



Social Inclusion of the Hard to Reach



Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach: Local Government, Social Profiling and Civic Infrastructure



The **Hard to Reach Project** is a collaborative research venture with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association and researchers from Swinburne University of Technology. The three year project is jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and partner organisations.

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How to read this report

This report is intended as a practical resource for local councils wishing to engage their communities in decision making and planning. The focus is on how to broaden the range of people represented in council processes, especially those who are reluctant to participate in traditional consultation methods. Councils sometimes think of these groups as being *hard to reach*. We hope that this report will go some way towards redressing this perception.

The report draws on the *Community consultation and the hard to reach: local government, social profiling and civic infrastructure* project (Hard to Reach Project) and aims to present its findings in an accessible and practically applicable format that will help councils to extend their consultation processes to become more inclusive. Throughout the report, examples illustrate instances of good practice, as well as traps to look out for. Examples are drawn from the findings and observations made during the case studies that were conducted for the Hard to Reach Project. The examples illustrate key findings from the research in a simplified way. Where the reader is interested in gaining greater understanding of the complexity of the cases, it is recommended that s/he pursue the individual case study reports that were prepared for the project (Appendix 1).

Introduction: public participation in council planning and decision making

The *Community consultation and the hard to reach: local government, social profiling and civic infrastructure* (Hard to Reach) project aimed to investigate how consultation is currently practised in Victorian local government, especially in relation to multiple publics and groups that councils can find hard to reach. Using case studies with each of the eight participating councils, the research considered why, with whom and how councils consult. The analysis of the cases was framed by the themes of the need for representativeness and social inclusion to ensure the legitimacy of public participation processes.

Why do councils consult?

Local governments across Australia devote considerable time and resources to involving community members in decision making and planning about local issues. At the same time, councils seek to build closer relationships with community members and community groups, local businesses and other stakeholders. However, the rationales behind consultation often combine multiple aims and objectives that are not always clearly distinguished.

The research showed that the reasons local councils consult with their communities are sometimes pragmatic, while at other times they stem from conceptions about local government's role in democracy, in community building and engagement, in fostering civil society or in redressing social injustice or exclusion. Reasons for public participation include the desire to improve planning and decision making through a better understanding of constituents' needs and priorities, statutory requirements, the desire to foster good governance, the wish to educate the community about important issues, and the desire to strengthen social capital through community engagement and community building.

Public participation processes vary considerably in scope and emphasis. Our research showed that councils typically consult on:

- Major policies and strategies
- Policies and targeted strategies that are place or issue based
- Operational and service planning and development
- Performance evaluation
- Issues of special concern to the community.¹

The case studies chosen for the research, and which furnish the examples used in this report, were matched to provide instances of this range of levels of consultation.

Who do councils consult?

The level of consultation and the issues under consideration to some degree determine who councils consult. A consultation on a place based issue, clearly, will have a different target group from one on council's strategic plan. Ideally, consultations should aim to include all those affected by the issue. In reality, this is not often the case, nor is it always practicable. Hence councils face difficult decisions about how to include a representative range of community members and how to use their resources best in designing participation processes that engage those with different attitudes, needs and priorities.

The reason it is desirable to include a representative cross-section of the community in public participation is to ensure the legitimacy of decisions made on the basis of 'what

the community says'. Otherwise results are open to criticism and complaint and can be subject to challenge on the basis that they do not reflect wider community interests.

The research for the Hard to Reach project showed that, despite efforts to broaden the range of those involved, most council consultations attract only a small section of the community that is often not representative of the broader constituency. Most direct citizen interactions continue to use 'traditional methods', such as public meetings, forums and surveys. Most consultations are advertised using public notices, leaflets, letter drops and pre-existing networks. Participants are usually 'active citizens' and representatives of community (and other) organisations, as it is easier to access people who already have established relationships with council. This favours a certain kind of participant (middle aged, male, articulate and relatively well educated) and falls short in terms of representativeness and the inclusion of multiple publics in participatory processes.

How do councils consult?

Consultation is a process, not an event, and as such its success is judged not only by the outcomes, but also by the manner in which it unfolds. Difficulties can arise because the community and the council frequently have different expectations of public participation and judge its success (or failure) according to different criteria. For example, community members may feel that a consultation was successful and that their views were heard *only if their input was acted upon*. Councils may be satisfied that they have undertaken a successful public consultation if they have gathered a range of views that aid their decision making and planning *regardless of whether these views are acted upon*. This highlights the importance of communication about the methods and purposes of consultation prior to its taking place, throughout the process and after its conclusion. In particular it is important to communicate how decisions will be made and what outcomes are likely to result.

There are numerous ways in which public participation can be thought about, conceptualised and evaluated.² An example of a pragmatic and pluralistic model, which views it as an activity that should be shaped by the policy problem at hand, and which includes community as well as council views, is the influential International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum (Table 1).

The table outlines the choices organisations have when doing public participation, depending on the degree to which citizens are expected to be involved in the decision-making process. The IAP2 Spectrum is useful for local authorities because it combines the goals of public participation (such as to obtain feedback or work directly with the public) with the implicit promise this approach holds for the community (e.g. information, consultation or empowerment), thereby directing organisations to think through the public perceptions of their participation processes.

The Spectrum describes a variety of options for community engagement. At one end of the Spectrum, organisations can choose to simply inform their citizens of a decision that has been or will be made. At the other end, they can delegate decision making to the public. The IAP2 Spectrum also suggests a small range of techniques that can be used, depending upon the level of involvement required of citizens, although it should be noted that some techniques can be used for a range of engagement levels. The IAP2 Spectrum is useful for thinking about the degree to which organisations want citizens to contribute to decision making and emphasises the need to be clear about the messages sent to the public. However, it does little to address a range of other issues, including how to constitute a representative sample of the community (multiple publics) and how to include specific groups that councils can sometimes find difficult to involve. These are the issues addressed by this report.

Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

	Increasing level of public impact 				
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced that decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus building • Participatory decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

Source: <http://www.iap2.org.au/sitebuilder/resources/knowledge/asset/files/36/iap2spectrum.pdf>

Characteristics of councils who 'get it'

The research for the Hard to Reach project showed that councils that are successful in engaging multiple publics (including hard to reach persons) in their participatory processes share a number of key characteristics in relation to their ability to identify, access and engage those who are not easily engaged using traditional methods. Beyond providing opportunities for involvement, effective participation requires councils to build their own capacity to conduct consultation and to reach out to the community.

The research indicates that the key determinants of councils that successfully engage their communities include the skills and knowledge of staff, the lines of communication within council, and most importantly, the organisational culture and the attitude of elected representatives. We found, for example, that all participating councils kept extensive statistics on their communities' demographic characteristics. Service areas in particular tended to have excellent knowledge of their communities and often used this to target participants for consultation. Not all councils successfully shared these skills and information across the organisation, which sometimes resulted in sub-optimal outcomes. For example, when high level plans and documents were consulted upon, demographic information was not frequently used to tailor a consultation strategy that would engage a representative section of the community by targeting multiple publics using a combination of consultation and sampling techniques. Perhaps it was considered too resource intensive to specifically target a wide range of groups.

The key criteria for successful and inclusive public participation identified by the research are:

- Ability to access, interpret and use demographic and socio-cultural information about constituencies
- Development or existence of a supportive organisational 'culture of consultation'
- History and experience of consultation
- Existence of and adherence to policy and processes that include guidance on establishing equitable, accountable and transparent participatory policy and processes
- Allocation of sufficient resources
- Councillors who have a positive attitude to consultation and are actively involved – in this way, it is not just council staff but also decision makers who hear the community
- Access to knowledgeable staff and continuing staff training
- Communication across organisational 'silos'
- Knowledge retention and knowledge sharing with council staff within and between different organisational areas and consultants
- Ability to select and work with consultants who are experienced in conducting inclusive participatory processes or who are experts in engaging particular groups
- Ability to flexibly adjust participatory processes as unforeseen issues arise.

The research

This report is the last in a series for the *Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach* research project.

The Hard to Reach Project investigated how community consultation is currently practised by Victorian councils, especially in relation to multiple publics and groups that councils can find hard to reach. It was a collaborative research venture, with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association, and researchers from Swinburne University of Technology. The three year project (2004-07) was jointly funded by the Australian Research Council, the Cities of Boroondara, Darebin, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moreland, Port Phillip and Whittlesea and the Shire of Nillumbik.

The initial [Consultation Policy and Practice: An Initial Overview](#)³ report and [Consulting the 'Hard to Reach' in Victorian Local Government](#)⁴ working paper scope the issues facing councils when consulting hard to reach groups. The subsequent [Community Consultation and the 'Hard to Reach': Concepts and Practice in Victorian Local Government](#)⁵ report considers the policy and theoretical debates underpinning community consultation, participation and engagement and links these to participating councils' current practices. The [Hard to reach? Engagement, governance and community consultation in Victorian local government](#)⁶ paper considers issues of community participation in the context of network governance, and the working paper [Who is Hard to Reach and Why?](#)⁷ addresses a range of definitional and conceptual issues.

Building on this, a series of seven in-depth case study reports address the issues facing councils when attempting to engage hard to reach groups in different consultation contexts. A detailed case study was conducted with each partner council. The case studies were matched to provide examples of a range of levels of consultation and to provide insights into how councils with differing socio-economic characteristics tackle the challenge of community consultation.

These reports are available online at <http://www.sisr.net/cag/projects/community.htm>. Table 1 gives an overview.

Table 1: Summary of case studies conducted for the Hard to Reach research project

Council	Theme	Case study
City of Melbourne	Local area planning Example: Southbank Boulevard Park	This case study addresses a proposal to redevelop/enlarge a park at Southbank Boulevard as one component of the joint Department of Sustainability and Environment and City of Melbourne 'Southbank Plan'. The community consultation process was conducted between October and November 2005. A number of issues are raised by council's decision to conduct community consultation about Southbank Boulevard, including the challenge of consulting a predominantly young population in a new and emerging inner city suburb.
Shire of Nillumbik	High level planning Example: Council Plan and Strategic Resources Plan	<p>From December 2005 to March 2006 the Shire of Nillumbik conducted nine community consultation workshops to obtain feedback on its strategic commitments as outlined in the Nillumbik Shire <i>Council Plan 2005-09</i> and the accompanying <i>Strategic Resource Plan</i>. Approximately 100 participants, including residents and representatives of local organisations, were involved in these face to face consultations which explored their views regarding preferred directions and emerging priorities for the Nillumbik Shire community and for council. A survey was also used to solicit additional feedback. This was included in council's paper, the <i>Nillumbik News</i>, and was also available on council's website. There was a very high response rate, with over 2,000 replies received.</p> <p>The Nillumbik case study raises a number of issues about councils' ability to engage a representative section of the community in consultations on high level issues and the suitability of various consultation methods.</p>
City of Boroondara	High level planning Example: Structure Plan	This case study looks at the City of Boroondara's efforts to engage the public as part of its Kew and Camberwell Structure Plans. Working with a number of consultants, this highly complex planning process utilised a range of community consultation methods including on-street surveys, a community reference committee and focus groups. The case study provides an opportunity to discuss how the council responded to the challenge of structure planning and how it negotiated issues around competing community preferences. It also raises questions about alternative methods of engagement that are available to councils when formulating their structure plans.

Council	Theme	Case study
City of Maribyrnong	Service review Example: Delivered Meals Service	In June and July 2006 the City of Maribyrnong conducted a series of four consultation workshops, as well as a survey with the users of its Delivered Meals Service. The aim was to consult with current users to ascertain their satisfaction with the service. The target groups were frail and elderly people, people with disabilities and their carers, and CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) and non-CALD users. The case study raises questions about how councils can make participation processes accessible to those who face barriers or disincentives to participation.
City of Moreland	Community building Example: Community Building Initiative	This case study provides an example of a place based community building initiative, Focus on Fawkner. The three year project was funded by the Department of Victorian Communities and supported by Moreland City Council. The case study examines issues around the sustainability of community building initiatives and their ability to involve a broad range of community members.
City of Whittlesea	Issue based consultation Example: Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre (TRAC) Strategy	The Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre (TRAC) Strategy case study is based on a series of community and stakeholder discussion groups which were intended to gauge community needs and ideas for the future of the centre. Six discussion groups were advertised, inviting members of the general community, schools, sporting clubs, youth service providers, older adults, aged care and health and wellbeing service providers. The case study raises questions about the capacity of councils to institute processes that will allow a range of community members to successfully participate in the consultation process.
City of Darebin	Consultation with specific groups Example: Darebin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Council (DATSICC)	The Darebin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Council (DATSICC) is a special committee of council dedicated to supporting Darebin's indigenous community. It provides an opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of this structure as a means of furthering the interests of the indigenous community.
City of Port Phillip	Consultation with specific groups and community development Example: Mural project for homeless people	The City of Port Phillip engaged a community artist to do a mural project with homeless people in the St Kilda area. The case study is an example of a place based initiative that aimed to bond people experiencing various forms of homelessness, link them to a range of council's social services and reframe a contested public space.

Structure of the report

The body of the report is organised into four sections.

The first section, *Definitions and context*, outlines public sector trends and public policy debates that have renewed the focus on consultation and community engagement in Australia and overseas.

The complexities surrounding the use of 'hard to reach' terminology and the implications for social inclusion are addressed under the heading *Identifying hard to reach groups*. This section highlights the use of socio-economic and demographic data as a source of information. It provides a tool which can be used to think constructively about those sections of the community that councils can find difficult to involve for certain purposes.

Strategies for involving hard to reach groups considers the degree to which particular groups are 'hard to reach' in specific contexts. This section evaluates participation strategies in terms of their relevance to the particular populations targeted and the issues consulted upon. The strategic roles of forward planning, liaison between council and community, and the facilitation of processes are also discussed here.

The technical challenges of designing inclusive and participatory consultation processes are addressed in the fourth section, *Participant selection*. A variety of tools are involved in the selection of participants and the collection of information. The benefits and limits of a range of sampling methods and data collection methods are discussed here.

The report concludes with recommendations for councils wishing to conduct inclusive participatory practices.

Definitions and context

The move to increased local consultation in Victoria follows broader international trends in new public sector management. Government agencies at the regional, national, state and local levels have sought to broaden their remit from 'government' to forms of 'governance' that work by partnership between the public, private and community sectors. This is paralleled by policies that aim to strengthen social capital through community building and social inclusion.

While public participation in councils' decision-making and planning processes is not new, as a result of the changing emphasis in public engagement, there has been a proliferation in the methods used to involve the public.⁸ At the local level, councils have been encouraged to play a community leadership role, work with key stakeholders and community partners to promote wellbeing and develop community strategies and use consultation processes to promote participation. Innovative methods such as citizens' panels and juries, charettes and listening posts have been added to the range of techniques, as regional and national governments have become more concerned about a decline in civic culture and a growing democratic deficit and as citizens express ever-lower levels of confidence in government and democratic politics. The aim is only partly to involve a broader range of citizens and stakeholders in local decision making. Such forums are also designed as civics lessons, counter-acting cynicism and disengagement from the political process.⁹

Representativeness and legitimacy of public participation

The need for representativeness and social inclusion in public participation can be framed theoretically using two key dimensions of democratic legitimacy: procedural legitimacy and the ability of political institutions to provide outcomes.

Procedural legitimacy refers to the way in which democratic processes are conducted to secure the consent of the governed.¹⁰ The notion is linked to the fundamental tenets of representative democracy where general acceptance of political decisions is predicated on the principle that each vote counts equally when electing representatives and that, beyond elections, everybody has the same right to attempt to influence political decision making through lobbying and advocacy. In the case of public participation in local government decision making, procedural legitimacy is closely linked to issues of representativeness and opportunity to become involved. Consultations may not require full inclusion, but should at least aim to involve a representative sample of the municipality's population. In reality, due to their complexity, consultations on major policies and strategies that affect the entire municipality (e.g. Corporate Plan, Strategic Resource Plan or Municipal Strategic Statement) are often carried out involving only a small number of community members who are often not representative of the broader demographic. Consultations that relate to a service review or an operational matter are usually aimed at a subset of the municipality's population and do not usually require full inclusion (though they may benefit from it). But even in these instances, only a small proportion of the affected citizens takes part in the consultation process.

The other key dimension of democratic legitimacy is the *effectiveness of political institutions*, which hinges upon the ability to deliver outcomes and address emerging issues and needs as they arise.¹¹ Here it is not so much the representativeness of public participation that counts (although representation remains an issue), but the outcomes that result.

While the two dimensions of democratic legitimacy are a useful test of the validity of public participation, decisions about doing and using the results of consultation are inevitably tempered by practical considerations. As outlined in the *Community Consultation and the 'Hard to Reach': Concepts and Practices in Victorian Local Government* report,¹² something can be learned about the desired level of community involvement in decision making from pluralistic and purpose based models of public participation.

Representative and participatory models of democracy

The broader public policy debate on consultation and participation in local government exhibits both optimism and caution. Many political commentators welcome local government's role in fostering community based decision making and engagement, seeing it as the basis for a more pluralistic and tolerant society based on participatory democracy and the frank discussion of differences.¹³ There are many benefits from involving 'ordinary people' directly in public decision making, rather than relying on elected representatives or the 'usual suspects' of lobby groups, community agencies and interest groups. Local government can be seen to be responsive and transparent; decisions can be seen as legitimate and based on consent; services are more likely to be used if people have expressed a preference. More importantly, perhaps, those involved in the process may gain a new experience of positive involvement in government and public decision making which may teach them to distinguish between their private interests and concerns and issues of the greater public good.

Sceptics argue that the increased emphasis on consultation and participation distracts from a realistic understanding of politics and the responsibilities of elected officials for decision making.¹⁴ It may also detract from the effective role that organised and expert interest groups play within the machinery of representative democracy.¹⁵ More participation is not necessarily the same thing as more democracy, in the sense of either greater representation in the decision-making process or greater say in the decisions that are made. One of the problems is that 'no decision-making process can involve all the people it affects'.¹⁶

The question is whether the available consultation techniques are able to adequately *represent* all groups, rather than reinforcing existing patterns of social exclusion or allowing self-interested individuals or groups to dominate.¹⁷ Consultation and participation initiatives may attract some groups rather than others, especially where they demand political skills or the ability to articulate interests and demands. Councils using techniques such as citizens' panels, where a sample of community members is invited to comment on particular issues, face the problem of how to ensure that the participants are representative, given the difficulty of attracting representatives from sections of the community that commonly 'decline to participate', with young people being a standard instance. Those who are recruited from 'recalcitrant groups'¹⁸ may be atypical and thus unrepresentative. Even if this is not the case, the process of participation may alter their attitudes (as it is often expected to do) to the point where their views become even less representative of marginal or disengaged groups.

If participation is to enhance democracy, it has been argued, then it must 'ensure political equality' and make sure that 'levels of representativeness' are met in relation to the geographic, demographic and political dimensions of the community concerned. First, the participatory process must be open to all territorial areas of a community. Second, no socio-economic group must be disadvantaged in the process or excluded from it.¹⁹ Finally, all political views must be given an opportunity of expression. The demographic dimension is regarded as the most challenging of these. Making the process representative involves not just inviting all ethnic, socio-economic, age-related and other groups to take part, but ensuring that they do so, despite the fact that some are difficult to involve and may be disengaged from political processes.

To recognise particular groups as hard to reach is to assume that the consultative approach used should extend beyond standard techniques and feature greater consideration of who is targeted for consultation, how they are asked to participate, their potential motivations for participating and any barriers to participation. Developing new relationships and identifying innovative ways to engage target groups may also be required, as well as additional effort and resources. Without such efforts, participation may simply reinforce existing patterns of social exclusion and disadvantage.²⁰

Rational ignorance and problems of citizen motivation

Recognising diversity, appreciating the barriers that certain groups face and searching for more appropriate approaches to consultation for those groups are all important to effective community consultation. Approaching consultation in this way assumes that citizens are willing to be consulted and are keen to have a say in matters that affect their daily lives. Thus people are difficult to involve either because of their own characteristics or due to a lack of resources or imagination on the part of those wishing to consult with them. This leaves aside the issue of the extent to which people are willing (rather than able) to get involved.

There may be various reasons why people choose not to take part in community consultation. For instance, the costs of becoming engaged in a political activity may outweigh the benefits.²¹ Where this is the case, it may be quite reasonable for individuals to let others represent them or to 'free ride' on the participation efforts of others. Participation by a single individual is unlikely to have that much impact on the process, perhaps not enough to outweigh the cost of involvement.²² People may not have much interest in political issues generally, they may not like conflict²³ or they may not have the time to get involved.²⁴ It has been argued that achieving widespread citizen involvement on issues that affect large numbers of people is particularly difficult and 'those most interested in a decision will make it'.²⁵ This underlying problem of 'rational apathy' is supported by recent research in the United Kingdom which illustrated the prevalence of this problem and the associated importance of self-interest in determining citizen involvements:

It was clear from people's accounts of their own experience that involvement with the council was largely reactive: a personal reaction to a decision or action affecting one's own family ... people's real experiences of participation were more likely to relate to protection of their own or their community's immediate interests, rather than to the wider 'issues' that they referred to in the abstract.²⁶

This is a familiar problem that leads to claims that the well organised and politically active 'usual suspects' often dominate attempts at community consultation.

Additional difficulties include negative perceptions of local authorities, which may or may not be supported by personal experience.²⁷ Whether justified or not, the low opinion people held of local bureaucrats and councillors is cited as one reason for non-participation in community consultation. Similarly, while attitudes may have changed over time, research in 1980 suggested that many Australians considered their local politicians to be, at best, incompetent and, at worst, corrupt.²⁸

Councils have been further criticised for failing to seriously consider citizens' input. This is backed by a survey in the United Kingdom, which found that only one-third of local authorities felt that public participation had a significant outcome on the final result. Similarly, the failure by some councils to link the results of consultation with decision-making processes and to report findings back to citizens has created further cynicism.²⁹

While local government faces the underlying difficulties of rational apathy, negative perceptions and cynicism towards community consultation, a steady increase in public participation initiatives has also resulted in problems of 'consultation overload'. People have become irritated by constant invitations to participate in consultation exercises,³⁰ with the issue being particularly acute where local leaders are consulted on behalf of their communities. This has also led some Australian councils to undertake research regarding their previous practices before undertaking further consultation.³¹

The issues of social inclusion and hard to reach groups are therefore multi-faceted. They involve addressing fundamental problems of motivation in public participation exercises, recognising that there are people who are different or disadvantaged and may face barriers to participation, and attempting to overcome these issues through appropriate and effective consultation strategies.

Identifying hard to reach groups

Many councils struggle to involve a representative cross-section of the community in their consultation processes. People who are reluctant to participate are often understood through notions of disadvantage or barriers to participation and also include those who are disengaged from the political process and the 'time-poor'. However, these notions are not necessarily helpful if councils wish to reach out to their constituencies. A positive, proactive approach to involving people through a combination of targeting public participation tools, reaching out to communities in ways in which they are likely to respond and providing support where needed are important to encourage certain segments of the population to become involved.

This section of the report explores the notion of 'hard to reach' in more depth. It addresses the problems associated with 'hard to reach' terminology and provides a tool which can be used to think in a constructive way about those sections of the community councils can find difficult to involve for certain purposes.

Problems with 'hard to reach' terminology

In the context of local government, 'hard to reach' is a term sometimes used to describe those sections of the community that are difficult to involve in public participation. The list of persons who fall into this category is seemingly endless.

Hard to reach has been used to refer to minority groups, such as ethnic people, gays and lesbians, or homeless people.³² Other times it may refer to broader segments of the population, such as old or young people or people with disabilities.³³ In the service context, hard to reach often refers to the 'underserved', namely, minority groups, those slipping through the net and the service resistant.³⁴ An alternative term used in the sampling context is 'hidden populations',³⁵ meaning they are hidden from the point of view of sampling. Hidden populations may also seek to conceal their group identity, as in the case of illicit drug users, victims of domestic violence, sexually active teens, gang members etc.³⁶

In the Australian context, local councils identify culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, indigenous, young, elderly, disabled and homeless people as hard to reach. Other groups mentioned included drug users, sex workers, those on low incomes, high rise apartment dwellers, faith based communities, businesses (traders), single parents, newly arrived residents, gay and lesbian people, problem gamblers and residents of hostels and boarding houses.³⁷ Some rural populations are considered to be hard to reach, while some groups of people (in particular those who are asked to regularly respond to service reviews) are seen to be over-consulted and increasingly reluctant to participate.³⁸ To this list should be added persons who would like to have a say in local issues, but do not know how to access council processes. Also identified were unresponsive people, such as the time-poor (those who are in full-time work or work outside the municipality), people who have a low commitment to the local area or no vested interest in local issues (e.g. renters), and disengaged people who are disillusioned with, or feel disconnected from, the political process.³⁹

Thus, the 'hard to reach' is an imprecise term that can be stigmatising, problematic and unhelpful. The problem with using the term is that it implies a homogeneity within distinct groups which does not necessarily exist. Thereby 'it defines the problem as one within the group itself, not within your approach to them'.⁴⁰ While a number of groups and population segments have traditionally been underrepresented in councils' public participation processes, in reality few of these are hard to reach if the right approach is used. Furthermore, various groups may or may not be difficult to involve depending on the issue consulted upon. ***Rather than thinking about certain sections of the community as being hard to reach, it is more useful to think of persons or groups that councils can find difficult to involve for particular purposes.***

Characteristics of hard to reach groups

A list of identified groups is not necessarily a useful tool to recognise and establish relationships with people who are difficult to involve because certain groups may be hard to reach in some contexts or locations and not in others. A more fruitful approach is to define characteristics of hard to reach groups and link these to successful approaches to contact or involve them.⁴¹

Persons or groups can be thought about in terms of their demographic characteristics, attributes, attitudes and likelihood to be responsive to various communication media or approaches. Rather than stereotyping certain groups as hard to reach, a good understanding of their needs and attributes can go a long way towards increasing the representativeness of the consultation and the outcomes that result from it. A tool for thinking about various population segments is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Tool to identify characteristics of the hard to reach⁴²

Characteristics Definition	Attributes	Examples	Prompts What do we know? What do others do?
Demographic The quantity and characteristics of the group	Large numbers Dispersed population Place of residence Occupation and employment status Age Gender Educational level attained Income Tenancy status Advantage/disadvantage *	Farmers Unemployed persons Tenants New residents Old people Young people Women Businesses Community groups and organisations Indigenous High rise apartment dwellers Faith based communities	Where are these groups found? How many are there in the group? What do members have in common? (Where) do they get together? Who else contacts them and how?
Cultural The way of life of a group of people	Lack of established information networks Unable to access services easily Language spoken Ethnic or cultural background Social invisibility Lack of knowledge about council's role and services	CALD Non-readers Home workers Ethnic groups Indigenous Drug users Sex workers Homeless people Problem gamblers Residents of hostels and boarding houses	Which organisations could we work with to develop an information network? What established information networks do people already use and how could we tap into them? Are there individuals we could work through? How? What are the alternatives to written information and points of contact?
Behavioural and attitudinal The way the group's attitude to council influences their behaviour	Distrust of government agencies Unwillingness to access services Public participation in local or council matters is a low priority Lack of time Diffuse or poorly organised internal structure and communication Previous bad experience	Busy people (Single) mothers Businesses Illegal workers Drug users Sex workers Homeless people Problem gamblers Residents of hostels and boarding houses	Who do they trust? How can we inform or educate about the relevance of, or necessity for, consultation? What methods of outreach can we use (social marketing approach)? How can we establish new relationships? What or who can influence them? What about the timing of the consultation?
Structural The way council processes and structures influence access	Bureaucracy and red tape Availability of information in relevant languages, print sizes and media Complicated 'procedures' Attitude of council staff Competence of consultants used Timing and location of public participation	Council staff Consultants Councillors	What changes can we make to reach the group? How can we improve the way we provide information and communicate? How do other organisations facilitate access?

* For example, using Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)⁴³

Strategies for involving hard to reach groups

The previous section highlighted the diversity of attributes that can lead to certain people and groups being seen to be hard to reach by councils for particular purposes. This section extends the question of how to identify hard to reach groups and outlines strategies for accessing and involving them in council consultations.

Many councils use a 'Consultation Matrix' or the like to identify which types of methods are suitable to engage the community on certain issues. An example of this is provided in Appendix 3. While this can be useful, the issue of which groups are more (or less) likely to respond to certain kinds of approaches is largely overlooked. The degree to which particular groups are hard to reach is context specific and depends on the population targeted, the participation method used and the issue consulted upon. Consequently, an 'off the shelf' solution to engaging these persons is not practicable.

Accessing hard to reach

Overcoming prejudice

A central issue that needs to be overcome is that of prejudice. Council staff and consultants may hold negative assumptions about the groups they find hard to reach. At the same time, persons and groups who are reluctant to become involved may, amongst other things, have negative preconceptions about council, a distrust of authority (e.g. migrants may have had negative experiences in their countries of origin) or a negative view of the impact their contribution will make (that they will not be listened to).

As a consequence, those wishing to be inclusive need to overcome their own prejudices about the people they wish to contact, while at the same time work to address the preconceptions (often misconceptions) of those whom they wish to involve.⁴⁴ An alternative way to view 'uninterestedness' or 'lack of motivation to contribute or become involved' often associated with hard to reach groups is to emphasise differences rather than deficits. The difference thesis is grounded in an understanding of the needs, attitudes and habits of various groups and suggests that when people are approached in ways they can understand and relate to, and when they see the relevance to their own lives, they are more likely to be responsive.

Identifying hard to reach groups

Successful consultation with a broad range of groups is rooted in the recognition that there are multiple publics. Before these can be included in public participation processes, they first need to be identified. The research found that there are various ways in which groups 'get on the consultation radar'. These may be in response to a desire for a more inclusive approach to public participation by council or result from initiatives by individuals or groups.

Mapping of demographic data (Local Area Data) in conjunction with an analysis of data from the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)⁴⁵ can yield useful information about groups that may be hard to reach and where they are located in the municipality. An example of this can be found in the appendix to the *Community Consultation and the 'Hard to Reach': Concepts and Practice in Victorian Local Government* report.⁴⁶ This approach is especially powerful if the analysis of data is done in relation to the *Tool to identify characteristics of the hard to reach*.

Frequently, consultations with hard to reach groups are driven by a need to consult with particular groups in relation to particular issues. This may be in response to an approach from the community group or from service providers. Alternatively, initiatives by council staff and political or personal initiatives by councillors can lead to hard to reach groups 'getting on the radar'. Some council officers and councillors have strong community links and take a special interest in identifying individuals or groups that

traditionally have not been well represented in council's public participation processes. Other times groups are identified in response to a particular policy or plan (e.g. Disability Action Plan).

Adapting consultation methods to be more inclusive

It is clear from our research that partner councils regularly (but not always) make efforts to identify particular segments of the population they want to consult with and then develop strategies to engage them. Thinking clearly about who should be consulted has led to significant modifications to more established methods and the development or trial of an increasing array of new ones.

Table 3 presents a range of techniques that were used by partner councils to contact, inform and consult with hard to reach groups. Participation events were publicised through a variety of media that were local or targeted in nature, such as local newspapers, radio stations or newsletters (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch). Similarly, existing networks such as local groups, service providers and community leaders were regularly mentioned as a good way to make contact and consult with target populations. This strategy may be only partially successful as an organisation or peak body may not be representative of the views of all of its members. Groups that are newly emerging or that do not have formal organisations can also remain particularly difficult to contact.

Table 3: Techniques for inclusive consultation

Publicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local newspapers • Community radio • Pamphlets • Newsletters (e.g. neighbourhood house, sports clubs) • Website • Email bulletins • Library
Making contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service clubs • Sporting clubs and associations • Interest based community groups • Faith based groups • Ethnic groups • Local leaders • Hire service providers to contact, consult (e.g. aged care services) • Staff networks
Participation incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid focus groups, interviews, surveys • Food vouchers, prizes • Barbeques, children's activities
Formal consultation methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen researchers (interviews, surveys, focus groups) • Think tents and listening posts • Drop-off and pick-up surveys
Informal consultation or community-building methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing trips • Street parties • Mural projects • Outdoor movies
New technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text messaging • Online survey • Casual sounding email

Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council transport• Appropriate venues• Child care• Consult out of hours• Help people fill in a questionnaire
Adapting information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pamphlets in different languages• Audio tape in different languages• Websites in different languages• Braille• Translators• Large print

The importance of developing and utilising networks for contact and consultation is a key theme and points to the necessity to take the time to build good relationships. One way that councils have attempted to do this is by inviting citizens to conduct interviews, surveys and focus groups with people in their community. Other less formal ways of getting people together and learning about citizens' views include street parties, movies or even fishing trips. As one council officer commented of a fishing trip with his male client group:

I learned lots, had a good time, and it was a good way to get to know these guys, what they thought about a whole lot of things, you could really get to know where they were coming from. It's all anecdotal, but you can find out what's happening in their lives. In this way we chose the least bureaucratised method we could imagine, it was very social.

This approach fits with a broader emphasis within many consultation strategies on making participation as enjoyable and easy as possible for people, and 'going to them' rather than expecting citizens to visit council at a time that is suitable for staff. On-site consultation methods such as 'think tents' or 'listening posts' employ a similar logic, engaging people at a place that may be more relevant for the issue being discussed and away from the council chambers. New technologies such as email and text messaging have also created easier ways to engage some citizens. Furthermore, ongoing mechanisms such as community reference panels (made up of a representative sample who volunteer to be consulted on various issues) provide many citizens with opportunities to be involved in a manner that suits their circumstances.⁴⁷

Adapting information to needs is central to reaching some groups, particularly those from CALD backgrounds and those with hearing or visual impairment. Other strategies to reduce the barriers to participation include the use of accessible venues and the provision of child care and council transport. Incentives such as cash or prizes are also used in some cases.

Although the above represents an impressive list of strategies for engaging hard to reach groups, our research also revealed that often councils do not have the time, resources or, in some cases, expertise to consult as well as they would like to. Effective consultation around some issues and with particular groups often proves time consuming and resource intensive. Council practices are sometimes recognised as second best. As one council officer stated:

The main difficulty relates to resources that we can devote to reaching hard to reach groups. There are never enough resources nor time available to do it as well as we would like.

It is perhaps for these reasons that, despite their limitations, more traditional and less complex and resource intensive methods such as surveys and public meetings remain an essential feature of local government consultative practice.

Communicating and negotiating access

Successfully negotiating access to any group in order to facilitate their engagement depends on a thorough knowledge of the underlying factors that may prevent their participation and on a good understanding of their characteristics and attributes. There are a number of ways in which councils can open up channels of communication with the groups they find hard to reach. A key factor is the provision of information about the planned participation in ways that are visible, accessible and relevant to the community and through channels that they trust (e.g. community leaders). Groups and persons will be more inclined to participate if they see the direct relevance of the consultation to their own lives.

Letter drops, public notices and advertisements in local papers and on council websites are popular ways to inform the community that a consultation is taking place. However, these may not be appropriate to communicate to certain groups that there are opportunities for them to provide input into council processes.

Example 1 points to the importance of planning timelines that suit the target groups. Example 2 describes a successful community engagement process with homeless people, highlighting the importance of communicating the existence of the process to the target groups and the wider community in an appropriate and visible manner.

Example 1: Timing communication

Council wished to consult with the schools surrounding a recreational facility about their needs in the facility's redevelopment. Invitations to the consultation meeting were sent out to school headmasters three weeks prior to the consultation taking place requesting RSVP. No expressions of interest were received and the consultation had to be cancelled.

When reviewing the reasons for the lack of interest in the consultation, it was discovered that the letters of invitation were sent out on the last day before the school holidays, and the consultation itself took place on the first day of school recommencement.

Lesson

The timing of the invitations and consultation were out of synch with the school year and did not provide enough of a window to respond.

The following is an example of a community engagement process that involved a group that can be difficult to engage, namely, homeless people, using an outreach approach.

Example 2: Engaging homeless people in community art

Council undertook a community art project to engage its homeless people. The aim was to invite them to tell their stories through art as a means of facilitating social interactions, validating their experiences and linking them to services. The project was also intended to build acceptance of diversity and provide an expressive outlet for the wider community. In this way, it was a means to reframe a public space that had been contested by different socio-economic groups in recent years. The tangible result was to be a public mural to be erected in the contested space.

The target groups were people experiencing homelessness (mainly at the secondary level, e.g. people in temporary accommodation, such as rooming houses or refuges) and the wider public. Council employed a community artist who worked together with the council's project manager to engage the target population.

The method involved inviting participants to use damp clay to create a tile, together with the community artist. During the process, the artist talked with them about the concepts they wanted to illustrate and assisted them in creating images. They were later invited back to paint their tiles. This

facilitated ongoing engagement, extended interest in the development of the mural and allowed participants to reconnect with others involved.

The success of the project depended on council's ability to involve a cross-section of homeless people and the wider community. An outreach approach was adopted, and the process of recruiting people became an integral part of the project.

The artist spent many hours on the streets speaking with and getting to know local homeless people. Her ability to build a genuine and ongoing rapport with them contributed greatly to this. The artist used her strong community ties to 'put out the word' about the project. She talked to homeless people about how the clay tiles would be made and the aims of the project. In the process, she gained support from well-connected local people who assisted her to distribute flyers that detailed times, dates and venues of art sessions. The flyers, which were also placed in strategic locations around the area, were hand written in large script and presented information in a simple, personal and casual way. This informality in promoting the tile-making workshops communicated the relaxed style of the artistic process and helped to convey that the venues were safe and inviting community spaces.

The artist also made large placards in the same style as the flyers, which she carried to outside venues and propped up in parks and at street corners to advertise that a community mural was in progress. This proved to be an effective means of attracting passers-by to tile-making sessions, with people stopping to read the placards and commenting that the signage caught their eye and drew their attention to the fact that anyone, not just homeless people, could participate.

Another way of raising the visibility of the project was to load up a trolley with freshly made clay tiles and art supplies and wheel the mobile art studio through the streets. This attracted a lot of attention and, importantly, it communicated to marginalised people that they were the focus of the art activity and that their contribution to the mural was sought out.

The choice of venues for creating tiles and their times of opening was also critical. They had to be familiar, safe, welcoming and easily accessible. The artist's studio, where many of the art sessions took place, was located in community gardens that adjoined a local park. The gardens were traditionally a venue for community barbeques, and the park hosted a farmers' market. The artist's studio was regularly open, even when there were no pre-scheduled art sessions. This meant that many of the homeless people the project sought to involve were already familiar and comfortable with the settings chosen for the art sessions. At the same time it maximised opportunities for members of the wider community to participate. In addition, a mobile 'clay studio' was set up in parks frequented by homeless people, at pre-existing service providers and community groups, and at schools.

A tile-making session was also held at the reserve where the finished mural was to be installed. This held special significance, as the reserve had in the past been a contested space, with the various user groups (homeless people, families and the wider community) not always comfortable in each other's presence. Creating tiles here provided participants with an opportunity to picture how their tile would fuse with the other tiles made, which represented the experiences of those living in the area. It also created a space for people to imagine how the spatial and social dimensions of the reserve could be transformed. During this art session, many of the participants wandered over to the poster billboard and commented on how different the park would look when the mural was constructed. Conversations were held about how other areas of the reserve might be redesigned to make the public space more accessible to a range of people and how the playground could be made more appealing to children. In this way, the community mural project linked with another council initiative that aimed to generate ideas about how the reserve could be converted into a more harmonious public space.

During tile-making sessions, participants were mostly seated at round tables, which facilitated discussion about tile design and contributed to absorbing people in mural activities. A key benefit of this seating arrangement was that participants could hear each other talk about the restorative benefits of tile making, which revealed that many people shared common problems around social isolation and similar experiences of depression, anxiety and negativity.

Scheduled art sessions ran for five months from November until March. Often these were combined with a barbeque lunch or dinner, which ensured that homeless people ate at least one nourishing meal for the day and also provided further scope for social bonding. The artist also welcomed people into her studio to participate in impromptu tile making and conversation. This organic, responsive approach was an important means of keeping them involved and a way for homeless people to set their own pace and determine their readiness to participate in the project. Some people wandered into the studio to observe and ended up making a tile of their own and even returned to make more.

Attendance at the tile-making sessions varied, depending on whether they were scheduled or spontaneous. Pre-planned sessions usually attracted more participants. Numbers swelled as the project progressed and its reputation grew. Most of the tile making occurred over the summer, which made outdoor sessions possible. Weekday sessions directly targeted homeless people, while weekend sessions attracted a bigger crowd and a wider cross-section of the local community, as well as some tourists.

Once the tile making was complete, the individual tiles were assembled into a mural by the artist, who conferred with local people about the overall theme and design. This involved reconnecting with people on the streets, in rooming houses and in parks. This was a time intensive activity but essential to the commitment of developing a project of authentic community art.

Lesson

While many homeless people are a hidden population, this example shows that it is possible to successfully reach out to them and get their input into council processes. The success of these initiatives depends as much on resources and planning as it does on the persons undertaking these processes, their skills, local ties and ability to connect with a wide range of people.

It is not possible to engage homeless people by imposing a project on them. Appropriate engagement requires reaching out to people living on the streets and in public and community housing, and taking time to understand issues of homelessness. This is achieved through building trust, developing ongoing relationships, and ensuring that homeless people are heard and their voices acted upon.

Consultation with specific groups

Often consultations are aimed at particular groups, such as the users of a particular facility or service. In such instances a good knowledge of the group and their needs and attitudes will contribute greatly to the success of the consultation. It pays to think across established council departments and boundaries. Many council staff, particularly in the service areas, have close community ties and are familiar with the needs of service users, their social networks and preferred way of interacting with council. This knowledge and the pre-existing community networks contribute to successfully reaching out to particular population segments. For example, if sports and leisure staff wish to consult young people about the redevelopment of a sporting facility, then the expertise and relationships of youth services staff could assist them to involve the young people in the area.

Alternatively, if the skills or resources to consult with a particular group are lacking within council, specialist consultants can provide advice, act as liaison and facilitate the consultation process. The other advantage of using consultants is that they may be seen to be more impartial by the community, as they are not 'the face of council' and therefore participants can feel more comfortable expressing their views to them.

Example 3: Consulting with elderly CALD communities

Council consulted with the current users of Delivered Meals to determine satisfaction levels and perceptions of the importance of the service. The target group comprised all current users of the

service, most of whom are frail, elderly, disabled, of CALD background, or a combination of these (81% were over 70 years old, and more than 12% spoke a language other than English at home).

A combination of a survey and focus groups was chosen as the methodology. These were chosen because the *Positive Ageing and Community Engagement: Perspectives of Older People*⁴⁸ report had found that older people preferred local meetings in neighbourhoods, being part of a focus group or feedback group, and public meetings in the town hall as methods for consultation. Surveys were seen to be an appropriate complementary tool as they are less time intensive and can be distributed to all users of the service. In the experience of council staff, they tended to have good return rates among service users and have the added benefit that their results can be analysed statistically.

An external project consultant was engaged on the basis of her extensive experience consulting with elderly and CALD citizens in numerous councils. Her advice and insight was valuable during the planning of the consultation and her experience as a facilitator significantly enhanced the success of the focus groups.

The use of focus groups in combination with a survey is a fairly standard methodology for consulting on a range of issues. Because many persons in the target group for the Delivered Meals evaluation were very elderly (more than half of them are 85 years and over), frail, disabled and some do not speak English well, a number of considerations applied to implementing the methodology.⁴⁹

To accommodate the special needs of elderly persons, a number of support services were made available to improve the accessibility of the consultation. Council's *Community Engagement Framework*,⁵⁰ the outcomes of the *Ageing Well Strategy*⁵¹ and the experience of the project consultant guided the choices of supports that were provided.

Community transport to and from the consultation sessions, food, interpreters (as needed) and a portable hearing loop (where required) were offered to prospective participants. Written material used large print (14 to 16 pt) and simple fonts. Promotional material was designed to provide important contextual information about the consultation, but avoided extraneous distracting details.

Elderly people can have trouble concentrating for longer periods of time and tend to be fresher in the mornings. Consequently it was decided that focus groups should be kept short (no more than 1½ hours) and should be held early in the day (10.00 to 11.30). The consultant stressed the need to speak loudly and clearly and advocated the use of visual aids (e.g. butchers paper) to summarise key discussion points and remind participants of issues that had already been raised.

Another consideration was a possible scheduling conflict between the timing of the focus groups in the morning and the arrival of the delivered meals at participants' homes. To make sure this did not cause hardship, it was arranged that the meals would be delivered to the location of the focus group and that participants could then take them home after the session.

Information about the focus groups and surveys was delivered to service users' houses by Delivered Meals staff. Distribution of the survey by staff was thought to be the most personal and efficient way of getting it to clients. This way staff could assist in the completion of the survey and also pick it up after it had been completed. To enlist their support and inform Delivered Meals staff about the consultation, an information session was held with them.

To be inclusive of persons with limited English, promotional material was translated into the languages of the four main speaker groups using the service: Vietnamese, Polish, Italian and Greek. Surveys were not translated, but the option of translating them as needed (verbally) was chosen instead. One focus group was aimed specifically at persons from non-English-speaking backgrounds. At this session, translators would be available to interpret as needed, with different languages being included in the one session.

At the beginning of each session, a member of council staff introduced the project consultant and the researcher observing the session and explained their roles. After welcoming participants, she

assured them that opinions expressed during the session would be treated confidentially and that she would not remain at the session so that they could speak freely. The consultant then welcomed participants and explained the purpose of the session and how it would proceed, i.e. a number of questions would be asked and responses would be written up by the consultant on butchers paper with a black pen. This visual aid was useful to direct and focus discussion and summarise key points at various stages.

Focus group participants were very satisfied with the service. They were happy with the quality, quantity, variety and presentation of the food. Punctual delivery was appreciated, as was the pleasant and friendly manner of delivery staff. The availability of the service was highly appreciated because it supports independent living by elderly and disabled persons, is economical and, in addition to providing nutrition, means that they are not exposed to cooking-related injuries, thereby contributing to safety.

Participants were reluctant to criticise the service or suggest improvements, as they thought it was already very good. They did, however, have comments to make about how the service could be promoted to new users and suggested that a 'tips sheet' with hints from users about how to use the service and meals flexibly would be welcome. While criticism may have been limited because people felt reluctant to express their issues directly to the consultant or because elderly people appreciate the availability of the service and do not feel it is their place to criticise it, comments made indicated a genuine appreciation and satisfaction with Delivered Meals.

Lesson

There are a number of lessons that can be learned from the consultation on the Delivered Meals that are applicable to consultations with elderly and CALD communities more generally.

The consultation used a traditional model of engaging the community, combining focus group discussions (a face to face method) with a written survey (which is able to reach a large number people). Because of the special attributes of the target group, many of whom were elderly, frail, disabled or from CALD backgrounds, a number of modifications were made to the methodology and support services to facilitate their engagement.

Council and service staff, who are knowledgeable about the needs and preferences of the target group, worked together with an experienced facilitator (the project consultant) to guide and implement the consultation process. The use of visuals and repeated summaries throughout the sessions, and the ability of the facilitator to communicate clearly and effectively, were all key to the success of the focus group sessions.

When consulting with service users, it is often appropriate to hold consultations in the place where the service is provided. Delivered Meals is a home based service and it may have been more appropriate to visit users in their own homes. However, participants who did come to the focus groups frequently mentioned that they were happy to get out of the house and meet other people.

CALD users are not as responsive to promotion of consultations by mail or general advertising. They prefer to be invited either in person (e.g. by telephone) or through already existing culturally specific networks and groups. For example, the consultation for the *Ageing Well Strategy* conducted at the City of Maribyrnong in 2004 successfully engaged many elderly CALD persons, who mostly came because they were already members of established groups.

This points to the importance of recruiting CALD people through appropriate persons and existing networks. For example, while the survey had a good response rate, with 22% returning the questionnaire, CALD recipients of Delivered Meals were proportionally underrepresented. Only 10% of survey respondents were CALD, compared to 18% of service users. This again highlights the need to target CALD community members for their feedback and to provide language services to them as needed.

Community relations and trust

Many marginalised and hard to reach groups are distrustful of authorities and have had previous negative experiences of dealing with those in power. In these instances, successful community engagement depends on the ability of council to establish ongoing relationships with these groups and persons. In the process, relationships between councillors, council staff and community members need to be formed and reformed as trust is built. This is an ongoing, iterative process that, if cut short, can undermine much of the effort that went in before. For example, often the ownership of the process is located with council, and community members are placed in the position of respondents. This can undermine community trust, due to perceptions that decisions have already been made or that planning processes have already been put in motion with little scope for further amendments. If true dialogue and partnerships are to develop, strategies that are based on dialogue and that move beyond 'one off' consultations are required.

Example 4: Communicating about the important things

Council was planning the launch of its indigenous arts precinct, which was undertaken with considerable involvement from the local indigenous community. To mark the event, a celebration at the town hall was planned and invitations were sent to indigenous groups and elders in the area to take part in the ceremonies marking the unveiling. It was intended as a celebration of Australian indigenous culture. Shortly before the event it became apparent that only very few of the indigenous people invited would be able to participate in the event, as the date clashed with National Sorry Day and they had ceremonial responsibilities elsewhere.

Lesson

Despite considerable community involvement in the development of the indigenous arts precinct, the date for the unveiling was chosen based on the availability of the town hall and without conferring with the indigenous community first, thereby undoing much of the good work leading to the event and undermining newly established relationships and trust.

Choosing appropriate locations

The location of public consultations is a significant factor in their success, and affects whether certain groups are included or deterred from attending. Locations are often chosen on the basis of availability, but this can lead to venues being selected that are not appropriate for engaging a broad section of the community. Considerations should also include the accessibility of the venue, its visibility (Is it easy to find? Is it likely to attract passers-by?), and its significance and connotations, which may encourage or deter some community sections from attending.

Clearly some locations have specific positive connotations for certain sections of the community, while they would not be appropriate for others. Knowing the target groups, what their attitudes are and where they gather is the most important thing in choosing an appropriate location. For example, when consulting with elderly Greek and Italian communities, it is helpful to know that they may be more likely to attend consultations at the town hall, because of the prestige of attending an event in this location. Young people, on the other hand, may be more comfortable attending meetings on school grounds or at recreation centres or reserves.

Example 5: Considering community values when choosing a venue

Council held a consultation aimed at the whole community at a local church hall. While familiar to some, this venue was not appropriate for encouraging a broad section of the community to participate. Those who were socially dislocated or unaccustomed to this setting and persons from

different religious backgrounds may have felt uncomfortable attending the venue and therefore chosen not to participate.

Lesson

When deciding where to hold its public consultation, council had made the decision primarily on the basis of availability of venues. A better approach would be to choose venues that are neutral, such as neighbourhood houses, sporting facilities, and health and welfare centres.

Example 6: Choosing accessible venues

A consultation meeting aimed at the whole community was held at a local bistro/restaurant. While the venue was well known to locals, located centrally and easily identifiable from the street, the way in via the front entrance was only by a steep flight of stairs, making access difficult for a range of people, including elderly persons, the disabled, and parents with prams. An alternative access point at the rear was not advertised in the information about the consultation, was not well signposted from the street and was cumbersome – persons with special needs could ring a bell at the rear entrance and staff would then assist with entry. In addition, the access ramp was not fully compliant with council's own accessibility standards (due to its historical standing, the building was granted special exemption by the Victorian government's Building Appeals Board).

Lesson

When choosing a venue it pays to consider whether a range of community members are able to physically access the site.

Example 7: Street displays

Council held a series of street displays intended to engage and inform the public about its vision for urban planning. The displays were located in a pedestrian walkway at the rear of the local supermarkets. Information boards exhibited maps of the area and summaries of key proposals. Two council staff and two consultants were present to speak with passers-by and to distribute copies of the urban planning proposal, as well as comments sheets which people could fill out and send in to council at a later stage.

While the street displays attracted considerable interest, a few simple measures could have greatly increased their impact. The location of the stalls, behind a supermarket in a narrow area adjoining the car park, had the advantage that it was on the pedestrian path running between the two key retail anchors within the centre. Considering that the main retail street was no more than 200 metres away, perhaps a location on, rather than behind, the main shopping strip may have maximised visibility and public interest.

The visual appeal of the displays themselves could have been enhanced by large signage clearly indicating that it was a council display. Activities such as face painting for children or a community barbeque could also have attracted more people to linger at the site, thereby increasing the opportunities for them to talk with council staff, consultants and each other about the proposed development.

Using expert knowledge and working with consultants

When targeting particular population segments for public participation, it pays to think across established council departments and boundaries. Many council staff, particularly in the service areas, have close community ties and are familiar with the needs of service users, their social networks and preferred way of interacting with council. This knowledge and the pre-existing community networks can greatly

contribute to the success of reaching out to particular population segments. For example, if sports and leisure staff wish to consult young people about the redevelopment of a sporting facility, then the expertise and relationships of youth services staff could assist them to successfully involve the young people in the area.

Many council staff are good at designing and implementing consultation tools and evaluating the outcomes. An experienced facilitator can significantly enhance the consultation process and it is highly desirable to develop the consultation and facilitation skills of council staff. There is, however, a role for specialist consultants. Consultants can be a good choice of facilitator with hard to reach groups in the community because of their specialist training and experience if these are lacking within council. In addition, consultants may be seen to be more impartial, as they are not 'the face of council' and therefore participants can feel more comfortable expressing their view to them.

Example 8: Using a consultant with expert knowledge

Council was consulting with people who spoke very limited English. To compensate for this, translators were scheduled to be present at the consultation sessions and a consultant who was experienced in facilitating groups with CALD community members was employed. At one session, no translator was available due to an administrative mix-up. The consultant's experience in facilitating CALD groups proved to be invaluable. While the presence of a translator would have been highly desirable, the consultant's experience and expertise meant that she managed to communicate most of the information to attendants and succeeded in eliciting useful feedback.

Not all expert consultants are well positioned to conduct public participation processes. Council staff often assume that consultants who are experts in topic areas are also experts in consultation and facilitation. This is not necessarily the case. Urban planners, for example, are often charged with the responsibility of conducting public consultations as part of developing their proposals. However, they do not generally have a background in social science disciplines or community work and may therefore struggle to conduct transparent, representative and inclusive participatory processes that account for the social and demographic dynamics of the community. A solution to this problem would be for planners, community development workers and social researchers within council to forge a closer professional relationship,⁵² which might involve facilitating community consultations in conjunction with each other. Furthermore, councils should consider the capacity of consultants to involve the community on any given issue and consider using additional expert facilitators where required.

NIMBYism and vocal interest groups

NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) is a phenomenon that many councils encounter at one time or another. The term is used to describe opposition by residents to a new project or planning proposal, even if locals themselves will benefit from it. Often, the proposal is seen to be beneficial to many, but residents in the immediate vicinity consider it undesirable and would prefer the building or facility to be 'elsewhere'. An example of NIMBYism that affects councils' ability to provide services to or engage with hard to reach groups is opposition to facilities for homeless or disabled people being built in a certain neighbourhood because they are perceived as negatively affecting property values and as liable to 'attract the wrong kinds of people' to the area. NIMBYism also frequently occurs in the form of opposition to planning and development.

The issue is related to the question of how councils can ensure that well organised, highly vocal interest groups do not take over consultation processes and drown out other voices. It is sometimes, but not always, possible to anticipate which proposals will encounter vocal opposition. One strategy for dealing with resistance includes setting up processes that encourage the participation of those who support the project and minimising the opportunities for NIMBYists to dominate. In addition, the provision of information to clarify any misunderstandings based on misinformation and

identification of the conflicts and values that underpin the positive and negative interests can contribute to a better understanding on all sides. Generally, persuasion, negotiation and compromise will be needed to resolve the issues.⁵³

The following is an example of how one council dealt with the challenge of highly organised dissenters to its planning processes.

Example 9: NIMBYism

Council was undertaking a structure planning process that was to provide the strategic vision to determine the needs and objectives for the future development of a local area. The process was to take place in conjunction with key stakeholders, such as local residents, landowners, businesses and infrastructure providers. To this end, council ran a number of workshops where members of the community were invited to provide feedback on urban design principles and had the opportunity to give input into the development of draft options for the plan. It also established an advisory committee comprising 15 representatives from stakeholder groups, which was intended to assist the Planning Department to develop the plan. The idea was that the committee would be a forum where stakeholders could work through the issues under consideration.

Recruitment was through advertisements in the local paper, with interested persons being interviewed by council staff to determine their suitability and ensure representative composition of the group. Recruitment was complicated by the fact that there were highly organised and vocal public interest groups who opposed the structure planning process as they contested its aims and nature and were intent on influencing the outcomes. Members of these groups were well aware that an advisory committee was being formed and put themselves forward as community representatives. Consequently a number of committee members held strong anti-development views. This created a complex situation for council, and the committee was hampered on a number of occasions in fulfilling its role of preparing advice and guidelines for structure planning because some committee members did not want such advice to be forthcoming and blocked the process.

Two public workshops were held to supplement the advisory committee and were intended to broaden participation, educate the community about the plan and seek feedback. From council's point of view, they provided opportunities for the community to 'articulate its vision'.

The workshops were structured to include a one-hour presentation followed by one-hour small discussion groups. They aimed to elicit community feedback on urban design principles that were endorsed by council, and to obtain input into the process of developing draft options for the plan. Members of the public were invited to register, and attendance at both workshops was high, with the first attracting 60 people, the second 40.

However, like the community advisory group, the workshops were also influenced in their process and outcomes by participants who represented the interests of the anti-development community groups. Many at the first workshop were of the opinion that structure planning should not take place and were very vocal about their position.

The meeting became difficult to manage as people talked over the top of each other, detracting from the presentation. When the planners proposed that it divide into smaller groups, some participants objected. Four groups were eventually formed. Because each of these also had representatives from the anti-development community interest groups who were intent on disrupting proceedings, some viewpoints could not be adequately conveyed (for example, one attendee's concerns about accessibility issues). Some participants were clearly intimidated by these events, with one commenting outside of group discussion: 'These people are so negative. We should be dealing with these issues'.

Council officers also obtained community feedback from focus groups, including a youth roundtable, a workshop with community service providers, and a workshop with local trader groups. The draft structure plan resulting from these processes contributed to the final version of council's draft structure plan, which was then to be made available for public comment before further consultations would take place.

Lesson

The consultation processes used by council were structured around an advisory committee as the main forum, supplemented by community workshops and focus group consultations. Urban planning, especially in contexts where views are polarised, is a complex task that needs to be managed carefully. This is complicated by the fact that many people can be reluctant to become involved in consultations on complex future-oriented issues. Consequently it is often those persons who are already politically active who participate, and whose voices and manner of participating can deter others from contributing or participating.

The use of robust consultation processes and careful participant selection with an emphasis on representativeness of wider views can mitigate some of the difficulties outlined above.

In response to the difficulties outlined above, council changed its methods of structure planning and moved away from the advisory committee model, opting in favour of a multi-tiered model based around sequential stages of consultation which included the use of street displays, community workshops and feedback forms. Here the planning aspects and associated community participation were conducted by consultants who were expert in urban planning, while consultation with groups such as service providers were conducted by another set of consultants. To some extent, this methodology circumnavigates the problem of well-organised interest groups dominating community consultation processes.

Participant selection

This section deals with some of the more technical aspects of designing the consultation process to maximise the chances of successfully involving target groups. It also addresses participant selection and how to choose data collection methods.

Sampling

There are numerous techniques to recruit people for council consultations. The key options available to councils deciding how to constitute a sample of the population to take part are *purposive selection*, *self-selection* or *random selection*. These apply to consultations with stakeholder groups (such as businesses, community groups or representative organisations) and individuals in the general population.

All methods of participant recruitment involve an element of self-selection, as people can always refuse to take part. Nevertheless, some provide a much better chance of obtaining input from particular segments of the population than others.

Purposive selection

The first option, and perhaps the most appropriate for engaging people who are reluctant to become involved, is the purposive selection of participants based on one or more characteristics. For instance, particular persons or stakeholder groups may be chosen because they are seen to represent the interests of a group of people, organisation or cause. Alternatively, they may have special expertise that will assist in making decisions. Purposive selection is also frequently used when a balanced sample (based on factors such as age, gender, occupation, education, knowledge or geographical location) is desired, as in constituting citizen panels, for example.

In each instance, it is important to think about why certain groups or individuals are being included and excluded and whether it is important to have a diverse range of representatives or simply a diverse range of views. If it is critical that some groups participate, then it may be necessary to use personal methods of contact and even incentives to increase their likelihood of doing so.

Example 10: Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is an example of a special technique that was developed to attempt to include hard to reach and hidden populations.⁵⁴ It is a link-tracing methodology that is used most often for qualitative research. In essence, the technique relies on a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other or are loosely connected. The respondent is asked to name other persons who fit the criteria described by the researcher. The newly identified persons are then interviewed and in turn asked to nominate others that fit the criteria and so on. A good description of how to use this method is provided by Atkinson and Flint (2001).

Self-selection

Participant self-selection, at least in theory, gives all people who have an interest in an issue the opportunity to participate. No attempt is made to limit participation, beyond perhaps considerations based on citizenship, residency or ratepayer status. An example of this is publicly advertised forums such as town hall meetings. The benefits of this form of recruitment are that all persons with an interest are given the opportunity to take part and can represent their own interests in whatever manner is provided. It is perhaps for this reason that self-selection remains a popular method of participant recruitment. However, its utility for engaging hard to reach populations is limited as any form of recruitment that encourages citizens to choose themselves tends to result in a sample that is biased in favour of active citizens who are already engaged in the political process.⁵⁵ Furthermore, it is the very fact that many groups or persons are reluctant to self-select that leads to their characterisation by councils as being hard to reach.

Random selection

Random selection works on the principle that citizens, organisations or groups have an equal chance of being selected, and is particularly valuable when other methods create the possibility of bias or conflict of interest. There are a number of ways in which it can be used: to make decisions directly, to judge opinions or to choose decision makers.⁵⁶ For councils, the judgement of community opinion is probably the area where random selection can be most beneficial, and can be understood by thinking about the rationale used in opinion polls. These do not require that everyone in the population needs to be consulted, as a relatively small sample of randomly selected participants can give a statistically accurate result. The key is to choose the sample carefully to ensure that it has the same characteristics as the population as a whole. One way of doing this is to use a stratified sample that divides the general population into groups and sets quotas for each group. A separate random sample must be selected from each, rather than just taking a single random sample from the entire population. The process is more time consuming and will require a greater number of people to be surveyed, but this technique can be very valuable as it is likely to produce a more accurate result.⁵⁷ If participation from some groups is initially low, it may be necessary to follow up by contacting people personally to encourage them to participate, otherwise policy makers may base their decisions on biased poll results.⁵⁸

There are a number of reasons why random sampling may not be appropriate to engage hard to reach populations: 'firstly, the potential legal and social sanctions [may] deter respondents from cooperation; secondly, an extremely large sample is needed to achieve sufficient data for an accurate estimation of what is a statistically rare event; and thirdly, given the "hidden" or "low visibility" of such populations, surveys tend to miss out important segments ... because they are not living stable or easy-to-locate lives.'⁵⁹

Example 11: Limits of stratified sampling of the whole population for hard to reach

Council conducts an annual survey to determine how community members rate its services, using 800 door to door interviews. Respondents are selected using stratified sampling to ensure that they are representative of the wider community. The survey collects information on a wide range of council services, including road maintenance and repairs, community services and waste management. Evaluation discovers that a particular service aimed at elderly residents is rated among the five least satisfactory services – a dramatic drop from the previous year.

These findings are cause for concern; but council staff have a number of reservations about the survey's capacity to accurately measure satisfaction with life-stage specific activities and services. This is especially so in relation to the ability of the survey to report reliably and validly for population cohorts. For example, the number of elderly persons responding to the survey is relatively small (101 persons or 15%), while the vast majority of users of the service in question (92%) are aged 55 years and over. Furthermore, it is not known whether any respondents are current users of the service, thereby casting doubt on the validity of its findings.

Consequently, council staff feel it is important to explore the issues further by conducting an in-depth review of the service. This discovers very high levels of satisfaction, thereby contradicting the survey findings and validating staff concerns about its accuracy.

Lesson

This example highlights the importance of ensuring that population cohorts represented in sampling are matched to the questions asked.

Combining approaches

Depending on the issue at hand and the level of consultation (e.g. high level strategic, service specific), council may choose to combine sampling approaches to ensure broad representation of groups and views. For example, a consultation with a random sample of the population may be subsidised with purposive samples of particular groups or persons using a combination of approaches, including questionnaires, on-street surveys, workshops with community representatives and youth roundtable discussions.

Data collection methods

Decisions about how to select the participants for a consultation depend on the aims of the consultation and on the method(s) that will be used to collect data or communicate with the community. Methods may be quantitative, qualitative or a mix of both.

Quantitative methods

Quantitative methods such as questionnaires using closed ended questions (e.g. multiple choice) have the advantage that they can be easily analysed and statistical methods can be applied. Hence they are sometimes seen to be more scientific and reliable than other methods. Often preference is given to sampling a large number of persons with the intention of making inferences about the whole population or targeted subsets (i.e. the method is seen to be representative).

Undoubtedly there are many advantages to such methods. Their main drawback, especially from the perspective of engaging hard to reach groups, is that they rely on closed questions that limit the data obtained and that may yield little understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is particularly restricting when exploring new or sensitive areas.

Furthermore, quantitative methods do not usually facilitate learning or improve civic engagement.

Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods such as oral histories, focus groups, workshops and interviews using open ended questions may not meet the test of statistical representativeness because of the smaller number of the sample. However, they provide greater opportunity to gain an understanding of social processes and the reasons for certain attitudes or behaviours. Snowball sampling (Example 10) can be an effective and cost efficient way to recruit persons for these consultations. While qualitative methods tend to be more resource intensive, the benefits for engaging with hard to reach groups are that in addition to providing council with information about their needs and attitudes, such methods also provide the opportunity to build relationships with people who are marginalised or disadvantaged and to educate people about a range of issues. Depending on the method chosen, qualitative methods can also be used to change behaviours and to gain community support for certain issues.

Qualitative methods also have the advantage that they are participatory in that they allow for discussion of issues and consideration of information material or expert opinions. This is beneficial if decisions need to be made on complex issues.

Matching method and purpose

The choice of method can influence the result of a public participation exercise. For example, some issues provoke a 'gut reaction' response. If these issues are consulted upon using quantitative methods alone, it is possible that only initial, instinctive reactions will be captured, as for example in relation to the tricky issue of rate increases (see Example 12). In these instances, the use of qualitative, participatory methods based around information, education and discussion may lead community

members to form their opinion based on a more comprehensive knowledge of the issue and may lead to a more balanced point of view.

Example 12: Different consultation methods can lead to different results

Council is consulting the community on its strategic plan, how to resource the items in the plan and the tricky issue of its financial sustainability and rate increases. To facilitate input, a twofold strategy is pursued. A series of community workshops is held at various times and locations around the municipality. Facilitated by an outside consultant to ensure their 'objectivity', these are publicly advertised and open to all residents. Persons who register interest in attending are sent an information kit. During the workshops, issues relating to council's strategic priorities and resourcing are discussed, and the consultant, council officers and in many instances a councillor are on hand to provide further details. The problems relating to resource constraints and council's ability to maintain vital infrastructure and provide services equitably to the whole community are discussed. At the conclusion of discussions, participants are asked to indicate their preferences for council's strategic priorities and their attitudes to any rate increases that may be necessary to resource these priorities. The results show that a large number of workshop participants are sympathetic to the need for rate increases, and this is matched by their understanding that rate increases will need to be 'sold' to the community through education about revenue issues. Effectively this means that participants understand the need to prioritise expenditure according to practical and strategic needs and that it is unlikely there will be major new initiatives that are cost intensive. They also understand that, in the long term, council cannot rely on rate increases alone for financial sustainability, but must seek to expand its revenue base through exploring other options and through lobbying the state government to provide financial support of costs of maintaining the green wedge.

The second consultation method used is a survey that is distributed together with the council newspaper to all householders. The survey is considered an important supplement to the workshops, since surveys are usually able to reach a larger number of people, thereby increasing the representativeness of the consultation. The survey has an overwhelming response, with 2,000 being returned in the first week alone.

Data collected using a survey format differs substantially from the rich and qualitative information that results from workshops. Rather than following the open ended questions used in face to face sessions, the survey is more structured, with a multiple choice format allowing respondents to indicate their preferences in relation to council's strategic priorities. The vexed issue of proposed rate increases is mentioned only in a roundabout way towards the end of the survey where respondents are asked to comment on the financial implications of their preferences.

Consequently, survey respondents' comments on what they think about the need to increase rates differ from the answers given at the workshop. While workshop participants were largely in favour of low to moderate rate rises, survey respondents are not clear on this issue: 60% do not comment, 8% support a small to moderate rate rise, 26% oppose a rate rise, and 10% make a general comment but do not indicate whether or not they support a rate rise. The fact that 60% of respondents make no comment about rates could mean either that they have no strong opinions about the issue or have insufficient information to make a comment.

A number of reasons could have contributed to the disparity in attitudes between survey respondents and workshop participants. It is possible (though not likely, given council's demographic characteristics) that most respondents were less able to afford proposed rate rises. A more plausible explanation is that survey respondents reacted instinctively to a suggestion of rate rises, 'No, we don't want that, it will hurt our hip-pocket'. Workshop attendants developed different attitudes to proposed rate increases because the process of discussion and the information provided in the participant information kit educated them about council's financial situation and the services it provides, thereby making them more understanding of the need to increase revenue.

Lessons

This section summarises the key lessons for councils wishing to institute inclusive participatory processes arising from the research.

Conducting public participation well is difficult at the best of times and, even if all the 'rules' are followed, it is frequently necessary to adjust processes as unforeseen issues arise. Hence the issues outlined below serve as signposts to councils rather than as a definitive 'must do' list.

Culture of consultation

Beyond providing opportunities for involvement, effective participation requires councils to build their own capacity to conduct consultation and reach out to the community. From an organisational perspective, the development of a supportive and proactive organisational culture – a 'culture of consultation' – is the greatest contributor to successful and inclusive participatory practice. This includes:

- Development, existence of and adherence to policies and processes that provide guidance on establishing equitable, accountable and transparent public participation. These may include consultation strategies, worksheets, checklists and templates.
- Consideration of what constitutes active and inclusive community consultation.
- Commitment to an integrated approach to public participation, including greater communication across departments and coordination of departmental staff in planning, conducting and evaluating community consultation.
- Allocation of sufficient resources in the form of staff time, venues and money required to consult and flexibility to adjust processes and timelines as unforeseen issues arise.
- Continuing staff training as well as training for councillors.
- Councillors who have a positive attitude to consultation and are actively involved – in this way, it is not just council staff but also decision makers who hear the community.
- Clear lines of communication of consultation results between council staff and councillors and defined avenues by which outcomes feed into decision-making processes.
- Ability to select and work with consultants who are experienced in conducting inclusive participatory processes or who are experts in engaging particular groups.
- Knowledge retention and knowledge sharing with council staff within and between organisational areas and consultants. To maximise benefits, information garnered from the process needs to be disseminated widely across council. This also avoids 'consultation fatigue' which can be experienced by the community if they are repeatedly consulted on related issues over a short period of time.

Decision making based on consultation outcomes

The way information from a consultative process is used by council affects the quality of the outcomes as well as the credibility of decisions. For example, if the preferences expressed during a consultation are at odds with council's preferred course of action, then it is necessary to communicate to the community why certain decisions were made and how community feedback was used in the process. If consultation outcomes are simply ignored, it may create the impression in the community that they have not been listened to and that their opinions have been ignored.

Councils should also consider, prior to a consultation taking place, how the community preferences will inform decision making, what to do if opinions expressed do not fit with council's intentions, and how this will be communicated to the public.

Choosing the right participation process for the type of information sought and outcomes desired is critical. For example, if council wishes to elicit community feedback about complex choice questions, then deliberative and face to face methods of consultation are more appropriate than a survey based format. This also applies if council wishes to educate the community about difficult decisions it faces.

Most consultations use multiple methods to facilitate participation. When selecting these, care must be taken to ensure that each is compatible with the outcomes desired and is suitable for the target audience. For example, comparing responses to complex issues resulting from a process of education and deliberation with results based on a minimum of information or multiple choice is like comparing apples with oranges.

Councils should carefully consider the degree to which participatory mechanisms chosen as part of a consultation strategy are compatible and facilitate the identified aims and outcomes.

Inclusive participatory practice

The representativeness of the consultation process is crucial to ensuring its democratic legitimacy and gives council a credible basis for decision making. Not all community members are equally likely to participate. Public responsiveness depends on the avenues for involvement offered, the ways in which people are invited to participate, ease of access and how the issue is presented as being relevant to the community.

The willingness and ability of councils to reach out to their constituencies is a critical factor in achieving inclusive participatory practice. To facilitate representative, inclusive and effective participation, councils have to provide appropriate methods and avenues to engage communities. Often it is not the community that is hard to reach: rather, lack of public engagement is symptomatic of councils failing to reach out to their community to solicit involvement. Involvement of a broad range of groups can be facilitated by designing methodologies that employ a clear strategy to target hard to reach groups beyond the usual, articulate and self-motivated stakeholders. This can be achieved by:

- Achieving greater clarity about the aims, purpose and implied promise of consultation and engagement processes, and fitting method to purpose.
- Recognising that the community is made up of a range of diverse groups who respond to different incentives, disincentives and barriers to participation.
- Identifying and targeting community groups using socio-economic and demographic data.
- Using appropriate and innovative consultation methods that are tailored to the groups council is seeking to involve. This can be facilitated by gathering and making available information about how to address the special needs of various groups, who may have to be encouraged and enabled to participate.
- Making imaginative and effective use of a variety of communication media and contact methods, suited to purpose and to the information uses and capabilities of identified constituencies.
- Utilising the knowledge of service staff and community networks to promote consultation processes, recruit participants and identify suitable avenues for people to contribute.
- Employing council and service staff, or experienced facilitators and consultants who are knowledgeable about the needs and preferences of target groups, and who are able to guide and implement consultation processes.

- Developing and implementing participation strategies that facilitate representativeness.
- More effectively sharing plans, information, resources and models of best practice between organisational units within council and between councils.
- Conducting regular critical evaluations of the aims and outcomes of community consultation strategies and implementing changed processes and professional development designed to build best practice.

Notes

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- ⁴⁰ Murphy, P (2006) *Practical: Reaching the Hard-to-Reach*, ProjectsETC., <http://www.projectsetc.org/all_about_audiences/reaching_the_hard_to_reach.html>; Smith, G (2006) *Hard-to-Reach Groups Don't Exist*, Delib.
- ⁴¹ Health and Safety Executive (1994) *Successful Interventions in Hard to Reach Groups*, <<http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/misc/hardtoreach.pdf>>; Jones, T & T Newburn (2001).
- ⁴² Modified from Health and Safety Executive (1994).
- ⁴³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) *Census of Population and Housing – SEIFA 2001*, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/Websitedbs/D3110124.NSF/24e5997b9bf2ef35ca2567fb00299c59/a17dc48d988ecf63ca256dad00005ea3!OpenDocument>>.
- ⁴⁴ Freimuth, VS & W Mettger (1990) 'Is there a hard-to-reach audience?', *Public Health Reports*, 105(3): 232-38, <<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/picrender.fcgi?artid=1580016&blobtype=pdf>>; Barlow, J, S Kirkpatrick, S Stewart-Brown & H Davis (2005) 'Hard-to-reach or out-of-reach? Reasons why women refuse to take part in early interventions', *Children and Society*, 19: 199-210; Burhansstipanov, L & LU Krebs (2005) *Reaching Populations Labeled 'Hard-to-Reach'*, Edict, <http://www.bcm.edu/edict/PDF/Reaching_Populations.pdf>.
- ⁴⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001).
- ⁴⁶ Brackertz, N, I Zwart, D Meredyth & L Ralston (2005).
- ⁴⁷ Nillumbik's Community Planning Think Tank is a group of local residents interested in planning and social issues that council consults regularly on these matters. Similarly, Boroondara has recently launched its community reference panel, which will be consulted on a range of issues and comprises over 500 residents who are broadly representative of the city's population.
- ⁴⁸ City of Maribyrnong, City of Brimbank & Shire of Melton (2005) *Positive Ageing and Community Engagement: Perspectives of Older People*, Jenny Ashby & Associates, Collective Results Consulting.
- ⁴⁹ The City of Maribyrnong's Community Engagement Framework includes a checklist for consultation with groups who have particular consultation requirements and needs. This section of the framework provides excellent advice on things to consider when consulting with certain population segments. Many of these considerations were incorporated during the planning stage of the consultation. An excerpt from this document is provided in Appendix 2. City of Maribyrnong (2000) *Maribyrnong City Council Community Engagement Framework*, Melbourne, Maribyrnong City Council.
- ⁵⁰ City of Maribyrnong (2000) *Maribyrnong City Council Community Engagement Framework*, Melbourne, Maribyrnong City Council.
- ⁵¹ City of Maribyrnong, City of Brimbank & Shire of Melton (2004) *Ageing Well Strategy 2004-2016: Positive Ageing and Community Engagement: Perspectives of Older People*, Jaa Associates.
- ⁵² Albrechts, L (2002) 'The planning community reflects on enhancing public involvement: Views from academics and reflective practitioners', *Planning Theory and Practice*, 3(3): 331-47.
- ⁵³ Stein, D (2007) 'How to overcome NIMBY opposition to your project', *Nation's Building News*, 19 March,

<http://www.gcastrategies.com/books_articles/article_031907.php>, provides a brief but useful discussion of the issues.

⁵⁴ Atkinson, R & J Flint (2001).

⁵⁵ Carson, L & K Gelber (2001) *Ideas for Community Consultation: A Discussion on Principles and Procedures for Making Consultation Work*, Sydney, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning,
<http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/planfirst/pdf/principles_procedures_final.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Carson, L & K Gelber (2001).

⁵⁷ CustomInsight (2006) *Random Sampling Overview*, Carson City, Nevada,
<<http://www.custominsight.com/articles/random-sampling.asp>>.

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Appendix 1:

Publications arising from the *Community consultation and the hard to reach: local government, social profiling and civic infrastructure project*

A summary of the initial research:

Stone, W (2005) *Consultation Policy and Practice: An Initial Overview*, Melbourne, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology.
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/Hard2Reach0305.doc>>

A paper scoping the issues facing councils when consulting hard to reach groups:

Zwart, I, N Brackertz & D Meredyth (2005) *Consulting the 'Hard to Reach' in Victorian Local Government*, Working Paper, Melbourne, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology.
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/Hard2Reach1205.pdf>>

A discussion of the policies and theoretical debates underpinning community consultation, participation and engagement in Victorian local government and examples of current practice:

Brackertz, N, I Zwart, D Meredyth & L Ralston (2005) *Community Consultation and the 'Hard to Reach': Concepts and Practice in Victorian Local Government*, Melbourne, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology.
Main report: <http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/HardtoReach_main.pdf>
Demographic appendix: <http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/HardtoReach_append.pdf>

An exploration of public participation in the context of network governance:

Brackertz, N (2006) *Hard to Reach? Engagement, Governance and Community Consultation in Victorian Local Government*, Proceedings of Governments and Communities in Partnership: From Theory to Practice conference, Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, 25-27 Sept.
<<http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference06/Brackertz.pdf>>

Definitional and conceptual issues related to hard to reach:

Brackertz, N (2007) *Who Is Hard to Reach and Why?*, Working Paper, Melbourne, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology.
<<http://www.sisr.net/publications/0701brackertz.pdf>>

Case studies:

Nillumbik Shire Council Case Study Report: Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan 2005-06, report by Nicola Brackertz and Denise Meredyth, May 2007.
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/nillumbik.pdf>>

City of Melbourne Case Study Report: Southbank Boulevard Linear Park Consultation, report by Ivan Zwart, June 2007
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/melbourne.pdf>>

City of Maribyrnong Case Study Report: Delivered Meals Consultation, report by Nicola Brackertz, June 2007
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/maribyrnong.pdf>>

City of Whittlesea Case Study Report: Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre Strategy, report by Nicola Brackertz, October 2007
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/whittlesea.pdf>>

City of Port Phillip Case Study Report: 'START ALL MURAL EXPERIMENTS!' The Art of Community Engagement, report by Katrina Gorjanicyn, October 2007
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/portphillipmurals.pdf>>

City of Moreland Case Study Report: Focus on Fawkner Community Group by Helen Sheil, Ivan Zwart, Nicola Brackertz and Denise Meredyth, March 2008.

City of Boroondara Case Study Report: Camberwell and Kew Structure Plans by Katrina Gorjanicyn, Ivan Zwart, Nicola Brackertz and Denise Meredyth, May 2008.
<<http://www.sisr.net/cag/docs/moreland.pdf>>

Appendix 2: Considerations when consulting with older people

Identified issue areas	Information Requirement	Consultation Requirement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Frailty: a number of older people have disabilities ■ Most older people to varying degrees have failing eyesight ■ A number are housebound ■ Older persons often do not like to go out to meetings at night ■ Often do not drive or else require assisted transport ■ A high proportion of older people in Maribyrnong are CALD. With age, they tend to revert to their first language. ■ A number of older people prefer verbal information as they are not always literate in their own language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Written material needs to be in plain, large print (font 14) on sandy coloured paper ■ Information needs to be short and simple ■ Use of translation and interpreters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consideration should be given to utilising support services and direct care workers for assistance, e.g. utilising ADASS and Home Care to assist older people to participate in surveys, interviews, group sessions etc. ■ Given that older people often have language difficulties and disabilities, it is better to hold group sessions or to use direct one on one assistance from support workers or people from their own ethnic or language group ■ Often a more structured approach is better. When surveys or interview questions are used they should be simple, short and clear ■ Adequate time needs to be allowed as communication could take longer ■ Hearing loops and portable microphones should be available ■ Assisted transport has to be provided ■ Availability of respite care for carers ■ Venue should be accessible to people with a disability and preferably be on the ground floor

Source: City of Maribyrnong (2000) *Maribyrnong City Council Community Engagement Framework*, Melbourne, Maribyrnong City Council

Appendix 3: Consultation matrix

This is an example of a consultation matrix used by the City of Moreland

	Site Specific	Area Improvement	Service Planning	Policy Development	Major Projects	Strategic Plans
Write a Letter	1	1	2	2	4	4
Survey	4	2	2	2	2	3
Letter Drop	3	2	4	2	2	2
Council Newsletter	5	3	1	1	1	1
Special Newspaper	5	3	3	2	3	1
Ads in Newspapers	2	2	1	1	1	1
Media	4	1	1	1	1	1
Community Leaders	3	2	1	1	1	1
Personal Briefing(s)	2	1	2	3	3	4
Focus Groups	5	4	1	2	1	3
Community Called Meeting	1	1	1	1	1	1
Public Meeting	2	2	2	1	1	1
1 = Every time 2 = In most circumstances 3 = Depending on the program 4 = On the odd occasion 5 = Rarest of circumstances						

Source: City of Moreland (2000) *Moreland Council Consultation Framework: Consultation and Democratic Governance*, Moreland, City of Moreland

<<http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/publications/consultationstrategy.htm#Consultation%20Matrix%20%E2%80%93%20which%20method%20is%20used%20when>>.