****

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

**PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS**

* **For Energy Networks**

**Written by Peter Kenyon**



**Developed in conjunction with Energy Networks Australia**

**With funding support from Energy Consumers Australia**

**April 2018**

**1. Introduction**

Uniting Communities, Inc. (UC) has been actively promoting consumer engagement as the basis for efficient network revenue decisions since the 2012 network regulation rules changes. We subsequently promoted this consumer engagement through leadership in the Australian Energy Regulator’s “Better Regulation” processes of 2013. These processes developed the first consumer engagement guidelines for utility regulation in Australia. In 2015, through UnitingCare Australia we released a paper proposing a move from combative network regulatory processes to what we called the “DNA approach”: the application of Deliberative processes and Negotiation to achieve Agreement between network businesses and consumer interests.

In 2016 the Energy Networks Australia (ENA) published a Consumer Engagement Handbook, which we have written this publication to sit alongside. We have titled this publication “Community Engagement Handbook” (*Handbook*) to reflect the growing practice by network businesses to recognise the communities in which consumers live and do business, as well as to recognise the consumers who ultimately pay for network services. Engagement with consumers and communities has developed significantly over the past couple of years.

This *Handbook* follows a workshop conducted with ENA in March 2018. Peter Kenyon of ENA was asked by Uniting Communities to lead the workshop and this *Handbook’s* development due to his four decades of community engagement experience, none of which included working with network businesses. Kenyon brought an outsiders perspective to the workshop and *Handbook* development, to help build on the impressive engagement that many network businesses have undertaken over recent years.

There are many ways to engage with consumers and their communities, different approaches suit different circumstances. This *Handbook* provides summaries of a large number of practical approaches to engagement and in Section 4, page 16 lists the strengths, weaknesses and operational tips for each approach.

This *Handbook* provides a summary of the variety of techniques and tools available to engagement staff and facilitators to engage community residents in participatory engagement processes that enable their meaningful contribution to opportunities, issues and challenges related to network regulation and policy as well as community life.

Such processes often involve community residents in activities aimed at:

* information discovery and exchange;
* asset, issue and opportunity identification, and
* consensus negotiation and prioritisation of possible options, strategies and actions.

There is a wide range of methods and tools that can be employed – each has its value and limitations. Selection and combination of these tools depends on specific purpose(s) for community engagement, the extent of financial and technical resources for the exercise and the available timeframe. Obviously, a combination of methodologies enriches the community engagement process.

Community engagement is not a public relations exercise – it is not about a group or institution deciding what to do and then trying to convince community residents that it is the best option. Effective community engagement must be an interactive process involving dialogue, information sharing and decision making.

Finally, there are three fundamental principles for meaningful community engagement:

* maximisation of community involvement, interaction and ownership of the process and its outcomes;
* recognition of the stakeholder diversity of values, ideas, capacities and opinions that exist within any community; and
* creation of meaningful conversation to ensure a two-way flow of information and learning.

***‘I work from the firm belief that “whatever the issue, community is the answer’.***

**(Margaret Wheatley)**

***‘Engagement is figuring things out together’*.**

**(Vince Varian)**

***‘Best practice engagement involves the interplay between three elements – capacity building, relationship development and decision making’.***

**(Energy Networks Association)**

**2. Key Concepts and Definitions**

There are a variety of concepts and terms that are often used in reference to community engagement and consultation. The following are provided to assist definition.

**i. Community**

Community is an umbrella term with different meanings.

***‘A group of people connected by place or sharing and having certain attitudes and interests in common. A sense of attachment is an important element’.*** (Bank of I.D.E.A.S)

**‘*The word “community” is a broad term used to define groups of people; whether they are stakeholders, interest groups, citizen groups etc. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of practice), or a community of affiliation or identity (such as industry or sporting club)’.***

(Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria)

***‘A group of people with something in common who consider they have some connection. Community suggests some form of commonality, whether it be geographic (e.g., neighbourhoods), interest (e.g., communities of practice), a community of identity (e.g., the gay and lesbian community) or virtual (e.g., online communities). Community also suggests boundaries (often self-defined) creating the sense that some people are part of a community and some are not’.*** (Graeme Stuart)

**ii. Consumers**

Consumers are users of products and services. The term is used to mainly include household, small business users of a regulated service, but also applies to large user, commercial and industrial customers

**iii. Stakeholders**

Those individuals, groups or organisations with an active involvement in supplying and using a regulated service, and including retailers, generations, demand management groups, contractors, suppliers and more. Consumers are a subgroup of the broader stakeholder cohort.

**iv. Community Engagement**

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

**Engagement: to establish meaningful contact with someone or become involved in something. This is a broad term that encompasses a range of activities from information provision through to collaboration and partnership.** (Oxford Dictionary)

**People working collaboratively, through inspired action and learning, to create and realize bold visions for their common future.** (Tamarack Centre for Community Engagement – Canada, the definition that Uniting Communities uses)

***‘Community engagement involves facilitating full understanding by community residents of what is happening in their community, soliciting their opinions and ideas, mobilising their active participation and promoting recognition of the choices they have in achieving the future community they desire’.*** (Bank of I.D.E.A.S.)

******

***‘”Engagement” is used as a generic, inclusive term to describe the broad range of interactions between people. It can include a variety of approaches, such as one-way communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships’.***

(Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria)

**v. Public Participation**

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

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

***‘Public participation is the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision – making process’.*** (Victorian Audit-General’s Office)

**vi.** **Community Consultation**

**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.** (Oxford Dictionary)

***'Consultation is about involving community members in decision making in a structured and rigorous way. Information is exchanged, concerns, issues and opportunities identified and responded to, and in many cases positions and consensus negotiated'.*** (Sheridan Coakes)

**vii. Facilitation**

***'To make easy, promote, help forward an action or result, to remove difficulty, promote ease or readiness with aptitude, dexterity or fluency'.*** (Dictionary definition)

**Key Facilitation Roles:**

* **Create an atmosphere of energy, excitement and optimism.**
* **Demystify concepts, processes and strategies.**
* **Optimise the knowledge and expertise of participating groups/individuals.**
* **Broker experiences, models, methodologies, networks and resources that may be relevant.**
* **Encourage collaborative efforts between relevant groups and networks.** (Bank of I.D.E.A.S.)

**viii. Conversation**

***‘Conversation is the most basic community development tool we possess. Conversation has always been the fundamental community building process we have used to share knowledge and ideas. When you have a conversation with another person or a group of people, you listen closely and respond appropriately, so that your conversation is a true exchange of ideas, not just people waiting for their turn to talk. A good conversation makes you feel heard, satisfied, and more informed.’*** (Bank of I.D.E.A.S)

***‘Creating a positive future begins in human conversation. The simplest and most powerful investment any member of a community or an organisation may make is to begin taking with other people as though the answers mattered’.*** (William Greider)

***‘The power of being heard is a wondrous thing’.*** (Mike Mather)

***‘One of the things we need to learn is that every great change starts from very small conversations held among people who care’.*** *(*Margaret Wheatley)

**3. Key Guiding Principles of Effective Community Engagement**

Guiding principles are the fundamental, moral and ethical beliefs that underpin any strategy or methodology. As core values, guiding principles help to define the boundaries for engagement conduct, act as driving forces for project outcomes and help foster trust and collaboration amongst all stakeholders and participants. Based upon successful community engagement strategies across the globe, the following seven principles are recommended for adoption;

* **Genuine Commitment to, and Valuing of Community Input:** all community stakeholders have access to relevant and credible information related to engagement goals, plus practical support to enable them to genuinely and strategically engage in conversations and option decision-making.
* **Inclusive Participation:** respect for, and creation of opportunities for the perspectives of all community stakeholders to be freely and fairly expressed and heard; opposing all forms of discrimination whether based on ability, ethnicity, age, gender, social circumstances or sexual preference.
* **Dialogue:** Commitment to a genuine conversation and a two-way exchange of information and learning.
* **Integrity and Transparency:** openness, honesty and consistency about the scope, limits and purpose of the community engagement processes.
* **Trust and Respect:** provision of adequate time and space to build strong relationships, trust and confidence with community stakeholders.
* **No ‘*one size fits all’* Approach:** provision of adequate time, skill and resources to develop the best engagement methodologies appropriate to place, engagement goals and diversity of community stakeholders.
* **Feedback:** ‘*closing the loop’* and engaging in reporting back to community and evaluation of efforts.

**4. Steps in Successful Community Engagement**

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in their resource *Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit* has provided an excellent seven step process framework to successfully engage communities;

## **Step 1: Purpose**

## Having a clear purpose helps focus goals and maximise the impact of engagement activities. To clarify the purpose, DHHS identifies important five sub-steps;

1. **Define the purpose -** the reason for undertaking engagement. This may involve outlining the problem or issue you are trying to address, the decision you wish to reach or the relationships you wish to build.
2. **Define the objectives -** the desired outputs of your engagement process. Are you trying to reach a certain decision or hoping to gather feedback on a proposal?
3. **Project objectives vs. engagement objectives -** objectives may vary for each stage of the project and may differ from the overall project objective.
4. **Outline the scope and limitations *-*** your engagement process will necessarily be limited by a range of factors. These may include time, staff, transport, funding and stakeholder capacity.
5. **Identify negotiable and non-negotiable elements *-*** each engagement project will have a set of factors or decisions that can be influenced by stakeholders and a set that cannot. This identification will allow participants to understand what they can influence.

DHHS provide a useful set of **key questions** that enable understanding of theunderlying purposes of a specific engagement exercise; namely:

* Why do you need to engage?
* Will you need to engage in more than one way?
* What will success look like?
* What engagement skills do you have within your team? What skills need developing?
* What are your limitations?
* What resources do you have available?

**Step 2: Stakeholder Identification**

Clear stakeholder identification will help in making informed decisions about who to engage with and how best to do so. In the stakeholder identification process, one must also consider the level of influence of the stakeholder or stakeholder group and their capacity for committing to the engagement exercise.

As mentioned above in *Guiding Principles*, inclusive participation is fundamental to effective engagement. All communities are diverse and include people of different backgrounds, values, contributions, needs and aspirations. It is important to not only engage with your high influence stakeholders, but to enable participation from participants who may not be frequently heard or who may be harder to reach.

Fostering inclusiveness and valuing difference also involves the tailoring of engagement processes to enable diverse communities and individuals to fully participate.

DHHS advocate careful consideration be given to the following:

* the needs and capacities of your stakeholders;
* engagement approaches that are responsive to diverse needs, communication and cultural preferences;
* barriers to stakeholder involvement and strategies to address them;
* resources, mentoring or training that may be required to enable certain people to participate;
* identification of participants who have been traditionally excluded from the process;
* using a variety of communication methods to engage harder to reach groups.

DHHS again provide a useful set of **reflective questions** relating to stakeholder identification; namely –

* Who are the stakeholders that are critical to the issue/theme?
* Who will be impacted by the issue/theme?
* Who has an interest in the issue/theme?
* How can you ensure your engagement is inclusive?
* What are your possible participant capacities, needs and limitations?
* Who are the stakeholders who have been traditionally excluded from decision making?
* How can you address the barriers to different stakeholders engaging?

## 

## **Step 3: Level of Participation**

Once a clear purpose has been defined and your community stakeholders identified, it is important to consider which level of participation your engagement exercise requires.

**The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum**

This *Handbook* endorses the *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum* as the theoretical basis for stakeholder engagement. *The IAP2 engagement spectrum* represents the most widely accepted and used participation model across government, business, local government and the community sectors. The *Spectrum of Public Participation* was developed to help clarify the role of the public (or community) in planning and decision-making, and how much influence the community has over planning or decision-making processes.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum identifies five levels of public participation (or community engagement); namely –

**Inform –** providing information to participant stakeholders.

**Consult –** obtaining stakeholder feedback on alternatives for potential courses of action or decisions made.

**Involve –** working directly with participant stakeholders to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and reflected in proposals or policy.

**Collaborate –** partnering with community stakeholders at each stage of a project.

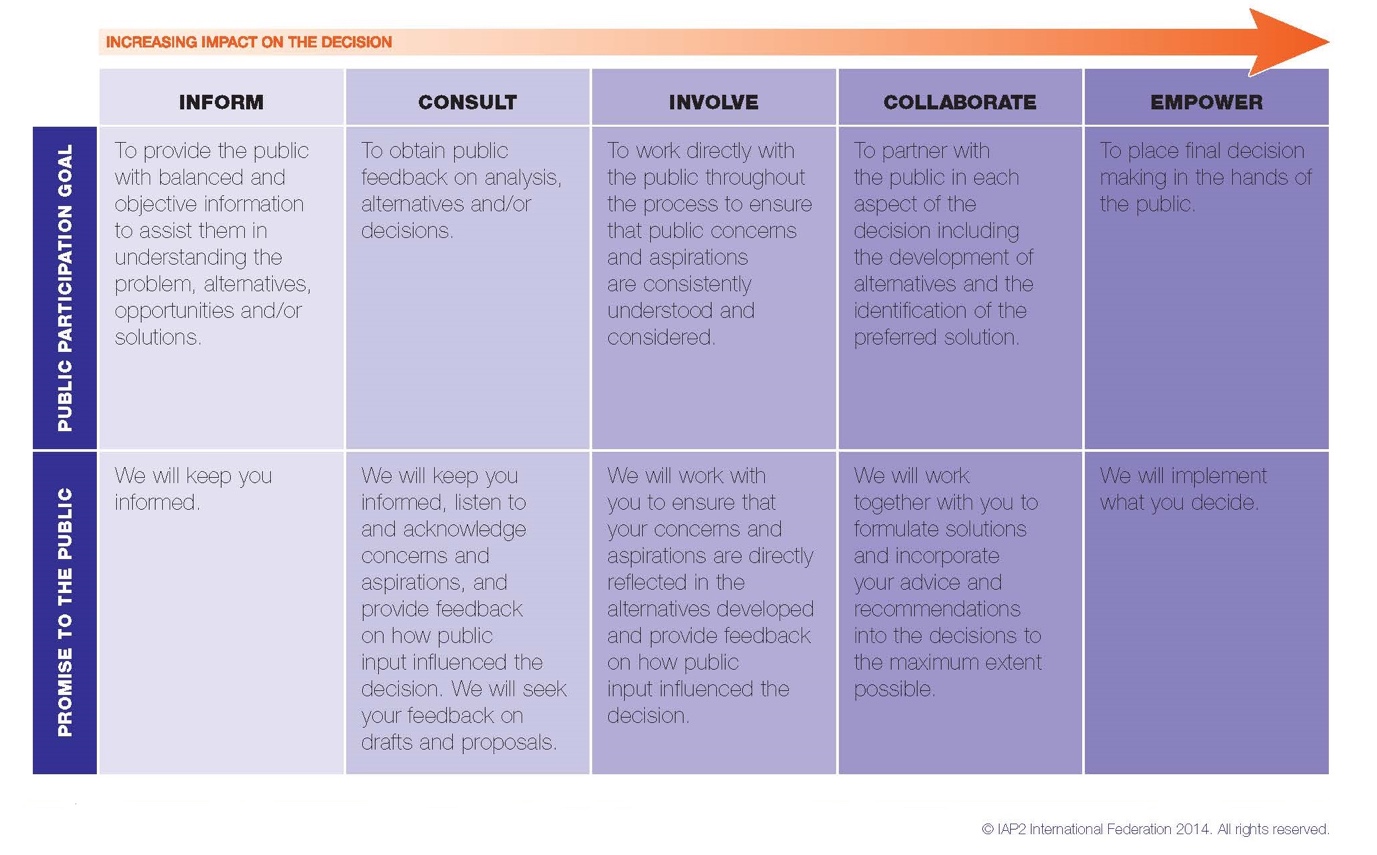
**Empower –** placing final decision making in the hands of the stakeholder community.

To determine the appropriate level of participation, DHHS believe the following need to be considered:

* **Purpose*:*** your reasons for engaging and the results you hope to achieve will help to determine which level of participation is appropriate. If your engagement initiative aims to implement decisions made by your stakeholders, then a high degree of participation may be required. However, if your project simply aims to keep the public informed, then a lower level of participation may be appropriate.
* **Stakeholders**: different community stakeholders will have different needs, expectations and capacity. These factors need to be considered in determining an appropriate level of participation, choice of methodologies and resourcing required for engagement.
* **Resources and Timeframes:** the resources and timeframes available to you will have a significant impact on the level of engagement you can realistically achieve.

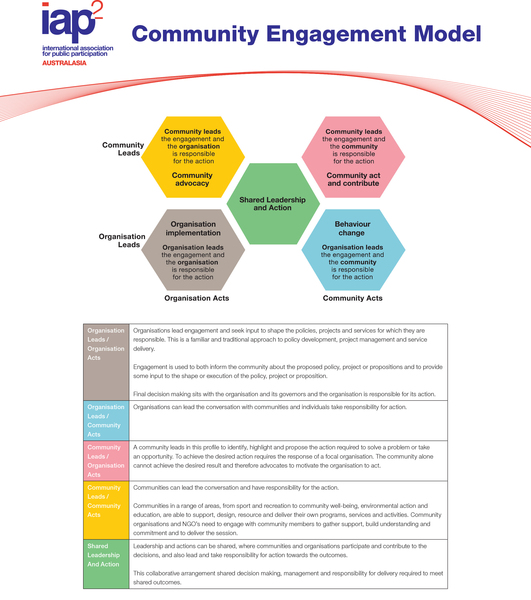
The further to the right on *the Spectrum*, the more influence the community has over decisions. However, each level can be appropriate depending on the context. It is important to recognise they are levels; not steps or stages. *The Spectrum* shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, *the Spectrum* articulates the public participation goal and the promise being made to the public at each participation level. For larger, more complex engagement initiatives, or those with multiple community stakeholders, it is likely that a variety of different methods across the levels to engage different groups will be required.

The two diagrams below illustrate the *IAP2 Spectrum* and *IAP2 Community Engagement Model*.



**Diagram 1. IAP2 Spectrum**

**Diagram 2. IAP2 Community Engagement Model**



**Step 4: Develop an Engagement Plan**

In the engagement planning process, it is important to tailor your approach and design an Engagement Plan to address your engagement goal(s) and meet stakeholder needs and expectations. As community stakeholders may have differing capacities and aspirations regarding participation, a tailored approach will help accommodate and encourage diversity in participants. *The Engagement Plan* needs to include appropriate tools and mechanisms to ensure equitable processes for all stakeholders and transparent decision making. See Section 5: Community Engagement Toolsbelow for the full range of possibilities.

A typical Engagement Plan according to DHHS should be a live document and include:

* purpose
* objectives
* stakeholders
* level of participation
* commitment to your stakeholders
* engagement tasks, methodologies and tools
* timeframes
* roles and responsibilities
* budget
* resourcing
* limitations
* risks
* feedback plan
* evaluation plan.

### The **key questions** identified by DHHS are:

* Is the *Engagement Plan* purposeful, prepared, genuine, inclusive and communicative?
* Are your timeframes and resources realistic?
* Are you engaging early enough in the process?
* Have you established clear parameters with your stakeholders around their level of involvement?
* Do you have the resources to undertake the chosen engagement methods?

**Engagement Risks**

DHHS identify the following as the common risks in stakeholder engagement:

* Stakeholder expectations are not met or do not match engagement objectives.
* Stakeholders do not have adequate time to participate, especially when timeframes are tight.
* Certain stakeholders are ‘*over consulted’*.
* Key stakeholders are excluded from engagement.
* Stakeholders believe engagement activities are tokenistic or shallow.
* The purpose and objectives of the engagement are not clear.
* The *Engagement Plan* fails to take account of the history or previous relationships with stakeholders.
* The *Engagement Plan* ignores ethical principles and responsibilities.

**Step 5: Implement and Monitor Engagement**

It is vital that the engagement process reflects the engagement principles outlined in Section 3 above and achieves genuine dialogue and input with community stakeholders. It is important to ensure all engagement staff/volunteers are well versed in the *Engagement Plan* and understand their roles in delivering it. It is also important to communicate clearly with community stakeholders during the implementation process. Ensure community stakeholders are provided with clear and consistent messaging on the process and their role within it.

During your engagement you should also monitor the implementation of individual engagement tasks as detailed in your Engagement Plan, especially for larger engagement projects. By monitoring your Engagement Plan you can better manage risks, address issues as they arise, and anticipate or communicate any significant delays.

**Key questions** suggested by DHHS:

* Are all engagement staff/volunteers well versed in the *Engagement Plan* and their role in delivering it?
* Do you have adequate resources organised to implement your *Engagement Plan*?
* What processes have you put in place to obtain and respond to early feedback from community stakeholders?

**Step 6: Feedback**

As indicated in the above Engagement Principles, once your engagement activities are complete, it is important to provide meaningful feedback to your community stakeholders about how their input and feedback has been used. Reporting back on the stakeholder engagement process will ensure that stakeholders feel that their contributions have made a difference to the outcome of the initiative. This in turn encourages community stakeholders to want to participate in the future.

Reporting back could be done by providing participants with written feedback, by holding feedback sessions or forums, or by using print and digital communication. Whatever the method, it is important you take every opportunity to provide feedback to your stakeholders. The diverse needs and capacities of your community stakeholders need to be considered in providing feedback.

**Key questions** suggested by DHHS:

* What input did your community stakeholders have and how was it used?
* How will you provide feedback to participants?
* What communication methods will you use?
* How will you communicate your engagement process or project’s outcomes, successes and learnings?

**Step 7: Evaluate**

All engagement processes should conclude with an evaluation to measure how effective the *Engagement Plan* was in achieving its objectives, and to capture the lessons learned during the initiative. Evaluating engagement processes will inform and improve future practice, engagement policy development and increase the organisation’s evidence base. This will be beneficial to both the organisation and to our stakeholders.

To measure the effectiveness of the engagement strategy, evaluation should be considered at both the beginning and end of a project and progress should be monitored throughout. The nature of the evaluation will vary depending on the complexity and size of your engagement process. This is a key step and should not be excluded.

### **Key questions suggested by DHSS:**

* What has worked well? What has been learnt?
* To what extent did the engagement process meet the engagement objectives?
* To what extent did the engagement process contribute to the overall project objectives?
* To what extent was the engagement process responsive to diverse community stakeholders?
* Were there any unexpected challenges?
* What could be done differently?
* Has it delivered the outcomes sought for participants? Are participants satisfied?

Regarding impact, evaluation, measurement and reporting,there are many models that could be used. One approach that is gaining increasing usage, both in the community and government sectors, is the ***Results-Based Accountability (RBA) model* (or *Outcomes-Based Accountability***) with its simple focus on three key questions; namely –

* ***How much did we do?*** -demonstrates activity data outputs.
* ***How well did we do it?*** *-* demonstrates the relevance and quality of activities and whether they are *‘hitting the mark’* regarding outcomes.
* ***Is anyone better off?*** *-* demonstrates that communities and consumers have improved input and contribution.

RBA enables the use of both quantitative and qualitative instruments. RBA assists in the gathering of evidence and enables communication of impact. RBA has some critical advantages; namely:

* Gets from talk to action quickly;
* Is a simple, common sense process that everyone can understand;
* Helps groups to surface and challenge assumptions that can be barriers to innovation;
* Builds collaboration and consensus; and
* Uses data and transparency to ensure accountability for both the well-being of people and the performance of programs.

See [www.raguide.org](http://www.raguide.org) and Mark Friedman’s publication ‘*Trying Hard is not Good Enough’* for more information on Results Based Accountability.

# **Barriers to Effective Stakeholder Engagement**

DHSS in their community engagement initiatives have identified several common barriers to effective stakeholder engagement;

* Unclear purpose;
* Insufficient skills or resources;
* Non-inclusive engagement approaches including a lack of facilitation skills in cultural awareness and inclusive engagement;
* Engagement fatigue;
* Failure to provide feedback on how stakeholder input has been used;
* Failure to evaluate.

**4. Community Engagement Tools**

As mentioned above, choosing the right tool or combination of tools for engaging your community is a critical step in the engagement planning process. Below are 27 tools, summarised under the five IAP2 levels, though certain tools when used in combination may be used at a variety of levels. Also note, that each tool summary indicates whether its value is primarily ‘*diverging’* (i.e. predominantly focussed on generating ideas and information) or ‘*converging*’ (i.e. brings information together and enables decisions to be made or a solution or recommendation to be identified) or enables both.

**i. Engagement Tools for INFORM level**

**a. PRINTED INFORMATION**

Involves the provision of fact sheets, brochures, newsletters, media advertising, letters, position papers, media releases etc. Such information needs to inform, excite, encourage interest and solicit response. Can be directly mailed or conducted electronically through e-newsletters, emails or via SMS. This is a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Provides profile to the organisation, exercise, or initiative (especially during times of low activity)
* Straightforward exercise
* Can inform large numbers of people
* Allows people to absorb information at their convenience
* Can be targeted to specific subgroups
* Can help reduce misinformation
* Can be used with a variety of other techniques
* A newsletter can give regular updates and create a sense of positive movement or change.
* A mailing list can be built up

**Limitations:**

* Provides no interaction or immediate reaction
* Allows potential misinterpretation
* No guarantee materials will be read
* Does not enable direct feedback
* Can be costly
* Only suitable for small amounts of relatively basic information
* May be viewed as a ‘*PR/selling*’ job

**Operational Tips:**

* Keep it short and simple
* Give attention to quality, layout and appeal - must excite!
* Proof-read all documents
* Seek feedback from random selected people before public release
* Provide response details and encourage and assist feedback and two-way communication (e.g. reply-paid forms and envelopes)
* Give attention to inclusive language - avoid jargon
* Provide information in variety of appropriate languages
* Utilise visuals
* Avoid glossy/slick publications
* Use in combination with other engagement activities

**b. DISPLAYS**

A community event intended to provide project information and raise awareness about particular issues. Displays can be interactive, and can be used as part of a forum, workshop, exhibition, conference or other event. Sites involving a static display may be located at shopping centres, council offices, libraries, community or neighbourhood centres, schools, childcare centres etc.This is a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Focuses public attention on an issue
* Relative low cost
* Enables visual displays
* Can reach large number of people
* Can reach people who may not participate in public forums or meetings

**Limitations:**

* Public must be motivated to attend
* Focuses on information dissemination rather than information exchange
* Distribution site may be overcrowded with information, and materials get lost
* May be expensive to prepare display
* Reactions and issues cannot be immediately explored
* Can damage the sponsor’s reputation if not done well

**Operational Tips:**

* Choose a high pedestrian traffic area e.g. shopping centres, window display of a prominent building, local library
* May be more successful if combined with open days and/or permanent shop front
* Advertise and publicise the event with emphasis on the issue to be considered; Advertise times when display or exhibit will be open
* Provide adequate staffing and consider the employment of volunteers
* Consider duty of care and insurance issues
* Give attention to quality and best practice merchandising principles
* Use visuals, photographs, maps, humour
* Consider electronic displays (e.g. touch screens, TV or video presentations etc.)
* If setting up a permanent display, update regularly and remove materials when past their use by date
* Provide contact details and response options
* Provide take away information
* Preferably staff the display with person(s) whose role(s) are specifically public interaction
* Provide reference to other community engagement options
* Regularly manage upkeep of information
* Develop a distribution list
* Collate feedback and publish result

**c. WEBSITE**

Involves the provision of information via electronic means directly into a household. It is now a popular way to provide information to the public. Websites are increasingly being used to target the online community.This is both a ‘*diverging*’ and ‘*converging*’ tool.

**Strengths:**

* Capable of reaching a large audience with enormous amount of information at low cost
* Ideal community noticeboards
* Readily updateable and able to dispatch information with relative ease
* Popular information source, especially for younger generations
* Enables visual displays
* Can contain a great deal of information that can be updated
* Can use a variety of languages
* Increasing number of web-based platforms that allow two-way engagement, including use of webinars

**Limitations:**

* Disadvantages people with no or limited access and/or digital literacy
* Technical difficulties
* Potential of information overload

**Operational Tips:**

* Good website design is essential
* Ensure ease of navigation.
* Keep information updated
* Ensure younger community members are involved in production and servicing
* Have alternative communication options for those who are not web-literate or do not have access to the internet

**d. MEDIA INITIATIVES**

Involves the use of media through either paid advertising or use of editorial and interviews. Advertising can be used for information dissemination and/or solicitation of feedback through a clip out coupon. Securing free media is either via news release distribution or securing interview opportunities (print, radio or television). This is a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Can reach a broad and significant audience
* Low or no cost
* Media coverage always provokes interest
* Can be used to motivate participation in other community engagement exercises
* Can alert media organisations to an issue/event and may encourage their active participation through civic journalism

**Limitations:**

* Potential for misinformation
* No interaction

**Operational Tips:**

* Must be newsworthy
* See **Section 8** below – *‘Tips for Working Effectively with the Media’*

**e. SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES**

Social media refers to digital channels that allow the creation, sharing and exchange of user-generated information, ideas, and pictures/videos with online communities or social networks. Applications may include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, YouTube, LinkedIn and Research Gate. This is both a ‘*diverging*’ and ‘*converging*’ tool.

**Strengths:**

* Can reach a broad and significant audience
* Cost effective
* Allows immediate and real time interaction on issues as they happen
* Clear data measurement and analytics can be built in
* Can be used to motivate participation in other community engagement exercises

**Limitations:**

* Potential for misinformation
* May exclude some groups with limited or no internet access or digital literacy

**Operational Tips:**

* Ensure resources to respond to responses
* Tailor the social media strategy to suit the platform used

**ii. Engagement Tools for CONSULT level**

**a. BRIEFINGS/COMMUNITY GROUP PRESENTATIONS**

Involves the provision of presentations to, and interaction with key stakeholder groups. Addresses to community groups may be a very useful technique to disseminate information and solicit feedback on a particular project/initiative/issue. Service clubs, churches, men’s sheds etc. are always interested in presentations on relevant topics. This is primarily a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Groups with an identifiable interest and relevance can be targeted and reached
* Relatively easy to organise
* Cost effective
* Potential to establish new working relationships and allies
* Enables opportunity for feedback, dialogue and interaction
* Enables control of information, and opportunities to correct misinformation
* Possibility of reaching a diverse range of people
* Gives opportunity to reflect, evaluate and adjust messages
* Useful public relations activity – builds community goodwill
* Allows presentations to be tailored with specific information suited to different groups

**Limitations:**

* May exclude certain groups
* Requires a presenter with effective public speaking/engagement abilities
* Time consuming
* Inaccurate information may get passed on by audience members
* Information may be used inappropriately
* Can raise expectations
* Does not provide a forum for making decisions

**Operational Tips:**

* Keep it short and simple
* Use clear, jargon free inclusive language
* Use visuals that illustrate the verbal and written content
* Accompany with printed information
* Use effective public speakers and credible resource persons
* Target groups with relevance to project, issue, or initiative
* Approach groups - do not wait to be asked
* Fit in with the group's regular meeting times
* Tailor presentation to group and its background- spend time researching that background
* Encourage participants to pass on the information to others in the community
* Leave printed information
* Concerns and ideas need to be recorded
* Always outline opportunities for ongoing participation

**b. SURVEYS, QUESTIONAIRES, AND RESPONSE SHEETS**

Surveying is a data collection tool, whereby participants are asked to self-report their experiences or opinions via a questionnaire. A survey questionnaire can be mailed-out, compiled through face to face interviews, completed over the telephone, or increasingly, completed on the internet. This can be in the form of an open online community, with an open conversation through a web page. Surveying may involve blanket, random or selected distribution. Questionnaires ensure that exactly the same questions are presented to each person surveyed, and this helps with the reliability of the results. This is primarily a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Can gather opinions of a large number of people, thus ensuring a representative community view
* Can gather information from people other than those who attend meetings
* Less personal than interviewing, their anonymity can encourage more honest answers
* Can gather specific information
* If done regularly, surveys can monitor trends in public views over time
* Can generate a data base
* Works well to reach respondents who live in remotely
* Can be used for statistical validation
* Allows results to be extrapolated by subgroups
* Allows the respondent to fill out at their convenience
* Internet-based surveys are convenient and cost-effective
* Useful to supplement other methods (e.g. focus groups, personal contact etc.)

**Limitations:**

* Can be expensive exercise
* Generally, only useful for qualitative data
* Low response rates can bias the results
* Require expertise in their design and the analysis. Poor design may result in biases and erroneous results
* Customer response to surveys (i.e. the proportion of surveys completed and returned) is typically extremely low – a good response is unlikely to exceed 20% or 30% of the surveys administered. A Low response often occurs when using a mail out/drop off return system
* Surveys may exclude certain groups and are thus unlikely to generate completely representative samples – does depend on a high degree of literacy
* Communities are often over surveyed
* Questions may be misinterpreted
* May not allow two-way communication (exception is the structured interview conversation questionnaire described below)
* Collation and interpretation can be time consuming

**Operational Tips:**

* Have a clear purpose and decide on the end use of results before construction
* Trial questions with a small sample (pilot group) to determine whether questions are unbiased, straightforward, unambiguous and not open to misinterpretation
* Be diligent about survey methodology and question construction (perhaps seek professional assistance in designing survey); effective question construction is a skill
* Include description of purpose in a preface or covering note
* Vary question types - include open ended questions
* Collection and method of analysis be determined before distribution
* Ensure questions are in a logical sequence
* Avoid using jargon and technical language
* Keep survey as brief and as simple as possible
* Try to ensure survey is administered to all interested stakeholders
* Telephone surveys, while typically more expensive than other surveys, usually provide better response rates and offer the chance to clarify questions for respondents
* Boost response rates by providing incentives or issuing reminders to complete them
* Include a return envelope/freepost address to encourage participation
* Develop a software package to capture results
* Avoid collecting data already available elsewhere e.g. census data
* Statistically tested results have more credibility
* Ensure results are fed back to community
* Consider the feasibility of using other languages than just English

**c. BIG IDEA POST CARDS**

Involves the design and printing of post card size cards which call for the submission of good ideas or responses to a particular issue or question. Ideal for distribution through community ‘*bumping spaces’* like local coffee shops or as an additional response outlet at other engagement activities. This is primarily a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Easy way to generate many ideas or responses
* Taps into individual creativity and ideas
* Low cost
* Adds to organisational profile
* Provides direct information gathering
* Builds a data base

**Limitations:**

* Does not allow for a two-way exchange of information
* No opportunity for community consensus on particular responses or ideas

**Operational Tips:**

* Accompany with a promotional campaign
* Link with prizes for a broader response
* Provide collection bins at key ‘*bumping spaces’*
* Always include an opportunity to express how respondent(s) can help make the idea a reality
* Report back to community via media regarding ideas or responses

**d. INFORMATION SESSIONS/DAYS/OPEN HOUSES/OPEN DAYS**

Involves the provision at a central location of displays, printed information and most important, project team members to answer questions or discuss issues within a comfortable environment. Represents a relatively informal event that enables the public to drop in at their convenience and obtain information and have a chat. This is primarily a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Allows the public to participate at their convenience and fit in to personal timetables
* Enables participants to engage at their own pace – participants can stay as long or short a time as they wish
* Provides an opportunity for informal discussion at participant convenience – fosters communication
* Provides opportunity to correct misinformation
* Allows opportunity for in-depth small group and one-on-one discussion
* Allows direct contact with interested stakeholders
* Can break down barriers and builds organisational credibility
* Often used as a lead-in activity to other engagement events - achieves early publicity for that activity
* Where a local issue is contentious, it provides a relaxed forum where conflict is less likely to occur
* Meets the information and interaction needs of many members of the public who are not attracted to typical and large public meetings

**Limitations:**

* Still primarily information giving, rather than receiving
* Expensive to create attractive displays
* Success relies on project staff knowledge and personal interaction/communication skills
* May only attract a limited cross section of the community
* Participation is always difficult to predict
* Protesters may use the opportunity to disrupt the event
* Usually more staff intensive than a meeting
* May not provide the opportunity to be heard that some community members were expecting

**Operational Tips:**

* Location(s) is the critical factor- needs to be central and accessible
* Hold at times and locations convenient to community members; be flexible with opening times.
* Requires extensive and creative advertising
* Be there when you say you are going to be there
* Organisers need to maintain a low-key presence but ensure everyone is acknowledged (verbally or non-verbally) as soon as they enter the space
* Requires project team members with excellent knowledge and strong communication skills
* Must be held at convenient times and locations for community
* Issues raised need recording and a response
* Provide take away material
* Combine with a feedback form or opportunities for community members to record or vote regarding their priorities and choices
* Provide refreshments
* Collect contact details to forward future information
* Consider rotating the venue location

**e. TELEPHONE ACCESS/INFORMATION HOTLINES**

Comprises the use of the telephone to provide or solicit information on a particular issue, initiative, or concern. Service is personally manned or through the use of an answering service. May involve provision of an 1800 number. This is primarily a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Easy access for community members
* Offers an inexpensive and simple device for publicity, information and public input
* Provides a good service to the public by preventing people *‘doing the run around’* to access project information
* Portrays an image of ‘*accessibility*’ for an organisation
* Can be an avenue for citizens to feel more involved in their community

**Limitations:**

* Affords limited interaction
* Language limitations
* Level of success depends on recording and good follow-up and feedback procedures
* Does not generally allow complex issues to be addressed and discussed
* If staffed by volunteers, can be time consuming

**Operational Tips:**

* Focus on maximising user-friendly nature
* If personally manned, use project team with good knowledge and strong customer service skills
* Provide translation options
* Ensure good recording, follow up and feedback procedures
* Must be adequately advertised to be successful
* Works best with an easy-to-remember phone number
* Ensure all information is recorded and analysed
* Ensure designated contact must have sufficient knowledge of the project to be able to answer questions quickly and accurately

**iii. Engagement Tools for INVOLVE level**

**a. PERSONAL CONTACT/ONE TO ONE CONVERSATIONS**

Involves a conversation with individuals who have a stake or interest in the issue or project. Conversations can occur in people's homes, work places, project office or community meeting locations e.g. local coffee shop. An example of use is a door knock visitation initiative to businesses within a street regarding future street improvements. This is primarily a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* People feel valued and listened to – builds good community relations.
* Generates a great deal of qualitative and in-depth information and data through people sharing their opinions, experiences and feelings.
* Allows for a two-way exchange of information.
* Provides direct information gathering on public concerns and issues.
* Creates opportunity for honest conversation that can build relationship and trust.

**Limitations:**

* Time consuming to conduct and analyse- time and cost restraints can limit the number of participants.
* Some key individuals may be left out – difficult to involve all interested people.
* Opinions may not be representative.
* No opportunity for community consensus on particular issues or options.
* Some people feel uncomfortable with individual contact.
* Participants can take their frustrations out on the interviewer.
* One to one contact may be culturally inappropriate for some ethnic groups.
* Some people are tired of being interviewed.

**Operational Tips:**

* Give attention to design, as poor questions can fail to generate useful information.
* The design of interviews must consider the selection of who is interviewed, and the phrasing of questions to ensure they are not leading or misleading.
* Pre-test questions before beginning.
* Seek diversity of participation – avoid sample bias.
* Make it easy to be engaged – it is preferable to go to a person’s chosen venue.
* Interviewing is a skill that needs cultivating and developing.
* Attempt to identify and involve all key stakeholders.
* Utilise appropriate meeting spaces.
* Care and sensitivity must always be exercised by interviewers.
* Allow people time to organise to participate and think about the relevant issues.
* Be organised - prepare appropriate introductions, questions and farewells.
* Maybe link with a questionnaire that can be left and picked up and returned later.
* At conclusion, always thank people for their participation, indicate what will happen with the information and other opportunities to contribute ideas and opinions.

**b. STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CONVERSATIONS**

Involves the preparation of a questionnaire which is used as a means of creating a dialogue with the interviewees, thus eliciting detailed information and enabling elaboration on responses. This technique has been made popular in Australia through the Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) Program. See Bank of I.D.E.A.S. [*Business Expansion and Retention Manual*](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/boifiles/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Economic+Development/BEAR-Manual-2014.pdf). This is primarily a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Provides in-depth and quality responses
* Useful for targeting key stakeholders who have specific knowledge about an issue
* Provides opportunity to get understanding of concerns and issues of key stakeholders
* Allows for a genuine conversation

**Limitations:**

* Extremely time consuming e.g. within the *BEAR Program* each interview usually requires one and a half hours
* Can be expensive
* Interviewers must engender trust or risk negative response to the format
* Requires skilled interviewers

**Operational Tips:**

* Requires prerequisite interviewer training
* Ideally, use two interviewers – one managing the conversation, the other recording interviewee opinions and choices
* Give attention is needed in question construction and question order
* Limit questionnaire to less than 25 question items
* Always pre-test
* Arrange times and venue at the convenience of the interviewee
* Ensure uninterrupted interview time for at least one hour
* Important that all interviewees receive feedback about results and outcomes of exercise

**c. FOCUS GROUPS**

Represents a structured group conversation-based interview situation. Focus groups are used to gather information focussed on a particular topic/issue. A facilitator conducts a *'group interview'* gaining a comprehensive range of views from a small group of people (5-12 persons). A focus group may be conducted to gain opinions and views and generate ideas. Focus group discussions typically start broad and progressively focus the discussion on to a single question or point. This is a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Provides an in-depth focus on a specific issue
* Flexibility
* Relatively inexpensive
* Can provide fairly dependable data within a short time frame
* Can verify prior assumptions
* Brings out subtle variations in community member views
* Particularly good for identifying the reasons behind people’s likes and dislikes
* Group environment may generate different dynamics and other issues and topics to a one to one interview situation. Focus groups can offer deeper insights into complex issues than interviews might, because individuals are exposed to a variety of views rather than just recounting their own
* Provides opportunity to observe participant interaction
* Less time consuming than individual conversations/interviews
* Excellent for generating lateral thinking and ‘*group leapfrogging’*

**Limitations:**

* Limited participation- the benefit of focus groups is depth, not breadth, of opinion and viewpoints. They may not be representative of a broader segment of the community
* Potential for participant(s) to dominate and/or for the conversation to be hijacked by vocal and dominant participants
* Personal power and group dynamics may influence opinions expressed
* Requires a skilled facilitator
* Participants may not represent majority community feeling or variety of opinions in a community
* May be confronting for some to be open about their opinions depending on how well participants know one another

**Operational Principles**

* Always use an experienced and skilled facilitator
* Run several focus groups rather than just one. Ideally, the saturation principle should be followed, with groups run until the investigator is hearing no new information
* Always use open ended questions
* Take care in selecting who is invited to participate in a focus group – the same issues about sample bias that afflict surveys and interviews, can also limit insights from focus groups
* Important to provide feedback to participants
* Always combine with other methodologies
* Never exceed 12 participants – best number is 5-6 persons
* Engage a co-facilitator to record issues and ideas

**d. PUBLIC MEETINGS/FORUMS**

Public meetings are open gatherings held to engage a wide audience in information sharing and dialogue. Public meetings increase awareness of an issue or proposal, and can be a starting point for, or an ongoing means of engaging, further public engagement. The format usually involves presentations followed by discussion and questions. This is a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Allows the involvement and input of a wide range of people
* Opportunity to present information to a large number of community members; to disseminate detailed information and decisions throughout the community
* Relatively low cost
* Allows two-way communication and immediate feedback
* Non-confrontational to most participants
* A traditional and familiar method of engagement
* Can develop consensus for action on complex issues that affect the broad community
* Provides opportunities for exploring alternative strategies and building consensus
* Provides a good focal point for media interest
* Often provide the springboard for the establishment of a common-interest action group which will continue to act on the issues raised and suggestions made
* Often contribute to building a sense of community
* attendance levels provide an indicator of the level of interest within a community on a particular issue

**Limitations:**

* Large audiences limit the quality of interaction, conversation and idea/opinion exchange.
* Onus is on community members to attend
* Can be time and resource intensive
* Unless well facilitated, event can be heavily influenced or distracted by a small number of vocal attendees who do not necessarily represent views of wider public
* Community members may not be willing to work together
* May not achieve consensus
* Does not ensure all views are heard - participants may not come from a broad enough range to represent the entire community
* Difficult to utilise for complex and contentious issues
* Can create opportunity for degeneration into emotional slanging matches
* Success of meeting may be judged purely by the size of the turnout
* Can raise expectations.

**Operational Tips:**

* Large turnout requires creative and extensive promotion and personal invitation.
* Select the best time to attract the largest number of participants
* Provide refreshments – *‘food and drink are what water is to fish’*
* Always use strong chairperson/facilitator to keep discussion on track
* Record issues/suggestions publicly
* Be aware of and prepared for potential conflicts
* Agree on the ground rules of meeting conduct prior to commencement. (see Section 7 below - *Community Conversation Ground-Rules / Etiquette*)
* Make clear that two-way communication is the goal
* Ensure a focus on issues not personalities
* Provide opportunities for small group table conversations and informal discussions e.g. refreshment breaks
* Cater for people with disabilities or from non-English speaking backgrounds
* Be prepared to change tack during the meeting
* As chair or facilitator ‘*never lose your temper or positive disposition!!’*

**More information:** see Bank of I.D.E.A.S. handout [‘*Conducting Effective Community Meetings’’*](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/boifiles/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Conversation+and+Facilitation/CONDUCTING-EFFECTIVE-COMMUNITY-MEETINGS.pdf)

**e. WORKSHOPS**

Designed to generate a *'group'* product e.g. lists of issues, range of options or a mutually accepted plan of action. It is a useful method to bring together stakeholders with different values. A workshop is best used when there is a specific focus/issue and a need to generate solutions. Workshops can deliver a report, opinions, suggestions or plans that have been collaboratively developed and agreed to by all participants, on an issue or proposal. This is a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

There are a variety of participatory group techniques that can be used in the workshop process; including:

* **Brainstorming** - A method for developing creative options to a specific problem, issue or scenario. Participants come up with as many deliberately unusual solutions as possible and by pushing the ideas as far as possible. During the brainstorming session there is no criticism of ideas. Once this has been done the results of the brainstorming session can be analysed and the best solutions can be explored. Brainstorming is particularly useful for generating lots of ideas in a short period; encouraging lateral and creative thinking; expanding, *'piggy backing'* or '*leapfrogging*' on the ideas of others; helping participants to temporarily suspend judgement or criticism; and helping shy individuals to participate more effectively.
* **Fishbowl:** represents an inner group of participants in a roundtable format involved in a decision-making process that is *‘witnessed’* by a larger group who have the opportunity for input and questioning
* **Mind Mapping:** developed by Tony Buzan, it is an effective method of notetaking and useful for the generation of ideas by associations. Mind maps help organise information. To make a mind map, one starts in the centre of the page with the main idea, and works outward in all directions, producing a growing and organised structure composed of key words and key images.
* **Nominal group technique:** a group process involving problem identification, solution generation, and decision making. It can be used in groups who want to make their decision quickly but want everyone's opinions taken into account (as opposed to traditional voting, where only the largest group is considered). The method of tallying is the difference. Firstly, every member of the group gives their view of the solution, with a short explanation. Then, duplicate solutions are eliminated from the list of all solutions, and the members proceed to rank the solutions, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and so on.
* **Force Field analysis:** a technique devised by Kurt Lewin that looks at the factors (*forces*) that influence a situation. It looks at forces that are either driving movement toward a goal (helping forces) or blocking movement toward a goal (hindering forces). The tool is useful for making decisions by analysing the forces for and against a change, and for communicating the reasoning behind one’s decision.
* **Values clarification exercise:** Values answer the question of why people do what they do and guide our actions towards the things we believe are good in some way or another. Value clarification exercises/games help to explore theses values, beliefs, motivations and choices within the group context. Very helpful in prioritising e.g. dot democracy activity.
* **Visioning:**  use of gaming and imagination techniques to develop preferred future scenarios, followed by the steps to make them happen.

* **Backcasting:** a method of analysing alternative futures and how desirable futures can be attained. It involves working backward from a desired future endpoint or set of goals to the present to determine the physical feasibility of a particular future and the measures required to reach that end point. End-points are usually chosen for a future of 25 to 50 years.

**Strengths:**

* Maximum interchange of information and ideas
* Enables prioritisation of possible actions
* Enables the creation of a '*group*' product
* Opportunity to hear the ‘*silent voices’*
* Can strengthen ongoing relationships in the community
* Builds ownership and credibility for the outcomes
* Maximises feedback obtained from participants
* Special issue groups get to listen to other voices and opinions

**Limitations:**

* Requires skilled facilitation
* Can be time consuming
* Limited number for effectiveness (12-25 people is an ideal range)
* Can generate unrealistic expectations
* Special interest groups may monopolise Workshop.

**Operational Tips:**

* Utilise a skilled and motivating facilitator
* Create as much space/time for inclusion of small group conversations (six persons or less), and their feedback to the wider group
* Hold additional workshops to meet demand rather than restrict participation.
* Avoid formality
* Create a comfortable environment – pleasant setting, comfortable seating, provision of refreshments etc.
* Hold at convenient time for participants
* Always use meeting ground rules and conversation etiquette - see Section 7 below - *Community Conversation Ground-Rules / Etiquette*
* Always feedback outcomes of the workshop

**f. COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING**

Represents a systematic process for identifying, connecting and mobilising capacities, resources and strengths (individual and organisational) in a community. The critical asset that is discovered is what people care about and willing to act upon, and who else cares about it. This is a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Represents a strong community building initiative
* An intentional appreciative approach that focuses on positivity and possibility
* Discovers and connects community assets
* Mobilises members to address critical community issues around what they care about
* Builds bridges between community members and between community groups

**Limitations:**

* Time consuming
* Requires a person skilled in asset mapping techniques

**Operational Tips:**

* Utilise an asset mapping focused facilitator
* use a variety of audit forms. See [Bank of I.D.E.A.S. website](https://bankofideas.com.au/handouts/)

**g. PHOTOVOICE**

Photovoice aims to add a visual element to engagement processes. Photovoice is a process where community members record information and express ideas, priorities, issues and concerns through photography. Participants engage in photographing their choices, suggestions and/or decisions which are then mounted as a photographic exhibition (with a one-line statement) to stimulate wider community conversation. This is both a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Provides pictorial evidence of community issues – ‘*a picture being worth a thousand words’*
* Provides an alternative means of expression which may help include those who are more visual than literate
* Great initiative to tap into thoughts and ideas of young people
* Provides a snapshot of an area or issue from which to develop indicators and to gauge changes/responses
* Can easily be used in the media (print/television/interactive technologies)
* With the widespread use of mobile phones and digital camera, very easy for people to engage

**Limitations:**

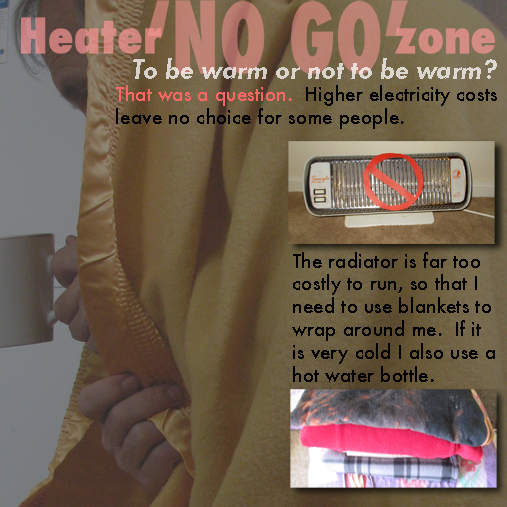
* Time and resource intensive - can be costly to mount exhibition

**Operational Tips:**

* Requires staffing and the coordination of participants
* Organise space and time for reflection and conversation
* Hold briefing session/training for interested participants prior to exercise

The following 2 images are from a photo voice project conducted by Uniting Communities in 2015 where a range of people using their services were loaned a camera, then asked to photograph and comment on “energy prices.”





**h. STUDY CIRCLE**

Study circles provide a venue for in-depth, regular, lengthy discussions that allow exchange and deliberation of information on a particular topic or issue. It comprises 10-15 people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way. A study circle is facilitated by a person/ facilitator who is there not as an expert, but to serve the group by keeping the discussion focused, helping the group consider a variety of views, and process difficult questions. This is both a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Allows participants to gain ownership of the issues
* Allows participants to discover a connection between personal experiences and public policies, and gain a deeper understanding of their own and others’ perspectives and concerns
* Since the dialogue does not promote one particular point of view or try to persuade people to take a specific action, potential coalition partners can usually find ways to work through ownership issues, mistrust or genuine disagreement
* Fosters new connections among community members that lead to new levels of community action

**Limitations:**

* Building a coalition that represents many points of view takes time and effort

**Operational Tips:**

* Requires good facilitation skills and knowledge of the study circle philosophy and processes

**iv. Engagement Tools for COLLABORATE level**

**a. COMMUNITY LIAISON GROUPS/DELIBERATIVE FORUMS/CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES/CITIZEN PANELS**

Involves the formation of a local reference group comprising selected community members due to their expertise or interest in a topic. Groups are usually formed with a specific purpose and mandate to provide broad based input and advice, and usually over the long term (in contrast to focus groups). Ideally groups should be less than 12 people. This is a ‘*converging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Involvement is open to a wide range of people
* A cost-effective way to test ideas and options
* Allows two-way exchange
* Builds community commitment and ownership
* Effectively disseminates detailed information and decisions to members of the organisations or community sectors represented on the group
* Provides opportunities for exploring alternative strategies and building on commonalities and alliances
* Provides for a detailed analysis of project issues, timelines and deliverables and a focus on the outcomes
* Participants gain an understanding of other perspectives leading toward an agreed, integrated outcome – often - allows for development of consensus
* Enhances profile of sponsor
* Builds community capacity
* Highly visible form of participation

**Limitations:**

* Usually restricted to advisory role, lacking any decision-making ability. This can frustrate participants. Frustration often occurs if advice not acted upon
* Resource intensive
* May not be representative of all interests
* Information may not be passed on to broader community
* Success depends on goodwill of all participants
* Success depends on effective leadership
* Potential of participant *'burn out'*. Sustaining the interest and availability of members over the long term may be difficult
* Members’ comments to the media may not coincide with the sponsor’s policy

**Operational Tips:**

* Give attention to membership selection – must have credibility, and be representative of various interests, points of view and background experiences. Diversity of views and backgrounds is essential
* Set and record defined *Terms of Reference*
* Participation should have a predetermined life-line
* Utilise consensus decision making approach
* Recognise and reward participation
* Involve a skilled chairperson/facilitator – leadership is a vital issue
* Tasks and actions need to be outlined and carried out
* Be aware of potential conflicts between members

**b. DESIGN CHARRETTE**

A charrette is an intensive planning session where community members, designers and others collaborate on a vision for their community development. It provides a forum for ideas and offers the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback to the designers. More importantly, it allows everyone who participates to be a mutual author of the eventual plans and actions. Usually occurs over a period from four days to two weeks long. This is a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Great opportunity to gain deep community insight of the future and design options - can open up horizons for community members to imagine and visualise possibilities
* Holistic community analysis
* Excellent option when people need to cut across boundaries and work on a large, collaborative project
* Provides an opportunity for community members to have input at a number of points in the process
* Can save money by being an effective use of time and resources
* Can create meaningful partnerships to ensure implementation
* Builds trust between parties involved
* The charrette process is an exercise of transparency, where information is shared between the design professionals and the stakeholders of a project area
* Builds community capacity, local leadership and partnerships
* Builds commitment to implement plans and actions- ‘*people support what they help to create’*
* Can achieve unexpected outcomes, new energized community efforts and amazing community creativity - provides joint problem solving and creative thinking
* Special interest lobbying can be diffused

**Limitations:**

* Time intensive - the process usually lasts 4–14 days
* Requires appropriate technical support - as specialists are required, the process is costly
* The process can be *‘railroaded’* by vocal stakeholders if not run by a trained design charrette facilitator
* Participants may not be seen as representative of the wider community

**Operational Tips:**

* Requires a dedicated team to administer
* Provide clear guidelines and parameters
* Provide input to stimulate creative thinking and ideas
* Provide appropriate technical support and financial resources
* Requires adequate time provided for reflection and refinement

**c. ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY**

Electronic democracy seeks to embrace existing and emergent media sources as a forum for allowing members of the public to express opinions and seek to influence decision-making within their community, state, country or globally. Participation using the internet through email, online voting and access to information on websites are widely used as participatory tools. Community members can use email or websites to register their opinions on proposed ideas or issues. Its desired outcome is to increase the number and diversity of people who exercise their democratic rights through choices and comments sent to decision-making bodies with regard to proposals and issues. This is a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Creates a virtual public space where people can interact, discuss issues, share ideas and vote
* Allows community members to participate at their own convenience
* Allows citizens to participate at their own convenience
* Can potentially reach a large audience
* Facilitates interactive communication
* Attractive to younger generations
* Disseminates large amounts of information effectively and without distortion
* Can generate a significant data base

**Limitations:**

* May exclude participation by those not online or internet literate
* Results can be manipulated; therefore results of polls should be carefully considered

**Operational Tips:**

* Requires a dedicated team to administer (maybe a volunteer team)
* Community members can become disillusioned if the project is ‘over-hyped’. Keep expectations realistic
* Keep the site well organised and up-to-date

**d. PLANNING4REAL**

Planning4real offers community residents a *‘voice’* to bring about an improvement to their own neighbourhood or community. Community members begin by constructing a three-dimensional model of their neighbourhood/community; from which they construct their community vision by placing suggestion cards on the three-dimensional model, then sorting and prioritising the suggestions. The model is made so that it can be moved from venue to venue, allowing more people to participate.

The intended outcome of Planning4real is to deliver a design or plan that incorporates community ideas, needs and issues and that will therefore be more acceptable and useful to the community. Hopefully it also will give the community a sense of ownership of the plan that may also incorporate elements of ongoing community involvement and monitoring. This is a ‘*diverging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Highly visual, ‘*hands-on’* and participatory activity
* Delivers a three-dimensional model that may help people better envisage planned changes
* Very effective in mobilising community support and interest
* Generates ongoing community involvement – ‘*people support what they help to create’*
* Specific projects are identified, and implementation is set in motion
* Has appeal for those who are more visual/tactile in their approach
* Can help bridge language barriers in multicultural communities
* Great media story
* Builds community capacity

**Limitations:**

* Requires commitment from decision makers to follow through on suggestions – can lead to community frustration if suggestions not acted upon
* Can be expensive to develop the three-dimensional model
* Requires commitment from participants to stay for two and a half hours to participate in the whole process
* Time consuming in terms of follow up and feedback

**Operational Tips:**

* Requires a dedicated and skilled team to oversee
* Ideal community project to engage local service clubs and Men’s Shed

**e. FUTURE SEARCH CONFERENCE**

Usually two to three day event where participants attempt to create a shared community vision of the future. It attempts to bring together those with the power to make decisions with those affected by the decisions to try to agree on a plan of action. Participants are encouraged to explore the past, present and future and make action plans based on common ground. This is a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

‘*A future search conference is a large-group task-oriented ‘conversation’”* (Fred Emery)

**Strengths:**

* Represents a strong community building initiative
* Develops creative and achievable strategies
* Useful in identifying issues at the early stages of a project or process
* Assists in identifying key or priority issues
* Generates support for ongoing involvement - combines formulation and implementation
* Useful when participation of large groups is desirable, and an open forum is sought
* Builds bridges between community members and between community groups - Generates consensus and shared values
* Achieves completion of a task in two or three days (and sometimes evenings) that would take months if left to specialised analysts and experts
* Equal status of participants is supported
* Personal commitment and ownership are emphasised

**Limitations:**

* Time and resource intensive – two/three day time frame may affect the availability of participants
* Can be logistically challenging given the number of potential participants
* Requires the engagement of an experienced facilitator

**Operational Tips:**

* Hire skilled facilitator
* Compile a report of proceedings

**f. NEGOTIATION and MEDIATION**

Negotiation and mediation aims to deal with conflict in a creative and positive way, and to find a solution or a way for people to hear and appreciate the differences between their perspectives. They are designed to create shared understanding through effective and reflective questioning.

Negotiation is the process of searching for an agreement that satisfies various parties. Mediation is the attempt to help parties in disagreement to hear one another, to minimise the harm that can come from disagreement (e.g. hostility or *‘demonising’* of the other parties) to maximise any area of agreement, and to find a way of preventing the areas in disagreement from interfering with the process of seeking a compromise or mutually agreed outcome. They are both a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tools.

**Strengths:**

* Generally used when normal participation methods fail
* Helps participants towards an understanding of other’s viewpoint
* ‘*Win/win’* outcomes
* Promotes accountability on both sides.

**Limitations:**

* Time and resource intensive
* Requires skilled mediator/negotiator
* Requires commitment from both sides
* Moderators can be costly, and their lack of knowledge of the content can be a drawback in the kinds of questions posed
* Can be time consuming; could take months of meetings to find a mutually satisfactory outcome
* Needs all parties to agree to objective criteria by which to assess the ‘*fairness*’ of solutions
* *‘Win-win’* is not guaranteed

.

**Operational Tips:**

* Use a skilled independent mediator/negotiator
* Establish firm operational guidelines
* Seek commitment to the process from both sides
* Works best when the parties concerned are engaged; less well when a representative is asked to negotiate, as they may not feel they have the authority to be flexible in their solutions

**v. Engagement Tools for EMPOWER level**

**(Which generally align with the “deliberative processes” encouraged by the DNA Approach)**

**a. CITIZEN JURIES**

Involves selected members of the wider community being engaged in the democratic decision-making process. Participants are engaged as citizens with no formal alignments or allegiances, rather than experts. Citizen juries use a representative sample of 8-12 citizens (usually selected in a random or stratified manner) who are briefed in detail on the background and current thinking relating to a particular issue and asked to discuss possible approaches. They examine data and evidence by questioning decision-makers, technicians and interested parties – all of whom are witnesses to the process. Citizens are asked to become jurors and make a *‘judgement’* in the form of a report, as they would in legal juries.

Citizen juries can be used to broker a conflict, or to provide a transparent and non-aligned viewpoint. Citizen jurors simply bring to the situation their own knowledge and personal experience. The Jury provides the opportunity to add to that knowledge and to exchange ideas with their fellow citizens. The result is a collective one, in which each juror has a valuable contribution to make. This is a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* Strives to improve representation in participative processes by engaging a cross section of the community on the jury.
* Can be used to moderate divergence and provide a transparent, independent and credible process for decision making.
* Provides a transparent participatory process which can be seen to be independent and credible.
* Provides a public democracy mechanism – a highly visible form of participation.
* Provides citizens with an opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the issue.
* Involves ordinary citizens.
* Pinpoints fatal flaws or gauges public reaction and opinion.
* Great opportunity to develop deep understanding of an issue.
* Can dispel misinformation.
* Can provide unexpected outcomes.

**Limitations:**

* The wider community is distanced from the final decision-making process.
* Can be expensive.
* Group selection can be mistrusted by the wider community.
* Sessions can lose focus.

**Operational Tips:**

* The wider community is distanced from the decision-making process.
* Requires strong organisational support and commitment.
* Timeframe often requires six months- while the event usually lasts four days, ahead of the event, time needs to be allowed to engage jury, hire facilitator, put together briefing or background papers and contact ‘experts’.
* Needs a skilled independent moderator/facilitator.
* Be clear about how the results will be used.
* Jury members need to be representative of the community in consideration.
* Everyone involved and the general public needs to be clear about the results and how they will be used.
* Provide expert witnesses to brief the jury who can be cross-examined and who can spend time discussing the issue with the Jury.
* The commissioning body must follow recommendations or explain why.

**b. PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING (PB)**

PB is another form of deliberative democracy. It is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a public [budget](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budget). Participatory budgeting allows community members to identify, discuss, and prioritise public spending projects, and gives them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent. PB processes are typically designed to involve those left out of traditional methods of public engagement. This is a ‘*diverging’* and ‘*converging’* tool.

The often-quoted best example of PB is the city government of Porto Alegre in Brazil. It 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, wellbeing 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.

**Strengths:**

* Strives to improve representation in participative processes by engaging a cross section of the community.
* Provides a transparent participatory process which can be seen to be independent and credible.
* Provides a public democracy mechanism. It is a highly visible form of participation.
* Provides citizens with an opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the funding decisions.
* Involves ordinary citizens.
* Great opportunity to develop deep understanding of funding arrangements.
* Can provide unexpected outcomes.

**Limitations:**

* Can be expensive.
* Group selection can be mistrusted by wider community.

**Operational Tips:**

* Requires strong organisational support, commitment and management.
* Needs a skilled independent moderator/facilitator.
* Participants need to be representative of the community.
* Everyone involved and the general public needs to be clear about the results and how they will be used.
* The commissioning body must follow recommendations or explain why.

**c. DELIBERATIVE OPINION POLLING**

A Deliberative Opinion Poll (DOP) is a form of [opinion poll](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_poll) that incorporates the principles of [deliberative democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative_democracy). The typical deliberative opinion poll takes a [random](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple_random_sample), representative sample of community members and engages them in deliberation on current issues or proposed policy changes through small-group discussions and conversations with competing experts to create more informed and reflective public opinion.

Compared to ordinary opinion polls, DOPs differ in that participants are informed via briefing notes and access to experts on a particular issue and have time to consider the issue in detail, whereas participants in ordinary opinion polls do not have the opportunity to learn about the issue being measured and may know little about the issue. Key DOP essential elements are ‘*influence, inclusion and deliberation’* (Janette Hartz-Karp). This is a ‘*converging’* tool.

**Strengths:**

* The DOP uses a random sample of the population so that the results can be extrapolated to the community as a whole. The DOP advises decision makers and the media what the public would think if they had enough time to consider the issue properly
* Facilitates interactive communication.
* Participants are exposed to a variety of views and opinions.
* Special interest lobbying can be diffused.
* Builds community capacity.
* Can provide unexpected outcomes.

**Limitations:**

* Time consuming for participants and sponsor.
* Usually needs 250-600 participants, so set up costs can be high.
* With so many participants’ opinions, managing data is a significant undertaking.
* Requires access to experts in a number of fields.
* Mistrust of sponsors and an unfamiliar process can hamper participation.
* Agenda can be too ambitious.
* Requires skilled management.

**Operational Tips:**

* Ensure a skilled facilitator/manager.
* Commit to the full process.
* Ensure adequate resources.
* Achieve a cross section of participants from across the community.
* Ensure that all key elements are included.
* Develop capacity in participants.
* Conduct baseline survey of opinion.

**5. Community Conversation Methodologies**

**a. OPEN SPACE (OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY)**

Open Space was created in the mid 1980’s as a learning experience by Harrison Owens when he discovered that people attending conferences / workshops preferred coffee breaks and lunchtimes more than formal presentation and planning sessions! He discovered that in coffee break and lunchtime, participants chose who they wanted to be with, and shared topics that were of interest to them. The theory behind Open Space is that people will take ownership of issues they wish to address. Participants determine the agendas, the length of the event and the outcomes.

***‘Open Space is a brilliant combination of order and chaos. It is a useful tool for any group of people (five to one thousand participants) who are really committed to exploring something that they all care deeply about’.*** (Harrison Owen)

**Process:**

Open Space events or sessions have no keynote speaker, no pre-arranged schedule of workshops and no panel discussions. Instead, participants learn initially about a process to create their own learning experience. They go about creating and participating in discussion of their own forces. The key steps are simple –

1. Processes and key principles/law are explained by event facilitator.
2. Anyone wanting to initiate a discussion or activity summarises it in a few words or a sentence on a large sheet of paper and then stands up and has less than a minute to announce/promote his/her interest topic to the group. After selecting one of the pre-established times and places, they ‘*post’* their proposed discussions / workshop on a wall.
3. When everyone who wants to initiate / post a topic is done, it is time for what Owen refers to as the ‘*Village Marketplace’* – participants mill around the wall of options, putting together their personal schedules for the duration of the event.
4. The first discussion / workshops begin immediately with those who posted topics hosting the individual discussions. Hosts appoint people to record .
5. Each discussion group shares their two or three ‘*nuggets of gold’* with the wider audience and submits their summary to event facilitator to have circulated.

**Open Space Principles and Law:**

1. Whoever comes are the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time.
4. When it’s over, it’s over.
5. ‘*The Law of Two Feet’* – if you find yourself in a group where you are not learning, contributing or enjoying, go somewhere else.

**For further information see:**

* Owen, H (1997) *Expanding Our Now: the story of open space technology*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
* Owen H (1997) *Open Space Technology: A User’s Guide*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
* [www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)

**b. CAFÉ CONVERSATION**

*Conversation Cafe*(internationally known as *The World Café)* is a fun, flexible and easy to use process for fostering dialogue, sharing knowledge and discussing new opportunities for action. Using the imagery of a café, *Conversation Cafe* is a methodology to create meaningful conversation around ‘*questions that matter’*. Conversation Cafe is based on the assumption that meaning and energy for change are generated as a result of the quality of the communications in which we participate.

**Key Steps:**

1. Determine the theme(s) you want to explore.
2. Invite through a comprehensive range of methods (especially personal invitations) as many people relevant to the theme(s).
3. Create a warm, inviting and hospitable environment that resembles an inviting café space:

* interesting décor
* food and drink
* background music
* tables with butcher’s paper as table covering.

1. Once participants arrive and gather around the tables (no more than six to a table), Event Host introduces the purpose of *Conversation Cafe* and the event process. Have the question(s) being discussed during the evening prominent on each table (e.g. on a card resembling a tent on each table) and projected onto the wall.
2. Tables engage in conversation around that question. Felt pens on each table allow participants to record and/or draw ideas on the paper table cloth.
3. After 20-30 minutes, the Event Host asks one person to remain at the table (e.g. ‘*youngest member’*, ‘*person with least hair’* etc.), and other participants to leave and join another table and continue the discussion. The person remaining ensures all new table members introduce themselves and then takes one minute to summarise with the new table group the key ideas that emerged from the previous discussion. This allows the opportunity for new members to piggyback discussion on an idea already contributed or to continue brainstorm new ideas.
4. After 15-25 minutes, the process of reshuffling the tables occurs again.
5. After a further 15-20 minutes, a third reshuffle occurs.
6. The Event Host then engages in a whole group sharing experience where he/she calls for the best ideas people heard to be shared. With assistance, he/she captures the ideas.
7. Event may end with using a technique like ‘*Dot Democracy’* for group prioritization of ideas i.e. each person is given six coloured dots and asked to ‘*spend’* dots on the best ideas they heard – such a process immediately gives a visual record of the most popular ideas.
8. Event Host explains what will happen to the information generated, thanks everyone for their participation and invites people to continue enjoying the company of fellow community / organisation members and the hospitality of the event.

**Key Process Principles:**

1. Clarify in planning the context for holding the event –

* topic/issue to be explored?
* who needs to be there?
* best timing?
* best venue?
* best duration?

1. Create a hospitable place – warm, inviting and non-threatening. Remember that food and drink is what water is to fish!
2. Craft the key question(s). It / they need to be –

* simple and clear
* thought provoking
* energy creating
* idea generating.

1. Encourage everyone’s contribution.
2. Never allow table group size to exceed six.
3. Share and record collective discoveries and practices.

**For further information see:**

* Brown, J et al. (2010) *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

**c. APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY**

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a conversation methodology that seeks out the *‘best of what’* to help ignite the collective imagination of *‘what might be’*. It was initially developed by David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University as an interview process that focuses on strength and high-point experiences. Appreciative Inquiry is a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, a community or an organisation. AI asks people to tell their stories about their connections with others when they have been at their best.   
  
The basic idea is to build the future around ‘*what works’*, rather than trying to fix what does not. AI is a reaction to problem based and deficiency focused change methodologies. It is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organisations and their community. It involves systematic discovery of what has happened in the past, and what gives a person, an organisation or community *‘life’* when most effective and capable.

*AI* involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilises inquiry through crafting *‘unconditional positive questions’*that lead to sharing best practices, magic moments and life-giving experiences. In *AI*, such sharing leads to imagination and innovation.  *AI* assumes that people, organisations and their communities have untapped, rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. When this ‘*positive change core’* is directly linked to change agenda, *AI* believes that changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilised. *AI* generates hope, optimism, collaboration and energy – powerful forces for change.

**Five Key Stages of Appreciative Inquiry:**

***DEFINE :*** *Determine what to focus on*

***DISCOVERY:*** *Appreciate what you have got*

***DREAM:*** *Imagine what can be*

***DESIGN:*** *Create what will be*

***DELIVER:*** *Work on making it happen.*

**Typical Appreciative Inquiry Questions:**

* *‘What are the strengths and assets of our community? ‘*
* *‘Share a time when you felt our community was at its best?’*
* *‘What do you value most about our community?’*
* *‘What is the essence of our community that makes it unique and strong?’*
* *What gives you most hope for the future of our community?*
* *What has happened in our community that gives our children a great start in life?*
* *‘If you had three wishes for the future of our community, what would they be?’*

**Appreciative Inquiry Assumptions:**

* In every society, organisation or group, something works.
* What we focus on becomes our reality – communities grow from what they personally ask questions about.
* People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
* If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
* It is important to value differences.
* The language we use creates our reality.

**Key Appreciative Inquiry Practice Principles:**

* Always work in the affirmative.
* Ask provocative questions. Probe for excitement and possibility.
* Focus on the positive. Look for the budding flower amid the gray backdrop!
* Generate interactive dialogue. Provide space for dialogue and questions.
* Respect the past, live the present and look to the future.
* Seek the root cause of success, not the root cause of failure.

**For further information see:**

* Cooperrider, D et al. (2003) *Appreciative Inquiry: The Handbook*, Euclid: Crown Custom Publishing.
* Hammond S (1998) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Plano: Thin Book Publishing
* Hammond S and Royal C (2001) *Lessons from the Field: Applying Appreciative Inquiry*, Plano: Thin Book Publishing.

**6. Who is a Facilitator?**

**A facilitator is many things:**

* Someone who organises the work of a group.
* Someone who brings out the full potential of working groups.
* Someone who provides processes, tools and techniques that can get work accomplished quickly and effectively in a group environment.
* Someone who keeps a group meeting on track.
* Someone who helps resolve conflict.
* Someone who draws out participation from everyone.
* Someone who makes sure that the goals are met.
* Someone who provides structure to the work of a group.

**What a facilitator is not:**

Someone who manipulates the situation through:

* Changing the wording of a participant.
* Refusing to record an idea (looks tired, got distracted, too many ideas coming at once).
* Getting involved in the content of the group work.
* Getting emotionally attached to outcomes.
* Judging comments of the group, liking some ideas better than others.
* ‘*Flip flopping’* the agenda and work processes.
* Manipulating people and behaviours through their own feedback.
* Monopolising conversation.
* Taking sides on issues or people.
* Being closed to group suggestions on the process.
* Trying to have all the answers.

**7. Community Conversation Ground-Rules / Etiquette**

In any group conversation event, it is useful to include a copy of the event ground rules / etiquette within the program handout as people arrive, or on the back of name cards or to display as posters around the room. It is important for the facilitator to reiterate the rules at the start of any workshop activity and seek group agreement.

This is the set utilised by the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. –

1. Discard old disputes, feuds and ideologies at the door.
2. Be mindful about what really matters.
3. Actively engage your heart and mind – share your passions and what you really care about.
4. Listen with respect and curiosity.
5. Share airtime - keep ideas, opinions and comments short.
6. Focus on possibility and positive futures rather than debate the past.
7. Above all, have fun!

**8. Tips for Effectively Working with the Media**

**The media (newspapers, TV, radio) is a very important means of informing the public about one’s organisation and its community engagement initiatives. Media coverage represents a vital information, marketing and promotional opportunity which no organisation can afford to ignore. However, effective use of the media is a skill which needs to be developed.**

**General Principles:**

* Decide who will deal with the media. Whether you use one person or a group to deal with publicity, it is essential that reporters know whom to contact for a clear, mandated comment or statement. Channel all communications with the media through one spokesperson and ensure all your members know who this is.
* Be careful not to raise local expectations beyond what you can deliver. This will quickly lose your credibility with the community and it will take a long time to get it back.
* Be proactive - seek the media out. Do not wait for the media to chase you. Make a list of local newspapers, radio and TV contacts, including local newsletters. Look out for specialist publications who may be interested in your initiatives.
* Establish relationships. Get to know local reporters, correspondents and editors. Find out about their deadlines and the issues they are interested in. But do not waste their time.
* Do not play favourites with the local media. Alternate timings the times when stories and press releases are distributed, to ensure no one media outlet is favoured.
* Be open and reliable - give accurate information. Stick to the facts. When giving an opinion, make sure you state it is your opinion. Provide honest answers to questions. If you are phoned by a reporter to comment on something, feel free to ask for 10 minutes to collect one’s thoughts, but make sure you phone back.
* Invite media representatives to your meetings. Send them minutes (always with a prepared media statement summarising the key points you wish to convey), give them early notice of important events. Always provide an after-hour’s phone number at the end of any press statement or after an interview and return calls promptly. Go out of your way to report progress.
* Be helpful - most media organisations are short of time and resources. The more you can help them without being asked the better. Put particular effort into writing media press releases (see below). Journalists are usually too busy to spend a lot of time rewriting press releases.

**Make sure it is news:**

The media look for news that is new, unusual and which in their opinion, will interest their readers, listeners or viewers. Do not bombard them with press releases every time you have an idea; you will soon develop a bad reputation. As a general rule, the more local the media outlet (local newspapers, community radio) the greater their feeling of obligation and willingness be to report events and issues of interest or benefit to the local community.

Make sure your news is fresh and allow time for reporters to meet their deadlines. Arrange photographic or video opportunities or provide good quality photographs (most media prefer to take their own).

Stories in which your local media could be interested:

* + new projects and initiatives
  + openings and launches
  + festivals
  + visitors with special skills or experiences
  + success stories
  + awards and presentations
  + surveys and statistics
  + workshops and community meetings
  + contests
  + local and overseas study tours and visits
  + exchange programmes
  + research projects
  + unusual local businesses - could be products, services or the people involved.

**Ways of conveying news to the media:**

* + Media press releases
  + Phone calls/alerts
  + Invitations
  + Media conferences
  + Radio phone-in shows
  + Circulation of documents
  + ‘*Letters to the Editor’.*

**Press Releases:**

A press release (media release or press statement) is one of the most efficient ways of informing the media or making an announcement. It saves your organisation and media outlets’ time, helps get the facts correct and enables your group to inform a range of media outlets at the same time. It is simply a statement that tells "the WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW, and WHY" concisely.

A press release must create a positive image in the critical eyes of the media. Poorly drafted press releases usually end up in the rubbish bin and reduce the credibility of your group.

To enhance the effectiveness of your press releases, note the following:

* Use a media release letterhead which reflects your group's identity - keep the design uncluttered and avoid using small typeface.
* Make sure you grab the reader's attention in the headline and the first sentence.
* Place the most important facts at the top and then arrange your material in descending order of importance. Do no attempt to get everything into the first (lead) paragraph, which should consist of no more than 30 words.
* Ensure material is accurate. Check all facts especially spelling of people's names and titles.
* Keep it short, preferable a single page, two pages at the most. (Keep to 400 words or fewer).
* Ensure it is dated and contains a contact name and phone/fax numbers. Make sure the contact person and telephone number are obtainable when journalists are likely to call, many journalists work at night or early in the morning.
* Know the copy deadlines of your target media outlets.
* Make sure you issue your release on the best day for maximum coverage. Generally, a release issued on Monday or Tuesday will get better coverage than one released on Friday.
* State the timing for release if not for immediate use, ie, embargoed until date and/or time.
* Attach any visual material, photographs, logos, maps, diagrams

In terms of media release writing style, note the following:

* Use simple language and sentence construction. Avoid the use of jargon and clichés.
* Use positive words and phrases.
* Use short paragraphs - often one sentence is enough. Limit sentences to 25-30 words.
* Write names of people and organisations in full the first time they appear in the text. Add abbreviations in brackets afterwards.
* Use quotes to make it more interesting.
* Write in the third person e.g. 'he said' or 'she said', not 'I said' or 'I was'.
* Do not use underlining - underlining is an editor's instruction to print those words in italics.
* Spell out numbers from one to nine, except for dates, times, prices, weights and measures, then use figures until they become unwieldy thousands of millions.
* Do not use the % sign, spell out "per cent" as two words.
* Limit the use of capitals.

**Radio interviews:**

* Arrive early for studio interview.
* Speak with producer before interview.
* Check on time allowed.
* If program is going out live, listen to program beforehand.
* Relax and breath calmly.
* Prepare and key words and phrases sheet about themes you want to speak about.
* Leave an information sheet with contact details.

**9. Resources for Community Engagement**

**Useful Websites:**

* Australasia Evaluation Society - [www.aes.asn.au](http://www.aes.asn.au)
* Aspen Institute - [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org)
* Bank of I.D.E.A.S. - [www.bankofideas.com.au](http://www.bankofideas.com.au)
* Conversation Café - [www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org)
* Energy Networks Association - [www.energynetworks.com.au](http://www.energynetworks.com.au)
* Everyday Democracy – [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)
* Future Search - [www.futuresearch.net](http://www.futuresearch.net)
* International Association for Public participation- [www.iap2.org.au](http://www.iap2.org.au)
* National Center for Dialogue and Deliberation – [www.ncdd.org](http://www.ncdd.org)
* New Democracy - [www.newdemocracy.com.au](http://www.newdemocracy.com.au)
* Open Space - [www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)
* Photo Voice - [www.photovoice.com](http://www.photovoice.com)
* Results Based Accountability- [www.raguide.org](http://www.raguide.org)
* Tamarack, Canada - [www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca)
* World Café - [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

**Useful Publications:**

* Arnstein, S.R. (1969) ‘A ladder of citizen participation’ in *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35(4): 216–224.
* Bank of I.D.E.A.S. (2014) *The Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) Program Handbook*, Kalamunda.
* Bank of I.D.E.A.S. (2014) T*he Community Builder’s Program Handbook*, Kalamunda.
* Bjerkaker S & Summers J (2006) *Learning Democratically: using study circles*, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
* Born P (2012) *Community Conversations: Mobilising the Ideas, Skills and Passions of Community Organizations, Governments, Businesses and People*, Kitchener: Tamarack.
* Brown J (2001) *The World Café: Living Knowledge Through Conversations that Matter.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
* Brackertz, N & Meredyth, D. (2008). *Social inclusion of the hard to reach: community consultation and the hard to reach: local government, social profiling and civic infrastructure*. Available at: <http://healthissuescentre.org.au/images/uploads/resources/Social-inclusion-of-the-hard-to-reach.pdf>
* Brown, J et al. (2010) *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
* Buzan, T with Buzan, B (1996) *The Mind Map Book: how to use radiant thinking to maximize your brain’s untapped potential*, Plume Books.
* Carmen K & Keith K, (1994) *Community Consultation Techniques: Purposes, Processes and Pitfalls: A Guide for Planners and Facilitators*, Brisbane: Department of Primary Industries.
* City of Greater Bendigo (2016) *Community Engagement: Guidelines and Toolkit* Bendigo: CGB -Available at: <https://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2016-11/Community_Engagement_guidelines_and_toolkit_2016_ECM3377622.pdf>
* Coakes S, (1999) *Consulting Communities: A Policy Maker's Guide to Consulting with Communities and Interest Groups*, Canberra: Bureau of Rural Sciences.
* Condon, P (2008) *Design Charrettes for Sustainable Communities.* Washington DC: Island Press
* Cooperrider, D et al. (2003) *Appreciative Inquiry: The Handbook*, Euclid: Crown Custom Publishing.
* Creighton J (2015) *The Public Participation Handbook – making better decisions through citizen involvement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
* Department of Health and Human Services (2018), *Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit*. Available at: <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/file/6686/download?token=zqh4H3zq>
* Department of Sustainability and the Environment (2005). Effective engagement: Building relationships with community and other stakeholders. Book 3 – the engagement toolkit. Melbourne: State of Victoria. Available at:

<http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Inst/01795CC6-001D0211.2/effective%20engagement%20book%203.pdf>

* Diehm K (2017) P*articipatory Budgeting in the City of Geraldton,* YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBhzzkFSWeA>
* Emery, M (ed.) (1993) *Participative Design for Participative Democracy*, Canberra: Australian National University Centre for Continuing Education.
* Emery M & Purser R (1996) *The Search Conference: a powerful method for planned organizational change and community action.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publisher.
* Energy Networks Association and CSIRO (2016) *Community Engagement Handbook*

Available at: <http://www.energynetworks.com.au/sites/default/files/customer_engagement_handbook_engagement_draft_april_2016.pdf>

* Friedman, M (2015) *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough: how to produce measurable improvements for customers and communities.*
* Hammond S (1998) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Plano: Thin Book Publishing
* Hammond S and Royal C (2001) *Lessons from the Field: Applying Appreciative Inquiry*, Plano: Thin Book Publishing.
* International Association for Public Participation (2014). *A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery*. Available at: <https://www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2s-publicparticipation-spectrum>
* International Association for Public Participation (2015). *Quality assurance standard in community and stakeholder engagement.* IAP2 Australasia, Wollongong. Available at: [www.iap2.org.au/resources/quality-assurance-standard](http://www.iap2.org.au/resources/quality-assurance-standard)
* Lennertz B & Lutzenhiser (2006) *The Charrette Handbook.* Routledge.
* NCOSS (2014). *Have your say – but how? -improving public participation in NSW*. NSW Council of Social Services Research Report. Available at: <https://www.ncoss.org.au/policy/have-your-saybut-how-improving-public-participation-nsw>
* Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (1995) *A Practical Handbook for ‘planning for real’ Consultation Exercise,* Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, Telford, UK
* Owen, H (1997) *Expanding Our Now: the story of open space technology*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
* Owen H (2008) *Open Space Technology – a User’s Guide,* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
* Parliament of Australia (2011). *Citizens’ Engagement in Policymaking and the Design of Public Services.* Research Paper No. 1, 2011-12. Available at: <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fprspub%2F942018%22>
* Queensland Government. *Guide to Community Engagement Methods and Techniques*. Available at: <https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/community-engagement>
* Robinson, L. (2003). *Consultation: What works.* Presentation to the Local Government. Available at: <http://www.enablingchange.com.au/what_works.pdf>
* Stuart G (2017), ‘What is the Spectrum of Public Participation?’ in *Sustaining Communities Blog*. - <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2017/02/14/spectrum-of-public-participation/>
* US Environmental Protection Agency (2015). *Public participation guide: Foundational skills, knowledge, and behaviors.* Available at: <https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-introduction-guide>
* Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (2017) *Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector*, Melbourne: VACO.
* Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, *The Engagement ToolKit*. Available at: <http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resource/guide/engagement_toolkit>
* Wagga Wagga City Council (2017), *Funbobutor -* [*http://funbobulator.budgetallocator.com*](http://funbobulator.budgetallocator.com)
* Weisbord M (1992) *Common Ground- how future search conferences bring people together to achieve breakthrough innovation, empowerment, shared vision and collaborative action.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
* Weisbord M & Janoff S (2008) *Future Search – an action guide to finding common ground in organisations and communities*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler
* Wheatley M (2012) *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope in the Future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Further Information

For further information about this *Handbook,* the “DNA approach”or other aspects of consumer engagement by network businesses in Australia, check the website:

[www.noshockenergy.com](http://www.noshockenergy.com)

Contact:

Mark Henley

Manager Advocacy, Uniting Communities

Email: [MarkH@unitingcommunities.org](mailto:MarkH@unitingcommunities.org)

Ph: +61 404 067 011

Mail: 10 Pitt St, Adelaide, South Australia, 5000