

## ENGAGING WITH HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

### Prepare: do your homework first:

- When planning engagement in a specific geographic area, talk to local government and non-government organisations, about the demographic features and issues affecting that community:
  - Ask questions about members of the community who could benefit from, or contribute to, the relevant service or program but who do not engage due to particular barriers.
  - Consider collaborating with organisations that work in the community or are connected with the people that you are trying to reach.
- Talk to staff in yours and other agencies who have engaged in this area or with this cohort to determine what worked well and what didn't.
- Take a flexible, non-judgemental approach and make the effort to go where people are.
- Communication should target people individually. Consider enlisting a community organisation, or well-known person in the community, to help making a connection for you.
- Use language that reflects how the community or individual sees themselves. Don't make assumptions and 'label' the community before you have an understanding of the issues that are being faced. Labels may include 'socially excluded', 'poor', 'disadvantaged' or 'vulnerable.'

### : Key considerations to consider include:

- **Communicating consistently** and frequently before, throughout and after the process, utilising local networks and different formats of communication. Do not rely on public notices or general advertisements.
- **Being considerate** of and responsive to people's time commitments and other constraints such as transport, cost, child caring responsibilities, disability, health problems, literacy, and language barriers.
- **Trying different approaches** to engagement:.. if small group meetings don't work, make personal visits and work with community members one-on-one.
- **Ensuring all communications are in accessible language** and in a range of formats (phone calls, emails and face-to-face visits, videos, audio files and **Easy English**).
- **Making sure your approach is warm**, friendly and non-judgemental. Be personally meaningful, acknowledge personal experiences, concerns, issues and/or problems.
- **Realising you may not have the skills** to address the concerns or issues that arise during engagement. If so, involve your manager and professional help, if required.

- **Managing your own expectations** and the expectations of the people you are reaching out to.
- **Provide feedback and follow up** with those who have participated. Ask about their experience of engagement, what was successful and unsuccessful to help with future engagement activities.

Refer to the [FACT SHEET: Inclusive engagement](#) for more information

## Engagement planning and resources

- Research the demographics of the affected communities you need to engage and tailor your engagement strategy accordingly. E.g. if there are significant groups of residents with English as a second language an interpreter may be required and / or communications materials may need to be translated to alternative language(s).
- Multicultural SA provides summary information on the age, cultural, language and religious backgrounds of each Council area based on the most recent Census data. Talking to your local council will also help develop a profile of the communities you will be engaging.
- The Interpreting and Translating Centre (ITC) is a South Australian government agency employing qualified translators and interpreters experienced in most of the community and commercial languages of South Australia

## Engaging with specific groups

### Children

Children have their individual attention spans, learning preferences and capacities for engagement. Consider the following to when planning and engaging with them:

- Ensure you have parental permission before engaging with children.
- Be as creative and engaging as possible by making the activities fun and meaningful from a child's perspective.
- Role-playing and story-telling is a great way to involve children and impart information to them.
- Children love 'doing' more than 'sitting and listening'. Be as active as possible and consider the 'walk and talk' approach to engagement or use a visual aid to get children involved.
- Never underestimate the capacity of a child to understand or be involved, but keep your language clear, concise and 'child friendly' so that your practice remains inclusive.
- Use visual or tactile tools to engage with children –view the [DEWNR case study](#), where Minecraft was used to engage children on ideas for future National Parks.

## Disadvantaged and homeless

If you are planning services to assist disadvantaged groups or the homeless consider the following:

- Go to them – visit their community or service centres to talk to groups and individuals
- Be mindful of varying levels of literacy and numeracy and ensure you have written and verbal information available and written and verbal ways to provide feedback.
- Consider ways in which they can participate at no cost (e.g. telephone hotline, access to internet to submit online survey and transport to events if you are unable to go to them.)

## Young people

'Youthfulness' brings many and varied considerations when it comes to a meaningful engagement process. These are some of the basic points to consider:

- Be engaging, positive and approachable to the extent that young people feel empowered rather than 'expected to participate'.
- Never presume what they can or can't do or what they don't know already or understand.
- Be clear about yours and their expectations, including time frames and continuity.
- Use the mediums that young people value, such as online tools and music, and don't forget creativity and 'doing' opportunities.
- Engage them with an offering of a mutually beneficial outcome. Young people will engage meaningfully if their time and effort is valued and heading somewhere of importance to them. This is the '*What's in it for me?*' (WIIFM) factor.
- Be respectful of the diversity of skills and understanding as you would with a group of adults or a blend of the two.
- Ensure that you have the mechanisms to address any issues of power balance between individuals or groups within your audience.
- Respect fresh ideas and celebrate the adrenalin of youth.
- Be mindful of confidentiality and anonymity where applicable.
- Consider covering the costs for young people to participate in your process – many will not engage if there are costs involved, as they have limited financial resources (as with many other hard-to-reach groups).

## People who have a disability

To be inclusive and respectful of people with a disability, connect with someone who works specifically in this discipline. This may help your planning as it will considering the following:

- Often people who have a disability face other challenges that also marginalise them. Don't focus solely on one aspect of their lives but work with the 'whole person' and avoid assumptions about his or her level of ability.
- Be mindful that they may need more time to voice their opinions or would prefer to provide their input in other ways than publicly
- Consider whether you need microphone (sound field) technology or a signing person (Auslan interpreter) for people with a hearing impairment.
- Arrange accessibility to venues or activities within a venue that caters for people who use wheelchairs. Request space and seating information when making arrangements. Asking if the person has any special requirements upon RSVP will be respectful.
- Be aware of differing communication capacities and a need to include activities or opportunities to engage with people depending on their needs or preferences.

Deepen your thought and planning processes about what is appropriate for your engagement strategy.

If your engagement process extends beyond an initial engagement into a more formal relationship, these primary considerations will become second nature.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Respect, dignity, control and power are qualities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have struggled to maintain since colonisation. In valuing their input, you aim to also respect the cultural nuances that will lead to a more successful engagement process. Consider the following:

- Work closely to the *Better Together* principles around research and develop a deep understanding of their place, culture and expectations.
- Spend time building a relationship and rapport with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as a group or as individuals within a broader group, particularly with the communities Elders.
- Be aware of some of the cultural sensitivities around topics for discussion and gender or age appropriateness of discussing these topics (eg men's business, women's business).
- Seek permission before photographing or filming any aspect of the activity.
- Identify an environment that is neutral and friendly to all participants. Consider a 'yarning place' for a yarning circle or regular meeting place, rather than a conference room or formal setting.
- Never assume that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same beliefs and opinions as one another.

- Consider the use of visual aids, such as photographs, images, timelines or maps to overcome potential language barriers.
- Find out if social media is an appropriate tool for the specific community you are engaging with

For some advice on engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, contact the [Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement](#).

### Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people

CALD groups or individuals will probably have had very different experiences of government services compared to the Australian system. They may have difficulties with the English language.

Establishing a sense of trust between staff and CALD people will be very important.

Some points to remember:

- anticipate issues that might arise
- demonstrate active listening and a willingness to address concerns or questions
- use sensitivity to establish if there is someone in the family or the wider group who understands written information
- use interpreters
- be aware of cultural differences, such as body and eye contact or pointing to someone, which may have undesired connotations in different cultures.
- Refreshments may need to be religiously and culturally appropriate.
- Some families may require assistance with transport, such as vouchers for taxis or bus fares
- Child care may need to be provided and meetings scheduled at convenient times.

*If an interpreter is not used*

- ensure you are understood, recognising that 'yes' or a nod may not always be adequate indicators of comprehension.
- use plain English in your explanations, avoiding jargon, idioms, irony and satire, which can be misunderstood by people from other cultures.