



# Consulting Citizens:

A RESOURCE GUIDE

APRIL 2002



Department of the  
Premier and Cabinet  
Citizens and Civics Unit

## The Purpose of this Guide

This Guide has been produced as the first step in establishing best practice guidelines for government agencies undertaking consultation. However, the Guide has broader application and can also be used by:

- > Local government
- > Project developers
- > Politicians
- > Consultants
- > Non-Government Organisations
- > Interest Groups.



The guidelines were developed in a consultative manner drawing on the experience and input of people from government departments, non-government organisations and the community. In particular, a public forum on consultation practice was held in late November 2001. The input of all forum participants, and the working group established at the forum to assist development of this Guide, is gratefully acknowledged.

In keeping with this consultative approach, readers are invited to offer comments and suggestions. To provide feedback please contact the Citizens and Civics Unit via email on [bacitizen@dpc.wa.gov.au](mailto:bacitizen@dpc.wa.gov.au) or in writing to:

*Citizens and Civics Unit  
Policy Office  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet  
197 St Georges Terrace  
Perth WA 6000.*

*An electronic version of this document is available on  
the Citizens and Civics Unit's homepage:  
<http://www.ccu.dpc.wa.gov.au>.*





## Foreword

One of the enduring challenges faced by any government is encouraging citizens to participate in public affairs - to become active citizens.

Participation helps to create a more inclusive and equitable society. It also strengthens our democratic institutions. One of the most effective and accessible mechanisms to help achieve greater participation, and one that has been innovatively used by my Government, is community consultation.

Consultation promotes active citizenship by encouraging individuals to provide real input into public life and decision-making. The benefits of genuine consultation, involving listening and actively responding to concerns and issues raised, cannot be overstated. It means decision-makers are better placed to make informed judgments by tapping into fresh ideas and new sources of information. For individual citizens this provides an opportunity to express their views and influence the outcomes of decisions that affect them.

Decisions that have been reached through a consultative process carry greater legitimacy and credibility in the community. Engaging the community in decision-making builds trust within communities and in our democratic systems of government. It can lead to new partnerships between citizens and policy makers through a shared sense of ownership of the issues that impact on us as a community.

Different forms of consultations are commonplace throughout our State yet they vary widely in terms of effectiveness and outcomes. This Guide aims to establish best practice in consultation. It details the vital elements of a consultative process and highlights how careful planning will help to ensure the best possible outcomes from the decision-making process. It is another way the Western Australian Government is demonstrating its commitment to increasing participation in all aspects of government policy.

I encourage all organisations to use this Guide to more effectively involve citizens in decision-making. In so doing, you will help create a stronger and more democratic society for all Western Australians.

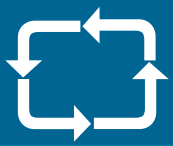
A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Gallop', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**DR GEOFF GALLOP MLA**  
**PREMIER**



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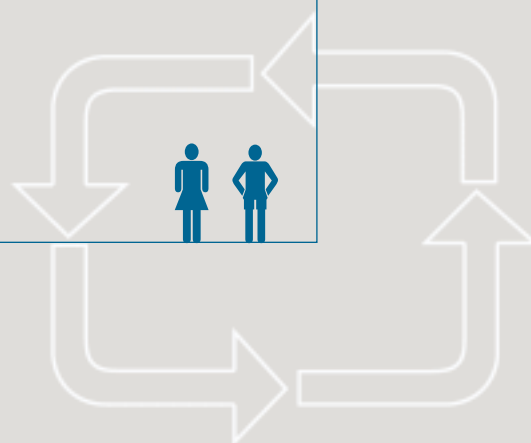
## How to Use This Guide

This Guide provides a starting point for consultation, offering best practice guidelines rather than formulas. Further information can be obtained by referring to the books, articles and electronic sources listed in the Resource Section.

The Guide is divided into three main sections:

- > *Preparing for Consultation* outlines the critical preliminary steps to be undertaken before the consultation
- > *Foundations for Effective Consultation* looks at some of the issues which are universal to all forms of consultation
- > *Outcomes* examines one of the most important and least developed elements in the consultative process - the follow up stages.

In each of the sections some important questions are raised. The answers to these questions will be determined by a number of factors such as the nature of the issues, stakeholders, consultation method and so on.







## 1.0 Introduction



*Engaging citizens in policy-making is a sound investment and a core element of good governance. It allows governments to tap wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions, and improves the quality of the decisions reached. Equally important, it contributes to building trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity.*

(OECD, Caddy & Vergez, 2001)

In October 2001 a report was prepared for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) discussing the importance of engaging citizens in policy-making. This comprehensive report, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making* (Caddy & Vergez 2001) highlights the many benefits of public participation to all involved.

The report notes that greater participation by citizens can:

- > Raise the quality of policies
- > Raise the chances for successful implementation
- > Reinforce the legitimacy of the decision-making process and its final results
- > Increase the chance of voluntary compliance
- > Increase the scope for forms of partnerships with citizens

Effective citizen participation requires that four essential conditions be met:

- > Access to objective, reliable and relevant information
- > Clear goals
- > Sufficient time, resources and flexibility for citizens to actively participate
- > Commitment from government.

This OECD report provides a set of **principles** for engaging citizens (Figure 1).

## Figure 1: Guiding Principles for Engaging Citizens in Policy-Making

### 1. Commitment

Leadership and strong commitment to information, consultation and active participation in policy-making is needed at all levels - from politicians, senior managers and public officials.

### 2. Rights

Citizens' rights to access information, provide feedback, be consulted and actively participate in policy-making must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens when exercising their rights must also be clearly stated. Independent institutions for oversight, or their equivalent, are essential to enforcing these rights.

### 3. Clarity

Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and active participation during policy-making should be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and government (in making decisions for which they are accountable) must be clear to all.

### 4. Time

Public consultation and active participation should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of policy solutions to emerge and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective. Information is needed at all stages of the policy cycle.

### 5. Objectivity

Information provided by government during policy-making should be objective, complete and accessible. All citizens should have equal treatment when exercising their rights of access to information and participation.

### 6. Resources

Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed if public information, consultation and active participation in policy-making are to be effective. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training. An organisational culture that supports their efforts is highly important.

### 7. Coordination

Initiatives to inform, request feedback from and consult citizens should be coordinated across government to enhance knowledge management, ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of 'consultation fatigue' among citizens and civil society.

### 8. Accountability

Governments have an obligation to account for the use they make of citizens' inputs received through feedback, public consultation and active participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny and review are crucial to increasing government accountability overall.

### 9. Evaluation

Governments need the tools, information and capacity to evaluate their performance in providing information, consultation and engaging citizens in order to adapt to new requirements and changing conditions for policy making.

### 10. Active Citizenship

Governments benefit from active citizens and a dynamic civil society and can take concrete actions to facilitate access to information and participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens' civic education and skills as well as to support capacity building among civil society organisations.

(Adapted from: OECD, Caddy & Vergez, 2001)

## 1.1 Empowering Citizens through Participation

*Empowerment is both a process and an outcome*


Empowerment is about people taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, developing skills, solving problems and increasing their self-confidence. Consultation is an ideal tool to empower individual citizens and communities. Institutions can facilitate this by providing an environment that encourages and appreciates public participation.

Public participation is both a means and an end. As a means, it is a process through which citizens and communities cooperate to provide input into programs and projects. As an end, it empowers citizens and communities through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and experience. In itself, involvement in public life is a positive outcome as it contributes to a strong civil society. It also means decision and policy makers can utilise the contributions of citizens.

Participation ranges from the provision of information, to involvement through consultation, collaboration, decision-making and implementation. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has produced a Public Participation Spectrum (Figure 2) which shows how various techniques may be employed to increase the level of public impact.

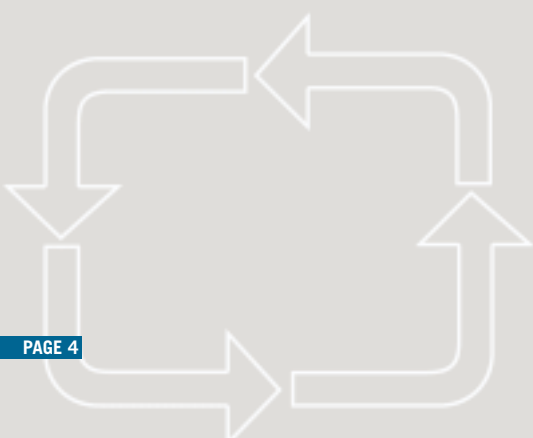
Citizens who care enough about their community and environment to contribute to the process of decision-making are the essence of a more participatory democracy.

**Figure 2: Public Participation Spectrum**



INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, and/or solutions</p>	<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions</p>	<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered</p>	<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution</p>	<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>To place final decision making in the hands of the public</p>
<p><b>Promise to the Public</b></p> <p>We will keep you informed</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public</b></p> <p>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public</b></p> <p>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public</b></p> <p>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible</p>	<p><b>Promise to the Public</b></p> <p>We will implement what you decide</p>
<p><b>Example Tools</b></p> <p>Fact Sheets Web Sites Open Houses</p>	<p><b>Example Tools</b></p> <p>Public Comment Focus Groups Surveys Public Meetings</p>	<p><b>Example Tools</b></p> <p>Workshops Deliberative Polling</p>	<p><b>Example Tools</b></p> <p>Citizen Advisory Committees Consensus-building Participatory Decision Making</p>	<p><b>Example Tools</b></p> <p>Citizens' Juries Ballots Delegated Decisions</p>

(Source: IAP2 2000)



## 1.2 Build Partnerships through Consultation

Genuine and credible consultation can contribute significantly to deliberative democracy, building trust and confidence in people and unleashing their potential as citizens. There are many models of consultation. These range from public meetings, forums and workshops, to more extensive processes such as summits, statewide consultations and parliamentary committees. These varying models of consultation are suited to different issues and objectives.

Consultation is not simply about collecting the views and opinions of citizens. Rather it should be thought of as a two-way information transfer - an opportunity to:

- > engage citizens in the activities of government; and
- > educate communities about government and decision-making processes.

Consultation is a complex and dynamic process, and like any important process it benefits from **best practice** and **diligence**. It should be considered an essential tool for policy makers, project developers and service providers, implementers and evaluators.

## 1.3 Consensus - Outcomes or Process?

*Consensus does not necessarily mean agreement; rather, it means an outcome which all participants can live with.*

There are two perspectives on consultation:

- i. 'Right result', or substantive consensus - concerned with the **outcome** of the consultation, and
- ii. 'Right practice', or procedural consensus - concerned with reaching agreement about the **process**.

These two perspectives are not necessarily alternatives. It is important for those planning the consultation to determine what is their focus - getting the 'right result' or ensuring that the processes and procedures are likely to result in an outcome that every participant can live with. A decision is more likely to be deemed legitimate if all participants concur on the process for making that decision.

## 1.4 Why Consult?

As the community becomes more diverse, decision-making processes become evermore complex. At the same time, the public is demanding to be more involved in decision-making. Government (and other) organisations increasingly recognise that engaging the community in consultation is good practice.

Organisations will benefit from the experiences and knowledge of those who are most affected by policy decisions, and profit also from the practical experiences and the diverse views, knowledge and skills of the community.

Consultations enable the active participation of citizens in decision-making, as well as the creation of partnerships between community, business and government. Participation through consultation can reduce citizens' sense of exclusion from, and lack of access to, decisions affecting their lives. Community engagement in the decision-making process leads to a sense of ownership of the outcome.

Consultations therefore:

- > Assist in governmental decision-making
- > Demonstrate a commitment to accountability, democracy and transparency
- > Empower citizens and promote community involvement
- > Foster democratic dialogue among citizens and revitalize civic culture
- > Help in planning and prioritising various options
- > Improve the level, profile and efficiency of services

- > Offer and/or create new perspectives and solutions on issues
- > Provide an opportunity for community input on issues at times other than elections
- > Provide greater legitimacy for decision-making
- > Raise awareness of issues and facilitate learning
- > Reveal actual or potential problems
- > Reveal the needs and wants of the community.

## 1.5 When to Consult

Consultation should be viewed as extending throughout a project cycle rather than as a 'one-off' exercise. It should begin early in the planning stage. Whilst most projects are suited to consultation, some policy questions will particularly benefit from citizen participation. It is necessary therefore to fully consider what type of issues are best suited to consultation.

The following criteria may be useful in deciding which issues would benefit from consultation:

- > The issue affects the rights and entitlements of members of the community or a significant group in the community
- > The issue is likely to affect people's quality of life
- > The issue affects the natural environment
- > A significant number of people, or particular groups, are likely to have strong views on the issue
- > Insufficient information is available on which to make a decision about an issue.

It is neither effective nor appropriate to consult if a final decision has already been made, or if the commissioning body cannot influence a final decision, or when there is insufficient time and/or resources available.

Ineffective or inappropriate consultation is counterproductive and increases apathy and cynicism - not only towards future consultations, but also political processes, public institutions and our systems of governance.

## 1.6 Intentions and Commitment

*Before embarking on any consultative program it is vital to be clear about the intentions, objectives and implications of the consultation.*

Recognition within an organisation of the value of consultation requires the development of what can be called a **culture of consultation**. Such a culture is based on collaboration, cooperation and a commitment to the role of citizens as decision-makers. It is important that everyone involved in the process not only believes in the value of engaging the wider community in decision-making but also recognises the diverse viewpoints the community can have on any particular issue.

When engaging the public in a consultation process it is essential that the reasons or intentions of the process are both credible and clear to all. For example, a consultative process that appears to be too narrow in scope will lack the credibility required to effectively engage the community.

The Report of the Taskforce established to review the Machinery of Western Australia's Government, *Government Structures for Better Results* (June 2001) supports the development of a culture of consultation. The report refers to the need "...to re-engage Western Australians in the business of government, strengthening local communities and connecting citizens with a shared vision for the State."



## 2.0 Preparing for Consultation

*So you have decided to consult. Now what? The following section outlines seven essential, practical steps towards implementing a consultation.*

### 2.1 Planning the Consultation

Before embarking on any form of consultation it is important to think through exactly **why** you are consulting and **what** you hope to achieve. Determining answers to the following questions may help to define the parameters and will assist in the consultation design.

- > What is the aim or purpose of the consultation?
- > What are the issues?
- > Who should be consulted?
- > Who is affected by the issue?
- > Who will manage the consultation?
- > What resources are available for the consultation?
- > What level of commitment, in terms of time and resources, is sought from stakeholders?
- > Are there any citizens whose special needs should be addressed/accommodated in order that they may participate more fully?
- > When would be the best time to consult?
- > How much time can be spent?
- > Have similar consultations been planned or carried out? How can the consultation be coordinated to take this into account?
- > What information should be made available to citizens to ensure their informed deliberation?
- > How will the information from the consultation be used and by whom?
- > How will recommendations be implemented?
- > How will the outcomes of the consultation and the final decision be conveyed to the participants and to those with an interest?
- > How and when will evaluation be carried out? What will be evaluated and by whom?
- > Where applicable, what role will the community have in implementation or ongoing management?

## 2.2 Identifying the Issues

Decision-making begins with issue identification. This can often be an iterative process with new issues emerging through further exploration. Planning should take into account:

- > What is the nature of the issue?
- > Whose issue is it?
- > Is resolution of the issue possible?

Issues can be highlighted to decision-makers through a number of external factors, including:

- > Community influence
- > Demographic changes
- > Economic factors
- > International relations
- > Legal judgements
- > Media attention
- > Special interest groups
- > Technological developments.

Or from within government:

- > Audit reports
- > Budgetary considerations
- > Ongoing monitoring
- > Performance indicators
- > Research, planning and policy processes.

The clear definition of an issue is essential for effective consultation to take place. Some issues may need to be broken into smaller, more manageable components. How an issue is defined will influence the range of options for achieving an acceptable outcome.

Acknowledgement that an issue exists is not, in itself, enough for it to be acted upon. An agreement between significant interests and individuals on the nature of the issue is necessary, together with a belief that a solution is possible, or that a better outcome is achievable. Even where this is achieved, the identified issue must be of consequence to, and be consistent with, the goals of the organisation. Finally, the issue has to be seen as falling within the organisation's responsibility.

## 2.3 Identifying the Aim of the Consultation

Some important factors need to be considered before determining which consultation method is best suited to a particular issue.

Is the purpose of consultation to:

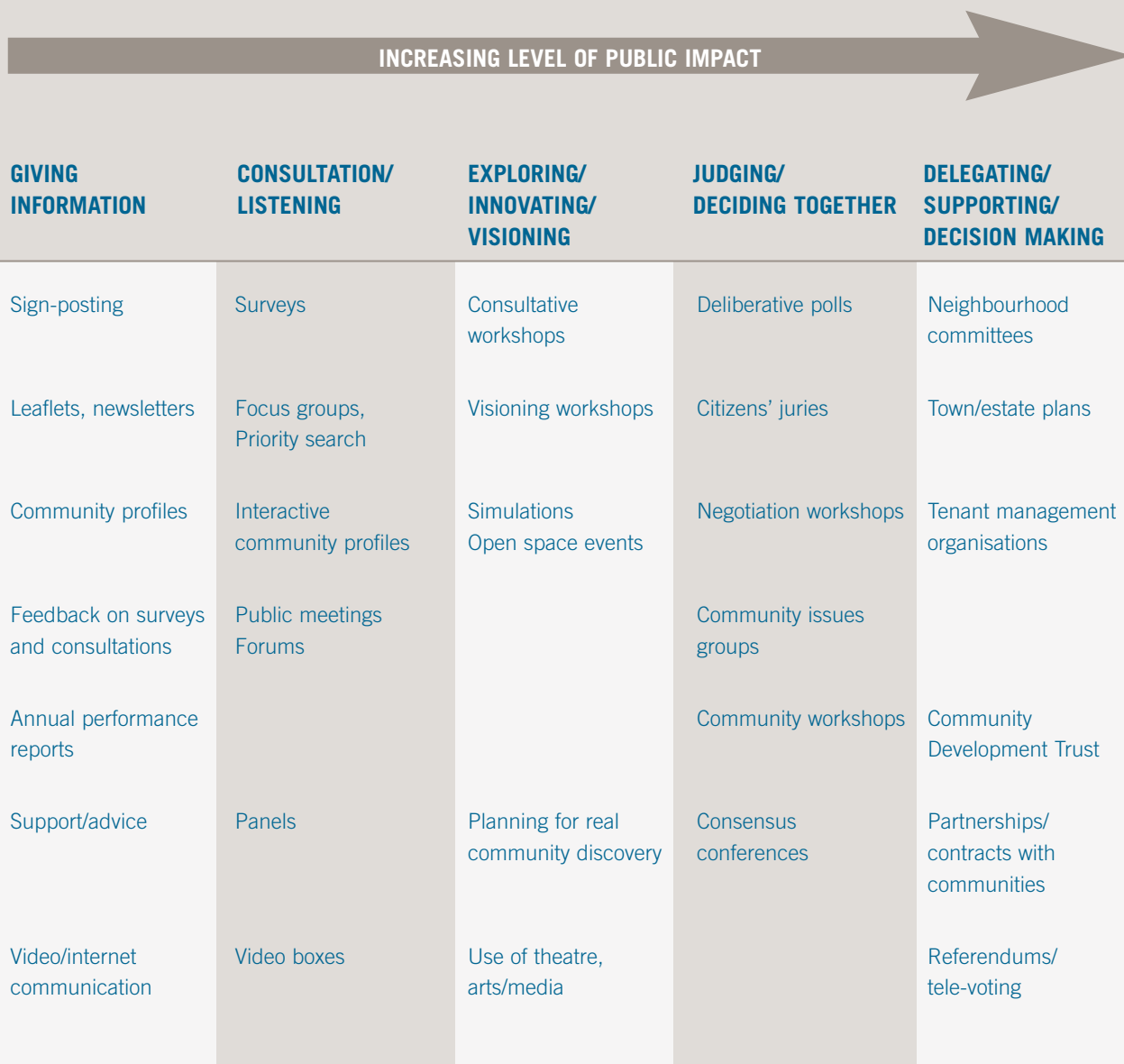
- > Contribute to the development of policies or strategies?
- > Establish service priorities?
- > Evaluate service delivery or performance?
- > Explore community needs or wants?
- > Foster a partnership with the community?
- > Gain or gauge public support?
- > Gather data in the form of statistics or opinions to guide future decisions?
- > Reach a consensual agreement?
- > Resolve disputes?

Both the 'identified issue' and the ultimate objective will determine which consultation method is most applicable.

The Office of Public Management in the United Kingdom (cited in Coleman & Gøtze: 2001) has developed a model of public engagement similar to that advanced by the International Association for Public Participation. This model, which matches aims to consultation methods, is summarised in Figure 3.

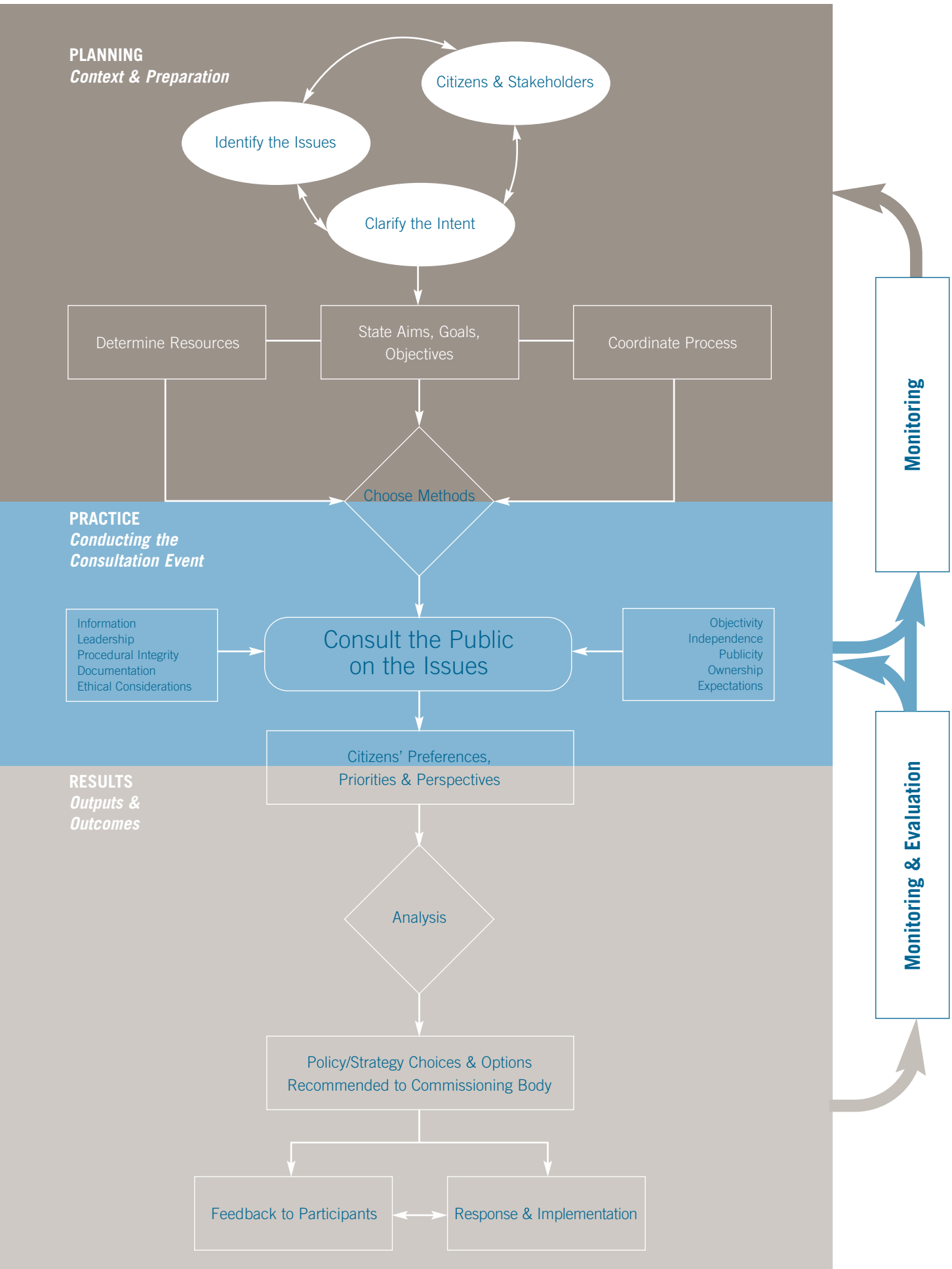


**Figure 3: Model of Public Engagement**



(Adapted from Coleman & Gøtze, 2001:13)

**Figure 4: Planning the Consultation**



## 2.4 Identifying the Stakeholders

The following questions may aid in identifying stakeholders:

- > Who is responsible for the issue?
- > Who might be affected by the issue (negatively or positively)?
- > Who are the representatives of those likely to be affected?
- > Who can make a contribution?
- > Who is likely to mobilise for or against the issue?
- > Who are the “voiceless” for whom special efforts may have to be made?
- > Whose absence from participation would detract from the final results?

After identifying the stakeholders, it is beneficial to relate each stakeholder to the issue by identifying:

- > Stakeholder expectations
- > The benefits to the stakeholder
- > What resources (and risks) the stakeholder will bring to the issue
- > The relationship between various stakeholders.

### Considering Community Groups

Identification of community groups and the initiation of communication may be aided by liaising with other departments, consultative and advisory councils, peak bodies and relevant representative organisations.

Consideration must be given to groups who may feel excluded from poorly conceived consultative processes, for example ethnic, Indigenous and remote communities, people with disabilities, seniors, women, youth and others. Whilst on occasion these groups feel that they are ‘over-consulted’, they also often feel that they are never listened to. Care must be taken to include them in appropriate ways.

The issues that confront society often impact most severely on young people. Providing creative opportunities for young people to participate and contribute is essential. This is particularly important given that the more traditional modes of participation often fail to include young people.

Some individuals may be restricted in their participation without special assistance. Their participation may be aided through the provision of travel assistance, payment for child-care facilities or through the provision of interpreters or audio-visual aids.

Similarly, in a state as large and sparsely populated as Western Australia, special consideration must be given to remote and regional communities to avoid these citizens feeling isolated and marginalised. Innovative methods may need to be developed to ensure the participation of remotely located citizens.

## 2.5 Coordinating those Involved

There is a need for coordination and cooperation across organisations, sectors and regions (and sometimes on a global basis) to limit duplication and administrative complexity, and to minimize the risks of consultation ‘fatigue’ for everyone involved.

It is important from the outset that all participants reach an agreement on both the aims and the parameters of the consultation, together with the roles and responsibilities of those involved.

Coordination involves managing relationships with:

- > Other parts of your own organisation and partner organisations
- > Those who will act on the results at policy and operational levels
- > Contractors assisting in the consultation or implementation
- > Participants such as experts or witnesses
- > Stakeholders.

## 2.6 Determining Resources Required - Time, Skills and Cost

### Timing

Successful consultations are implemented according to a well-defined schedule, particularly for those consultations designed to report on a specific issue. Sufficient time needs to be allocated to every stage of the consultation process to allow proper monitoring and due consideration of progress. Poorly planned consultations add to the level of cynicism some members of the community have towards government (and other) consultation initiatives. Consider the following points:

- > Having a realistic timetable is valuable for all participants. It can indicate what they can expect (short or long term commitment) and when. The timing of consultation may need to be adjusted to suit consultees' schedules, for example conducting consultation events after business hours, or outside of public or cultural/religious holidays.
- > Timing can also be important in a secondary way because some issues may be more prominent at particular times of the year (e.g. water consumption).
- > Ample time should be provided for consultees to participate throughout the consultation process, to become informed of the issues, reflect upon the information and make considered responses.
- > Consideration should be given to the meeting cycles of different organisations, and the time it takes for groups and individuals to be involved in formal discussions, debate and awareness raising.

### The Consultation Team

A skilled team is essential for planning, developing, executing, monitoring and evaluating a consultation. The team may come from within the organisation or may be contracted specifically for the purpose of the consultation project. There may be a need to offer additional training to staff to ensure that they have the pre-requisites necessary for effective consultation. These include knowledge, skills and understanding of:

- > Communication
- > Consensus building
- > Documentation
- > Evaluating and providing feedback
- > Evaluation
- > Facilitation
- > Group dynamics
- > Interpersonal relations
- > Knowledge of government processes and activities
- > Negotiation and conflict resolution
- > Problem solving
- > Public relations

### Developing a Budget

Where organisations are spending public money it is necessary to prepare a budget that provides for cost-effective ways to consult. Consultation need not be expensive - with resourcefulness consultations can be carried out with limited funds. Efficiently planned and budgeted consultations can deliver beneficial results for relatively low cost.

Some of the expenses that may be incurred include:

- > Advertising costs
- > Child or respite care
- > Consultant costs
- > Equipment
- > Parking, travel costs
- > Postal costs, delivery
- > Printing costs
- > Public address systems
- > Refreshments
- > Stationery
- > Travel reimbursements
- > Venue hire.

**It is false economy to allow insufficient resources for the consultation process.**

## 2.7 Choosing a Method

Different methods may be used to engage people in the consultation process. No one ‘correct’ method will suit every issue. Very rarely are ‘pure’ models adhered to. Using more than one method may increase the likelihood of gaining a more representative response. An appropriate choice must be made in each situation.

Choosing the method to be used will be determined by the purpose of the consultation and who is being consulted. It may also be determined by the level of expertise and experience the commissioning body has in conducting consultations.

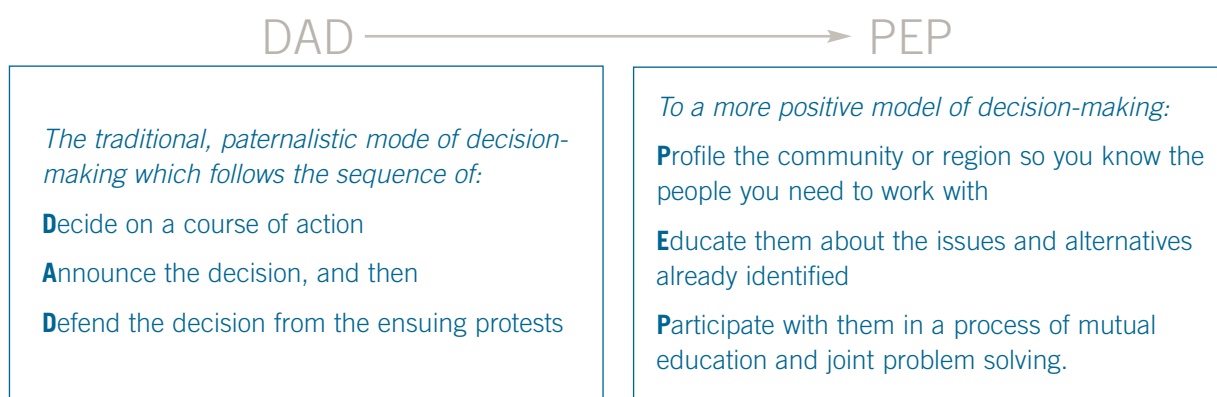
Some of the questions that will need to be answered before choosing a consultation method include:

- > What is the purpose of the consultation?
- > What information is required?
- > Who are the stakeholders?
- > How much information needs to be gathered from stakeholders?
- > Where are the stakeholders located (e.g. remote or rural communities)?
- > How much information needs to be given to stakeholders in order for them to provide considered input?
- > Are there special groups to be addressed (e.g. culturally and linguistically diverse groups, ethnic or indigenous groups, people with a disability)?
- > What is the complexity of the issue?
- > What is the urgency of decision-making and how much time is available?
- > What is the extent of resources available (personnel, time, venues, finances, etc)?

Appendix One of this guide presents a table of consultation methods, including a brief description and a list of some of the advantages and disadvantages for each type.

In the community and amongst decision-makers, levels of knowledge, understanding and commitment to consultation are changing, the table below reflects this changing attitude to consultation.

### From DAD to PEP?



(Source: Connor Development Services)



*Whilst much of the consultation process will be determined by the method chosen there are some aspects common to all. These are the important foundations for any effective consultation.*

### 3.0 Foundations for Effective Consultation



#### 3.1 A Statement of Intent

All participants need to understand the purpose of each consultation and so should be provided with a statement of intent. This statement should articulate the negotiable and non-negotiable items so that there is a clear understanding of the exact nature of the issues under consideration. The reasons for non-negotiable items need to be explained.

Being clear from the outset about what is, and what is not, under consideration will help to avoid unrealistic expectations.

The Statement of Intent should include the following elements:

- > Intentions and purpose of consultation (focus)
- > What is, and what is not open to consultation (scope of decisions, options and issues)
- > The range of stakeholders involved and their level of involvement
- > Roles and responsibilities of designated decision-maker/s

- > The organisation's commitment to the outcome
- > Background information providing the rationale for holding the consultation, including information on previous consultations
- > Information to assist consultees understand where the consultation fits within the organisation's/community's overall aims
- > Consultation ground rules outlining the process to be undertaken
- > A description of the methods proposed for consulting, evaluating and providing feedback
- > Consultation schedule or timeline
- > Commitment of the organisation to ensuring that special needs of citizens are accommodated
- > Contact details.

### **3.2 Make Information Accessible**

To facilitate community, group or individual participation and to allow for informed decision making it is vital that participants are provided with comprehensive and unbiased information on the issue under consideration. This may require involvement of a neutral party to ensure credibility. This information must be accessible to all potential participants and can be aided through:

- > Making it easy for people to participate - accessible venues, accessible information, accessible processes and accessible consulters
- > Using language that is clearly written and free from unnecessary jargon
- > Incorporating mechanisms to address differing levels of literacy in the community.
- > Being responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community, including different language needs and the needs of the visually and hearing impaired.

### **3.3 Choose Effective Leaders and Staff**

A consultation process can only be as good as the people involved in its implementation. It is therefore imperative to appoint skilled staff and to consider the following:

- > Effective leadership is vital
- > Personnel with skills such as facilitating, information dissemination, knowledge of the issues and so on are essential to keeping the consultation process on track
- > Enthusiasm and commitment from the consultation team will directly impact upon the success of the project
- > At times, there may be a need to bring specially skilled and/or experienced staff into the organisation through the use of consultants and contractors.

### **3.4 Ensure Procedural Integrity and Documentation**

Good consultation is documented. From the moment an issue has been identified as needing action, all aspects of the process should be documented. Documentation is the basis for procedural integrity - vital for maintaining credibility, accountability and transparency in the process.

For more detailed information on preparing consultation documents see Bartram (1997).

### **3.5 Maintain Objectivity and Independence**

Consultations will only be effective and useful if the information collected is a true reflection of the views and opinions of those consulted. Consultations must endeavour to obtain responses that accurately reflect the views of the participants. The following factors can benefit this process:

- > Provision of unbiased information
- > An independent and professional facilitator who is regarded by all parties as neutral
- > Expert witnesses
- > Use of appropriate data collection methods
- > Allowing consultees the freedom to determine options.



### 3.6 Publicise the Consultation

Effectively publicising the consultation is essential if you are to engage all stakeholders. Some of the methods that can be utilised include:

- > Media releases
- > Placing advertisements or articles in community, council and resident group newsletters, community magazines and newspapers
- > Agency or departmental newsletters or brochures, leaflets or flyers in places such as local shops, recreation centres and libraries
- > Using radio and television (particularly local and public access stations)
- > Accessing special interest groups who may have email lists or bulletin boards
- > Various websites.

### 3.7 Ensure Ethical Practice

The Public Sector Standards Commissioner has a general Code of Ethics that is based on the principles of justice, respect and responsible care. All consultations by State agencies must adhere to the Code of Ethics. The confidentiality of consultees must be respected. The process must be responsive to special needs, display integrity and honesty and must not undermine public confidence.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a draft code of ethics (see Figure 5) specifically for consultations and public participation practitioners.

#### Figure 5: Code of Ethics

**Purpose:** The purpose of public participation is to make better decisions that reflect the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders, including decision-makers.

**Role of Practitioner:** The role of the practitioner is to enhance the public's participation in the decision-making process and to assist the decision-maker in being responsive to the public's concerns and suggestions.

**Trust:** A public participation practitioner should at all times encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process and among the participants.

**Defining the Public's Role:** The public's role in the decision-making process should be carefully considered and accurately portrayed to the public.

**Openness:** Information relevant to the public's understanding or evaluation of a decision should be disclosed.

**Access to the Process:** All stakeholders should have the opportunity to take part in the public participation process. A stakeholder should not be given special privileges in the public participation process based on its sympathy for the decision maker's preferred alternative.

**Respect for Communities:** A public participation practitioner should avoid strategies that tend to polarize community interests or appear to divide and conquer.

**Advocacy:** In interactions with the public, the practitioner should provide a clear understanding of when the practitioner is acting as an advocate for the public participation process and when the practitioner is acting as an advocate for a particular interest, party, or project outcome.

**Commitments:** The practitioner has a responsibility to ensure that commitments made to the public by the decision maker are genuine and capable of implementation.

**Support of the Practice:** The experienced practitioner should participate in the development of new practitioners in the field and engage in efforts to educate decision makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.

(Adapted from IAP2: 2000)

### 3.8 Managing Expectations

Throughout the consultation process it is important to manage the expectations of both consultees and consulters.

Consultees who are well informed about the consultation process are better placed to have realistic expectations of the process and its outcomes. As long as consultees are informed at the outset of what they can and cannot expect, they are less likely to become frustrated with the process. Ideally, consultees should be informed upfront as to whether or not their views will be binding on decision-making authorities.

Additionally, it is inappropriate for consulters to expect that a consultation will simply be a “rubber stamping” or “buck passing” exercise for a particular initiative or program. The results gathered from consultation may not always correspond with organisational preferences.

**Open and accountable processes** are the key to managing expectations.

### 3.9 Encouraging a Sense of Ownership

Effective consultation can promote ownership of, and commitment towards, policy outcomes. Ownership does not only rest with the originators of consultation (the commissioning body) or with the consulters, rather it is shared between these two and with the consultees themselves. The shared ownership of the consultation process will create a sense of involvement and commitment to the end product or service.

People who have been listened to often become active stakeholders - “championing the cause” - leading to optimal results. For consultees, a sense of ownership of the consultation exercise is vital for not only their continued cooperation and interest but also for ensuring their contributions are both candid and considered.

Building a sense of ownership can be achieved through:

- > Involving stakeholders early in the process
- > Well-defined roles and responsibilities for all concerned
- > Open, timely and sincere communication
- > Continually providing feedback on the progress of the consultation
- > Effective follow up - turning responses into action, achieving results and outcomes
- > Proper reporting, accountability and responsibility
- > Monitoring and evaluation.

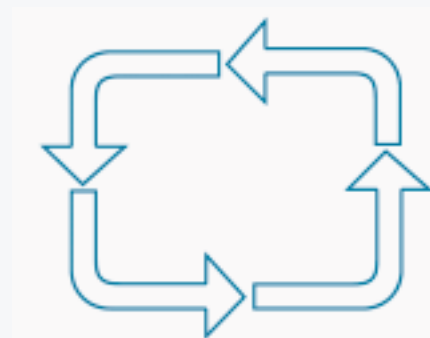
### 3.10 Mutual Respect and Honesty

Having respect for the legitimacy and views of all participants is essential when engaging in public consultation. All consultations should be based upon values of openness, trust, and transparency of purpose and process.

### 3.11 Be Aware of Potential Problems

Despite the demands for and advantages of consultation there are, nevertheless, concerns raised about its effectiveness and usefulness. Some of the potential problems commonly associated with consultations are:

- > Difficulties in gaining representative views, particularly if there are a few well resourced lobby groups
- > Disagreements within the organisations involved
- > Inability to reach an outcome acceptable to all
- > Incompatibility between organisational preferences and community views
- > Lack of trust amongst stakeholders
- > Poor participation
- > Unrealistic expectations



Usually, the 'output' of a consultation exercise refers to the substantive decisions, conclusions, or recommendations made. These substantive outputs can be evaluated and compared using a variety of criteria, including stakeholder satisfaction with the results, cost-effectiveness, or risk minimization. Evaluation of these outcomes is essential. Narrowly interpreting "outcome" to refer only to substantive decisions misses some of the most important results of a consultation process. A more inclusive interpretation of outcomes includes the extent to which a consultation, and the wider project to which it relates, has achieved its original aims.



#### 4.0 Outputs and Outcomes

## 4.1 Analysis

To assess the results of consultation several factors must be considered. Prior to undertaking any analysis the original purpose and objectives of the consultation need to be revisited so that the analysis is firmly grounded in the original intent. Some consultations may raise new issues or may appear not to answer the original questions – suggesting that further consultation is required or that the original question was not fully defined. Factors to consider include:

- > Continuity of staff throughout the consultation is beneficial; those who have been involved from inception should be involved in assessing the results
- > Translating raw data into conclusions must allow for accountability - valid research methods and appropriate statistical techniques must be used
- > Analysis should commence as soon as possible after the consultation and should be completed promptly to maintain momentum
- > Conclusions and recommendations should be reported in a format that is accessible to all interested parties.

## 4.2 Feedback

Feedback to consultees should be provided throughout the consultation process to ensure their continued involvement. However, it is of vital importance for feedback to be provided soon after the analysis phase to help ensure integrity and credibility.

Feedback should acknowledge the contribution of both consulters and consultees. In keeping with a policy of openness it may be beneficial to provide transcripts of any deliberations that were recorded, making note of both consensus and dissent.

Feedback should be provided to consultees on any decisions that have been taken and should include the rationale behind these decisions. Any report should also outline how consultee input was used in the decision-making.

## 4.3 Response to Recommendations

The consultation commissioning body must respond to any views or recommendations put forward by consultees. Was each recommendation accepted in whole or in part, or was it rejected? For each outcome, it is highly advisable that the reasons for the decision are made clear and made publicly available. The public also needs to be informed about how the outcomes will be implemented and who will be responsible for monitoring and review.

## 4.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation involves a two-pronged approach which assesses both the substantive outputs of the consultation while also reviewing the process. However, the focus here is on evaluation of the process.

The consultation project should be monitored throughout the duration of the process to ensure procedural integrity and ethical practice. By monitoring the project the consulting team can review and modify the process to take account of stakeholder concerns.

Evaluations can be carried out using a variety of techniques including questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or stakeholder panels. Questions should be asked of the participants regarding the planning, process and follow-up stages of the consultation.

Final evaluation should:

- > Determine the level of satisfaction of all participants in both the process and outcomes
- > Improve understanding of stakeholders perspectives
- > Provide an assessment of the costs and benefits to stakeholders
- > Provide conceptual learning to improve the understanding of how different consultation methods influence decision-making

- > Provide insights into the shortfalls of the consultation process - discrepancies between consultation aims and those actually achieved
- > Show accountability in accessing and justifying the costs and resource utilisation
- > Show the extent and quality of citizen participation and how it might influence future consultations
- > Show the impact of consultation on outcomes and decision-making.

Usually the outcomes of consultation can only be assessed in the context of the wider program or project to which they relate, as consultation is not an end in itself.

## 4.5 Emerging Evaluation Techniques

There is considerable research being undertaken in various countries on the effective evaluation of consultation and other public participation processes, using indicators other than cost effectiveness, resource allocation or other substantive outputs.

Frewer, Rowe, Marsh and Reynolds (2001) have developed a set of nine 'evaluation criteria' that "form the basis for the development of methodologies to assess the effectiveness of different public participation exercises". These help to outline evaluation techniques that go beyond the traditional and somewhat limited analyses of previous methods (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Evaluation Criteria**

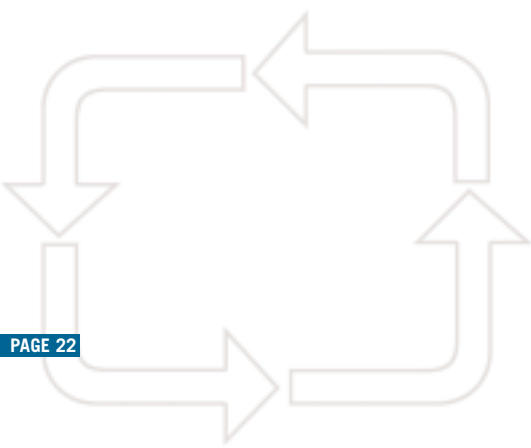
<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<b>Acceptance Criteria</b>	
<b>Representativeness</b>	The participants in the exercise should comprise a broadly representative sample of the affected population
<b>Independence</b>	The participation process should be conducted in an independent (unbiased) way
<b>Early Involvement</b>	The participants should be involved as early as possible in the process, as soon as value judgments become salient or relevant
<b>Influence</b>	The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy
<b>Transparency</b>	The process should be transparent so that the relevant population can see what is going on and how decisions are being made
<b>Process Criteria</b>	
<b>Resource Accessibility</b>	Participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to successfully fulfil their brief
<b>Task Definition</b>	The nature and scope of the participation task should be clearly defined
<b>Structured Decision Making</b>	The participation exercise should use/provide appropriate mechanisms for structuring and displaying the decision making process
<b>Cost Effectiveness</b>	The procedure should in some sense be cost effective from the point of view of the sponsors

(Source: Frewer, Rowe, Marsh and Reynolds 2001: 4)

Factors or indicators to be considered when evaluating a consultation include:

- > Accessibility to the decision-making process
- > Costs avoided for affected agencies
- > Diversity of citizens represented
- > Diversity of views expressed
- > Expectations met
- > Information exchange
- > Integration of concerns
- > Interests of all addressed
- > Mutual learning among participants
- > Mutual respect among participants
- > Opportunities for participation
- > Participation time costs for participants
- > Project/decision acceptability
- > Project/plan efficiency (duration of process)
- > Relationships enhanced
- > Special needs accommodated.

Participant feedback may also provide other criteria relevant to a particular consultation project.



## Appendix One: Consultation Methods

Methods and Models	Considerations	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><b>User Comments and Complaints</b></p> <p>Encourage feedback from users</p>	<p>Make feedback forms accessible</p>	<p>Provides input from those using the services</p> <p>Easy to set up</p> <p>Provides information about service's weaknesses and strengths</p>	<p>Not representative</p> <p>Essentially reactive to existing systems</p>
<p><b>Staff Feedback and Suggestions</b></p> <p>Encourage feedback and suggestions from frontline staff who deal with the public</p>	<p>Train staff to deal with comments and complaints</p> <p>Establish systems for obtaining feedback</p>	<p>Shows you value staff and are open to suggestions</p> <p>Valuable source of information on service use and users</p>	<p>Relies on staff effort</p> <p>Time consuming</p> <p>Doesn't necessarily provide representative views</p>
<p><b>Surveys and Questionnaires</b></p> <p>Inquiries sent randomly to sample population to gain specific information for statistical validation</p>	<p>Ensure statistically valid results are needed before making investment</p> <p>Survey/questionnaire should be professionally developed and administered to avoid bias</p> <p>Most suitable for general attitudinal surveys</p>	<p>Provides input from individuals who would be unlikely to attend meetings</p> <p>Provides input from cross-section of public not just activists</p> <p>Statistically tested results are more persuasive with political bodies and the general public</p>	<p>Response rate is generally low</p> <p>For statistically valid results, can be labour intensive and expensive</p> <p>Level of detail may be limited</p> <p>May be perceived as a public relations tool</p>
<p><b>Small Neighbourhood Meetings</b></p> <p>Small meetings within neighbourhood usually at a person's home</p>	<p>Issue relevant to neighbourhood</p> <p>Make sure staff are very polite and appreciative</p> <p>May need to be aware of other neighbourhood issues</p>	<p>Relaxed setting is conducive to effective dialogue</p> <p>Maximises two-way communication</p>	<p>Requires a lot of labour to reach many people</p>
<p><b>Open Public Meetings</b></p> <p>Formal meeting with scheduled agenda</p>	<p>Accessible and convenient public location</p> <p>Publicise event</p> <p>Clearly defined objective</p> <p>Defined meeting structure</p> <p>Provide proper staffing and facilitation</p>	<p>Opportunity to provide information and obtain feedback</p> <p>Demonstrates commitment to public consultation</p> <p>Builds relationships with local community</p> <p>Relatively inexpensive</p>	<p>Not representative</p> <p>Localised knowledge only</p> <p>Large group format may be a barrier to some</p>

## Methods and Models

## Considerations

## Advantages

## Disadvantages

### Representative Groups

Made up of people with particular interest in the issue. Contact may be through forums or discussion groups

Find relevant groups, what they do and who they represent

Determine best contact method

Access to body of research  
Consultation with knowledgeable group  
Allows in-depth discussion  
Relatively inexpensive

Opportunity for individuals to capture discussion  
Not necessarily statistically representative  
Can be time consuming  
Large group format may be a barrier to some

### Future Search Conferences

Considering future scenarios and ways to influence outcomes in uncertain situations

Independent and skilled facilitator

No pre-set proposals

Seeks consensus

Allows an exchange of information

Many viewpoints can be heard

Resource intensive  
Can be captured by large interest groups  
Difficulty in reaching a consensus

### Face to Face Interviews

One-to-one meetings with stakeholders to gain information on public concerns and perspectives

Where feasible, interviews should be conducted in-person, particularly when considering candidates for citizens committees

Take advantage of opportunity for citizens to input on how they participate

Use trained researchers

Provides opportunities to understand public concerns and issues

Provides opportunity to learn how to best communicate with public

Can be used to evaluate potential citizen committee members

Scheduling multiple interviews can be time consuming and expensive  
Interviewers must engender trust or risk negative response to format  
Not necessarily representative

### Focus Groups

8-10 people led by trained facilitator in 'one-off' discussion on particular topic

Selection of group is of primary importance

May need to have several groups to investigate views from different perspectives

Value the input and commitment of group members

Requires skilled facilitator

Rewards/incentives may be offered

Allows for brainstorming of ideas

Can include those who may usually be excluded (e.g. culturally and linguistically diverse groups)

Allows in-depth discussion

May be costly  
Lack of confidentiality  
Qualitative information only  
Difficulty in prioritising issues  
Does not lend itself easily to discussing sensitive issues

### Public Hearings

Formal meetings with scheduled presentations offered

Try to use informal meetings immediately before to build knowledge base

Provides opportunity for public to speak without rebuttal

Meets legal requirements

Puts comments on record

Does not foster dialogue  
Creates 'us vs. them' feeling  
Minority groups not easily included

### Community Facilitators

Use qualified individuals in local community organisations to conduct project outreach

Define roles, responsibilities and limitations up front

Select and train facilitators carefully

Promotes community-based involvement

Capitalises on existing networks

Enhances project credibility

Can be difficult to control information flow  
Can build false expectations  
Information capture can be difficult



## Methods and Models

## Considerations

## Advantages

## Disadvantages

### Advisory Committees

A group of representative stakeholders assembled to provide public input to the planning process

Define roles and responsibilities up front

Be forthcoming with information

Use a consistently credible process

Interview potential committee members in person before selection

Use third party facilitation

Ensure members communicate with their constituencies

Provides detailed analyses for project issues

Participants gain understanding of other perspectives, leading toward compromise

General public may not embrace committee's recommendations

Members may not achieve consensus

Sponsors must accept need for 'give-and-take'

Time and labour intensive

### User Panels

A small group regularly assembled to debate or provide input on specific issues over a long period of time

Small size - no more than twelve

Have clear objective and time frame

Useful sounding board

Relatively quick feedback

Continuing dialogue

Can build credibility if all sides are represented

May provoke media attention

Gives user perspective

May provoke unwanted media attention

Can polarise issues if not conceived and moderated well

Users can become too closely linked to organisation

Often excludes minority groups

### Citizens' Panels

Comprise between 500 and 2500 citizens who are representative of population. Used as sounding board to test, assess and develop proposals over an extended period of time

Panel members need to be made clear of their roles

Can be conducted in partnership with other connected organisations/agencies

Track views over time

Can be directed towards particular targets

Access to wide range including minority groups

Resource intensive in initial stages

Maintaining interest for panel members

Replacing members throughout process

### Citizen Juries

Small group of representative citizens empanelled to learn about an issue, cross examine witnesses, and make a recommendation. Always non-binding with no legal standing

Requires skilled moderator

Commissioning body must follow recommendations or explain why

Be clear about how results will be used

Consensus not required

Great opportunity to develop deep understanding of an issue

Provides informed feedback

Public can identify with representative citizens

Resource intensive

Expensive

Not suitable for all issues

Extensive preparatory work

May not be representative

### Consensus Conferences

10-16 panel members come together to research a complex issue and then question expert witnesses before reaching a consensus decision

Requires high level of commitment from panel members

Requires compilation of complex material for preparatory days

Make available expert witnesses as determined by panel

Requires skilled and independent moderator

Panel determine questions to ask witnesses leading to greater impartiality

Open to public - transparent

Provides informed deliberation

High level commitment from panel

Resource intensive

Costly

Extensive preparatory work

Not representative

May be difficulty in reaching a consensus

## Methods and Models

## Considerations

## Advantages

## Disadvantages

### Deliberative Opinion Polls

Measures informed opinion on an issue during a 2-3 day meeting. Uses statistically significant sample

Do not expect or encourage participants to develop a shared view

Requires skilled facilitator

Polling of an informed group

Exposure to different backgrounds, arguments and views

Resource intensive

Can be costly to set-up and pay expenses of those attending

Not statistically representative

### Written Consultation Exercises

Inviting public submissions for written comments on specific proposals

Provide full details of issue for which views are sought

Publicise event

May need multiple format for documents

Allow ample time to respond

Provides detailed information on the issue for those interested

Elicits a considered view

Resource intensive

May have poor response rate

Lengthy process

### Open Days Community Exhibitions

Informal events to inform citizens about an organisation

Locate suitable venue

Publicise the event

Provide information displays

Timing is important

Gives public flexibility to attend

Allows contact with public and can provide ad-hoc feedback

Publicise organisation

May not be representative

Feedback may be limited

Difficulty in recording responses

### Consensus Building Exercises

Help people reach consensus by focussing on the issues

Requires experienced mediators. Typically used to bring stakeholders together to reach consensus over an issue

Round tables are one approach where adversarial groups are brought together

Helps people reach solutions they can all support

Allows for different viewpoints to be expressed

High emotional commitment

### Citizen Advisory Committees

Intended to represent broader public views

Benefits from balanced committee

Can be made up of variety of organisations from government and public

Advice of committee should influence decision making

Informs public, aids trust in government, reduces conflict

Not always representative group

### Referenda

Issue put to popular vote

Initiated by government

Issue should stand on its own (not complex question)

Results usually binding

Incites discussion

All voters have equal influence

Results cannot be ignored

Expensive

Potential for undue influence by organisations with greater resources

Limited use

### Information Technologies

Using information technology as a means to inform and gather feedback (e.g. calls for submissions, completing online questionnaires etc)

Access to computers may be limited

Cost effective after initial outlay

Quick response rate

Easy to keep information current

Can incorporate large amount of data

Won't reach everyone

Technical problems

Requires expert staff

Results can be unrepresentative

## Appendix 2: Checklist

### Do we have:

- Organisational commitment to consultation and to the outcomes derived?
- Mechanisms and resources to document the full extent of the consultation?
- Adequate time for consultation built into project timelines?
- A shared understanding, from all parties involved, of the scope and objectives of the consultation?
- An understanding from all stakeholders of what is negotiable and open to change and what is not.
- Agreement from all parties concerned as to whether the focus is on gaining agreement on the process for consultation or on the outcome of the consultation process?
- The ability to coordinate information and actions across the organisations involved?
- Relevant information that is readily accessible to all members of the community - including information on the issue and on the consultation process?
- The financial and technical resources to undertake the consultation?
- Practical/logistical matters identified and resourced?
- Appropriately skilled human resources to undertake the consultation?
- The credibility to engage the community?
- Open and accountable processes that can withstand public scrutiny?
- Community understanding of the level of input expected of them?
- Opportunities for engaging the community in debate on the issue?
- All potential stakeholders identified?
- Adequate publicity in place to ensure all potential stakeholders are aware of the consultation?
- An understanding of possible barriers to participation and appropriate strategies in place?
- Mechanisms in place for monitoring the consultation process and the organisational flexibility to make changes if required?
- Strategies in place for evaluating feedback from the consultation?
- Strategies in place for providing feedback to participants?
- A clear understanding with stakeholders regarding their level of involvement in implementation of outcomes?
- An evaluation of the consultation process built into project timelines?

## Appendix 3: Sample Evaluation Questions

The following questions may assist in designing protocols to evaluate the success of the consultation process. Some questions are more appropriately directed to participants, some to the consultation team.

### 1. Planning

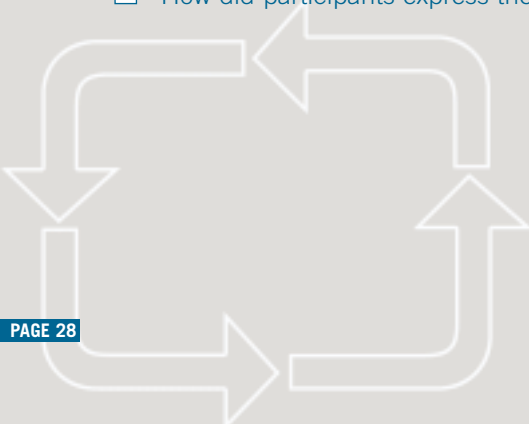
- Were the aims of the consultation made clear?
- What parameters were defined at the outset?
- Did participants have input into the design of the consultation?
- Was there a clear understanding of the expectations of all parties?
- Were the consulters trained in the skills required for effective consultation?
- Was financial assistance made available to enable consultees to participate?
- Was the outcome determined beforehand?
- Were other departments consulted/coordinated?
- Was there agreement on the approach to be taken?
- Were there enough opportunities to allow a full range of views to be expressed?

### 2. Process

- Were all stakeholders identified at the outset and involved in the consultation?
- Were the stakeholders representative of the affected population?
- How were roles and responsibilities made clear for all involved?
- Was participation voluntary?
- Were independent, skilled and neutral facilitators used?
- Was information made accessible to all including special groups?
- Was the process fully documented?
- Did the process maintain objectivity and independence?
- Was there an acceptance of the diverse values, interests and knowledge of all participants?
- Was there respect for the confidentiality of information shared?
- How was flexibility integrated into the process?
- Was enough time allocated for the project?
- Did participants have the opportunity to provide feedback throughout the process and was it acted upon?

### 3. Outcome

- Did the consultation produce reliable information?
- Was the collected information objectively analysed by skilled personnel?
- Was there a sense of shared ownership of the process and outcome?
- Was there a commitment to implement the outcome?
- Was feedback provided to participants?
- How did participants express their satisfaction or otherwise with the process?



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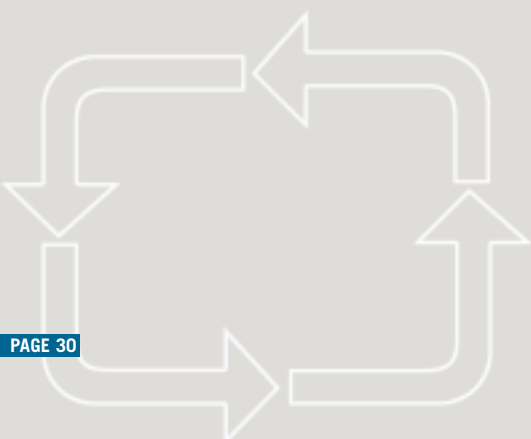
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Department of the  
Premier and Cabinet  
Citizens and Civics Unit

Citizens and Civics Unit  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet  
197 St Georges Terrace  
Perth WA 6000.

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