



Queensland
Government



Engaging Queenslanders: *Get involved*

**Improving community engagement
across the Queensland Public Sector**

July 2003



Message from the Premier

Listening to and working productively with Queenslanders are two of the hallmarks of my government. Greater involvement of citizens and communities in government processes is becoming a standard feature of many democratic systems nationally and internationally. It is one of the cornerstones of our drive to better communicate with Queenslanders and to enhance their involvement in the State's democratic processes.

The government has taken up the challenge of community engagement through Regional Parliament, Community Cabinets, Ministerial Regional Community Forums and a host of other avenues. Queensland has already received international recognition for its leadership in implementing an integrated and multi-level approach to involving people and communities in the business of Parliament and government.

An important component of this approach is the *Community Engagement Improvement Strategy* which includes a range of initiatives to improve community engagement across the public sector and contribute to Queensland as the Smart State.

I encourage all Queensland public servants to read this document which outlines the Queensland Government's approach to community engagement and the *Improvement Strategy*. It will help you to make a contribution to better engagement and to the delivery of the government's priorities for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. Beattie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peter Beattie MP

Premier and Minister for Trade



Engaging Queenslanders: *Get involved*

What is community engagement?

Community engagement refers to the many ways in which governments connect with citizens in the development and implementation of policies, programs and services.

Engagement covers a wide variety of government-community connections, ranging from information sharing to community consultation and, in some instances, active participation in government policy development and decision-making processes.

Engagement acknowledges the right of citizens to have a say and to get involved in the business of government. Effective community engagement allows government to tap into diverse perspectives and potential solutions to improve the quality of its decisions.

Queensland Government's commitment

The Queensland Government has recognised the importance of effective community engagement through the inclusion of *Community Engagement and a Better Quality of Life* as one of its five key priorities, the establishment of the Community Engagement Division in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and the development of a *Directions Statement* for community engagement.

A Community Engagement category has also been included in the Premier's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management to recognise significant achievement and improved community engagement performance by Queensland Government agencies.

The Queensland Government has adopted an integrated, multi-level approach to community engagement. It includes innovations and reforms in Parliament, Executive Government and across Queensland Government agencies (see *Figure 1*).

This approach incorporates:

- Regional Parliament
- Internet broadcasting of Parliamentary proceedings
- Community Cabinets
- Ministerial Regional Community Forums
- *Smart Service Queensland*
- online engagement through e-petitions, online consultation and a community engagement website
- a *Community Engagement Improvement Strategy* for the public sector

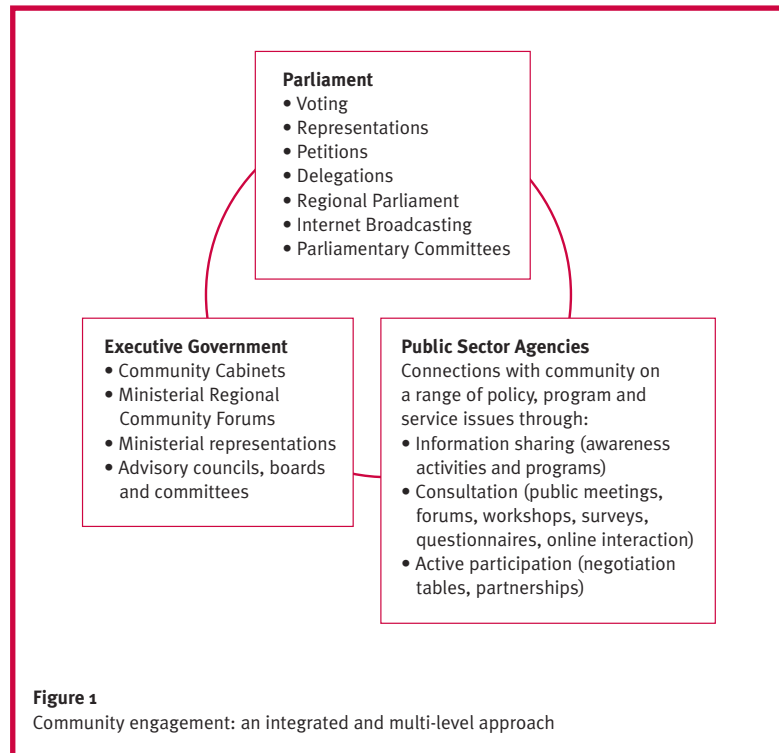


Figure 1
Community engagement: an integrated and multi-level approach

The Community Engagement Division is driving the implementation of this integrated and multi-level approach partly by focusing on improving community engagement across the Queensland Public Sector.

Key outcomes of the government's community engagement commitment will be:

- citizens who are better informed about the government and how to access government services;
- greater involvement of citizens and communities in the business of Parliament and government;
- more effective policies, programs and services which take account of diverse community needs and views; and
- the reduction of barriers to participation so that those unaccustomed or disinclined to work with government can become more involved.





Building Queensland's regions

The government is helping to build Queensland's regions by developing effective relationships with regional communities through better engagement practices.

There is growing community expectation that government will identify, acknowledge and address local issues. This requires government to give communities more tailored and accessible services and information, and increased opportunities for input into government decision-making processes.

Effective community engagement identifies opportunities for new types of partnerships between government and communities, and innovative ways to achieve solutions to local problems.

There will be opportunities for citizens of regional communities in Queensland to have their say through online consultation.

The key challenges

The Queensland Government recognises the value and the limitations of traditional approaches to community engagement, and is determined to meet the challenge of changing circumstances and expectations.

Increasing the involvement of people in the government's deliberations requires a significant shift in the role of the public sector towards greater facilitation of productive and trusting relationships between citizens, communities and government. This shift requires changes to public sector cultures, capabilities, processes and systems.

Government agencies are improving their engagement practices, increasing public access to information and framing information in ways that are most useful to communities and citizens. However, a commitment to better engagement also requires more coordinated practices by agencies, including aligning engagement activities and sharing resources and information.

This is important because in some communities citizens describe 'consultation fatigue', where large amounts of time and commitment are required to participate in frequent, single-agency consultation sessions. Many people express concern at poor past experiences – of not feeling listened to and not receiving appropriate feedback. Others report anxiety about traditional methods such as public meetings or are unclear about where to go and how to have a say.

While many citizens report being 'disengaged', there are increasingly explicit expectations that they should be involved in the decisions affecting them, or of particular concern to them.

Encouraging the 'unengaged' and 'disengaged' sectors of our communities to get involved with government will require approaches more tailored to their interests and needs.

Greater community involvement in government processes also requires clarity and effective communication of the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the public sector, elected representatives, Executive Government and the Parliament.

For public officials, there are other challenges too.

These include making informed decisions about:

- the level of engagement – information, consultation or participation – being asked for or offered;
- the most suitable method of engagement;
- accommodating diverse interests and addressing unrealistic expectations;
- who should lead and facilitate the engagement; and
- how the results of engagement will properly inform policy and decision-making.



The contribution of Queensland Government agencies

The *Community Engagement Improvement Strategy* recognises the many community engagement activities and achievements of Queensland Government agencies. The following recent initiatives incorporate a range of community engagement practices:

- *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices* – the Queensland Government’s response to the Cape York Justice Study
- *Mapping the Future: a discussion paper for Queensland women and girls*
- Queensland’s Youth Participation Strategy
- Community Renewal
- Education and Training Reforms for the Future
- Health 2020
- *Smart State: Smart Stories*
- *Queensland Regulations: Have Your Say*

The *Framework for Improving Community Engagement in Land and Resources Business* developed by Queensland Government land and resources agencies also contributes to the community engagement priority. This framework outlines how land and resources agencies will work together to promote and improve community engagement for better land use.

Community Engagement Improvement Strategy

The Community Engagement Division, in collaboration with all Queensland Government agencies, developed the *Community Engagement Improvement Strategy* in 2002. The strategy supports the government’s commitment to increase the involvement of Queenslanders in a range of government processes and deliberations.

It is designed to:

- produce resources and tools to assist the public sector in developing and delivering effective engagement programs and activities;
- highlight and develop good community engagement practices, including engagement with Indigenous communities;
- improve engagement coordination across the public sector;
- build leadership capability for more effective engagement; and
- build engagement skills and knowledge into recruitment and selection processes, and performance management systems.

During implementation focus will be on:

1. reaching out to those who are unaccustomed, uncomfortable or uninterested in working with government;
2. increasing opportunities for active participation by Queenslanders in government processes; and
3. improving coordination of the government’s engagement activities.



Implementation of the Improvement Strategy

The strategy's initiatives will be implemented through a coordinated and staged approach led by the Community Engagement Division. However, there will be opportunities for individual agencies to lead or to be involved in the implementation of various initiatives.

The implementation process will recognise the unique contributions each agency has to offer and will acknowledge the specific circumstances and issues being faced by agencies.

Agencies will be encouraged to determine their community engagement strengths and to devise improvements that can be made over the next two years. They will also be encouraged to take a more coordinated approach to working with citizens and communities at local, regional or State levels.

Some agencies have already created community engagement units or designated positions to coordinate agency engagement. Some agencies are developing or updating community engagement guides, while others are looking at enhancing their training and development.

The Community Engagement Division will lead the strategic direction of improved community engagement across the public sector, provide advice and guidance to agencies where relevant, improve coordination, and deliver a range of showcasing events.

The overall result of the coordinated implementation process will be the delivery of major government community engagement priorities and the development of a public sector culture and systems that support effective community engagement practices.



Image courtesy of Logan City's Celebration of Diversity campaign

Agency reporting

Queensland Government agencies will be required to report on community engagement activities in their annual reports, highlighting ways in which improved community engagement has delivered better outcomes for communities aligned with the government's five key priorities.

Agencies will also be asked to provide details of community engagement activities and steps taken to improve practices for an annual report to be prepared by the Community Engagement Division.

Review of government processes

As part of the *Improvement Strategy's* implementation process, the Community Engagement Division will participate in reviews of central processes and documents, such as the Cabinet and Policy Handbooks.

The Division will also work with Treasury to improve the community engagement components of the Priorities in Progress Report under the Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility.

Improvement Strategy initiatives



The *Community Engagement Improvement Strategy* includes a range of initiatives to improve community engagement across the public sector. These initiatives are:

Community engagement guide and resource package

A general community engagement guide for the Queensland Public Sector will be the first product flowing out of the *Community Engagement Improvement Strategy*. The guide will be the initial component of a comprehensive community engagement resource package to be produced in stages during 2003-2004.

The package will include a range of tools to improve connections between government and the community, and to involve those who are traditionally hardest to reach. The package will incorporate resources with themes such as:

- engagement methods and techniques, including costs and benefits;
- developing and implementing more inclusive engagement practices;
- assisting members of government boards and committees to understand their roles and the role of government;
- assisting senior managers to contribute to the government's community engagement priority;
- evaluating community engagement programs and activities;
- engaging with Indigenous communities; and
- managing challenges associated with community engagement activities.



Coordinated training and development

This initiative will develop a range of community engagement competencies, raise awareness of the importance of training in community engagement across the Queensland Public Sector and provide the basis for improved coordination of training activities.

There are four major components to this initiative:

1. an audit of current training across the public sector in the area of community engagement to inform the development of competency standards;
2. a joint venture with Public Sector Development Queensland Inc. to develop community engagement competency standards that reflect work performance requirements;
3. the production of an annual calendar featuring the range of community engagement training and development activities across the public sector and beyond; and
4. agency reviews of community engagement training needs.

Currently there is an ad hoc approach to training in community engagement. While some agencies offer staff training in community consultation, others offer only communication training. In addition, many agencies offer training in aspects of community engagement that are not recognised as engagement related, such as stakeholder analysis and risk management.

Community engagement capability and performance management

Many public sector roles require community engagement skills and capabilities, ranging from frontline service delivery to program management and policy development. This initiative will build community engagement skills and capabilities into performance management systems across all levels.

To be led in 2003 by the Office of Public Service Merit and Equity in partnership with the Community Engagement Division, this initiative will promote the inclusion of community engagement responsibilities, skills and capabilities in appropriate Queensland Public Service position descriptions, selection tools and accountability statements. It will also improve the capacity of the public sector to recruit staff with experience in community engagement when necessary.

Engaging with Indigenous communities

Queensland Government agencies are currently engaging with Indigenous communities around a range of policies, programs and services.

This initiative is designed to develop and trial more powerful methods of engagement which are relevant, culturally appropriate and likely to have positive results.

A scan of relevant materials and expertise in the community and industry sectors across the State and nationally will be undertaken. This will inform the development of good practice models for engaging with Indigenous communities.

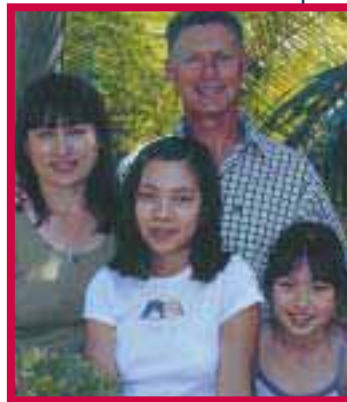
Coordinated and integrated community engagement

Research indicates that more relevant policies, programs and services eventuate through collaboration at local, regional and State levels. Greater opportunities for local decision-making may emerge and government interventions can have more powerful impacts.

While integrated community engagement is only a part of the overall process of cross-government collaboration, it is central to activities such as integrated strategy development, planning and systems, information management and service delivery.

This initiative will examine the roles of the Regional Managers' Forums, broader use of negotiation tables, linkages with local government and more effective engagement with Queensland's regional communities.

The Community Engagement Division will investigate opportunities to further develop new approaches to community engagement, in partnership with other Queensland Government agencies and with community and industry organisations.



Information management and knowledge sharing project

The Community Engagement Division will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information and promote dialogue about community engagement.

This project will include an online knowledge bank, showcasing events, a practitioners' network and an e-bulletin of current activities and research. It will be closely linked to the community engagement website www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au developed through the online engagement initiatives.

It will provide knowledge support for public sector officers and citizens involved in community engagement programs and activities at local, regional and State levels.

Community engagement leadership project

This project recognises that leadership skills provide a strong foundation for the development of community engagement capability. It will examine and assess current leadership programs across Queensland's government and non-government sectors to identify opportunities for leadership development activities around improved community engagement.



Online engagement

A range of online engagement initiatives are being implemented by the Queensland Government to extend community access to the government and its decision-making processes.

A community engagement website (www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au) will provide agencies and the community with a central access point to the government's online engagement activities.

A 12-month Online Community Consultation trial includes the development and implementation of interactive online consultation mechanisms to enable citizens to raise issues with government and provide opinions on policy issues via the community engagement website.

The online engagement initiatives also incorporate the broadcasting of Parliamentary proceedings on the Internet, an online petitioning system and the *Smart State: Smart Stories* project through which the Community Engagement Division is seeking and promoting stories of innovation from citizens across the State.

Strategies will also be developed to address the future of online engagement in Queensland.

Showcasing and demonstration events

The Community Engagement Division will host a series of small, targeted showcasing and demonstration events throughout 2003 and 2004. The events will draw on the lessons of past and current community engagement activities and demonstrate good practice engagement.

The showcasing and demonstration events will connect with existing government, community and industry networks to improve knowledge and capability through a process of critical reflection and dialogue.

The focus of the events will be information dissemination, shared learning and the identification and development of opportunities for future partnerships and innovation. The events will tap into and document expertise, experience and ideas from across government, community and industry, and collect views, information and ideas contributing to the process of improving community engagement practice.

The initial showcasing events will be themed around:

- innovations in community engagement practice; and
- more inclusive and enabling engagement practices.

Where to from here?

The Community Engagement Division will lead and facilitate the implementation of the *Community Engagement Improvement Strategy* through a collaborative process.

The cross-government team responsible for developing the *Improvement Strategy* will support the implementation, inform agencies of progress and identify opportunities for collaboration in community engagement activities.

The tools and resources developed through the strategy will be available to the Queensland Public Sector via GovNet.

The Community Engagement Division has developed a communication strategy to support the government's community engagement commitment. The strategy's theme is *'Get involved'* and it aims to increase community awareness about opportunities for involvement in government processes.

For further information visit www.premiers.qld.gov.au/about/community/index.htm phone (07) 3224 7499 or email: communityengagement@premiers.qld.gov.au.

