

Institute for
Public Policy
and Governance



How local governments can increase the social and economic participation of people with disability

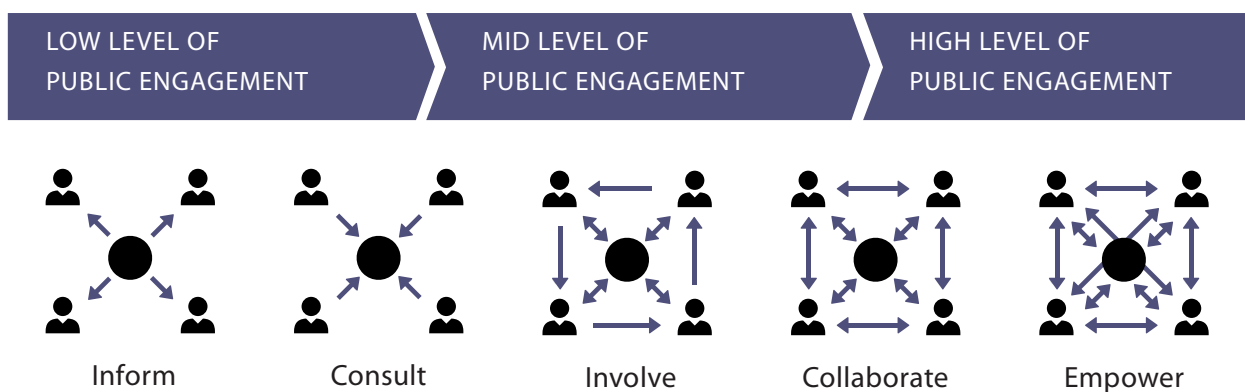
Engage people with
disability about their needs



Engage people with disability about their needs

Overview

Many local governments effectively engage with their communities, including people with disability, their families and carers, on a wide range of strategic and operational issues. They generally operate on a spectrum from providing information to consulting to collaborating. This is shown in the figure below.



Source: What is community engagement (www.bangthetable.com/what-is-community-engagement/)

At the left-hand side of the spectrum, local governments provide information to people with disability and many are doing this. At the right-hand side, some local governments empower people with disability to make decisions on planning or budgeting which affect them.

This section provides information about how local governments engage with people, what they engage on and how engagement leads to better outcomes for people with disability.

Enable access to information

Local governments provide their communities with a wide range of information and reporting about services and operations but not all is provided in a way which is accessible to people with disability. When local government websites comply with Australian web accessibility standards

and online and hard copy documents are available in accessible formats, people with disability may:

- Read hard copy documents in Braille or easy-to-read versions
- Listen to website content
- Watch videos with instructions about issues such as emergency management or public transport
- Access website documents in specific formats and in easy-to-read versions
- View websites via easy navigation and without large amounts of text
- Use specialist screen reader software.

Some local governments also build staff capacity, outside of the communications team, to develop

accessible material and information. Increasingly, information for people with disability is also translated into key community languages and into Auslan, the Deaf community's language.



CITY OF WHITTLESEA, VICTORIA – ENSURING WEBSITES ARE ACCESSIBLE (Urban Fringe)

The Council is committed to the provision of information which is accessible for the whole community, including people with disability. Its website was recently upgraded to be compliant with the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, and the homepage has large print, clear contrasting colours with most of the text replaced by symbols. Documents and information are provided in a range of formats, including basic word documents, accessible PDFs and, where possible, audio.

The Communication and Marketing Team developed a manual for staff to help them develop accessible documents. This also involves training a 'champion' in each division to implement the manual and ensure that content produced by that division is accessible.

The City has also invested in CommonLook software which creates accessible PDF documents.

See: www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au

Many local governments have developed access maps which details the location of accessible bathrooms, scooter recharge points and accessible buildings and infrastructure. Some local governments also provide guides which highlight accessible businesses. These maps and guides can generally be downloaded from websites as accessible PDFs.

Identify and engage with people

Local governments identify and engage with people with disability, their families and carers (as they do with other community members) about their current and future needs. This is usually undertaken periodically in a strategic planning context and more frequently in an operational sense. The survey undertaken as part of this research showed that about half of the local governments in Australia have disability advisory committees, access committees or similar groups to drive this engagement and support people with disability, their families and carers to provide input into a range of issues such as how to:

- Design and implement public infrastructure, facilities and services
- Promote and build social and economic participation
- Monitor and measure outcomes
- Build local government staff capacity
- Promote accessibility in private land and building developments
- Advocate to other levels of government.

As a vital starting point, local governments make sure that community engagement strategies include people with disability

and that information about community engagement is in an accessible format.



GLENORCHY CITY COUNCIL, TASMANIA – MAKING THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUSIVE

(Urban Fringe)

Council has a long history of engagement with its community, including people with disability. The local population is becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse and this is highlighted in Council's new community engagement strategy. An important part of this new strategy will be to improve engagement with people with disability.

Council's Access Advisory Committee provided input into the framework which underpins the new strategy and provides ongoing advice as each element is developed. Council has also redeveloped its website and engaged the Access Advisory Committee about layout and language.

Local governments often engage people with disability in strategic planning by liaising with their advisory committee to help develop, monitor and report on disability access and inclusion plans. Where local governments do not have a disability advisory committee or want to engage more broadly, they use other ways to collaborate with people with disability, their families and carers.



BREAK O'DAY COUNCIL, TASMANIA – WORKING GROUPS FOR DISABILITY ACTION PLANNING (Urban Fringe)

Council's relatively small population is spread across several small towns and rural properties. A high proportion of residents need some form of assistance with everyday activities and this is increasing as the community ages. There is currently only one provider of disability services and no day or longer-stay respite facilities in the area.

To identify gaps and support future planning for disability, Council convened a working group which included residents with a lived experience of disability, community organisations, elected members, and council staff to develop Council's first Disability Action Plan. The plan was endorsed by Council and the working group has now become a standing Disability Advisory Committee.

Setting up advisory committees

The membership of disability advisory committees varies across local governments. They can include people with disability, their families and carers, service providers and disability advocates, elected members, and key local government staff.

Elected members are important to strategically position the committee within council and ensure that disability is considered in all decision-making. Over three quarters of councils with these committees include at least one elected member which strengthens the influence of the committee. The Access and Inclusion Committee in the Campbelltown City Council in South Australia and the Disability Network at the City of Whittlesea in Victoria are both chaired by the mayor and include one other elected member.

In many local governments, disability advisory committees are established under state or territory local government acts. This means that minutes are tabled at council meetings.

Disability advisory committees need to represent the interests of people with a wide range of disability. This is often formalised in their Terms of Reference but can be difficult to achieve where membership is generally by expression of interest. In particular, many local governments find it difficult to recruit people with intellectual disability. The Access Committees at Penrith City Council and Glenorchy City Council recruited community members with intellectual disability by engaging local organisations providing services for these people to identify suitable representatives.

Whilst advisory committees can assist with engagement on a regular basis, they are not a substitute for broader participation. Some local governments have been able to engage a representative sample of people with disability, their families and carers and this creates a richer source of baseline data to use for monitoring the impact of future initiatives and actions.



WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL, NEW SOUTH WALES – BROAD ENGAGEMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY (Urban Regional)

As part of the development of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Council engaged broadly with people with disability and their carers. This engagement involved:

- A community survey which rated the importance of 21 Council facilities and services
- Two 'community conversations' with 26 people with disability and their carers and 34 Council staff
- A workshop with 17 young people from a Transition to Work program and seven local high school students.

Feedback included where to prioritise actions to increase social and economic participation (i.e. actions that have high importance but low satisfaction with current services), general community attitudes and issues around access to meaningful employment. The

engagement also provided baseline measures to monitor the impact of changes implemented by Council.

See: Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2016-2020 ([www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/council/publicdocuments/Documents/Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2016-2020 Engagement Summary.pdf](http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/council/publicdocuments/Documents/Disability%20Inclusion%20Action%20Plan%202016-2020%20Engagement%20Summary.pdf))

See also: Increasing civic participation and improving consultation with people with a disability ([www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/ageing-disability/disability/relateddocuments/Increasing civic participation and improving consultation with people with a disability.doc](http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/ageing-disability/disability/relateddocuments/Increasing%20civic%20participation%20and%20improving%20consultation%20with%20people%20with%20a%20disability.doc))

Empower people in decision-making

Some local governments go beyond engagement and actively empower people with disability in decision-making and priority setting. Generally, this means that the outcomes for people with disability are generally stronger as they have been actively involved in planning or considering the best way to allocate scarce resources.



CITY OF ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA – AUDITING ACCESS AND INCLUSION (Urban Fringe)

The City's infrastructure and facilities are used by residents from across Greater Adelaide and visitors, including people with disability. Each year, the City's Access and Inclusion Advisory Panel selects four projects or initiatives as case studies. The Panel contributes to the Case Study project over a period of a year or longer to add specialist and strategic advice regarding access and inclusion. This can include project briefings, site visits, audits, and design reviews. The Panel provides insight into the user's experience of the service, facility or place.

The case studies are published on Council's website and illustrate how specialist advice during the development and delivery stage of projects can lead to better results for people with disability. For example, engagement during the re-development of the Adelaide Aquatic Centre helped improve accessibility and services for people with disability. The panel is also currently advising Council on redevelopments such as the Riverbank to Central Markets master plan to ensure the small linking laneways in this area are accessible.

Case studies are not limited to public spaces and Council facilities, but can apply an access and inclusion lens to policy and strategy initiatives as well.

See: City of Adelaide Action Inclusion (<http://bit.ly/2sSQaWW>)



PENRITH CITY COUNCIL, NEW SOUTH WALES – REFERRAL OF DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS TO THE ACCESS COMMITTEE (Urban Fringe)

Penrith has grown rapidly which has led to the design and delivery of significant new infrastructure. Council aims to be a leader in planning for accessibility and is committed to establish and advocate for design principles which go beyond compliance levels in the Building Code of Australia.

To achieve this goal, Council's Access Committee formulated a Development Referrals Policy to guide the development applications it should consider, prior to approval by Council. This ensures that development applications for group homes and hostels (Class 3), department stores and shopping centres (Class 6), public buildings (Class 9) and non-habitable buildings or structures (Class 10) are reviewed by the Access Committee during the assessment process.



DISTRICT COUNCIL OF
THE COPPER COAST,
SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND
GLENORCHY CITY COUNCIL,
TASMANIA – EMPOWERING
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY
IN DECISIONS ABOUT
INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES

(Rural and Remote
and Urban Fringe)

Both councils allocate significant funding for access upgrades of ageing council infrastructure. Both also work with their disability advisory committees to develop annual work plans using prioritisation matrices. These matrices place weightings on the number of people impacted, the risk of injury if an upgrade is not addressed, cost and the length of time projects have been in the pipeline.



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