

# Principles of Good Practice

Institute of Public Administration Australia **Queensland**

## Community Engagement

The Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) Queensland has developed the Principles of Good Practice series of guidelines to champion good practice in the public sector. The principles cover hot public sector issues to encourage debate and discussion amongst those involved in the profession whether in government agencies, politics, academia or the private and community sectors.

The Community Engagement Principle outlines what you need to know about community engagement including implications, challenges and ideas on achieving good practice.

### Community Engagement

- Community engagement is the joining of community and government bodies in government planning and decision making processes.
- There has been a refocus on community engagement for a number of reasons including declining trust and confidence in government, changing community expectations and the need for more involved ways of managing social policy.
- The community engagement spectrum can be divided up into information, consultation and active participation. The trick is to choose the best approach depending upon your desired outcomes.

<b>Information</b>	One-way communication where government provides information to the community.
<b>Consultation</b>	Two-way communication where community views are actively sought and considered.
<b>Active participation</b>	Both government and community have equal partnership in the relationship and equal opportunity to set the agenda. The community is recognised as able to independently develop policy options.

### Current Practice

Across the three tiers of government there has been a focus on community engagement with the provision of support and advice for members. To date, there have been some community engagement successes. Unfortunately, however, these are overshadowed by some less than successful ventures which have left the community feeling a little jaded. This makes it even more important that we get our community engagement ventures right in the future.

### Recommendations for Good Practice

- It is recognised that community issues are complex and that such complexity demands new ideas, lateral thinking and an 'unlearning' of professional and organisational conventions and norms.
- Where an 'active participation' approach is required, government needs to respond in a networked fashion where traditional departmental demarcation is broken down and links with external community bodies are formed. Here, government needs to organise through networks, collaboration and partnerships, make decisions through negotiation and consensus, and provide solutions that are innovative and experimental.

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## Community Engagement

Here are some things that you can do to encourage your 'active participation' community engagement activities to be successful:

- **Know what you want to achieve:** determine the appropriate level of engagement and base your activities on your objectives.
- **Choose your engagement activities wisely:** consider what's been done before and whether there is readiness on the part of the community to get involved (e.g. has there been a crisis?)
- **Be realistic:** it takes time to build trust, so don't expect outcomes upfront. Stimulating some 'quick wins' initially will increase momentum and engender commitment.
- **Focus on building trust** through empathy, information sharing, reciprocity, shared values and predictability. Follow through and do what you say you will!
- **If a group is formed,** ensure that members have legitimate authority to make decisions.
- **Build a common purpose:** this will be the 'glue' that holds people together without a traditional hierarchy and will ensure that everyone is motivated and headed in the same direction.

A shift towards networked government also requires a shift in our concept of leadership. The following table presents a perspective of what the leadership of the future will look like:

'Now' leadership	'Future' leadership
Hierarchical	Non-hierarchical and inter-organisational
Evokes followers	Evokes collaboration and concerted action
Takes charge; seizes the reins of an organisation	Provides the necessary catalyst or spark for action
Takes responsibility for moving followers in certain directions	Takes responsibility for convening stakeholders and facilitates agreements for collective action
Heroic; provides the right answers	Facilitative; asks the right questions
Has a stake in a particular solution or strategy	Has a stake in getting to agreed-upon outcomes, but encourages divergent ways to reach them

### Something for you to think about...

- How does your agency practice community engagement?
- What do you think about your agency's approach and processes?
- What other ways could the government promote community engagement?
- Does there seem to be an ad-hoc approach or a whole of government approach towards community engagement?
- What leadership skills need to be developed to encourage people to play an equal role in community collaboration?

Concepts in this Fact Sheet are discussed further in the **FULL VERSION** of this Principle. Please see

[www.qld.ipaa.org.au](http://www.qld.ipaa.org.au)

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