

*Working Together for NSW:  
An agreement between the NSW Government and  
NSW non-government human services organisations*

**GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE:**

**NGO PARTICIPATION IN  
INTEGRATED REGIONAL HUMAN  
SERVICES PLANNING PROCESSES**

Endorsed by the Joint Human Services Chief Executive Officers / Forum of Non Government Agencies Committee overseeing implementation of the Working Together for NSW Agreement on 6 August 2007



New South Wales Government



# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

## NGO Participation in Regional Human Services Planning Processes

### Introduction

This Good Practice Guide aims to provide guidance and support to Government and non-government organisations participating in human services planning processes by outlining a series of principles of good practice. The Guide is not intended to be prescriptive; rather, it aims to promote ongoing reflection and discussion within and between Government and NGOs undertaking planning.

The Guide is based on the findings of one of the projects implemented as part of the *Working Together for NSW Agreement*, namely the NGO Participation in Integrated Regional Human Services Planning Processes project. This project aimed to identify key success factors of NGOs' participation in regional planning processes that contribute to achieving better outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

The project has been developed by conducting three case studies across NSW in which Government agency and NGO representatives participating in planning processes have been consulted. Their views have provided invaluable information about successes and challenges when it comes to planning, acknowledging that a lot of thought and effort has to date been invested by both Government and NGOs into existing processes.

This Good Practice Guide was endorsed by the Joint Human Services CEOs/Forum of Non Government Agencies (FONGA) Committee overseeing implementation of the *Working Together for NSW Agreement* on 6 August 2007.

### Using the Guide

The principles contained in this Guide aim to encourage ongoing appraisal by Government agencies and NGOs of their efforts to continually improve the way they work together to achieve better outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

Government and non-government agencies are encouraged to use the guidance provided in this document as a focus for reviewing their planning practices and to determine whether, and to what extent, these practices could be modified to improve outcomes through service delivery. This should not be a one off process. Good practice in planning will be supported through ongoing review in the context of the principles provided in this Guide.

This Guide acknowledges that no two planning processes are likely to be the same and that a region's particular context and history will influence how Government and non-government organisations shape their planning processes.

This Guide consists of a number of principles, each written as a broad statement of what is considered to be good practice in planning. It is underpinned by the overarching principle that the relationship between Government agencies and non-government organisations works at its best when it is based on trust and respect.

## Principles of good practice in planning

### **The purpose of, and approach to planning should be clear to all participants and established from the outset**

The first stage in any planning process should be establishing and agreeing on the purpose of undertaking planning and the process by which this will be achieved. This process can range from consultation, in which non-government organisations are generally invited to provide feedback on a proposal, to a more participatory situation in which NGOs may be involved to a greater extent in decision making processes. The value of local knowledge and perspective should be always recognised and sought wherever possible/feasible.

While the governance of the planning process is likely to be different across programs and/or locations, what should not change is that this process is underpinned by clarity, dialogue and honesty so as to avoid raising false expectations and broken trust between parties.

### **Planning processes should be based on open communication**

Open communication should be a constant feature throughout planning processes and be promoted through good facilitation procedures. Participants should understand how their views will be used, what decisions these views are likely to influence, how and when decisions will be made and who will make them.

In addition planning processes should, wherever possible, include a discussion about the resources available for the purpose of planning, the extent to which decisions and outcomes resulting from the planning exercise will be shared between Government and non-government organisations and who will be responsible for putting them into practice.

### **Planning processes should include the creation/implementation of feedback mechanisms**

Feedback should, wherever feasible, be provided to all participants after each of the planning process stages has been completed, in a timely and relevant manner. Feedback will generally be information about the outcomes of the planning process and a description of the process undertaken in making any decisions including, where relevant, an outline of the different options or alternatives which were considered and by whom.

### **Participants to planning processes should have access to adequate information**

Government and NGOs participating in planning processes should have access, where available, to information which is relevant, complete and easy to understand. Consideration should be given to the potential benefits of providing this information beforehand in order to maximise participation.

This may mean establishing protocols and principles about identifying and sharing information between all parties.

### **Planning process should be based on an ongoing dialogue between parties**

Planning processes should be based on an ongoing dialogue between Government and non-government organisations. Such an ongoing dialogue may include reviewing previous planning processes and their outcomes, discussing how regularly, how many and how often planning meetings should be undertaken so as to facilitate the best participation of stakeholders, discussing issues of concern or interest relevant to the planning process and, where feasible, having the opportunity to appraise the effectiveness of the planning process.

### **Planning processes should be flexible**

The size, complexity, context and history of planning will differ across regions and according to the objectives of the process. Planning processes can be undertaken within or across programs and should be flexible enough to tailor planning to the specifics of the region and its communities and the diverse needs of the participants. It should also be considered, where appropriate, whether different stages of planning should require distinct approaches and/or should involve different stakeholders.

### **Planning processes should involve relevant Government representatives**

Planning processes should endeavour to achieve appropriate representation from all the relevant NSW Government agencies impacting and being impacted on by the planning process. Consideration should also be given to including Commonwealth agencies and Local Government where this will maximise outcomes for clients.

In this context, “appropriate” relates to stakeholders who are knowledgeable in the area of work being planned for and who will preferably also have the capacity to make decisions commensurate with the decision making capabilities of the group.

An agreement on who should participate in the planning process, and at which stage, should take place as part of initiating a planning process.

### **Planning processes should be as inclusive of NGOs members as possible**

Planning processes should acknowledge that NGOs are made up of a range of paid and unpaid staff and should seek to consult with a cross section of representatives where this is imperative to the outcomes being sought. All those involved in a NGO, from staff to volunteers, have the potential to offer insight into various aspects of planning and service development. While it is clear that it would not be possible to consult with everybody about everything, planning processes should consider whether it would be appropriate to consult with different NGO members for different purposes or at different stages of the planning process.

### **Planning processes should maximise the opportunities for NGOs to participate**

Opportunities for NGOs to fully participate in planning processes should be maximised where their involvement is integral to achieving outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Possible strategies to maximise these opportunities may involve building on what planning and/or consultation mechanisms are already in place and using existing partnerships in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of consultation.

Planning processes should also try to overcome the barriers that may prevent some stakeholders from participating in planning, related for example to the size or location of their organisations. In doing so, things like key events clashing with planning meetings, transport obstacles or the time it takes for different stakeholders to participate in planning should be considered.

**Planning processes should be based on reliable evidence and be results focussed**

Close consideration should be given to utilising the Results Based Accountability<sup>1</sup> model in all planning processes. Planning should be based, where available, on reliable evidence-based information and data relevant to the local experience and should be focussed on achieving solutions and results for people and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Results Based Accountability model see <http://www.raguide.org/> and <http://www.resultsaccountability.com/>