

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION IN COMMUNITY SERVICES PROCUREMENT**

This document has been developed as a guide for government agencies undertaking community services procurement. It provides an outline of the behaviour expected when engaging with the Not-for-Profit (NFP) sector, and provides some practical considerations for undertaking collaboration processes.

The nature of the relationship between government agencies and NFP service providers is central to the *Delivering Community Services in Partnership (DCSP) Policy*. Partnership Principles and Behaviours have been established which guide both sectors when undertaking collaboration regarding the planning, design and delivery of community services. The *DCSP Policy* is clear that collaboration must commence during the procurement planning phase, prior to decisions being made about possible funding and contracting strategies.

### **What are the Partnership Principles and Behaviours that apply to engagement and collaboration in community services?**

Government agencies undertaking engagement and collaboration with NFP organisations must have regard to the Partnership Principles outlined in the *DCSP Policy*.

1. A commitment to improve social, cultural and economic outcomes for the Western Australian community.
2. A collaborative approach to decision-making and working together recognising the interdependence in the delivery of Community Services.
3. A partnership based on mutual trust and respect, with openness and transparency in all activities.
4. A recognition of the value and contribution of both sectors in the design and delivery of Community Services and the important roles each play in the wellbeing of the community.
5. An enduring commitment to the sustainability of Community Services.
6. A commitment to empowerment of service users in the planning, design and delivery of Community Services.<sup>1</sup>

The *DCSP Policy* outlines expected Behaviours for both government agencies and NFP organisations engaged in the provision of community services.

1. An enduring focus and drive to deliver demonstrable improvements in outcomes for all Western Australians.
2. Consultation on all significant issues, including the development of policy, planning and service design.
3. Transparency in decision-making, including through the sharing of data and information, basis for funding decisions and contracting requirements.
4. An interdependent approach to the planning and delivery of Community Services.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy* (2011), p5.

5. Public Authorities and Organisations work together to ensure that funding levels are sufficient for sustainable Community Services.
6. Engagement of citizens in the ongoing planning, design and delivery of Community Services through direct and indirect methods of consultation and representation in the development of service delivery. <sup>2</sup>

These Principles and Behaviours are reflected in the practical guidelines below.

### **Who should government agencies consult with?**

The *DCSP Policy* notes the importance of engaging citizens as well as the NFP sector in the planning, design and delivery of community services. The engagement of citizens could be undertaken through an anonymous survey of service users about how current services are meeting their needs, or gaining advice from consumer advocates regarding gaps in service delivery.

Community Services peak bodies are key sources of information regarding community needs. Contacting peak bodies early in the procurement planning phase will enable them to assist with engaging stakeholders, many of whom government agencies may not have access to. It is recommended that as many potential service providers as is practicable are engaged, as this will deliver a variety of viewpoints and a robust collaboration process. In practice this may involve government agencies contacting a wide range of individuals or organisations and asking these parties to participate in any engagement activities.

Additional key stakeholders may include other government agencies, sector experts, and service experts. Where a government agency is unsure of which stakeholders may be relevant to the community service they are looking to purchase, advertising collaboration sessions widely through any usual means of communication with the community will often be a useful starting point.

### **What should we consult and collaborate on?**

Collaboration with NFP organisations and service users should cover a variety of aspects of the proposed community service. At a minimum, engagement and collaboration should take place regarding the community outcomes being sought (i.e. the desired impact or 'change' the services should achieve), the potential design of the service model, or any other requirements the government agency may have about how services are to be delivered (for example, quality standards).

In some cases, the government agency may need to consult key stakeholders regarding the community need, social drivers and possible strategies to engage the service users. This may include undertaking an analysis of gaps in current services and/or a market profile and capacity analysis. Engagement should identify any previously unknown information about the market including potential service providers and service models; this is a process with which peak bodies may be able to assist.

For example, in planning a community services procurement process you may be unsure of whom the potential service providers are, what best practice is for this area of services, and whether the

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<sup>2</sup> The *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy* (2011), p5.

community's needs have changed since engagement was last undertaken. In this scenario, contacting all relevant stakeholders to gain feedback on these questions would lead to a greater understanding of the community need, how it could be achieved and who would be well placed to provide the services.

In another scenario, you may have a good understanding of the market and the community need, but choose to engage your stakeholders in collaborative service design to develop community outcomes and ensure that your specification for services encourages innovation in service delivery.

### **How should engagement and collaboration take place?**

There are a number of ways that government agencies can undertake engagement and collaboration. Forums or workshops with multiple representatives of the NFP sector and/or the community are often useful, or it may be more appropriate to meet with service users and NFP organisations individually. Where unsure, seek guidance from the organisations or individuals with whom you are in consultation to ensure that the format of the formal engagement process is one they are comfortable with and will enable honest and considered feedback.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to provide documents (for example, a table of draft outcomes) prior to collaboration meetings to enable participants to consult with their key stakeholders prior to a meeting. This can encourage an iterative engagement process whereby service design evolves through a series of discussions between parties.

Government agencies should communicate the result of engagement with all participants, and encourage participants to provide feedback on the engagement process to improve future practice.

Therefore, in practice, an engagement process may involve many elements. Successful service design may be achieved by holding workshops with an open invitation to all interested parties (e.g. potential service providers and community representatives) to discuss funding levels and service design. Documents could be provided to participants prior to the workshop; feedback could be incorporated into the design of services on the spot and all participants would be contacted with the results of their feedback following the collaboration process.

### **How long should we allow for engagement and collaboration?**

Allowing insufficient time is a significant barrier to effective collaboration and engagement. The co-design of a community service can take time, especially in circumstances where a government agency has a range of stakeholders to consult and the service is complex.

As the tendering process may take six months or more, it is recommended that initial engagement is undertaken as soon as possible. Government agencies should aim to have completed their collaboration at least six months prior to the anticipated commencement date of any service agreement.

For example, if a service agreement is due to expire 30 June 2015, the procurement process would ideally commence in early 2015. As such, the government agency may choose to begin their engagement process from 30 June 2014 in order to allow sufficient time for an iterative,

collaborative process to identify the ongoing community need, define the desired community outcome and explore service design options.

### **Where can I find further guidance and practical examples about how to collaborate effectively?**

A wealth of evidence and guidance about the value of collaboration and partnership from early service planning and design stages through to procurement, service delivery and evaluation, is available from both Australian and International sources.

Some suggested resources are available online:

- The Australian Centre for Social Innovation's [Co-Design Approach](#);
- The Australian Centre for Social Innovation's [Australian and International Networks](#);
- Nesta's [Innovation Labs](#);
- Nesta's [Coalition for Collaborative Care](#); and
- Nesta's Report: [By Us, For Us: The Power of Co-Design and Co-Delivery](#).

### **Who can I contact if I need further assistance?**

FaCS is available for assistance with community services procurement, including any queries regarding engagement and collaboration via [e-mail](#) or on (08) 6551 1515.