage on, evaluate the resources needed and provide guidance on the best methods to engage on a particular issue. The IAP2 spectrum of public participation can help local governments identify when and how to engage the relevant stakeholders in a community.

To achieve a cohesive framework, the charter should cover the following:

* Set engagement requirements;
* Set principles that can deliver performance outcomes to ensure that engagement must be genuine, inclusive and respectful, fit for purpose, informed and transparent and processes must be reviewed and improved; and
* Set methods to measure performance.

A charter can be adapted to suit the local government and its community but have a set of minimum requirements to achieve effectiveness.

There is currently no requirement for community engagement beyond IPR in Western Australia. Identifying the role of the community clearly in the objects of the Act is a good starting point to identify how engagement should be determined.

The Act could set out principles that guide how a local government should address community engagement, including how it will engage with those that are socially disadvantaged. By providing a principle-based framework instead of being prescriptive on how engagement should be conducted, there is an opportunity to create a space for genuine engagement instead of just another criterion with which local governments have to comply.

Local governments are then able to determine how to best put the principles into practice. As has been identified above, there are a number of existing resources available to assist local governments such as the IAP2 framework and other online resources on best practice community engagement.

Social media

As social media continues to advance, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are being used by local governments as a tool to strength community engagement. While social media is being embraced by the sector, concerns have been expressed at the negative and undisciplined way it is being used. This was especially evident during the 2017 local government election.

Though it can be great tool for community engagement, social media has unfortunately also given rise to “keyboard warriors” who have launched attacks against council members and local government employees. Other than pursuing defamation, there is no specific legislation that addresses this issue.

An option for reform is to introduce a legislative requirement that local governments must adopt a social media policy. The policy would not only address the use of social media by council members and staff, but also the appropriate use of social media in community engagement.

This policy would be supported by the Mandatory Code of Conduct that will apply to council members and candidates and is being introduced as part of earlier Act Review consultation.

# What do you think?

The easiest way to have a say on the future of your community is to complete the survey available [here](http://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/LGAreview).

Your responses to this survey will inform the review and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

We ask that you take care in completing a survey. While you may lodge multiple written submissions via email at [actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au](mailto:actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au), you will only be able to complete each online topic survey once.

The public submission period closes on 31 March 2019. This is the last day that you will be able to respond to the surveys.

Unless marked as confidential, your submission (including survey responses) will be made public and published in full on the Department’s website. Submissions that contain defamatory or offensive material will not be published.

The questions in the survey are provided below but we encourage you to complete the survey online which is available [here](http://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/LGAreview).

***Survey* - Community Engagement**

1. Have you read the discussion paper associated with this survey?
   1. Yes
   2. No
2. Who are you completing this submission on behalf of?
   1. Yourself
   2. An organisation, including a local government, peak body or business
3. What is the name of that organisation?
4. What is your name?
5. What best describes your relationship to local government?
   1. Resident / ratepayer
   2. Staff member or CEO
   3. Council member, including Mayor or President
   4. Peak body
   5. State Government agency
   6. Supplier or commercial partner
   7. Community organisation
6. What best describes your gender?
   1. Male
   2. Female
   3. Other
   4. Not applicable / the submission is from an organisation
7. What is your age?
   1. 0 – 18
   2. 19 – 35
   3. 36 – 45
   4. 46 – 55
   5. 56 – 65
   6. 66 – 75
   7. 76+
   8. Not applicable
8. Which local government do you interact with most?
9. Would you like to be updated on the progress of the *Local Government Act 1995* review and further opportunities to have your say?
   1. Yes
   2. No
10. Do you wish for your response to this survey to be confidential?
    1. Yes
    2. No
11. What is your email address?
12. What methods of engagement do you believe are most effective (please select all options that apply)
    1. In person
    2. Telephone
    3. Online
    4. Community forums
    5. Citizen juries
    6. Other (please specify)
13. How could local governments engage with different community groups (e.g. young people, seniors, families, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, etc.)?
14. To what extent do you support the following statements?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Very unsupportive | Unsupportive | Neutral | Supportive | Very supportive |
| “The Act needs to set rules for community engagement by defining what community engagement is and how it should be done.” |  |  |  |  |  |
| “Local governments should be required to adopt a community engagement charter or policy.” |  |  |  |  |  |
| “All local governments should operate under a universal community engagement charter or policy.” |  |  |  |  |  |
| “Local governments should determine if they require a community engagement charter or policy and the content of that charter or policy.” |  |  |  |  |  |

1. Other jurisdictions have included principles with their engagement charter. How relevant do you believe each of these principles are?

|  | Irrelevant | Neutral | Relevant |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Engagement is genuine |  |  |  |
| Engagement is inclusive and respectful |  |  |  |
| Engagement is fit-for-purpose |  |  |  |
| Engagement is informed and transparent |  |  |  |
| Engagement processes must be reviewed and improved |  |  |  |

1. In what circumstances should local governments be required to engage with the community? (please select all options that apply)
   1. When preparing or reviewing their Strategic Community Plan
   2. When preparing their annual budget
   3. Making a local law
   4. Planning matters
   5. Emergency and community infrastructure planning
   6. Only when the local government determines that it is necessary
   7. Other (please specify)
2. Would you like to make any further comments regarding community engagement?

Additional information can also be provided to the review team via email at [actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au](mailto:actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au).

1. <http://www.saplanningportal.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/449496/Community_Engagement_Charter_-_April_2018.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)