



Office for Disability

## How to consult with people with a disability

### Involve people with a disability in consultation

People with a disability should have as much input into the planning and development of services and activities as other community members. When conducting consultation and engaging with stakeholders it is therefore important to include people with a disability. By making a few changes to existing consultation processes, you can obtain the views of people with a disability, and the results will be more representative of the wider community.

### Why undertake consultation and engagement?

A dynamic and reflective organisation will seek the views of stakeholders and the broader community. Consultation is a way to listen to and obtain input from a broad range of stakeholders — whether individuals or groups in the community. Input is generally sought to:

- scope and generate ideas or seek feedback on available options
- inform the planning and development of activities, policies and programs
- inform and gauge the satisfaction of service users and customers about programs, services and facilities to understand what is working well, what needs to be improved and what extra measures may need to be taken to make improvements.

It is important to include people with a disability when consulting, as they may have distinct requirements, and have diverse experiences of accessing services.

### What is inclusive consultation and engagement?

Inclusive consultation and engagement:

- adopts flexible approaches for consultation to suit individuals and groups
- takes into account a variety of access and communication requirements
- respects people's differences — that is, just because two people have the same impairment does not mean their requirements are the same

- provides people with equal opportunity to contribute.

## **Methods of inclusive consultation and engagement**

These include:

- regular suggestion boards or boxes for satisfaction comments and improvements
- feedback and scoring sheets
- incorporation of verbal and visual opportunities for feedback
- an open-door policy for people to approach a representative or someone independent from the organisation if they have some feedback and suggestions
- availability and promotion of accessible complaints processes
- representation of people with a disability in advisory and reference groups
- accessible interactive websites and online forums.

Periodic ways, to suit single issues or task-related consultation, include:

- accessible surveys, written (email or postal), on-line, phone or face-to-face. Alternative format surveys can include Easy English with photos or symbols
- interviews — face-to-face, telephone or Skype (including 1800 free call number)
- paired interviews
- focus groups with an independent facilitator
- service user-groups (regular meetings with users of a service)
- citizen workshops or citizens' juries — panels of people from the general public who meet to discuss their views on issues
- employing people with a disability to interview and facilitate feedback and focus group sessions
- targeted (invited) consultation forums
- public meetings
- mystery shopping. A mystery shopper is someone who is recruited by an organisation to use its services as a regular customer would, to evaluate the services.

## **Promoting consultations to draw input from people with a disability**

Consider more than one promotion or advertising approach, such as:

- promoting the consultation using different accessible print and electronic formats
- various web postings — consider government, corporate and community
- mainstream media, such as local newspapers, corporate and community radio, including media produced by culturally and linguistically diverse groups
- disability-specific media such as newsletters published by disability peak bodies, advocacy organisations and support agencies
- community organisations and networks not associated with disability
- contacting regional and local government connectors
  - access for all ability providers
  - metro access, rural access, and deaf access workers
  - arts and cultural development officers

- disability advisory groups and committees in local councils
- postings to colleges and universities and a range of different industry-based organisations where people with a disability may be studying or working.

## **Messaging**

Information about a consultation is important in how it can be conveyed as welcoming attendance or discouraging attendance. Consultations don't necessarily have to be promoted as having a disability focus. Organisations can promote other features such as being an inclusive organisation, being an equal opportunity employer and that the organisation welcomes all members of the community to provide input for the consultation.

Complementary to this approach are the steps of inviting people with a disability to notify the organisation's contact person to request any access requirements — such as an Auslan interpreter or attendant carer — so they can participate in consultation. The organisation can also provide information and associated materials in readable standard print as well as stating the availability of accessible format documents upon request.

## **Disclosing disability**

When engaging with stakeholders and conducting consultation, it is important to provide an opportunity for participants and respondents to disclose disability. It will inform the experience of people with a disability in accessing an organisation's programs or services and how their experience differs from those who do not have a disability. Such feedback when identified as coming from a person with a disability may also report whether any improvements an organisation makes are having a positive impact.

Consultation methods must provide an opportunity to allow disclosure of disability. This is usually done by questions which establish whether the respondent has a disability and the nature of their functional barriers. Some people, however, may choose not to disclose a disability. That is their right.

## **Consultation preparation**

- Be clear of the purpose of consulting, the target group and chosen methodology.
- Give adequate notice of any public sessions by advertising well in advance.
- Provide advertisements and invitations in readable standard print and be ready to provide them in accessible formats upon request (see Further information).
- If engaging a facilitator such as for a focus group or public meeting, make sure the facilitator is aware of the access and communication needs of people with a disability.
- Conduct public meetings or targeted forums at appropriate times, keeping in mind people's routines, and that people with attendant carers or who use accessible taxis may find it difficult to attend events at certain times of the day.
- Provide invitees with the opportunity to notify a contact person if they have any particular access requirements, such as attendant carers or Auslan interpreters in order to participate in the consultation.
- If undertaking a public meeting, consider if child care should be provided.
- Consider catering. Adding together transport times and consultation time, the participant can easily be away from home for more than three hours.

## Accessible formats and venues

- Select accessible venues. These will have clear signage, wheelchair access, stairways with handrails, and will have hearing loops available. Accessible venues are close to public transport and have parking bays close to the venue.
- Inside the venue, ensure that toilets are accessible, that the venue provides wide hallways and doorways, and that there is sufficient circulation space for wheelchairs.
- Ensure that the area where speakers will address the audience, such as a podium or stage, is also accessible.
- Ensure that any overhead slides are in large font and contain high-contrast colours. Where possible, provide a handout or email copies of the slides to audience members beforehand.
- Ensure any written materials and handouts use a readable standard print. Produce some handouts in an accessible format such as large print.
- Provide name tags with large printing.
- Reserving seats near the front of the venue will help people with a vision impairment to see and will assist people with a hearing impairment to lip read or view a sign language interpreter. Check that the venue can reserve or allocate seating for people who use a wheelchair. These seats should be situated throughout the audience and not just limited to the front or back of the venue.
- If using microphones, use roving or lapel microphones, rather than a fixed microphone stand.
- Consider the use of 1800 or free call number to reduce the cost of participation.

## Further information

The full guide 'Inclusive consultation and communication with people with a disability' is available from the Office for Disability website: [www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au](http://www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au).

**See also:** Office for Disability fact sheet: 'Accessible formats'.

If you would like to receive this document in an accessible format, contact the Office for Disability:

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