

# Have your say ...but how?

Improving public participation in NSW



**NCOSS Research Report**

November 2014



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**



## About NCOSS

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) is a peak body for the not-for-profit community sector in New South Wales. NCOSS provides independent and informed policy advice, and plays a key coordination and leadership role for the sector. We work on behalf of disadvantaged people and communities towards achieving social justice in NSW.

## About the Sydney Social Justice Network (SSJN)

The Sydney Social Justice Network is a collaborative network at the University of Sydney. It fosters collaboration on social justice issues with a wide range of organisations in academia, civil society, and government.

This project was undertaken as a Social Justice Visiting Fellowship in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. It is part of the Sydney Social Justice Network Community Fellowship Program.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a research project on public participation by the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS). Public participation is about people having a say in decisions that affect them. It means people are not only involved in government decision-making processes but they can potentially influence the outcome of those processes. It is an important feature of our democracy and makes society fairer (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011).

## Key themes

This report has identified the following themes about public participation based on a review of the literature:

1. **Participation is a contested concept.** There is no agreed definition of public participation. How is it used and understood varies across different fields and contexts.
2. **Participation is valuable.** Public participation can produce a range of benefits. These include strengthening democracy, greater government transparency and accountability, more efficient and effective policy and services, greater social trust and social capital, and increased individual agency and capacity.
3. **Practice is variable, producing mixed outcomes.** Evidence shows participation is sometimes not done well in practice. As a result, it often fails to deliver the desired outcomes. Participation can be difficult to do due to institutional barriers, in particular power asymmetries, and practical barriers such as insufficient time, skills, or resources.
4. **No single 'one-size fits all' approach.** How to do participation and who should participate will depend on the particular issue and context. There are a wide range of different models and tools. The choice of tools and methods should match the purpose of the participation exercise. Many practice guides and 'how to' manuals are available to assist organisations with public participation.
5. **Principles for good practice.** There is general agreement on the requirements for successful public participation. The guiding principles can be summarised as: commitment, rights, time, inclusion, resources, clarity and transparency, accountability, and continuous learning and evaluation. Critical to any participation exercise is the promise made to the public about their participation.
6. **Not everyone has equal opportunities to participate.** Evidence shows many groups in society are under-represented or excluded from participating in government policy and decision-making due to a range of institutional, financial, social, and cultural factors. Targeted measures are needed to lower barriers to participation and build participatory skills and capacity. NGOs have a key role as intermediaries or conduits for participation; but they require the authority of and accountability to the people they claim to represent.

## NSW Context

The NSW government has made a high-level commitment to give the community a say in the State Plan (Goal 32, NSW2021). Recent initiatives have focused on devolved local decision-making, customer service reform, collaboration, and enhanced digital engagement. These are positive steps to improve the way government engages with citizens, particularly in relation to service delivery.

However there is no state-wide policy framework outlining how people have a say in NSW government policy and decision-making, and individual agency practice varies. Only 60% of people in NSW feel they are able to have a say on issues that are important to them. There remain opportunities to enhance the way government engages with people and organisations in policy and strategic decision-making.

The community sector has a growing responsibility to ensure people can participate in the publicly funded programs and services it provides. Peaks, in particular consumer representative organisations, have a key role in this regard. The NSW government's outsourcing of public services and shift to person centred approaches in human services increases the onus on community sector organisations to actively consider how they involve users, members and communities in their work. If the sector, including NCOSS, is to advocate government for better public participation then it must lead by example.

## Recommendations

Giving the community a real say in decisions that affects them requires robust legal, policy and institutional frameworks, along with appropriate tools, resourcing and political commitment (OECD, 2009). Based on the literature findings and analysis of the current context in NSW, this report makes the following recommendations to the NSW government, community sector, and NCOSS in order to improve public participation in NSW:

### **Recommendation 1**

- > NSW government develops a state-wide public participation strategy

### **Recommendation 2**

- > Public participation is made a statutory requirement for NSW government

### **Recommendation 3**

- > NSW government implements sustained participatory mechanisms for public involvement in governance and strategic policy at the state and regional levels

### **Recommendation 4**

- > NSW government builds on its use of digital technology platforms to engage people in the design, delivery and evaluation of policy as well as services

### **Recommendation 5**

- > NSW government builds and resources participatory capacity in the public sector and establishes accountability frameworks

### **Recommendation 6**

- > NSW government supports participatory capacity in the community sector, including developing a whole-of-government sector funding policy

### **Recommendation 7**

- > NSW government resources a network of regional support organisations to strengthen participatory capacity in rural and regional NSW

### **Recommendation 8**

- > NSW government builds individual and community participatory capacity by expanding capacity building programs and civic literacy education

### **Recommendation 9**

- > NSW government adequately funds independent advocacy, information, and representation for consumers with lived experience

### **Recommendation 10**

- > NSW community sector builds its participatory capacity and develops a participation charter

### **Recommendation 11**

- > NCOSS builds its participatory capacity and improves its engagement processes, including developing a community engagement framework, reviewing its membership strategy, building internal participatory skills, and supporting participatory capacity in the community sector.

# INTRODUCTION

## Overview

This report presents the findings of a research project on public participation theory and practice by the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS).<sup>i</sup> Public participation is about people having a say in government policy and decision-making. It is an essential feature of a healthy, well-functioning democratic society and a tool for creating a fairer, more just society (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011).

*Participation is essential to build fair, equitable and flexible policy that meets the needs across all of community* (Respondent to NCOSS participation survey, September 2014).

As the community sector peak and a voice for social justice, NCOSS has a particular interest in public participation as a means to address poverty, disadvantage and inequity.<sup>ii</sup> Participation can lead to more equitable resource distribution, greater social inclusion, increased individual agency, and empowerment. Yet in NSW people experiencing poverty and disadvantage and many community sector organisations face barriers to having their voices heard and acted on in public policy processes and decision-making.

*Public participation can address inequalities of voice and access to both policy making processes and public services* (OECD, 2009, p14).

This paper is structured in four main parts. The first section outlines key concepts and debates. The second section explores issues relating to practice. The third section describes public participation in the NSW context. The final section concludes with recommendations to improve public participation in NSW.

## Background

Over the past two decades public participation has been subject to renewed attention in response to emerging social, economic and political issues (Barnes, 2007; Fawcett, 2010). Drivers include a declining trust in government, citizen demands for greater public transparency and accountability, government reforms based on market forces and individual freedom and responsibility, increasingly complex interdependent policy problems requiring multi-actor solutions, structural inequality, civil rights movements, and rising consumer expectations (Barnes, 2007).

In Australia, public participation had its formal origins in the early 1970's with the Whitlam government's Area Assistance Program (AAP), urban planning proposals, and regional development initiatives (Hendriks, 2012; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011; Smyth, 2005). It subsequently re-emerged as a policy focus of state and national governments in the late 1990's. The current NSW government has made community involvement in decision-making a strategic priority in the NSW state plan (NSW 2021, Goal 32).

Internationally, interest in public participation was re-ignited with the Blair government's New Labour reforms in Britain. Around the same time it emerged as a strategic priority for organisations including the European Union, World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and United Nations who concluded: "People's participation is becoming the central issue of our time." (1993, p. 11). Since then, participation has come to be seen as an essential ingredient of public policy and decision-making.

## Methodology and scope of the research

### Research methods

This research aimed to address the question of how public participation in NSW government policy and decision-making can be improved for a fairer NSW. A qualitative mixed methods approach was used to collect data from March to October 2014 as outlined in Table 1.

Face-to-face interviews with community sector leaders and expert participation practitioners were held to scope the project and guide the research. A desk-based literature and document review was conducted from April to August to collect and synthesis the theoretical literature. Initial feedback from the community sector on the broad theme of participation and representation was gathered via an open online survey and at a targeted workshop in July as part of NCOSS 2015 state election platform consultation.

More specific feedback was collected in September-October through a variety of mechanisms, including a public discussion paper, an online survey, and invitation to post comment on Facebook. Targeted consultation on the draft recommendations was held with NCOSS forums and key stakeholders, including NSW government representatives. A roundtable of consumer organisations for frequently under-represented groups was held in October.

*Table 1. Data collection*

<b>DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY</b>	<b>TIMING</b>
<p><b>LITERATURE AND DOCUMENT REVIEW</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic research, practice guides and manuals, and government policy documents</li> </ul>	April-August 2014
<p><b>INTERVIEWS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brian Smith, Executive Officer, Local Community Services Association</li> <li>Asha Ramzen, Executive Officer, Inner South-West Community Development Organisation</li> <li>Louisa Mackay, Executive Officer, NSW Family Services</li> <li>Liz Reedy, Transport Development Worker, Western Sydney Community Forum</li> <li>Iain Walker, Executive Director, New Democracy Foundation</li> <li>Michelle Blicavs, Executive Director, IAP2 Australasia</li> <li>Rebecca Falkingham, Deputy Secretary - Communities &amp; Social Investment, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet</li> <li>Michael Pratt, NSW Customer Service Commissioner</li> <li>Deborah Brill - Strategic Policy &amp; Cabinet Coordination, Executive Director, NSW Family and Community Services</li> </ul>	<p>30 April 2014</p> <p>2 May 2014</p> <p>9 May 2014</p> <p>15 May 2014</p> <p>19 June 2014</p> <p>15 October 2014</p> <p>20 June 2014</p> <p>22 October 2014</p> <p>10 November 2014</p>
<p><b>CONSULTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forum of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA)</li> <li>Regional Forum</li> <li>On-line member survey (NCOSS 2015 state election platform)</li> <li>Targeted stakeholder workshop (NCOSS 2015 state election platform)</li> <li>Discussion paper – written submissions, online survey, and Facebook</li> <li>Consumer peak organisation roundtable</li> </ul>	<p>4 April 2014</p> <p>10 October 2014</p> <p>5 June 2014</p> <p>9 October 2014</p> <p>June-July 2014</p> <p>17 July 2014</p> <p>1 September-7 October 2014</p> <p>10 October 2014</p>

The scope for the project was research literature on public participation theory and practice, along with secondary evidence about the context for participation in NSW state government policy processes and decision-making. This included participation by both people and organisations, such as not-for-profit community sector organisations. While it focused on state-level participation, it also necessarily included consideration of sub-state mechanisms in the context of the NSW government's devolution and localisation agendas.

This report has a number of limitations. Firstly, it is not a complete synthesis of all the theoretical or practical material. The public participation literature is extensive yet diffuse and a comprehensive review was not possible within the time and resources available. Equally, a detailed review and evaluation of NSW government agencies and community sector organisations current practice was beyond the capacity of the project.

Secondly, the paper is not necessarily representative of the mainstream public view. Although the surveys and discussion paper were open to public comment via NCOSS website and Facebook, consultation was primarily directed to NCOSS members and community sector organisations as representatives of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage who are frequently marginalised or under-represented.



# SECTION ONE – CONCEPTS & DEBATES

## What is public participation?

### A contested concept

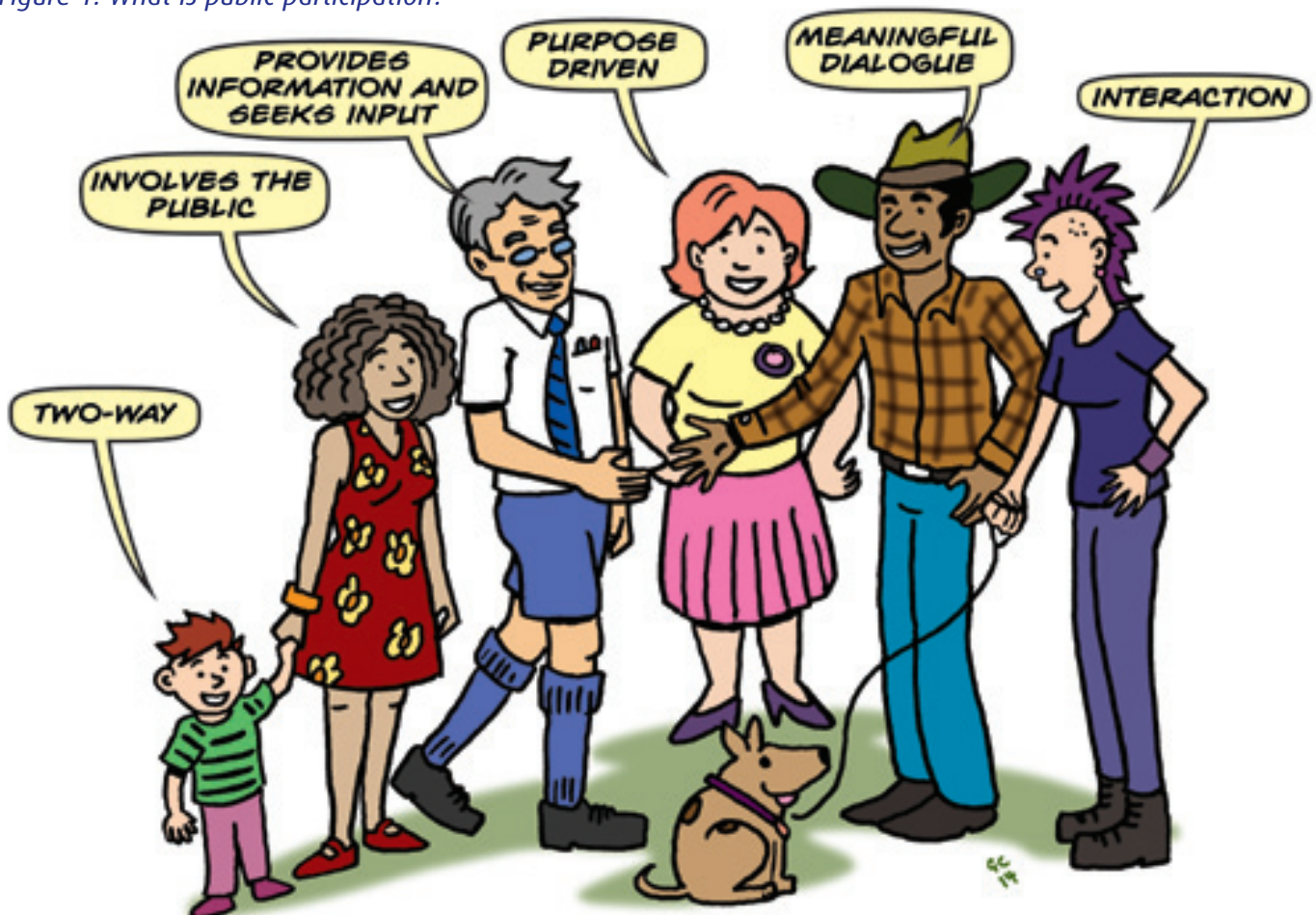
Public participation is broadly defined as the involvement of people and organisations in government policy processes and decision-making (Barnes, 2007; Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2001a; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Yet there is little consensus about its meaning or its purpose (Meagher, 2006). The public participation literature is often contradictory and ambiguous, dominated by dilemmas and paradoxes (Barnes, 2007; Evans & Reid, 2013; Innes & Booher, 2004).

*Community participation is an ambiguous term that implies an interactive process between government and the public with the aim of giving citizens a direct voice in decisions that affect them.* (Lahiri-Dutt, 2004, p. 14).

Some different definitions of public participation are outlined at Appendix 1. Participation doesn't have an agreed meaning because it has not developed from a singular field or practice. It has origins in areas including politics, public administration, urban planning, community development, social work, health promotion, and environmental management. It is also emerging practice in other fields such as design science.

*It is precisely because participation serves many masters that it remains essentially a contested concept* (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 26).

Figure 1. What is public participation?



Source: Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (2014)

## Box 1. Consultation and engagement – participation by another name?

The terms participation, consultation and engagement are often used interchangeably. They are related but have distinct meanings:

**Participation** = To be involved or take part in something. It implies an interactive process with a level of collaboration and shared ownership or responsibility.

**Consultation** = To seek information or advice from someone. While consultation is also considered a two-way process, it generally implies less influence and control than participation.

**Engagement** = To establish meaningful contact with someone or become involved in something. This is a broad term encompasses a range of activities from information provision through to collaboration and partnership.

Source: Adapted from Oxford Dictionaries accessed on 20/06/14 at: [www.oxforddictionaries.com/](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/) and Involve (2005, pp. 16-17)

### The participation spectrum

Participation can also be defined using typologies or models such as a scale or spectrum, illustrated in Appendix 1. The classic model is the 'ladder of participation' (Arnstein, 1969) which provides a ranking from non-participation or manipulation through to full participation or control. The public participation spectrum commonly used by public sector agencies in Australia and internationally identifies five differing levels of participation (see Figure 2. below). They are: information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)).

Figure 2. IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum



The spectrum model raises debate about what type of interaction between government and the public constitutes participation. Authors such as Barnes, (2007); Graaf & Michels, (2010); Meagher, (2006) argue there must be a level of influence or power in decision-making, which calls into question whether information or consultation can be defined as participation. Other writers claim citizen influence and power is not always practical or appropriate in every policy process or government decision (Evans & Reid, 2013; Fung, 2006; Gains & Stoker, 2009; OECD, 2009).

Involve, an expert public participation organisation in the UK, says most practitioners and academics accept there are different 'levels' of participation, and different levels of involvement are appropriate in different circumstances.

## Active participation

In response to the ambiguity about the activity associated with participation, some authors distinguish between ‘participation’ and ‘active participation’ (see Figure 3). The OECD defines ‘active participation’ as a relationship based on partnership with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making (2001a, p. 23).

Active participation encompasses the IAP2 participation spectrum levels of involvement, collaboration and empowerment. It implies a more significant and more direct role for citizens in shaping the nature and priorities of their communities (Aulich, 2009). Active participation reflects that responding to government policy is not the same as contributing to its development (Lister, 2007).

Figure 3. Active participation



Other similar terms used in the literature include ‘meaningful participation’ (Wills, 2012), ‘authentic participation’ (King & Feltey, 1998) and ‘genuine participation’ (Innes & Booher, 2004). Active participation is also closely associated with other emerging public governance concepts such as co-design (Briggs & Lenihan, 2011), co-production (Involve, 2005), public value (Stoker, 2006), and collaborative governance (Aulich, 2009).

*Authentic participation means that the public is part of the deliberation process from issues framing to decision-making* (King & Feltey, 1998).

## NCOSS’ definition of public participation

Given the many different meanings of public participation it is important to establish a common understanding of how public participation is defined in any given context. Based on a review of the participation literature, NCOSS proposes the following definition:

*Public participation is an interactive form of engagement between people and governments. It spans the range of activities that enable people to get involved in and have influence on government decision-making.*

The defining characteristic of public participation is the capacity for citizens to influence public decisions - not just to be involved in them. This does not mean government must always accept people’s views, only that those views must be duly considered in the decision-making process.

Consequently the standard ‘Spectrum of Public Participation’ is more appropriately described as a ‘Spectrum of Engagement’. One-way passive interaction such as information sharing is not participation when considering the capacity for influence as an integral feature, Consultation can be where it genuinely seeks, considers, and responds to public feedback. The activities on the spectrum that potentially constitute participation are consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment.

*Governments typically respond by adding some engagement strategy to existing processes. It’s the ‘add citizens and stir’ approach. The problem is that these exercises are often seen as adjuncts to the ‘real’ policy-making that goes on in our parliaments...citizen-engagement exercises need to be bestowed with real power; governments need to believe in the capability of citizens’ assemblies to craft well-reasoned policy and allocate resources for learning and for consulting with fellow citizens* Rose, J. (2009). Civic Engagement and the Promise of a New Citizenry, Occasional paper no. 2, State Services Authority of Victoria, Australia and New Zealand School of Government.

## Why is public participation important?

### Benefits

Just as there are many different definitions of public participation there are also many different perspectives on why it matters, as outlined in Appendix 2. From a political viewpoint, participation is integral to a strong democratic system and to public trust and confidence in government. From an administrative perspective it leads to better policy outcomes, more efficient and effective public services, and increased decision legitimacy. Community development approaches emphasise participation as a means of capacity building, increasing social capital, and greater community cohesion.

### Box 2. Benefits of public participation

Experience and research has shown that when done well, public participation can help to:

- Identify solutions to complex problems
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending and services
- Promote social cohesion and social justice, and overcome conflict
- Build the confidence and agency of individuals and communities
- Improve well-being and reduce social problems

Source: Involve UK, accessed 20/06/2014 at [www.involve.org.uk/about/](http://www.involve.org.uk/about/)

From a social justice perspective, participation is an important means of redressing poverty and social exclusion. It opens up what Young (2002a, p. 3) calls the “*re-enforcing circle of social and economic inequality*”. Disadvantage is associated with the multiple interacting dimensions of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion (Saunders, 2008). Participation provides a means to address these dimensions by re-distributing power and resources, recognising and respecting people’s lived experiences, and enabling self-determination and self-development (Lister, 2007).

*Participation, from the human development perspective, is both a means and an end. It is a means to greater economic and social development, and an end in that it allows people to realize their full potential and make their best contribution to society* (United Nations Development Programme, 1993).

Recent Australian research shows that public participation can reduce inequity. A case study based on the implementation of government reform in Aboriginal health found the involvement of Aboriginal community members and community controlled organisations in regional health planning and governance played an important role in improving health equity (Kelaher et al., 2014). Aboriginal community controlled organisations of various kinds play a critical role in facilitating participation by Aboriginal people in governance and service delivery (Martin, 2006, p. 136, Smyth 2005).

## CASE STUDY: Participatory budgeting

The city government of Porto Alegre in Brazil practices 'participatory budgeting'. The government convenes neighbourhood, regional and city wide assemblies, with over 50,000 citizens participating, in which participants identify spending priorities. Since the practice was established, a range of improvements in governance, well being and citizen engagement have been achieved, with an increase from 75 to 99 per cent of homes having running water and the number of public schools almost tripling. Many other cities in Brazil have introduced participatory budgeting following Porto Alegre's successful example.

Source: The Australian Collaboration (2013)

### Costs

While there are many potential benefits of public participation, it does not always result in positive outcomes. Evidence shows participation is frequently not done well in practice and fails to deliver the desired results (Lewis & Marsh, 2012; Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2001b; Sullivan, Knops, Barnes, & Newman, 2004). Participation exercises can be costly, time-intensive and challenging. Yet the risks must be compared with the potential costs of not engaging with citizens (OECD, 2001a). These competing arguments are explored further in Appendix 3.

*With an 'ever shrinking public sphere' due to neo-liberal government reforms devolving local decision-making and outsourcing service delivery, there needs to be ways for citizens to influence the strategic agenda, and participate in alternate domains* (Barnes, 2007).

## Where does participation happen?

### Diverse domains

While public participation is frequently associated with government-led processes, it also occurs outside of government. Community sector organisations (CSOs),<sup>iii</sup> social movements, and informal community groups all offer alternative sites of public participation within the broader sphere of civil society.

*NGOs are important in policy development, identifying needs, providing services, assisting with policy implementation, linking government and community and sharing their expertise. From this perspective, they play a vital role in the co-production of policy* (Colebatch (2006, p. 37).

NCOSS is mainly concerned with participation in NSW government policy and decision-making at the state-level, although participation at the local level and in the community sector is increasingly important in the context of the government's localisation and outsourcing agendas.

*The critical distinction in terms of participation is that which occurs through the opening-up of existing government structures to greater public involvement [top-down]; and the creation of new empowered social groups [bottom up]* (Coleman cited in Involve, 2005, p.17).

### Box 3. Types of participation

Public participation is just one form of participation. Other domains include:

- Social participation, e.g. member of a community, sporting, or cultural group
- Economic participation, e.g. producer, entrepreneur, employee, or consumer
- Political participation, e.g. member of trade union, political party or social movement

Source: Adapted from United Nations Development Programme (1993); Vromen (2012)

#### Local or central?

Public participation can occur at various levels ranging from the local community level to state or nation-wide level. Conceptually, localised decision-making is argued to be best placed to facilitate participation and local government is often regarded as the sphere of government closest to the people (Rawsthorne & Vinson, 2013; Wills & Nash, 2012). Yet in practice the benefits of devolution is contested (Chaney, 2006).

Taylor suggests the 'rhetoric of decentralisation' often masks power imbalances, co-option, cost-shifting and continued centralisation (2007, p. 297). While responsibility for decision making is delegated to the local level, it is frequently not matched with the commensurate devolution of power and resources to affect substantive change (Chaney, 2006; Evans & Reid, 2013). Similarly, it has limited potential to address systems-level issues. Localisation brackets decision-making to issues arising within a geographic boundary and tends to focus on parochial or specific issues rather than strategic agendas (Barnes, 2007; Mayo & Rooke, 2008).

It also does not guarantee more inclusive or equitable participation. Devolved governance can also be dominated by local political elite, professional experts, or known interest groups, just as central government can (Bracht & Tsouros, 1990; Fraser, 2005; United Nations Development Programme, 1993). For example, local participation initiatives under Britain's New Labour 'democratic renewal' agenda were found to reproduce existing patterns of social exclusion and disadvantage (Lowndes et al., 2001b).

### How does public participation occur?

#### No single 'right' approach

Public participation can take many different forms involving diverse actors across many settings. There is no set rule for how participation should occur; different processes will suit different purposes (Bryson, 2013; Fung, 2006; ODP, 2007; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Factors to consider include the specific issue and participation objectives, as well as the available time, skills, and resources (OECD, 2001, p12-13). There are numerous practice guides, manuals, tool kits and resources on how to undertake public participation processes, some of which as listed in Appendix 5.

#### Evolving methods

The range of public participation methods is a large and growing. Traditional forms, such as town hall meetings, advisory bodies and public consultations are being complemented by new and emerging techniques such as citizen's juries, participatory budgeting and online deliberation forums. A snapshot of different participatory methods is listed in Appendix 4.

New forms of information and communications technology, particularly the internet and social media, are opening up new ways of engaging with people (Chen, 2013). More than two-thirds (69%) of Australians use social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest, primarily through mobile devices (Sensis, 2014).

*...new digital tools are opening up new and often unexpected windows that offer much more direct visibility of the lived experience of people affected by the actions and decisions of public agencies...*  
(ANAO Social Media Roundtable, cited in Australian National Audit Office, 2014, p. 37).

Barnes (2007) and Chen (2013) caution new methods of participation do not necessarily produce better participation. New forms of participation may simply re-enforce rather than challenge entrenched forms of power, particularly where government retains control of the agenda and process. The challenge is to address institutional barriers to change and power-sharing and embed sustainable technical and cultural change (Chen, 2013).

#### Box 4. What is deliberative democracy?

Deliberative democracy is an expanding field that aims to increase meaningful participation in public decision-making. Methods include citizens' assemblies, consensus conferences, planning cells, deliberative opinion polls and peoples' juries.

Key characteristics of deliberative processes include:

- **Representativeness:** involvement of diverse publics
- **Deliberation:** consideration of a range of views, evidence, and options to arrive at a collective reasoned decision on an issue.
- **Influence:** impact on decision-making

Deliberative democracy techniques have been shown to deliver robust outcomes while facilitating informed, representative, and equitable participation. The use of random sampling accesses people who might not normally participate and adds the voices of everyday citizens to policy debates typically monopolised by experts.

One form of deliberative democracy, People's juries', has been successfully used by local Councils in NSW such as Canada Bay and City of Sydney and the South Australian Government in partnership with the newDemocracy Foundation (nDF). They involve a group of randomly selected people who come together in an independent facilitated forum to debate an issue based on independent information, evidence and expert advice, and reach a consensus decision.

Source: adapted from Gollagher and Hartz-Karp (2012), Hendriks (2012) and newDemocracy foundation (2013)

## Who participates in what?

### Whose voice?

Public participation processes can be open to everyone, or limited to a representative sample of the population, or targeted to affected stakeholders (Barnes, 2007). How the public is defined and who defines it are key factors in determining who participates and on what basis (Fraser, 2005). Terms such as the general public, community, citizen, consumer, and stakeholder are often used interchangeably, yet they have distinct meanings which affect who gets a say (see Box 5. below).

For instance, the 'public' can refer to people within a geographic area, to consumers of public services, informal groups based on interest or identity, or organisations in the private, community, or public sectors. Likewise, the 'community'

is term varyingly used to mean a local neighbourhood, the general public, or the community sector. However these are distinct stakeholder groups each with diverse perspectives that should be heard in their own right.

Similarly, the term 'consumer' or 'customer' is being increasingly used by governments to describe their relationship with people using public services (PSC Advisory Board, 2014). Yet this is a narrow term that does not reflect the other ways in which people interact with government as citizens. For many people experiencing disadvantage, such as children in out of home care or people in corrective services, their interaction with government is not best characterised as a customer relationship. Limiting participation to public service delivery potentially excludes people from being involved in strategic policy-making processes.

### Box 6. Who participates?

Other terms frequently used in relation to public participation include 'community', 'stakeholder', 'consumers' and 'citizens'.

**Public** is a collective term for the people of an area as a whole.

**Community** is an umbrella terms with different meanings. It is frequently associated with a geographic area or local neighbourhood, but can also refer to social groups related by interest, identity or circumstance (Fraser, 2005; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011). It is sometimes used interchangeably with 'public'.

**Citizens** are individuals in society, sometimes associated with recognised legal status.

**Consumers** are users of products and services. The term is mainly associated with the private sector but is increasingly being used in relation to public goods and services.

**Stakeholders** are those individuals, groups or organisations with an interest or concern in the issue.

### Inclusion, representation, and legitimacy

Ideally everyone who is affected by a decision should have the opportunity to have a say in it. In practice completely open and inclusive participation on every public issue is impossible. Representation is often necessary but raises questions of who is included on what basis and what is their legitimacy to speak for others (Barnes, 2007; Hendriks, 2012).

There are no set rules governing who should participate in any given context (Barnes, 2007; OECD, 2001a; Young, 2002c). According to Involve (2005) the guiding principle is to include people who feel they have a stake in the issue and to ensure particular groups are not excluded because they are outside the usual networks. At the same time, not everyone wants to be involved in everything all of the time and people's choice not to participate must be respected.



# SECTION TWO – PRACTICE ISSUES & DEBATES

## Participation often fails to deliver in practice

### Practice is often poor

While there is a strong theoretical basis for public participation and it is widely accepted by government (OECD, 2009), numerous studies show it is often not done well in practice (Lewis & Marsh, 2012; Lowndes et al., 2001b; Sullivan et al., 2004). As a result, public participation often fails to produce the desired results.

Issues commonly identified in the literature include:

- Ambiguous purpose
- Lack of clearly defined scope
- Starting too late after decisions have already been made
- Insufficient information to participants
- Lack of participant involvement in agenda-setting
- One-way consultation rather than two-way dialogue
- Insufficient time for meaningful input
- Outcomes not feeding into the decision-making process
- Lack of feedback to participants on how their views were taken into account

*Some of the common reasons given for the failure of a consultation process is that consultation is carried out for its own sake, rather than to genuinely shape policy. Another is that consultation takes place too late to have any real influence on policy decisions. Some consultation initiatives that were successfully initiated, have eventually failed because resources to support their continuation were withdrawn, reduced, or were insufficient to begin with* (New Zealand questionnaire response, OECD (2001a, p. 71) .

### Barriers and challenges

There are many reasons why public participation is not done well. A ‘cosmetic commitment’ or tokenistic intentions are frequently attributed to the gap between rhetoric and practice (OECD, 2009); yet implementation can be difficult even with genuine commitment (Fung, 2003).

A key challenge is the power dynamic between governments and citizens. Institutional factors such as public accountability requirements, representative democracy ideals, and resistant organisational culture are barriers to governments’ sharing power with citizens for policy and decision-making (OECD, 2009, p227). Institutional power can also ‘crowd-out’ organic community-based participation processes that build capacity and social capital (Barnes 2007).

At an operational level, poor process design and implementation is often the result of insufficient time, skill, or resources. An OECD study (2009, p15) found member governments’ investment in skills development and resourcing was well below what was needed to raise professional standards and to mainstream open and inclusive policy-making.

Faced with these challenges, Barnes (2007) suggests being realistic about the capacity of participation to affect power relations and influence public decisions. While participation is not always easy, it remains important to continue to develop participatory spaces for change.

## Not everyone has equal opportunities to participate

### Under-represented or excluded groups

Not everyone has the same opportunities to participate. Certain social groups are frequently under-represented or excluded from public decision-making processes (Bracht & Tsouros, 1990; Lister, 2007; Meagher, 2006; Phillips, 1998). These include people living in poverty, people in rural areas, children and young people, women, Aboriginal people, people from culturally, religious and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people with disabilities (Brackertz & Meredyth, 2008; Grant-Smith & Edwards, 2011; United Nations Development Programme, 1993).

There is evidence of a socio-economic gradient in participation (Bracht & Tsouros, 1990; Meagher, 2006). South Australian research found people of low income and low education levels had lower levels of civic and social involvement (Baum et al., 2000). Other researchers qualify that socio-economic disadvantage does not necessarily mean people participate less, rather they participate differently through informal processes or social activities (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011).

### Barriers to participation

A range of demographic, cultural, behavioural and structural factors can make it difficult for people to participate (Brackertz & Meredyth, 2008). Structural barriers include formal structures or complicated procedures, lengthy or technical written documents, inaccessible venues and lack of information about participation opportunities (Gunn, 2006; King & Feltey, 1998). Other common barriers include out-of-pocket costs, lack of transport, lack of alternative care for dependents, lack of time, distrust of government, low education levels or civic skills (Gunn, 2006; OECD, 2009).

*...low-income people may not have the resources to participate in civic activities if they are struggling to survive* (Baum et al., 2000).

Systemic social and economic barriers - particularly poverty, stigma, and discrimination - lead to some groups being excluded or under-represented from mainstream policy processes (Wise, 2013). For instance, there may be an assumption some people either do not have the capacity to participate, such as people with intellectual disability or mental illness, or that others will participate on their behalf, such as children. Inadequate consideration or resources to facilitate participation by people with diverse needs is a barrier to equitable participation.

*...governments need to consider community members time, energy and resources when developing policy - and carers and vulnerable members of the community are likely to be short of all three* (Respondent to NCOSS member survey, June 2014).

## A framework for good practice

### Good practice principles

Principles used by leading international organisations including OECD, IAP2, and Involve, and the NSW government are listed at Appendix 6.

The can be broadly summarised as:

<b>COMMITMENT</b>	There is a political mandate and support for participation at all levels of government.
<b>RIGHTS</b>	Those who are affected by a decision have the right to be involved in the decision-making process, along with the right not to choose not to participate.
<b>TIME</b>	Engagement occurs early in the policy development process before any major decisions are taken, preferably at the stage of setting broad direction, principles, and identifying options. There is sufficient time for meaningful participation.
<b>INCLUSION</b>	Those with an interest in the decision have an equal opportunity to participate. Special support is provided for traditionally excluded groups. As wide a variety of voices is involved as possible.
<b>RESOURCES</b>	Adequate human, technical, and financial resources are available to meet the objectives and implement the results.
<b>CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY</b>	The purpose of the participation exercise is clearly defined. There is openness about the process and any limitations. All relevant information is provided to participants and is easy to understand.
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	There is feedback to participants about the outcome of the process and how their input was used.
<b>CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND EVALUATION</b>	The process supports learning and development for participants. The process is evaluated and informs future learnings.

*...Council staff are making the effort to go to outlying rural locations on a regular basis and while only one or two people turn up at the beginning, they have kept up the sessions and gradually more people come. I think this is a good example of how building trust takes time and consistent effort and not giving up. Poor examples are those where they call the session “consultation” but it is “telling” – telling people what is happening after a decision has been made (Respondent to NCOSS participation survey, September 2014).*

### **Critical success factors**

At the macro-level, effective public participation requires institutional barriers to be addressed, particularly the power dynamic (Barnes, 2007; Lister, 2007; Meagher, 2006). This requires leadership and commitment from both politicians and senior public administrators to create an authorising environment and culture that supports public participation.

*Governments have a key role to play in encouraging citizen engagement... The first responsibility is to create an enabling environment; the second is to clarify the rules of engagement* (OECD, 2009, p206).

Embedding a commitment to meaningful public participation into government policy processes requires specific institutional mechanisms, such as legal and policy frameworks, along with sufficient time, skills, and resources (OECD, 2009).

*Engagement cannot be undertaken without planning and resources and too often insufficient thought is given to resource allocation which can lead to tokenistic activity and lack of capacity to follow up* (OECD, 2009, p. 227).

At the micro or practice level, IAP2’s spectrum states there must be alignment between the objective of the participation exercise, the level of participation, and the promise made to the public about their participation. Involve (2005) argues the critical factor for any public participation exercise is to clearly define the purpose and use appropriate methods to suit the context. Similarly, the OECD says the key is to clearly define the objective and limits of the participation and to select appropriate tools (2001, p. 22).

*...the most important factor for practitioners is to be clear about why they are doing it in a particular instance, to communicate that to all participants and to agree it with them. Lack of clarity is one of the biggest causes of participation failure* (Involve, 2005, p. 12).

*Make sure that when you ask a question of the public you are ready to act on the answer in ways that the people can observe* (Respondent to NCOSS participation survey, September 2014).

## Methods and tools

There are a range of public participation methods, some of which are outlined in Appendix 4. The OECD (2001b, pp. 56-63) identifies the following tools for government to engage people in policy-making:

<b>Tools for active participation:</b>	<b>Tools for two-way consultation:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consensus conferences</li> <li>• Citizens juries</li> <li>• Stakeholder evaluations</li> <li>• Tripartite commissions</li> <li>• Open working groups</li> <li>• Participatory vision development</li> <li>• Citizens’ fora</li> <li>• Dialogue processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultative bodies</li> <li>• Workshops, seminars, conferences</li> <li>• Public hearings</li> <li>• Non-binding referenda</li> <li>• Citizens’ panels</li> <li>• Local electorate office open-days</li> <li>• Advisory committees</li> </ul>

Detailed practice-based materials on public participation methods and their application to particular case studies are widely available, such as the IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox and Involve’s Participation Compass. For a list of available resources see Appendix 5.

## CASE STUDY: Deliberative democracy in NSW

In 2012, newDemocracy was commissioned by the bi-partisan NSW Parliament Public Accounts Committee to explore citizens' preferences regarding renewable energy. A randomly selected jury was given time and information to explore the issue in depth. The result was a clear consensus around an informed set of recommendations of the type not usually seen in the media or as part of a party policy platform. These recommendations - later mirrored by the Productivity Commission - received a positive response from the business community and were trusted by citizens. Critically, the recommendations were acknowledged by both parties as sensible approaches that were electorally unappealing but made practical sense.

The newDemocracy Foundation (nDF) is a not-for-profit research group, with a particular focus on best practice citizen engagement and innovation in democratic structures.

Source: newDemocracy foundation (2013)

## Towards more inclusive participation

Effective and legitimate decision-making requires the voices of those who are affected by the decision to be heard and taken into account. Extra efforts are required to reach out to people with a stake in an issue who may have difficulty getting involved (OECD, 2009). This generally requires lowering barriers to equitable participation and building participatory skills and capacity (See Box 7).

Key strategies to facilitate inclusive participation include:

- Using open and inclusive participatory processes,
- Outreach and targeting particular groups,
- Capacity building and community strengthening, and
- Using not-for-profit community organisations as conduits and intermediaries.

These strategies are explored in more detail in the following sections.

### Box 7. Addressing barrier to participation

**Content** – providing concise and/or simplified information, or information in community languages.

**Format** – providing large-letter or spoken information.

**Channel** – using intermediaries to reach target groups.

**Resourcing** – to support active engagement

**Skill development** – education and training on civics, policy, and engagement

**Flexibility measures** – e.g. open door policies, flexible hours

**Tailored activities** – e.g. developed for specific ethnic or cultural groups

Source: OECD (2009 p50-51)

## **Open and inclusive participatory processes**

Inclusionary practice requires consideration of the underlying factors that might prevent some people or groups from participating. These factors are listed in Appendix 7 as part of a tool developed to identify characteristics of hard to reach groups (Brackertz & Meredyth, 2008, p16).

Specific strategies include:

- Adapting consultation methods to be more inclusive
- Choosing appropriate locations and accessible venues
- Providing transport to engagement activities
- Providing childcare or respite care
- Reimbursing out of pocket expenses
- Providing incentives, such as catering or sitting fees
- Adapting materials and publishing information in a variety of languages and formats
- Providing translating and interpreter services
- Developing and utilising networks
- Identifying and meeting with community leaders
- Utilising support workers

More ideas for inclusive consultation techniques are listed in Appendix 8.

In group contexts, good facilitation techniques can mitigate inequalities in power relationships by creating an enabling environment where everyone feels they can participate and have their views respected (Kelly and Cumming (2010). Alternate participation methods, such as humanistic surveys, visioning exercises, storytelling, testimony, and experiential learning also support more open and inclusive participation (Gunn, 2006).

*Recognise and cater for the diversity of circumstances people are in when it comes to public participation...Not everyone has an address to post a letter/survey to; not everyone has a mobile phone or access to Facebook...* (Respondent to NCOSS participation survey, September 2014)

## **Targeted outreach**

Direct invitation and outreach may be needed to engage people who would not normally take part (Lowndes et al., 2001b). Holding separate participatory forums for specific groups or communities of interest provides a 'protected arena' for people who have been marginalised to engage and develop their own position (Cameron, Grant-Smith, & Edwards, 2005). Social network analysis can help to identify those isolated people who need to be included (Andersson, McLean, Parlak, & Melvin, 2013) along with analysis of mapping demographic data in conjunction with data from the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) (Brackertz & Meredyth, 2008, p17).

*Above all, governments must expect to 'go where people are' when seeking to engage with them, rather than expecting people to come to government* (OECD, 2009, p14).

An issue for organisations seeking to engage people from under-represented social groups is how to identify those groups. Labelling people as excluded or disadvantaged carries the risk of perpetrating negative stereotypes and causing further marginalisation and isolation (Lister, 2007; Cameron et al. 2005). It also doesn't take into account that people within an identified group may have different views, needs and priorities to each other.

Brackertz and Meredyth (2008, p14) suggest rather than labelling groups as 'hard to reach', practitioners think about the people or groups that are difficult to involve for particular purposes. Lister (2007) also recommends a case-by-case approach to consider who is affected but not represented in each instance. Cameron et al. (2005) advocate holding separate consultation processes followed by broader participatory activities with diverse groups to promote consideration of broader collective interests. Using multiple strategies and approaches may be needed to ensure engagement is inclusive and representative.

Figure 4. *Tips for getting people involved*



Source: Voluntary Action Westminster, *Involving people: a practical guide*, p. 59.

## Community development and capacity building

Long-term community development initiatives are proven to be effective at reaching traditionally under-represented groups (Lowndes et al., 2001b; O’Keefe & Hogg, 1999; Rawsthorne & Vinson, 2013). Community-based programs can develop confidence and trust in people from marginalised and excluded groups by building their skills, knowledge, and resources to participate, along with strengthening the community to reduce inequality and disadvantage (Lister, 2007).

*...participation is not a substitute for policy measures to reduce material disadvantage. Reducing inequities itself, is likely to be one of the most effective means of encouraging broader civic participation* (Baum et al., 2000, p. 421).

NSW Community Builders is the main government program to strengthen communities and build their capacity.<sup>iv</sup> In 2012/13 it funded non-government organisations and local councils \$49.4m to provide a range of services, including community and neighbourhood centres where people can meet and access resources, services and projects targeting particular groups such as men, women and cultural groups, and projects to support and build communities and community organisations, such as by providing mentoring schemes and management training.<sup>v</sup> The program is currently under a review with a view to reform in 2016-17.

### CASE STUDY: Tenant Participation Resource Services Program

The Tenant Participation Resource Services Program is a Housing NSW initiative to provide social housing tenants with increased access to information, advice and opportunities to more actively participate in processes related to their housing, as well as to engage in their communities.

The TPRS Program goals are to ensure social housing tenants:

- are engaged in communities
- have their needs and priorities identified and considered in planning and service delivery
- are informed about their rights and responsibilities and are supported with their housing needs
- have skills and resources to participate in community life
- receive services that are coordinated, flexible and responsive to their needs.

Source: [www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Living+in+Public+Housing/Get+Involved/Tenant+Participation+Resource+Services+Program.htm](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Living+in+Public+Housing/Get+Involved/Tenant+Participation+Resource+Services+Program.htm)

## Intermediary organisations

Using not-for-profit organisations<sup>vi</sup> as conduits or intermediaries with government is another well-recognised means of facilitating more inclusive participation (Cameron et al., 2005; OECD, 2009; Young, 2002b). Peak bodies,<sup>vii</sup> particularly consumer representative organizations, have an important role in facilitating participation and representation of their members in government policy and decision-making processes as well as participating as stakeholders in their own right.

*Working with a trusted third party such as a civil society organisation can help to reach a wider range of people ... more could be done to develop the brokering role of civil society organisations, alongside their more traditional roles of public scrutiny, advocacy and service delivery* (OECD, 2009, p. 279).

In addition to facilitating participation in government policy processes and decision-making, community sector organisations (and civil society more generally) have a critical role as independent spheres of public participation. User



participation in the design and delivery of programs and services is a feature of many community sector organisations. They also provide alternate spaces for people to develop their own voice and public agendas. This leads to greater empowerment and builds participatory capacities.

*Participation is a central tenet for almost all NGOs. Do they promote participation in practice? Mostly, it seems they do. Many studies have shown participation to be a dominant feature of their operations* (United Nations Development Programme, 1993, p. 97).

However it cannot, and should not, be assumed community sector organisations always speak on behalf of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Community sector organisations' representative legitimacy requires the authorisation of, and accountability to, those they claim to serve (Hendriks, 2012; Lister, 2007). Taylor (2007) argues this requires organisations to communicate effectively with their constituency. Fawcett (2010, p. 33) says it requires NGOs to actively involve their members in the organisation's policy development processes.

*Groups and advocates claiming to represent poor and disadvantaged people should be able to demonstrate a clear mandate to speak on their behalf. Focus groups should not just be representative of service providers* (Respondent to NCOSS participation survey, September 2014).

Some people also remain outside of formal organisations as they do not access human and community services. Where possible people must be given the opportunity to speak for themselves and express their own views.

*...Even if the actual activity of going out and listening to services/clients/the public is undertaken by consultants, the closer they get to real people and small groups, the more likely they are to see innovative ideas in practice, hear and see good and bad stories and absorb the real situation to better inform policy development or reality check changes to services* (Respondent to NCOSS participation survey, September 2014).

# SECTION THREE – HOW DOES PARTICIPATION OCCUR IN NSW

## NSW Government

### Strategic context

#### *NSW State Plan priority*

The NSW Government has committed to give people a say on significant initiatives that affect them.<sup>viii</sup> This commitment is outlined as a priority in the NSW State Plan, NSW2021, with Goal 32 to involve the community in decision-making on government policy, services and projects.

Initiatives to implement Goal 32 have to date focused on devolved local decision-making, local government and planning system reforms, customer service reform and enhanced on-line engagement tools (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2014).

#### *Devolution and localisation*

Devolution and local decision-making is central to the NSW government's participation agenda. The government's rationale is to give people more control over their choices and opportunities and shape their own futures (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011). Following consultation with local government and communities, the government has developed 19 Regional Action Plans aligned to the state plan.

At an agency level, the localisation initiative has seen the establishment of 15 Local Health Districts with decision-making largely devolved to independent local Boards. More recently, FACS regional service boundaries in Housing, Community Services and ADHC have also been aligned to Local Health Districts to improve planning and decision-making at the local level.<sup>ix</sup>

Local decision-making is also a key initiative under *OCHRE: the NSW Government plan for Aboriginal affairs*.<sup>x</sup> Announced at the end of 2013, a new Aboriginal community-based regional decision-making model is being implemented in three regions with the aim of increasing local control of government services in their communities.

#### *Customer service*

Improving the customer focus of the NSW public sector is another government initiative in support of Goal 32. Service NSW has been established as a 'one-stop shop' for a broad range of government services and transactions. The NSW Customer Service Commissioner and NSW Public Service Commissioner have been appointed with a reform agenda to improve public sector agency productivity, customer satisfaction measurement, and collaborative service provision.<sup>xi</sup> A whole-of-government service reform strategy is in development (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2014).

#### *Collaboration and co-design*

Collaboration, in the form of alliances and partnerships, is an emerging area of work being led by the NSW Public Service Commission. The focus is on the relationship between the public sector and the not-for-profit and private sectors with the aim of improving public service delivery.

The Commission has published a collaboration blueprint for practitioners based on research undertaken by Nous Group (NOUS group, 2013). Citizen engagement was recognised in the report but it was not specifically addressed. The Commission reports that senior discussions are planned about strategic actions to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and work is underway to identify potential high-impact projects for collaboration and to promote partnership approaches (PSC Advisory Board, 2014).

Collaboration with citizens and communities in the form of co-design processes is also gaining traction within

government. A current example is a service delivery re-design process being launched in four local communities around early intervention and prevention. The community will be involved in identifying their priority issues and the interventions needed to address them.<sup>xii</sup>

### *Digital engagement*

The NSW government has committed to make greater use of using digital channels to interact with citizens. *NSW Government ICT Strategy 2012* and the subsequent update *Digital+ 2014* commits to engaging with the community and industry through online and social media in order to deliver improved services and to enhance transparency and participation.

An Accelerating Digital Government Taskforce has recently been established to develop a co-ordinated approach to digital government in NSW (Office of Finance and Services, 2014a). It aims to improve customer experience, citizen engagement, and access to government information by streamlining government digital channels and increasing the capability of the public sector to use digital engagement platforms (Office of Finance and Services, 2014b).

The *Have Your Say* website is the NSW government's main online consultation platform. It allows people to share their views on community consultations taking place across NSW, yet it has limited functionality to feedback to participants about the outcome of the consultation process. The government is planning to redevelop the site and launch an upgraded website soon.<sup>xiii</sup>

## **Institutional framework for public participation**

### *State-level*

While giving people a say is a goal in the State Plan, there is no whole-of-government strategy or framework for public participation in NSW as exists in South Australia and Tasmania.<sup>xiv</sup> Opportunities for the public to be involved in and influence state priorities or strategic decisions are limited. For instance, there was little public involvement in the development of *NSW2021*, in contrast to the extensive public consultation processes to develop the South Australia's Strategic Plan (see Box 8 below) and Queensland State Plan.

### **Box 8. South Australia's Strategic Plan**

There was an extensive community engagement on South Australia's state plan. The Plan was driven by state wide consultation and encouraged individuals to spell out fresh ideas and thoughts on where the state should be by 2020.

In the early years of the plan the government hosted three-months of roundtable community forums and written submissions to enable public participation in the plan's development. A Community Congress was held for further dialogue with the involvement of Ministerial advisers and government staff.

In contrast to these slower traditional forms of consultation, the current update of the Plan has incorporated new social media approaches to engage the public online. More than 9,200 people were engaged in phase one, in a process including face-to-face 'conversations' in metropolitan locations and regional areas, live blogging on the Plan's website (post moderated) and a variety of social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube.

The second phase of consultation continued this hybrid approach to stakeholder engagement, seeking feedback through an online survey, social media and through face-to-face consultation sessions

Source: Suggett (2012)

A recent positive development is the NSW Premier's Innovation Initiative announced in August 2014. Non-government and private sector organisations can submit proposals for new and innovative service methods and models across four key priority areas – social housing, open data, congestion, and an open category to address any policy challenge – in order to improve public services for the people of NSW.<sup>xv</sup> This initiative is similar to overseas models such as London Ventures program and Challenge.gov outlined in Box 9.

### **Box 9. Crowd sourcing solutions to policy issues in the U.S**

Challenge.gov is a collection of challenge and prize competitions inviting the public to come up with the best ways to solve problems and innovate together. The challenges are run by more than 50 agencies across federal government, including Department of Labor, Federal Trade Commission, NASA, Health & Human Services, U.S. Mint, Kids.gov, ED.gov, USDA, Department of Defence. These include technical, scientific, ideation, and creative competitions where the U.S. government seeks innovative solutions from the public, bringing the best ideas and talent together to solve mission-centric problems.

Source: [challenge.gov/p/about](http://challenge.gov/p/about), accessed 29/07/14

#### *Regional level*

Within the localisation framework there are limited mechanisms for the community to participate in regional level policy processes or decision-making. Community Cabinet meetings provide opportunities for local people and community organisations to raise matters with the Premier and Ministers but are ad-hoc and there is little transparency about how public feedback is incorporated into decision-making.

The NSW regional governance framework does not formally involve community sector organisations or individual community representatives, and there is no consistent, state-wide platform for community organisations to participate effectively at the regional level. Some regional support organisations currently exist but are unevenly resourced and spread across the state.<sup>xvi</sup> A network of regional support organisations is needed to build the participatory capacity of local organisations and support and coordinate their participation in public policy processes (Council of Social Service of NSW, 2013).

#### *Agency level*

At an agency level, participatory frameworks vary significantly. A rapid desk-based review<sup>xvii</sup> of NSW government agency websites did not find many examples of consumer and community engagement policies. Some agencies are currently developing frameworks, such as Housing NSW<sup>xviii</sup> and the NSW Ministry of Health. FACS NSW is developing a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Engagement Strategy but does not have a broader community participation policy.<sup>xix</sup> Similarly, there is wide variation in public participation structures such as advisory committees and participation councils across agencies.

The NSW Public Service Commission has identified the need for government to develop capabilities in collaboration, supported by tools and resources, accountability and incentives, and increased opportunities for collaboration and learning (PSC Advisory Board, 2014, p. 25). This is broadly consistent with OECD recommendations to embed open and inclusive policy-making in government (2009, p16), that is to:

- Mainstream public engagement through adequate resourcing, skills-building, and supportive political and administrative culture
- Develop effective evaluation tools
- Leverage technology and the participative web
- Adopt sound principles to support practice.

## Participation in practice

### *Public perceptions*

In practice, not everyone in NSW feels they can participate or has had positive participation experiences. The 2014 NSW Customer Service Satisfaction survey found only 60% of people in NSW feel they are able to have a say on issues important to them (*NSW2021 Performance Report 2013-14*). NCOSS participation survey found only 20% of respondents felt they are able to have a say in NSW government policy and decision-making.<sup>xx</sup> When asked to rate their experiences participating in government policy and decision-making, over two thirds (70%) rated their experience as poor, 23% as average and only 7% rated their experience as good.

NCOSS participation survey respondents identified a few positive examples of public participation processes - primarily by local government, such as Gosford Council's "Have your say" Community Engagement Consultation 2011/12. Respondents gave more examples of public participation that had not been done so well, such as railway line development and train timetabling, public housing development, and homelessness service reforms.

### *Variable practice*

While the NSW government is taking steps to improve the way it engages with citizens, it remains to be fully embedded into consistent quality practice. Past reviews have noted considerable variation across NSW government agencies (Byrne, 1998 (unpublished) and IAP2, 2010). Issues identified include a lack of management support, lack of broad skills base, inadequate resourcing, and lack of transparent feedback (IAP2, 2010). Critically, public participation initiatives do not always reach those people most affected by an initiative, particularly in hard to access communities (IAP2 Australasia, 2010).

Under the previous NSW government, IAP2 Australasia's 2010 report found public participation was generally at the 'inform' or 'consult' levels. Engagement was frequently undertaken after decisions had already been made. Participant input was rarely sought on the design of participatory processes. Expert opinion and technical information was often privileged over individuals knowledge and experience, correlating with other previous NSW studies (Lahiri-Dutt, 2004).

*...governments are slowly, and perhaps too reluctantly, letting users have control of the programs they require and the providers they prefer* (Professor Peter Shergold, PSC Advisory Board, 2014, p. 6).

### *New approaches*

More recently there have been some positive examples of agencies seeking more active participation by communities early in the policy development process. For example, Family and Community Services NSW have recently initiated a co-design process in several Districts to implement aspects of the *Safe Home for Life* Child Protection Legislative Reforms<sup>xxi</sup> This approach has been used successfully in other jurisdictions such as South Australia as illustrated in the Family by Family case study below.

*Being open to the ideas of other experts is not enough. Where possible, new approaches should be co-designed by those inside and outside the public service. It should be a joint activity* (Professor Peter Shergold, PSC Advisory Board 2014, p. 6).

## CASE STUDY: Co-design in human services – Family by Family

TACSI was engaged by the South Australian Government to help reduce the number of families needing crisis services, and to help keep more kids out of the child protection system. A co-design process was used with 100 families in Marion, South Australia to develop a new program that would enable them to make the changes they wanted to make in their own lives.

Instead of beginning with a pre-determined outcome or established program, TACSI asked: what would be a good result for people? To answer that, they spent time with families, learning what motivates them, what excites them, what works for them. They then used prototyping to try out ideas with real families by testing what worked for them and what didn't.

The result was Family by Family, a network of families helping other families make the changes they want to make. The program works by finding and training 'sharing' families to use their own stories, strategies and connections to help 'seeking' families move towards their goals.

Source: adapted from *Helping Families Change – Family by Family*, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, [www.tacsi.org.au/project/family-by-family/](http://www.tacsi.org.au/project/family-by-family/), accessed: 29/08/2014

## NSW community sector

### Sector participation in government policy and decision-making

While there is no sector-wide data specifically on participation, a recent study of the community sector in NSW by the Social Policy Research Centre UNSW surveyed organisations more broadly about their engagement with government. Respondents said the most common ways their organisations participate in public policy processes and decision-making is by providing government funded programs and services, advocacy, and contributing to policy development (see Box 10).

*As a service provider we may be consulted on implementation but not system and service design* (NCOSS participation survey respondent, September 2014).

### Box 10. How do community sector organisations engage with NSW government?

In a 2014 survey of non-government not-for-profit community service organisations in NSW, nearly all organisations, 96.3%, said that they received funding from the NSW Government to deliver programs. The next most common type of engagement was through advocacy: more than half of respondents (54.0%) reported that their organisation advocated for service users or disadvantaged people in NSW. Just over a third of respondents (35.4%) reported contributing to policy, for example through writing policy submissions. A little under a third indicated that the NSW Government asked them for advice, for example, by requesting their participation in committees (31.2%).

Source: Cortis and Blaxland (2014) *The state of the community service sector in NSW 2014*, SPRC, Sydney, p.26-27.

*On the surface it appears that human service workers have abundant opportunities to participate in the making of social policy. Yet an enormous body of research demonstrates that service deliverers and service users feel marginalised in the policy process* (Fawcett, 2010, p. 39).

**Public participation in the community sector**

The SPRC survey highlighted the different ways people are involved in community sector organisations. Apart from service provision, the main way organisations engage with their service users or members is through feedback after events or services, providing comment boxes, and inviting input through surveys or focus groups. Volunteers were also involved in over four-fifths of organisations; most commonly on a management committee or advisory board (see Box 11 below).

**Box 11. How do community sector organisations engage with volunteers and service users?**

The most common ways NSW not-for-profit community service organisations engage with service users, members and volunteers are:

Service users and members	Volunteers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service provision (88%).</li> <li>• Feedback after events or services (78%),</li> <li>• Comment boxes (70%),</li> <li>• Surveys or focus groups (69%),</li> <li>• Consultation meetings (60%),</li> <li>• Management committees or advisory boards (60%),</li> <li>• Comments on issues papers or organisational policies (53%).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management committee or advisory board (71%),</li> <li>• Provide services to users or members (59%),</li> <li>• Assistance with fundraising (43%),</li> <li>• Feedback after events or services (39%),</li> <li>• Comment on issues papers, service planning or organisational policies (39%),</li> <li>• Taskforces or committees (36%),</li> <li>• Surveys or focus groups (36%).</li> </ul>

Source: Cortis and Blaxland (2014) *The state of the community service sector in NSW 2014*, SPRC, Sydney, p.26-27.

User participation and community control is a core principle of many community sector organisations. Services with origins in the social and civil rights movements, such as Women’s Health Centres and Aboriginal Legal Centres, were established by the community for the community. Similarly, many consumer-based organisations have user involvement as a core feature of their work, for instance the Association of Blind Citizens of NSW and Create Foundation. An example of how organisations participate in public policy and facilitate participation by the community is outlined in Box 12.

*Non government organisations (NGOs) are driven by ‘community purpose.’ They exist to support and champion the needs of people who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and socially isolated. They exist for people whom access to the usual networks of family, mainstream services, and community supports have failed or are inadequate. NGOs are mainly inclusive, participatory and quality-focussed, and have the capacity to create social capital in a way that government and the private sector cannot. There are thousands of NGOs across NSW, each with their own philosophy, specialisation, and collaborations. The rich diversity of the sector provides an economic and social benefit for NSW* (NSW Government Submission to Community Services Inquiry into Outsourcing Service Delivery, 2012, p1).

## **Box 12. NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc.**

NSW CAG is the state-wide, non-government peak body that represents people who use mental health services (mental health consumers) to all levels of the NSW Government. In this way NSW CAG acts as a bridge between mental health consumers and the government. An essential part of NSW CAG’s role is to encourage mental health consumers to provide input into decision making at all levels concerning the way mental health services are provided.

NSW CAG gathers information and lobbies decision makers about issues relevant to the mental health system. It seeks to influence legislation and policy introduced by the government where it affects the lives of mental health consumers. NSW CAG also keeps people informed of what is happening in the state through our Network.

To produce the evidence for its advocacy work, NSW CAG gathers information through its interactive website, committees, consumer groups, forums and research about consumers’ experiences of mental health services, the improvements they would like to see and what they expect from government.

Source: Adapted from [www.nswcag.org.au/about-nsw-cag.html](http://www.nswcag.org.au/about-nsw-cag.html), accessed 11/08/14

## **Roles and responsibilities in a changing landscape**

### *Market-based funding policy*

While many not-for-profit organisations have traditionally claimed a base in the community, Goodwin and Phillips (unpublished, p11) argue their activities are increasingly constructed by governments as services for the community rather than *from* it. Research suggests market-based funding and accountability regimes is impacting on community sector organisations’ participation and their ability to facilitate it (Mayo & Rooke, 2008).

In competitive funding environments characterised by purchase of service contracting, participation may not be seen as the most effective use of limited resources or within scope of narrow contract specifications. Advocacy may be expressly prohibited as a condition of funding, as recently occurred with Community Legal Centres,<sup>xxii</sup> or insecurity about funding may lead to self-censorship (Milbourne, 2009). Consequently, participation by community sector organisations is being reduced or limited to an apolitical technical function (Taylor, 2007, p301).

*Deliberation must always be anchored and controlled from outside officialdom to some extent if it is to address issues – and solutions to issues – that are controversial and threaten to significantly threaten the status quo* (Kadlec & Friedman (2007) quoted in Kelly & Cumming, 2010).

Similarly, public participation in community sector organisations is also changing with funding policy favouring larger organisations over local grass-roots organisations, increased professionalization requiring skills-based management and governance, and accountability requirements to government funders subsuming accountability to the community (Craig & Mayo, 1995; Fawcett, 2010; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011).



### *Person-centred approaches*

Against this backdrop the community sector has a growing responsibility to ensure people can participate in the publicly funded programs and services it provides. The NSW government's outsourcing of public services to the not-for-profit sector<sup>xxiii</sup> and the shift to person centred approaches in human services increases the onus on community sector organisations to actively consider how they involve users, members and communities in their work. If the sector is to advocate to government for better public participation it must lead by example. Many organisations, such as Family Planning NSW and Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW, have developed policies for how they engage with consumers and the community (see Box 13).

#### **Box 13. A formal commitment to engage service users**

Family Planning NSW Consumer Engagement Framework outlines the organisations commitment to seek the views of people who use their services and to partner with stakeholders. The Framework is available on the Family Planning NSW website and is annually audited and reported to the Board.

COTA NSW Consumer Engagement Strategy 2011 was developed to provide a framework for the implementation of the COTA NSW Strategic Objectives 2011-2013, particularly to develop social policy positions based on broad consultation and research. The Strategy commits to establish and sustain an organisational culture that supports consumer and community engagement and strategic information gathering to inform and enhance the policy development process of COTA NSW. It recognises resourcing is needed, including the establishment of a network of regional consumer consultative groups across NSW.

### *Peak bodies*

Peak bodies<sup>xxiv</sup> have an important role in facilitating participation and representation of their members and in building participatory capacity. They are ideally placed to lead this work given their membership-based structures and remit for systemic policy and advocacy, facilitating information exchange and advice, and building capacity. This work supports broader government endeavours by contributing to planning, communicating directions, and developing partnerships with government and other service providers.

The current government program and funding reform processes means peak bodies are being required to increase the provision of sector development services to support member organisations. This focus on technical or industry support means peaks have less capacity to undertake activities such as policy, advocacy, expert advice, information exchange and broader capacity building. These functions need to be preserved to ensure an effective, sustainable community sector and to achieve good outcomes for clients and communities.

### *Consumer representative organisations*

Consumer representative organisations, as with peaks, play a key role in facilitating the participation of people with lived experience in government policy and decision-making. However, organisations report consultation fatigue and overload given the small number of specialist groups and limited availability of trained consumer representatives.<sup>xxv</sup>

Consumer representative organisations frequently receive numerous requests from government and other stakeholders to participate in consultations, distribute surveys through their membership, or provide trained consumer representatives to participate in advisory committees or forums. Facilitating these requests, along with providing education and training to build the skills and confidence of consumers to tell their stories in a safe and positive way, requires significant time and resources.

Program reforms in a number of areas mean that services providing independent information, advocacy and representation are at risk. For instance in disability there is no guarantee organisations providing these services will continue to be funded beyond 2015 when ADHC funding transfers to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

## **NCOSS and participation**

NCOSS has a number of roles and responsibilities in relation to the public participation agenda. NCOSS 2013 Strategic Directions outline a role for NCOSS to advocate for good public policy processes that ensure equitable participation by people experiencing poverty and disadvantage and the community sector.

As a peak body for the not-for profit community sector in NSW, NCOSS has a role in building participatory capacity within the sector. Some of NCOSS current activities include NSW Legislative Council Workshops, NSW budget briefing for the community sector, Window on Economics seminars, policy briefs and factsheets, and advocacy guides and resources such as *Engaging with a Community Cabinet Meeting*.

Respondents to the consultation survey for this paper identified ways in which NCOSS could facilitate better participation. These included:

- providing links to good practice participation resources,
- sector awards for good participation practice,
- publicising participation opportunities,
- training and resourcing on government policy processes
- providing simple and concise policy digests on current issues,
- supporting and resourcing regional peak organisations
- partnering with other peak organisations to run consultations, especially in regional areas or in specific sectors
- holding regular consultations and feedback forums,
- establishing a simple standardised feedback mechanism for members and stakeholders to provide their views on set topics
- providing a central digital platform for service providers and community members to undertake collective systemic advocacy
- providing an on-going mechanism / channel for grassroots issues to be raised with NCOSS

As a membership based organisation NCOSS also has a responsibility to facilitate participation of members and stakeholders in its work. In 2012-13, an internal strategic review process highlighted NCOSS has access to many networks and groups but may not make best use of this resource to inform and amplify its work. A key recommendation was to develop a clear and consistent communications and engagement strategy with stakeholders and to develop a consistent way to identify and engage stakeholders (sector and non-sector) on a variety of issues, as well as through a variety of channels.

NCOSS membership structure is a potential mechanism to expand engagement with non-sector stakeholders. An example of this is the recent decision by the ACOSS Board of Directors to remove fees for individuals to join ACOSS. This decision was made to provide an opportunity for a wide range of individual to add their voice in support of the work of ACOSS and to better connect with people impacted by the issues that ACOSS advocates on every day. A similar approach could be employed by NCOSS to develop a more inclusive and dynamic membership.

## SECTION FOUR – RECOMMENDATIONS

Everyone in NSW should have equal opportunities to be involved in and influence decisions that affect them. Giving the community a real say requires robust legal, policy and institutional frameworks, along with appropriate tools, resourcing and political commitment (OECD, 2009). Based on the research evidence and analysis of the NSW context, this report proposes eleven recommendations to improve public participation in NSW.

### **Recommendation 1: NSW government develops a state-wide public participation strategy.**

There is no overarching strategy or whole-of-government framework for public participation in NSW. A state-wide public participation strategy is needed provide an explicit political mandate and establish a framework for good practice based on internationally recognised principles and enablers. It would drive more consistent and higher quality practice across government. Other states have recognised the need for consistent, whole-of-government participation and engagement strategies, such as South Australia *Better Together* (2013) and Tasmania's *Framework for Community Engagement* (2013). Institutional infrastructure to support the strategy should include:

- establishment of an independent Public Participation Board, with annual public reporting on government performance under the strategy.
- seed funding for demonstration projects to show high quality engagement in action
- skills development training program for government and community sector, and
- creation of a participation community of practice.

### **Recommendation 2: Public participation is made a statutory requirement for NSW government.**

Institutionalising public participation requires appropriate policy and legal frameworks. It should be a statutory requirement for the NSW government to involve the community in strategic governance, as currently exists for local councils under s402 of Local Government Act.<sup>xxvi</sup> The legislation should include a requirement for the NSW government to develop a state-wide public participation strategy and individual agency plans.

### **Recommendation 3: NSW government implements sustained participatory mechanisms for public involvement in governance and strategic policy at the state and regional levels.**

For people to have a say in decision-making there must be the opportunities and mechanisms for them to do so. Localisation, customer focus and collaboration in service provision are important initiatives to improve the quality of public services. However, state governments have the capacity and responsibility to address systemic issues that go beyond service provision and that cannot be addressed at the local level.

Sustained participatory mechanisms are needed to facilitate public participation in state governance and strategic policy development, particularly priority-setting. The recent NSW Premiers Innovation Fund is a positive example. Deliberative democracy techniques such as community/citizens' juries, consensus conferences, and participatory budgeting are other promising methods that could be explored. The use of these techniques could be facilitated by enabling agencies wanting to use randomly selected juries to ask the Electoral Commission to produce a random draw and issue notices.

## **Recommendation 4: NSW government builds on its use of digital technology platforms to engage people in the design, delivery and evaluation of policy as well as services.**

Digital technology provides opportunities for more diverse, accessible, and responsive engagement between government and citizens. The current suite of digital consultation and engagement mechanisms needs to be expanded to reflect the broader relationship between people and government beyond service delivery.

## **Recommendation 5: NSW government builds and resources participatory capacity in the public sector and establishes accountability frameworks.**

Skills, tools, and resources are required for successful participation processes along with performance frameworks to embed it as a practice of government. Evidence shows the quantity and quality of agencies' practice varies. In line with the NSW Public Service Commission recommendations on public sector collaboration and the OECD recommendations to embed open and inclusive policy-making in government (2009, p16), the NSW government should:

- Develop public sector capabilities in public participation and engagement, including digital engagement,
- Adequately resource participatory exercises,
- Establish accountability frameworks and incentives, and
- Increase opportunities for participation and learning.

## **Recommendation 6: NSW government supports participatory capacity in the community sector, including developing a whole-of-government sector funding policy.**

The community sector has a long standing history and well developed capacity in facilitating effective public participation. Recently government funding to the sector has become increasingly tied to direct service outputs, diminishing this participatory capacity. In building participatory capabilities of the public service the NSW government should provide commensurate support for the community sector. Peak bodies and advocacy organisations have a key role in this regard. Their broader roles beyond industry development – information, advocacy, coordination and leadership – need to be maintained and supported.

A whole of government sector funding policy that goes beyond direct service delivery, to include funding for participatory capacity, is required. A fair, effective and evidence-based approach to community sector funding is required to mitigate the unintended or negative impacts of market-based funding regimes on organisation's participation.

NCOSS has previously recommended the NSW government develops a comprehensive whole-of-government funding policy for the sector that provides for a range of procurement methods, longer funding timeframes, consideration of non-monetary factors and the distinct nature of human and community services, as well as participation in strategic funding and planning process.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **Recommendation 7: NSW government resources a network of regional support organisations to strengthen participatory capacity in rural and regional NSW.**

With the shift to localisation, a network of Regional Support Organisations is required to strengthen the capacity of community organisations to participate at the local level. Some organisations currently exist but are unevenly resourced and spread across the state.<sup>xxviii</sup> Resourcing an NGO regional support program would provide a platform for the sector to participate more effectively in local decision-making.

### **Recommendation 8: NSW government builds individual and community participatory capacity by expanding capacity building programs and civic literacy education.**

Sustained community development approaches and individual capacity building programs, such as NSW Community Builders and Ability Links NSW, provide the foundations for effective public participation. The NSW Community Builders program needs to be expanded and re-designed to build community capacity to participate effectively, particularly in new urban fringe growth areas, and to support organisations to deliver flexible community-driven initiatives in response to locally identified priorities.

Family and Community Services (FACS) NSW have announced a review of the current Community Builders program as part of service reforms.<sup>xxix</sup> Local communities and organisations must be involved early and throughout the review process to inform the program re-design.

In addition to community development programs, other capacity building measures are needed to support participation by individuals, particularly people from under-represented or marginalised groups. Education to build civic literacy and skills combined with access to easy-to-understand information can prepare people to participate more effectively.

### **Recommendation 9: NSW government adequately funds independent advocacy, information, and representation for consumers with lived experience.**

People need to be actively involved in decision making and developing solutions to the systemic issues they face. Independent advocacy, information and collective representation facilitates participation by people who may be under-represented or marginalised in government decision-making processes due to social, economic, political or cultural barriers.

The government must recognise the valuable role consumer representative bodies and independent advocacy organisations play in facilitating participation of people with lived experience by adequately funding independent advocacy, information, and representation. Resourcing training programs for consumer representatives and individual community members is another important way to increase participation by people with lived experience.

## **Recommendation 10: NSW community sector builds its participatory capacity and develops a consumer and community participation charter.**

While the community sector has a specific role in public sphere as providers of human and community services, its independence from government makes it an important alternate participatory sphere and a site of different ideas and debates. The sector must actively preserve and build on these strengths so it can continue to most effectively meet the needs of the communities it serves.

The sector can facilitate public participation and promote good participatory practice by leading through its own actions. Developing a NSW Consumer and Community Participation Charter would codify the sector commitment to involving service users, members and the community in its work.

Facilitating participation outside of government in informal spheres also requires social capital building, social networks, leadership development and collaboration. The UK Inquiry into the future of civil society identified growing the alternate sphere of public participation requires:

- resources for sustained, non-instrumental, open-ended dialogue and deliberation processes,
- key alliances between organisations to act as ‘deliberative leadership coalitions’ and advocate for participation on important issues,
- specialist expert participation organisations,
- training and education,
- advocating for measures to address social inequity, and
- role modelling good participatory practice in their own ways of working (Kelly & Cumming, 2010, p. 31).

## **Recommendation 11: NCOSS builds its participatory capacity and improves its engagement processes, including:**

- **developing a community engagement framework,**
- **reviewing its membership strategy,**
- **building internal participatory skills, and**
- **supporting participatory capacity in the community sector.**

As a peak body for the NSW community sector NCOSS has a key role in supporting organisations and advocating the government for better participatory practice. NCOSS also has a responsibility to lead by example. How NCOSS includes the community sector and people experiencing poverty and disadvantage disadvantaged in our policy advocacy processes goes to our legitimacy as a peak and a voice of social justice in NSW.

NCOSS needs to develop a comprehensive and transparent approach to public engagement with members, stakeholders, and the wider community consistent with the findings of its 2012 internal review. This includes consideration of consultation and participation processes and platforms. A broader membership base, such as that of ACOSS, would also facilitate more inclusive participation by people with lived experience in NCOSS work.

As part of its leadership role, NCOSS must continue to strengthen the community sector’s capacity to participate in government policy and decision-making by:

- publicising opportunities to participate in government consultations on social policy and sector issues
- providing accessible policy digests and briefs on current issues

- education and training on government policy processes
- systemic advocacy training and support
- providing online mechanisms for collective and systemic advocacy
- partnering with other organisations to hold consultations, particularly in regional areas or specialised sectors
- facilitate communities of interest on key policy issues.

This report recommends that NCOSS:

- Develops a community engagement framework to guide a transparent and consistent approach to the participation of NCOSS members, broader community sector, people with lived experience and other stakeholders in NCOSS policy processes and priorities. This should outline what things NCOSS will engage on, with whom, when, and how. It should also include greater use of IT, such as teleconferencing and webinars, to facilitate participation by rural and regional stakeholders, online advocacy tools, and sustained participatory mechanisms for on-going dialogue and feedback on grass roots issues.
- Reviews the membership strategy and consider how to facilitate a broader membership structure, including individuals with lived experience of poverty and disadvantage.
- Builds organisational capacity in stakeholder engagement and participation, such as training IAP2 Australasia Certificate in Engagement.
- Investigates online and digital platforms for coordinated systemic advocacy by members and the community
- Establishes a public participation webpage with links to good practice resources on the NCOSS website
- Undertakes a regular stakeholder survey to provide feedback on how well NCOSS has performed as a peak body for the community sector and as a voice for social justice
- Advocates to the NSW government and community sector to improve public participation in line with the recommendations in this report

# APPENDIX ONE – DEFINITIONS AND TYPOLOGIES

## Definitions

Some common definitions of participation in the practice literature are:

*Any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and that uses public input to make better decisions.”* (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), p. 3)

*...participation is everything that enables people to influence the decisions and get involved in the actions that affect their lives...* (Involve, 2005, p. 19)

*Active participation means that citizens themselves take a role in the exchange on policy-making...At the same time, the responsibility for policy formulation and final decision rests with government. Engaging citizens in policy-making is an advanced two-way relationship between government and citizens based on the principle of partnership.* (OECD, 2001a, pp. 15-16)

*Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives.* (United Nations Development Programme, 1993, p. 21)

Definitions of public participation, engagement and consultation used in NSW government policy include:

*Participation – refers generally to more active processes in which the public is given a greater role in formulating plans or influencing development outcomes.* (NSW Department of Planning, Community engagement in the NSW planning system, 2003, p. 6)

*Consultation describes the broad range of communications between government and community and business stakeholders with an interest in decision-making. Consultative approaches range from one-way information delivery through to interactive discussions and participation by stakeholders in the decision-making process.* (Consultation Policy, NSW Better Regulation Office, 2009, p. 3)

*Engagement refers to the processes in which agencies, stakeholders and the general community are invited to contribute to the development and implementation of strategy, policies, programs and services. Engagement encompasses a wide variety of interactions, both formal and informal. These range from information sharing to more active consultation through to collaboration in government decision making processes.* (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, Preparing for effective engagement, 2012, p. 4)



## Typologies

### Ladder of participation, Arnstein (1969)

A leading seminal work, Arnstein defined participation in terms of the degree to which power is devolved to participants. It is framed in an empowerment discourse (Barnes, 2007; Meagher, 2006) that views the purpose of participation as redistributive to achieve social justice. The eight rungs of the 'participation ladder' span three levels of non-participation (manipulation, education), tokenism (information, consultation, involvement) and full citizen power (partnership, delegated power and citizen control).

### Participation continuum, OECD (2001a)

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) views participation from a government perspective as a means of facilitating service delivery objectives. The continuum spans five domains: Information, consultation, partnership, delegation, control.

### Participation spectrum, International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

The IAP2 spectrum is a model widely used by governments in Australia and internationally. Participation varies according to the public's levels of influence, which is determined by the reason participation is being sought. The spectrum identifies five types of participation: Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower.

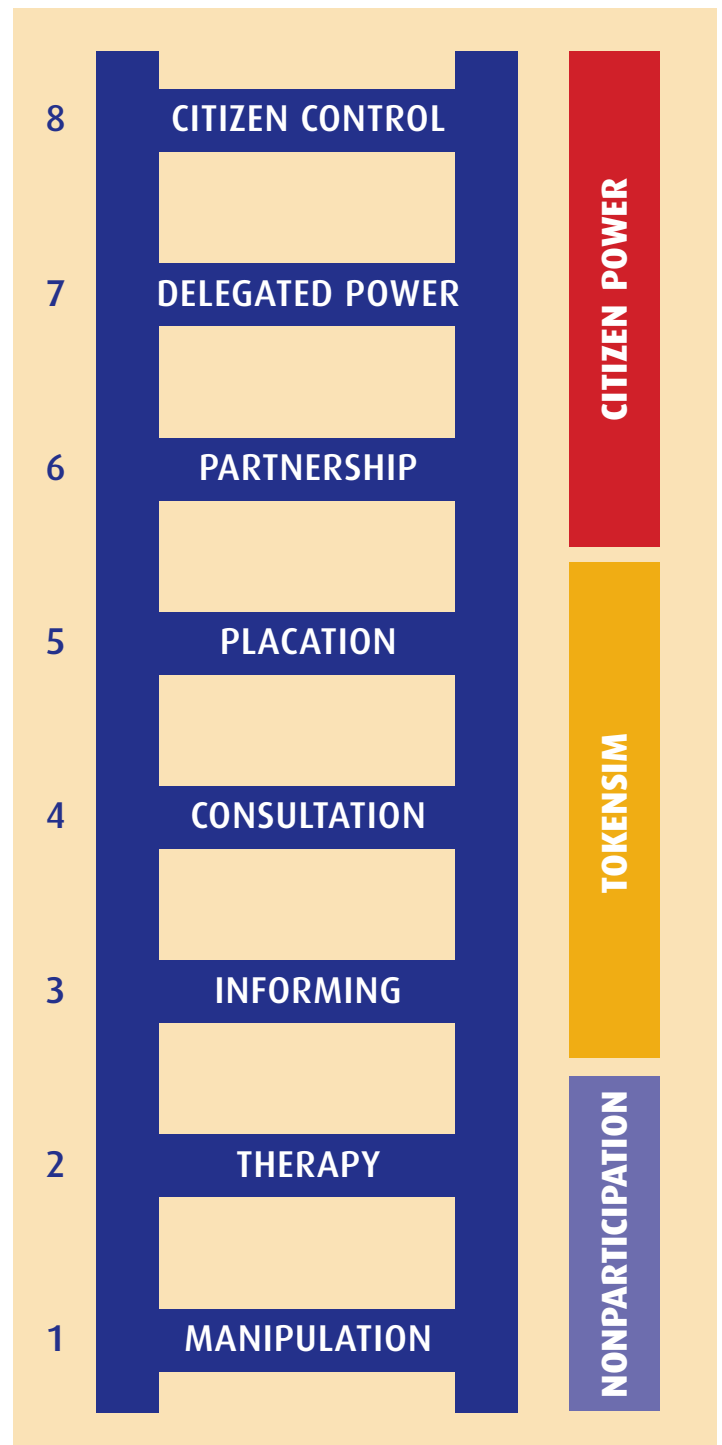


Image: Arnstein's 8-rung ladder of citizen participation (1969, p217)

## IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

<b>INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT</b>					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen Advisory committees</li> <li>• Consensus-building</li> <li>• Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

# APPENDIX TWO – PARTICIPATION BY FIELD AND PURPOSE

FIELD	CONCEPT AND PURPOSE	APPROACHES IN PRACTICE
<p><b>DEMOCRACY</b></p>	<p>Participation is an essential feature of democracy. It is inherent in the principles of popular control and political equality that underpin democratic systems of government. There are different schools of thought about the role of participation in democracy.</p> <p>Representative government characterises participation as voting for elected representatives. Participatory democrats argue for more equal and collaborative participation in public governance. However, most authors acknowledge neither ideal exists in reality and accept a plurality of approaches in practice.</p> <p>Participation is viewed as a means to address the democratic deficit by increasing active citizenship, building public trust, and strengthening government legitimacy and accountability.</p>	<p>Voting in general elections</p> <p>Citizen’s juries</p> <p>Policy networks</p>
<p><b>PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</b></p>	<p>Participation is traditionally framed in the context of the policy cycle (Althaus, 2007). It is a way to gather public views to improve public outcomes. Benefits include alerting government to emerging issues, informing the development of more creative or appropriate policy solutions, increasing decision legitimacy, and supporting effective policy implementation.</p> <p>More recently, drivers such as the rise of networks and plural polities, increasingly complex intractable policy problems and theories of public value administration (John &amp; O’Flynn, 2009) (Stoker, 2006) have placed increased importance on public participation as a collaborative governance approach.</p> <p>In practice, public participation generally continues to be characterised by technical, managerial approaches and is often limited to information and consultation.</p>	<p>Consulting on draft policy proposals</p> <p>Collaboration and partnership</p> <p>Co-produced services</p>

FIELD	CONCEPT AND PURPOSE	APPROACHES IN PRACTICE
<b>SOCIAL JUSTICE</b>	<p>Participation is a central concept in social development theories at the individual (Phillips, 1998; Young, 2002b), community (Craig &amp; Mayo, 1995; Lowndes &amp; Sullivan, 2008; Newman, 2004; "Participation in Community Development: Problems and Possibilities," 2006; Rawsthorne &amp; Howard, 2011) and international levels (United Nations General Assembly, 1998).</p> <p>Participation aims to empower people to act to change their situation and to challenge structural inequality. At a systemic level it redistributes power and resources and re-dresses discrimination and exclusion by conferring respect, dignity and control. (Lister, 2007). At an individual level, participation builds personal skills, confidence and resources that allow people to realise their full potential (United Nations Development Programme, 1993).</p> <p>In this context, power and empowerment are fundamental. Participation is a means of shifting power over resources as well as ideas, problem definition and agenda setting, life choices and opportunities (Rawsthorne &amp; Howard, 2011).</p> <p>In this context, participation is frequently viewed as needing to be organic or bottoms-up, arising from individuals or communities themselves, rather than imposed or created top-down by government.</p>	<p>Community development initiatives</p> <p>Skills building</p>
<b>CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL ORGANISING</b>	<p>Social movements, such as civil rights, gay rights, disability rights, women's rights, environmentalist movements and student movements have demanded to participate in public policy as a civic right and as a means to achieve social change (Fawcett, 2010). Related to the concepts of social justice and empowerment, it is also about people speaking up for themselves and being included as equals (Barnes, 2007; Meagher, 2006).</p>	<p>Public protests</p> <p>Online activism</p>
<b>NEO-LIBERAL ECONOMICS</b>	<p>In the context of neo-classical economics and neo-liberal government philosophy, citizens are 'service users' or 'consumers', and participation is aimed at informing the design and delivery of public goods and services. The rationale is consumer choice and preferences will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness. (Barnes, 2007).</p>	<p>Customer feedback forms</p> <p>Client satisfaction</p>

# APPENDIX THREE – ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST PARTICIPATION

CRITICISMS	COUNTER-ARGUMENTS
<b>ENGAGEMENT IS TIME-CONSUMING AND EXPENSIVE</b>	<p>While there may be initial costs upfront, the costs of not engaging can be far greater. Engagement can help identify potential problems early, uncover cost savings, develop more appropriate solutions, and support more effective implementation.</p> <p>Not all public participation processes have to be long and expensive. Methods can be tailored to suit the issue and the context.</p>
<b>DECISION-MAKING SHOULD BE LEFT TO THE EXPERTS</b>	<p>Experts have not solved many of the ‘seemingly intractable wicked’ policy problems in modern societies.</p> <p>People are experts in their own lives and have expertise some professionals do not, including knowledge about the impact of services and decisions on service users.</p> <p>Lay knowledge does not have to replace expert opinion, but can complement professional advice.</p>
<b>PEOPLE AREN’T INTERESTED IN BEING INVOLVED</b>	<p>While most people don’t want to be involved in every decision of government, there is evidence people do want to have a say in decisions that matter to them (Vromen, 2012). People are often apathetic towards government participation exercises as they have lost trust it will make a difference.</p> <p>Evidence shows when it is done well, participation can encourage further involvement and rebuild public trust in the democratic system (Involve, 2005).</p>
<b>ENGAGEMENT ONLY WORKS FOR EASY ISSUES</b>	<p>There is now substantial evidence internationally showing public participation can successfully address complex issues. There are examples of deliberative democracy methods such as citizen’s juries being used to decide state budgets (Porto Alegre, Brazil), rewrite national constitutions (Iceland), decide renewable energy options (NSW government), and address alcohol related violence (City of Sydney).</p>
<b>PARTICIPATION FAVOURS THE LOUD AND POWERFUL</b>	<p>Certain groups of people are less likely to participate and can be excluded from participatory processes due to a range of personal, financial, and social barriers. It is important participation processes are designed to be inclusive, along with broader capacity building measures.</p> <p>Inclusive, equitable participation can help correct biases derived from the dominance of partial perspective over the definition of problems or their possible solutions by communicating the experience and knowledge derived from different social positions</p>

Source: adapted from Involve 2005 and Fairytales

# APPENDIX FOUR – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS

There are a large variety of different methods for public participation. It is a developing and expanding field, with new methods being regularly invented. As such there is no complete list of participatory methods.

**Involve**, an expert UK organisation, has developed the Participation Compass tool. The website provides practical information for those working to involve people, including methods, case studies, library resources, and news. Some common participatory methods are:

- Appreciative Inquiry
- Citizens' Juries
- Citizens' Panels
- Community Empowerment Networks
- Consensus Building/Dialogue
- Consensus Conference
- Deliberative Mapping
- Deliberative Polling
- Democs
- Electronic processes
- Future Search Conference
- Participatory Appraisal
- Participatory Strategic Planning (ICA)
- Planning for Real
- Open Space Technology
- User Panels
- Youth Empowerment Initiatives

In deciding which participatory method to use, Involve recommends considering the number of participants; roles of participants; budget; length of process; types of outcomes; and where on the spectrum of participation the method works best.

**International Association for Public Participation** (IAP2)'s Public Participation Toolbox describes a range of participation techniques, key considerations, benefits, and risks in varying contexts. Further information can be found at [iap2.affiniscap.com/associations/4748/files/06Dec\\_Toolbox.pdf](http://iap2.affiniscap.com/associations/4748/files/06Dec_Toolbox.pdf)

**NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet strategic engagement guide** (Elton Consulting, 2012) lists various methods of engagement along with their strengths and weaknesses. It identifies common engagement tools and techniques for public sector organisations (p25):

- Advisory group
- Briefing (key stakeholder)
- Citizens' jury
- Citizens' panel
- Deliberative workshops
- Facebook
- Field trip
- Focus group
- Informal engagement
- Information and feedback session
- Media
- Online forum
- Public hearing
- Regional forum
- Steering committee
- Summit
- Survey
- Twitter
- Webinar
- Wiki
- Written information
- YouTube

# APPENDIX FIVE – RESOURCES

## NSW resources

- > Office of Communities (2013) Local Decision Making Policy and Operational Framework, OCHRE: the NSW Government plan for Aboriginal affairs, NSW Government  
[aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/LDM-Policy-Framework.pdf](http://aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/LDM-Policy-Framework.pdf)
- > Better Regulation Office (2009) Consultation Policy
- > Commission for Children and Young People (2012) *Citizen Me! Engaging children and young people in your organisation* guide  
[www.kids.nsw.gov.au/uploads/documents/Citizen\\_me!\\_report\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/uploads/documents/Citizen_me!_report_WEB.pdf)
- > Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) NSW (2014) *Community engagement guide*  
[www.nsw.ipaa.org.au/](http://www.nsw.ipaa.org.au/)
- > Keep Them Safe, Community Services NSW, *Engaging children, young people and families Child Wellbeing and Child Protection – NSW Interagency Guidelines*, Family and Community Services (FACS) NSW  
[www.community.nsw.gov.au/kts/guidelines/engaging/index.htm](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/kts/guidelines/engaging/index.htm)
- > NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (2012) Preparing for effective engagement  
[www.advertising.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/downloads/page/preparing\\_for\\_effectiveengagement\\_\\_a\\_guide\\_to\\_developing\\_eng\\_1.pdf](http://www.advertising.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/downloads/page/preparing_for_effectiveengagement__a_guide_to_developing_eng_1.pdf)
- > Planning NSW (2003) Community engagement handbook  
[www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/community\\_engagement\\_handbook\\_part\\_1.pdf](http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/community_engagement_handbook_part_1.pdf)

## Australian resources

- > Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) (2014) Online community engagement toolkit for Rural, Remote and Indigenous councils, Victoria  
[www.acelg.org.au/online-community-engagement-toolkit-rural-remote-and-indigenous-councils#tk1\\_1](http://www.acelg.org.au/online-community-engagement-toolkit-rural-remote-and-indigenous-councils#tk1_1)
- > Australian National Audit Office (2014) *Better Practice Guide - Successful Implementation of Policy Initiatives*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
[www.anao.gov.au/~/\\_media/Files/Better Practice Guides/2014 2015/ANAO - BPG Policy Implementation.pdf](http://www.anao.gov.au/~/_media/Files/Better Practice Guides/2014 2015/ANAO - BPG Policy Implementation.pdf)
- > Chief Minister and Cabinet Directorate (2011) *Engaging Canberrans: A Guide to Community Engagement*, ACT Government  
[www.timetotalk.act.gov.au/storage/communityengagement\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.timetotalk.act.gov.au/storage/communityengagement_FINAL.pdf)
- > SA Government (2013) *Better Together: Principles of Engagement*, Department of Premier and Cabinet and Institute for Public Administration, SA Government  
[www.saplan.org.au/](http://www.saplan.org.au/)



- > VIC Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005) *Effective Engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders. Book 1: An introduction to engagement; Effective Engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders. Book 2: The Engagement Planning Workbook; and Book 3: The Engagement Toolkit*, Victorian Government  
[www.dse.vic.gov.au/effective-engagement/resources/download-effective-engagement](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/effective-engagement/resources/download-effective-engagement)

## International resources

- > OECD Citizens as partners: Handbook on information, consultation and public participation in policy-making  
[www.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/display.asp?K=5LMQCR2KHGS8&DS=Citizens-as-Partners](http://www.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/display.asp?K=5LMQCR2KHGS8&DS=Citizens-as-Partners)
- > IAP2 Foundations of Public Participation  
[www.iap2.org.au/documents/item/83](http://www.iap2.org.au/documents/item/83)
- > IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox  
[iap2.affiniscape.com/associations/4748/files/06Dec\\_Toolbox.pdf](http://iap2.affiniscape.com/associations/4748/files/06Dec_Toolbox.pdf)
- > Involve (2005) People and Participation  
[www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/People-and-Participation.pdf](http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/People-and-Participation.pdf)
- > Involve Participation Compass  
[participationcompass.org/welcome/index](http://participationcompass.org/welcome/index)
- > Picker Institute Europe Invest in Engagement  
[www.investinengagement.info/](http://www.investinengagement.info/)
- > Jefferson Center  
[www.jefferson-center.org/](http://www.jefferson-center.org/)
- > Loka Institute  
[www.loka.org/pages/panel.htm](http://www.loka.org/pages/panel.htm)

# APPENDIX SIX – PRINCIPLES COMMONLY UNDERPINNING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

## OECD (2009)

### *Ten guiding principles*

- 1. Commitment:** Leadership and strong commitment to open and inclusive policy making is needed at all levels – politicians, senior managers and public officials.
- 2. Rights:** Citizens’ rights to information, consultation and public participation in policy making and service delivery must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens must be clearly stated. Independent oversight arrangements are essential to enforcing these rights.
- 3. Clarity:** Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and public participation should be well defined from the outset. The roles and responsibilities of all parties must be clear. Government information should be complete, objective, reliable, relevant, easy to find and understand.
- 4. Time:** Public engagement should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of solutions and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective.
- 5. Inclusion:** All citizens should have equal opportunities and multiple channels to access information, be consulted and participate. Every reasonable effort should be made to engage with as wide a variety of people as possible.
- 6. Resources:** Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed for effective public information, consultation and participation. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training as well as an organisational culture that supports both traditional and online tools.
- 7. Co-ordination:** Initiatives to inform, consult, and engage civil society should be coordinated within and across levels of government to ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of “consultation fatigue.” Co-ordination efforts should not stifle initiative and innovation but should leverage the power of knowledge networks and communities of practice within and beyond government.
- 8. Accountability:** Governments have an obligation to inform participants how they use inputs received through public consultation and participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny can help increase accountability of, and trust in, government.
- 9. Evaluation:** Governments need to evaluate their own performance. To do so effectively will require efforts to build the demand, capacity, culture and tools for evaluating public participation.
- 10. Active citizenship:** Societies benefit from dynamic civil society, and governments can facilitate access to information, encourage participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens’ civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity-building among civil society organisations. Governments need to explore new roles to effectively support autonomous problem-solving by citizens, CSOs and businesses.

## IAP2

### *Core Values for public participation practice:*

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision

## **Involve (2005, p19)**

### *Good participation requires that the following principles are followed:*

- Makes a difference. The purpose of participation is to achieve change in relation to the purpose identified; it may also make a difference to all those involved in terms of learning, confidence and sense of active citizenship. This requires active commitment to change by all parties.
- Voluntary – People may be encouraged to be involved, and even paid for involvement, but effective participation requires them to choose to be involved. Participation cannot be compulsory.
- Transparency, honesty and clarity about the purpose, the limits of what can and cannot be changed, who can be involved and how, and what happens as a result.
- Adequate resources to manage the process well and to deliver on the results.
- Appropriate participants – representative and/or inclusive, depending on the purpose of the exercise, with traditionally excluded groups given special support and encouragement when their involvement is appropriate.
- Accessibility so that no participant is excluded because of lack of physical access to meeting places, timing, appropriate support (e.g. child care), etc.
- Accountability – Participatory processes need to be accountable to all those involved (including the organisation that may be running / commissioning the exercise, and to the wider 'community'). This requires good record-keeping and reporting of both processes and outcomes.
- Power – Participatory processes should have sufficient power to achieve the agreed objectives. This may require a change in the existing power sharing arrangements.
- Learning and development – Participatory processes should seek to support a climate of mutual learning and development among all those involved.

## NSW DPC Preparing for Effective Engagement (2012, Appendix B, p19)

1. Keep the purpose of the engagement process front of mind throughout the project
2. Gain high level commitment to the engagement process
3. Clarify the products required from the engagement process
4. Respect the community and stakeholders when planning the engagement approach
5. Ensure the community and stakeholders understand the purpose of the engagement process
6. Work with respected, credible project champions and influencers
7. Monitor and evaluate the engagement process as it progresses and change if required
8. Remember that engagement is an ongoing component of a project

## NSW OBR Consultation Policy (2009, p3-4)

*Effective consultation processes will commonly have the following features:*

**Proportional** – The effort and resources spent on consultation should be commensurate with the magnitude and complexity of the problem, the nature and impact of the proposal and the level of stakeholder concern.

**Timely** – Consultation should occur early enough in the process to influence regulatory development. Stakeholders should be given sufficient time to properly consider the issues and submit their views.

**Accessible and representative** – Consultation should involve all relevant stakeholders, including members of the public, likely to be affected by the proposal. It is important that all stakeholders are able to participate in the process, including those with special needs. The consultation process should be publicised and participation encouraged by involving industry peak bodies and community organisations.

**Focused** – The objectives of the consultation and the particular issues on which views are sought should be clearly stated. As far as possible, no feasible options should be excluded from consideration. Any particular constraints on options, such as prior commitments or decisions, should also be clearly stated.

**Transparent** – Stakeholders should be given sufficient information to enable them to understand the policy problem and proposed response. Documents should be written in simple language and their purpose should be clear. Submissions received as part of a consultation process should be made publicly available, except where a stakeholder specifically requests that a submission be treated as private or confidential.

**Flexible** – The consultation method should be chosen on a case by case basis. A comprehensive consultation strategy may be appropriate in some cases, whereas in others, more informal consultation may suffice.

**Responsive** – Outcomes of consultation processes should be communicated to stakeholders. Feedback should also be given to participants about how their input was considered and the reasons for any divergence between their input and the outcomes.

**Evaluated** – The success of the consultation process should be evaluated, and lessons incorporated into future consultation strategies

## **Planning NSW Community Engagement Handbook (2003)**

*The principles are clustered under nine headings:*

1. Clarity of purpose
2. Commitment
3. Communication
4. Evidence
5. Flexibility and responsiveness
6. Timeliness
7. Inclusiveness
8. Collaboration
9. Continuous learning

# APPENDIX SEVEN – TOOL TO IDENTITY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HARD TO REACH

CHARACTERISTICS	ATTRIBUTES	EXAMPLES	PROMPTS What do we know? What do others know?
<b>DEMOGRAPHIC</b>  <i>The quantity and characteristics of the group</i>	Large numbers Dispersed population Place of residence Occupation and employment status Age Gender Educational level attained Income Tenancy status Advantage/disadvantage	Farmers Unemployed persons Tenants New residents Old people Young people Women Businesses Community groups and organisations Indigenous High rise apartment dwellers Faith based communities	Where are these groups found? How many are there in the group? What do members have in common? (Where) do they get together? Who else contacts them and how?
<b>CULTURAL</b>  <i>The way of life of a group of people</i>	Lack of established information networks Unable to access services easily Language spoken Ethnic or cultural background Social invisibility Lack of knowledge about council's role and services	CALD Non-readers Home workers Ethnic groups Indigenous Drug users Sex workers Homeless people Problem gamblers Residents of hostels and boarding houses	Which organisations could we work with to develop an information network? What established information networks do people already use and how could we tap into them? Are there individuals we could work through? How? What are the alternatives to written information and points of contact?

CHARACTERISTICS	ATTRIBUTES	EXAMPLES	PROMPTS What do we know? What do others know?
<b>BEHAVIOURAL AND ATTITUDINAL</b>  <i>The way the group's attitude to council influences their behaviour</i>	Distrust of government agencies Unwillingness to access services Public participation in local or council matters is a low priority Lack of time Diffuse or poorly organised internal structure and communication Previous bad experience	Busy people (Single) mothers Businesses Illegal workers Drug users Sex workers Homeless people Problem gamblers Residents of hostels and boarding houses	Who do they trust? How can we inform or educate about the relevance of, or necessity for, consultation? What methods of outreach can we use (social marketing approach)? How can we establish new relationships? What or who can influence them? What about the
<b>STRUCTURAL</b>  <i>The way council processes and structures influence access</i>	Bureaucracy and red tape Availability of information in relevant languages, print sizes and media Complicated 'procedures' Attitude of council staff Competence of consultants used Timing and location of public participation	Council staff Consultants Councillors	What changes can we make to reach the group? How can we improve the way we provide information and communicate? How do other organisations facilitate access?

Source: Meredyth & Brackertz (2008) *Social Inclusion of the Hard to Reach Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach: Local Government, Social Profiling and Civic Infrastructure*, Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Victoria, p16

# APPENDIX EIGHT – TECHNIQUES FOR INCLUSIVE CONSULTATION

<b>PUBLICITY</b>	Local newspapers Community radio Pamphlets Newsletters (e.g. neighbourhood house, sports clubs) Email bulletins Website Library
<b>MAKING CONTACT</b>	Service clubs Sporting clubs and associations Interest based community groups Faith based groups Ethnic groups Local leaders Hire service providers to contact, consult (e.g. aged care services) Staff networks
<b>PARTICIPATION INCENTIVES</b>	Paid focus groups, interviews, surveys Food vouchers, prizes Barbeques, children's activities
<b>FORMAL CONSULTATION METHODS</b>	Citizen researchers (interviews, surveys, focus groups) Think tents and listening posts Drop-off and pick-up surveys
<b>INFORMAL CONSULTATION OR COMMUNITY-BUILDING METHODS</b>	Fishing trips Street parties Mural projects Outdoor movies
<b>NEW TECHNOLOGIES</b>	Text messaging Online survey Email
<b>ACCESS</b>	Council transport Appropriate venues Child care Consult out of hours Help people fill in a questionnaire
<b>ADAPTING INFORMATION</b>	Pamphlets in different languages Audio tape in different languages Websites in different languages Braille Translators Large print

Source: Meredyth & Brackertz (2008), p18.



# APPENDIX NINE – GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

**Citizens** are individuals in society, sometimes with recognised legal status.

**Civil society** is the broader public sphere separate to the state and the market (Fawcett 2010). It is comprised of diverse social groups, networks and organisations (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011)

**Collaboration** can be broadly defined as more than one party working together in the areas of policy development, service design or service delivery. More specifically, it is characterised by mutually developed common purpose, joint authority and control, along with shared resources, risks and benefits (NOUS group, 2013)

**Community** is an umbrella terms with different meanings. It is frequently associated with a geographic area or local neighbourhood, but can also refer to social groups related by interest, identity or circumstance (Fraser, 2005; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011). It is sometimes used interchangeably with 'public'.

**Community sector organisations** are not-for-profit organisations operating in the community to provide public goods and services in response to local or specific needs. CSOs provide human and community services to improve individual and community wellbeing, such as the provision of care, education and training, relief of poverty, social disadvantage, social distress and hardship; the provision of emergency relief or support. This is distinct from community-based services, which are about community participation in non-human service areas such as the arts, sport, recreation and environment (Productivity Commission, 2010).

**Consumers** are users of products and services. The term is mainly associated with the private sector but is increasingly being used in relation to public goods and services.

**Deliberation** is the examination of a problem and the careful consideration of different viewpoints and options to arrive at a well-reasoned solution (Gastil, J. (2008) cited in Gollagher and Hartz-Karp (2012)).

**Deliberative democracy** describes a broad theoretical and practical movement that aims to expand meaningful public participation in political decision-making (Gollagher & Hartz-Karp, 2012). Key elements are representativeness, deliberation, and influence (Carson and Hartz-Karp (2005) cited in Gollagher and Hartz-Karp (2012)).

**Effective public participation:** there is no settled definition of what constitutes effective participation or how it can be measured. It is generally acknowledged as a relative question that depends on the context, purpose, and methods (Bryson, 2013; Fung, 2006; Involve, 2005; OECD, 2009; OIDP, 2007; Rowe & Frewer, 2005).

Barnes (2007) argue effectiveness is determined at two levels, by the institutional and cultural context (macro) and the rules and norms of the process (micro). Neshkova and Guo (2012) support Irvin and Stansbury (2004) that effectiveness should be measured by the process and outcomes to direct participants, government, and the broader public. The International Observatory on Participatory Democracy proposes five criteria for evaluating a par-ticipatory process: process coordination, participants, sub-ject, method and consequences (Parés & March, 2013).

**Inclusive public participation:** the equal opportunity for people to participate and the involvement of as wide a variety of citizens' voices as possible (OECD, 2009). Lister (2007) argues it is promoting voice and presence within policy processes. Graaf and Michels (2010, p. 486) identify two components of inclusion, the openness of the forum to individuals and representation of the relevant interest. This concept recognises that some people tend to be under-represented or excluded from participation process due to individual, financial, social or institutional barriers (Gunn, 2006; Lister, 2007; Meagher, 2006; United Nations Development Programme, 1993)

**Public participation:** the involvement by citizens, groups and organisations in public policy processes and government decision-making (Barnes, 2007; Bishop & Davis, 2002; Lowndes et al., 2001a; Rowe & Frewer, 2005).

IAP2 defines public participation as any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and that uses the public input to make better decisions. It must include the commitment that the public's contribution will influence the decision (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)).

'Public' participation is different to other types of participation, such as social participation in sporting or voluntary community groups, or economic participation in employment or as consumers (United Nations Development Programme, 1993; Vromen, 2012).

**Public** is a collective term for the people of an area as a whole.

**Public policy** is commonly understood as a course of action by government designed to attain specific results. It is the product of multiple competing interests and actors within society (Althaus, 2007). It can be depicted in a number of phases, stages and movements, known as the policy cycle (Fawcett, 2010; Hogwood & Gunn, 1984; Weimar & Vining, 1999). The Australian policy cycle comprises issue identification, analysis, instruments, consultation, co-ordination, decision, implementation, and evaluation (Althaus, 2007).

**Non-government organisation:** is an umbrella term in this paper, recognising the term is contested and there is no standard definition in Australia (Productivity Commission 2010, Bridgeman and Davis 2007). Other common terms are the not-for-profit or non-profit sector, third sector, voluntary sector, civil society, charities, welfare sector, community sector or the human services sector.

**Stakeholders** are those individuals, groups or organisations with an interest or concern in the issue.

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# ENDNOTES

- i NCOSS participation research project has been undertaken as part of a community fellowship with the Social Justice Network (SSJN), University of Sydney.
- ii NCOSS Strategic Directions (2013) include a focus on improving public policy processes by advancing participation and consultation that involves low income and disadvantaged people and the community sector.
- iii Community sector organisations (CSOs) are a sub-set of non-government or not-for-profit sector. They are distinguished by their community-purpose rather than commercial or market orientation. The NSW community sector is diverse ranging from small local neighbourhood groups to large, multi-site charitable organisations. See the NSW Community Sector Charter (2011).
- iv *Community Builders*, NSW Family and Communities Services, accessed 23/06/14 at: [www.community.nsw.gov.au/docs\\_menu/for\\_agencies\\_that\\_work\\_with\\_us/our\\_funding\\_programs/community\\_builders.html](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docs_menu/for_agencies_that_work_with_us/our_funding_programs/community_builders.html)
- v *ibid*
- vi Not-for-profit (NFP) is an umbrella term used to describe non-government organisations established for a community-purpose rather than a profit-motive as with private sector organisations.
- vii Peak bodies are also known as ‘umbrella organisations’ or ‘intermediary bodies’. They have several definitions in Australia, including:  
  
*A peak council is a representative organisation that provides information dissemination services, membership support, coordination, advocacy and representation, and research and policy development services for its members and other interested groups* (Industry Commission, 1995, p.181).  
  
*A “peak body” is a non-government organisation whose membership consists of smaller organisations of allied interests. The peak body thus offers a strong voice for the specific community sector in the areas of lobbying government, community education and information sharing between member groups and interested parties* (Melville & Perkins 2003).
- viii NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (2011), *NSW 2021 – A Plan to make NSW Number 1*, NSW Government, p2.
- ix Chavez, V., FaCS consults the sector ... WS Localisation & Current Reforms, 2 July 2014, WSCF, accessed 8/7/14 at [wscf.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=522:fac-consults-the-sector-ws-localisation-current-reforms&catid=59:community-sector-development&Itemid=295](http://wscf.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=522:fac-consults-the-sector-ws-localisation-current-reforms&catid=59:community-sector-development&Itemid=295)
- x See: [www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/local-decision-making/](http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/local-decision-making/)
- xi See the PSC Advisory Board report *Doing Things Differently – Raising Productivity, Improving Service and Enhancing Collaboration across the NSW Public Sector*, accessed July 2014.
- xii Interview with Rebecca Falkingham, Assistant Secretary, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet on 20 October 2014.



- xiii NSW Government, Key Areas of Focus - Restoring Accountability, [www.nsw.gov.au/restoring-accountability](http://www.nsw.gov.au/restoring-accountability), accessed 14/08/14.
- xiv See: South Australia Better Together (2013) and Tasmania's Framework for Community Engagement (2013).
- xv [www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/miscellaneous/premiers-innovation-initiative-guide.pdf](http://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/miscellaneous/premiers-innovation-initiative-guide.pdf), accessed 14/08/2014
- xvi New England, Central West, Orana Far West, Riverina, Albury-Wodonga, Far South Coast and Southern Tablelands/ Monaro
- xvii A more comprehensive evaluation of individual agencies mechanisms and their effectiveness was beyond the scope of this project. A more detailed report on public participation by NSW government agencies was commissioned by the former government - see Byrne and Davis (1998) *Participation and the NSW Policy Process: A discussion paper for The Cabinet Office*, NSW Government, Sydney.
- xviii Housing NSW reports it has developed a draft tenant engagement framework and is developing a set of community engagement principles for social housing estate redevelopment projects, see: [www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Living+in+Public+Housing/Get+Involved/Tenant+Engagement+Framework.htm](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Living+in+Public+Housing/Get+Involved/Tenant+Engagement+Framework.htm), accessed 13/08/14.
- xix In 2013, FACS approached NCOSS to work on a research project to support and contribute to the development of a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Engagement Strategy. NCOSS final report to FACS made recommendations to strengthen engagement processes and practices based on findings from a sector-wide survey and service reform case studies. The FACS NGO Engagement Strategy remains in development at time of publication.
- xx Results from an online survey about public participation in September 2014. Respondents were asked "Do you feel you are able to have a say in NSW government policy and decision-making about issues important to you?" Responses were 70% No, 20% Yes, and 10% Unsure.
- xxi Family and Community Services NSW (2014) *Child Protection Legislative Reforms Briefing*, accessed 18/08/14 at: [www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au/images/SHFL\\_External\\_July\\_2014\\_Leg\\_Reform\\_Focus\\_Read-Only.pdf](http://www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au/images/SHFL_External_July_2014_Leg_Reform_Focus_Read-Only.pdf).
- xxii The Commonwealth government has proposed changes to funding and service agreements for Community Legal Centres that would restrict their legal advocacy and law reform work [www.naclc.org.au/cb\\_pages/news/NACLcvoicesstrongconcernovernewfundingguidelinesforNSWCLCs.php](http://www.naclc.org.au/cb_pages/news/NACLcvoicesstrongconcernovernewfundingguidelinesforNSWCLCs.php)
- xxiii For example, the transfer of all government out-of-home care services to the non-government sector, Going Home Staying Home reforms to specialist homelessness services, and the health NGO funding reforms, NSW Partnerships for Health.

- xxiv Peak bodies are also known as ‘umbrella organisations’ or ‘intermediary bodies’. They have several definitions in Australia, including:
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- xxv NCOSS Consumer Representative Peaks roundtable 10 October 2014
- xxvi Under s402 of the Local Government Act, Councils are required to develop Community Engagement Strategies and involve the community in the development of their 10 year strategic plans
- xxvii See: NCOSS (2014) NSW State Election 2015 Platform – *One Step Away* and NCOSS *Submission: Inquiry into Outsourcing Service Delivery Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services* (May 2012), Sydney, pp 8-11.
- xxviii New England, Central West, Orana Far West, Riverina, Albury-Wodonga, Far South Coast and Southern Tablelands/ Monaro
- xxix *Extension of funding for some FACS programs to 30 June 2016*, NCOSS Blog, 12 May 2014, accessed at [www.ncoss.org.au/content/blogsection/7/100/](http://www.ncoss.org.au/content/blogsection/7/100/)



This report presents the findings of a research project on public participation by the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS). Public participation is about people having a say and influencing decisions that affect them. It is an important feature of our democracy and makes society fairer.

Have Your Say... But How? has identified a number of key themes about public participation:

- **Participation is a contested concept..**
- **Participation is valuable.**
- **Practice is variable, producing mixed outcomes**
- **No single 'one-size fits all' approach.**
- **Principles for good practice are broadly agreed.**
- **Not everyone has equal opportunities to participate.**

The NSW government has made a high-level commitment supported by a number of initiatives aimed at giving the community a say in decisions that affect them. These are positive steps to improve the way government engages with citizens, particularly in relation to service delivery. However there remain opportunities to enhance the way government engages with people and organisations in policy and strategic decision-making.

The NSW government's outsourcing of public services and shift to person centred approaches in human services increases the onus on community sector organisations to actively consider how they involve users, members and communities in their work. The sector has a long tradition of participation from its community-based roots. It must continue to lead by example to deliver better outcomes for everyone in NSW, particularly those people who are traditionally excluded or under-represented in government policy processes.