



Office for Disability

## Why Consult with People with a Disability?

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 consult and engage with any stakeholders?

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.

Input can also be sought to provide the organisation with a profile of their customer base, such as clients and members. While not strictly consultation, this type of information can be gathered during consultation activities.

### Why consult and engage with people with a disability?

Information is sought from people with a disability, because they may have distinct requirements and may have had diverse experiences of accessing and using services. People with a disability may also have experienced indirect discrimination due to out-of-date policies and omissions in policy and practice.

People with a disability can be under-represented or not represented at all in some consultation or data collection processes. This can create the perception that people with a disability are not interested in having access to mainstream services or programs. This may actually mean that the service was not accessible to people with a disability.

The results of consulting people with a disability as service users can have a powerful influence on identifying and addressing gaps and barriers to participation, such as increasing and extending access to programs, services and facilities to a broad range of community members.

Organisations developing disability action plans (DAPs) are encouraged to consult internally and externally with people with a disability when reviewing what obstacles may be present to people with a disability using their programs, services and facilities. The organisation can also consult to identify and prioritise actions to improve the organisations access and inclusion. Further, consultation can be used to inform how well actions are being implemented and of resulting outcomes and impacts.

### **Representation on committees**

Seeking out and requesting people with a disability to join a committee — such as an advisory or reference group — for the purpose of stakeholder engagement and consultation is different from broad community consultation.

The aims for this type of engagement and the role of participants must be made clear. There are many variables. For example, does the committee have decision-making responsibility? Is the person contributing as an individual or representing others? How and why will the information will be used?

The cost of participation in this type of consultation should be considered. This could include:

- reimbursement of taxi or public transport fares
- meals and catering
- overnight accommodation if location is a distance from home
- sitting fees.

### **Consulting with carers and families of people with a disability**

Obtaining input from carers and family members of a person with a disability needs to always be considered in the context of the legal age of that person. In the first instance, input needs to be sought directly from adults with a disability.

Consulting families and carers is appropriate when children with disability are involved or when an adult with a disability provides permission for consulting with their family or carer. Families and carers can often be effective facilitators of communication between a third party and their family member with a disability who may have specific and complex communication requirements.

Consulting directly with family members is appropriate when an organisation wants a family or carer perspective, such as providing services to the carer, in addition to and not instead of the perspective of people with a disability.

## Consulting with disability support and advocacy organisations

Disability support and advocacy organisations:

- are a good source of information to assist organisations in planning a consultation so it will be inclusive and effective, as they can offer specific expertise relating to different types of disability and accessible practice
- are a rich source of feedback about the barriers commonly experienced by people with a disability in accessing programs, services and facilities
- can often be connectors to individuals with a disability and networks of people with a disability in local communities
- can often be effective facilitators of communication between a third party and people with a disability who may have specific and complex communication.

## Disclosing disability

When engaging with stakeholders and conducting consultation, it is important to provide an opportunity for participants and respondents disclose disability. It will inform the experience of people with a disability in accessing an organisation's programs, services or facilities 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.

## Customer base

Organisations can use the opportunity of consultation to gain a better understanding of those who are their customers, such as clients and members, and in turn who is being overlooked or missing out. This can include the collection of some demographic profile data such as the number of customers with a disability.

## Reporting back after consultation

Where possible, provide feedback from the organisation to consultation participants. How information is reported and communicated to participants should be considered when planning consultation. When in doubt, ask participants to indicate their preferred format for receiving feedback.

## 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: 'How to consult with people with a disability': [www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au](http://www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au).

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