SERVICE PRIORITY REVIEW
BACKGROUND PAPER
ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY
This background paper was authored by the Service Priority Review secretariat in consultation with, and to inform the work of, the Service Priority Review Panel. Every effort has been taken to ensure accuracy, currency and reliability of the content. The paper is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the subject nor does it represent the position of the Western Australian Government. Changes in circumstances after the time of publication may impact the quality of the information.

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1. Agency capability reviews
2. Best practice regulation
3. Overview of the budget process
4. Counterproductive rules and processes
5. Digital transformation
6. Engaging with the community
7. Functional leadership
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16. Service design and delivery
17. Successful implementation of reform
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Introduction

There is a growing focus in both the theory and practice of placing citizens at the centre of public sector decision-making processes, as both target and agent, in order to design policies and services tailored to the needs of the community.¹

As evidenced throughout the Service Priority Review (the review) consultations, the community also increasingly expects genuine engagement with government. Stakeholders consistently identified the need for better consultation; quality engagement; and co-design of programs between government, service providers and citizens to find solutions to complex problems and deliver better outcomes, particularly for people living in regional areas and Aboriginal West Australians.

Citizen engagement serves a number of purposes in addition to improving policy and service design, including:

- Fulfilling the ethical imperatives of democracy. Engagement is at the heart of democratic governance and decision making.
- Promoting a strong concept of citizenship. Engagement can foster a sense of collective agency and responsibility for the achievement of common goods or goals, and enable the development of shared societal understandings.
- Leveraging the ideas, expert knowledge and skills of the non-government sector.
- Clarifying and developing a shared understanding of priorities, needs and expectations; shaping public opinion; and educating the public about policy alternatives.
- Legitimising the final decisions of government.²

The mode of engagement with citizens needs to be purposefully chosen according to specific context, with consideration given to the nature of public participation and the level of public influence over the decision-making process. Co-design, for example, involves a high level of shared decision making and ongoing, open engagement between parties.³

This background paper explores how the Western Australian public sector can respond to citizen expectations for more effective engagement, while leveraging the benefits of such engagement for both government and citizens. Rather than delving into what effective engagement should or should not look like, this paper considers the structural enablers needed for more effective engagement between citizens and the WA public sector.

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² Ibid.
³ For more information on co-design, see the SPR Secretariat’s Services Design and Delivery Background Paper.
Engagement in other jurisdictions

The trend towards citizen-centred public service has seen many jurisdictions direct effort and resources to better understanding and responding to community needs. Foundational to better understanding community needs is the approach to citizen engagement.

Several Australian jurisdictions (i.e. South Australia, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Tasmania) and the New Zealand Government have demonstrated a commitment to citizen participation through the adoption of whole-of-government approaches to engagement. See Table 1 of Appendix 1 for further details. These approaches generally aim to:

- support a culture of high-quality, best-practice, coordinated engagement
- promote the importance of engagement for effective policy design and implementation
- enable and empower citizens to actively participate in decision making.

These jurisdictions tend to take a principled approach to engagement and provide practical support for undertaking engagement in the most appropriate form.

To complement face-to-face modes of engagement, several international and Australian jurisdictions have implemented centralised and online platforms to make it easier for citizens to participate in government decision-making processes. Examples are provided in Table 2 of Appendix 1.

Platforms vary in their level of sophistication. Some jurisdictions simply provide a list of all government matters open for consultation (e.g. Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania, the Commonwealth) and others offer citizens a variety of interactive methods of participation (e.g. Victoria, SA, ACT, Northern Territory).

In addition to providing a convenient and accessible avenue for participation, sophisticated online platforms can improve the engagement process by:

- supporting a wide range of engagement tools, including polls, forums, ideation tools and surveys, as well as subscription tools allowing citizens to register for topics of interest
- encouraging creative and innovative approaches to engagement
- building a list of engaged citizens
- centralising the collection of consultation results and facilitating better data analytics
- generating efficiencies as a result of reduced duplication of effort in stakeholder list creation and procurement of engagement tools.
South Australia

An excellent example of a whole-of-government approach to engagement is the SA Government’s Better Together program, which was established in 2013 with the aim of helping that Government to engage more effectively with its citizens.

To provide a consistent approach to engagement across government and guide best practice, the program is centred on six principles:

1. we know why we are engaging
2. we know who to engage
3. we know the history
4. we start together
5. we are genuine
6. we are relevant and engaging

Led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Better Together program provides public sector employees practical support through advice, tools, training and events, and partnerships. One such tool is the Community Engagement Toolkit, which provides a step-by-step guide, templates and other practical tools to help public servants:

- identify the type and level of engagement needed
- develop a comprehensive plan
- make preparations, from logistics to communications materials
- put the plan into action
- evaluate and report on the process.

The SA Government’s online community engagement website YourSAy has, since 2011, provided a space through which citizens can influence government decision making. Alongside the launch of the Reforming Democracy: Deciding, Designing and Delivering Together policy in 2015, YourSAy was reconfigured to facilitate additional modes of engagement and increase citizens’ involvement in decision making. Ensuring a central platform for community to engage with government, all SA Government agencies are required to coordinate significant engagements through the YourSAy website.

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Engagement in Western Australia

In the past, Western Australia was considered a leader in citizen engagement. In 2001 a citizenship policy unit was established within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) to prioritise “encouraging and empowering people to participate effectively, creatively and critically in community life”. The unit developed a series of guides to:

- provide best practice guidelines for consultation
- help agencies plan public participation programs appropriate to issues and objectives
- build Aboriginal community and public sector capacities to fully engage in effective partnerships.

The Citizenscape website, which was launched in 2002, provided citizens with information on how to actively engage in decision making and included a catalogue of consultations undertaken by State Government departments. In 2004 WA was the first Australian jurisdiction to develop a State Citizenship Strategy, which sought to “promote and facilitate greater community involvement in policy development and implementation”.

Since the winding up of the citizenship policy unit in 2006, it appears that the priority of, and commitment to, citizen engagement has somewhat diminished. There are some tools and frameworks currently available for use across the WA public sector, and some agencies have significant and valuable expertise and experience in stakeholder engagement. However, WA currently lacks a whole-of-government approach to engagement, with no strategy or framework to support consistent, best-practice engagement. There is also no central online platform for citizens to engage with the WA Government.

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15 For example, see the Office of Multicultural Interests guide to Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities, and the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety Stakeholder Identification Tool and User Guide.
Throughout the review consultation process, stakeholders within and outside the public sector raised a number of issues in relation to this current approach. Comments included:

- At times, consultation can be seen as a ‘tick-the-box exercise’ with some agencies not embracing its full intent.
- Community is better informed and engaged, but formal consultation approaches can come at the wrong time in the process. Community engagement models need to change.
- There needs to be work into how to do community engagement well.
- Although some agencies are doing good work in this space, there needs to be better strategy and principles around engagement.
- Frameworks, for instance citizens’ juries, make engagement an action, not just a policy. Consumers, agencies and service providers need support to harness each other’s expertise.
- Collaboration for Aboriginal involvement needs to extend beyond reliance on arrangements built on personal trust relationships; structural and procedural supports are required.
- Empowered citizens are keen on greater transparency from government and more avenues for participating in decision making.

The Department of Communities proposed that the “critical need for better engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal people…should be facilitated at a whole-of-government level in order to demonstrate the government commitment”.

The WA Council of Social Service submitted that “governments should have their own engagement mechanisms and feedback processes to support and encourage direct consumer participation, as well as (that facilitated by) community organisations and consumer advocates… Agreeing a common set of principles and practices based on our shared commitments can provide a basis for ensuring our expectations are aligned and realistic”.

### Options for reform

Empowered and engaged citizens are essential to building a public sector focused on and responsive to community needs. An engagement strategy for the WA public sector is needed to:

- prioritise community engagement as a core function for the public sector
- empower citizens to actively participate in decision making
- build capacity within both the public sector and community to engage effectively
- articulate, promote and facilitate good engagement practice to ultimately embed this as an integral way of operating.

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16 Department of Communities. 2017. Submission to the Service Priority Review.
17 Western Australian Council of Social Services. 30 June 2017. Submission to the Service Priority Review.
In the medium term

Led by a central agency or line agency with relevant expertise, and in consultation with the public sector and community, take steps to develop a whole-of-government approach to engagement – including a strategy, practical tools and support – that leverages the existing resources and expertise of WA and other jurisdictions.

Recognising the need for genuine co-design and place-based solutions, particularly in regional and remote WA, the approach should include a focus on building capability in co-design and regional and remote engagement, particularly in relation to complex issues where governments traditionally struggle to gain traction.

The approach could also include the creation of a stakeholder engagement community of practice.

In the long term

In the context of a WA digital transformation agenda, implement a whole-of-government online platform, to complement – not replace – face-to-face engagement, based on successful models employed by other jurisdictions, which, at a minimum, provides a central location for all WA Government consultations.
References


### Appendix 1 – Examples of Approaches, Tools and Online Platforms Across Jurisdictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Whole-of-government engagement approaches and tools</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td><em>Better Together</em> program(^{18}), principled approach to engagement with citizens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td><em>Engaging Canberrans: A guide to community engagement</em>(^{19}), outlines principles and practical tools for effective community engagement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Engagement support and training provided by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.(^{21})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td><em>Remote Engagement and Coordination Online Toolkit</em>(^{22}), collection of ideas, tools and information on the most effective ways to engage with people in remote communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td><em>Preparing for effective engagement: A guide to developing engagement plans</em>(^{23}), focuses on the strategic elements of planning a project-based engagement. <em>NSW Public Sector Open Government Community of Practice</em>(^{24}), a collaborative forum for sharing best practice on community engagement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Guideline, policy and tools for online community engagement(^{25}).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td><em>Toolkit on engaging stakeholders</em>(^{26}), advice from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet’s Cabinet Implementation Unit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Public participation toolbox, including online engagement centre of expertise(^{27}), led by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet as part of <em>The Policy Project</em> for building public sector capability.</td>
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\(^{18}\) Government of South Australia. *Better Together*.  
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<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Whole-of-government online community consultation platform</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Your Say website. Online consultation hub for citizens. Methods of participation include online discussions, voting in polls, and deciding where government funds are spent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Your Say website. Online platform for citizens’ feedback on ACT Government projects and initiatives. Methods of participation include surveys, polls and discussion boards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>Services Tasmania’s Have Your Say webpage. List of links to TAS Government consultations currently open for public feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Engage Victoria website. Victorian Government's Online Consultation platform. Provides a range of tools to enable the community to readily share their ideas and opinions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Have Your Say website. Online community engagement hub for feedback on a range of NT Government projects, initiatives, and services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Have your say website. List of NSW Government consultations currently open for public feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commonwealth of Australia</td>
<td>Business Consultation website. Platform for direct or public consultation on business-related policies and regulations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>NZ Government’s Engaging with government webpage. Includes list of local and central government consultations. NZ Parliament’s Have your say webpage. Platform for citizens to make a submission to a select committee, start a petition, or contact an MP.</td>
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