Department of
Urban Affairs and Planning

Ideas for Community Consultation

A discussion on principles and procedures for making consultation work

A report prepared for the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning
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Much of the material in this two-part report is drawn from previous work by Carson & Martin (1999) and Carson (1999)

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Executive Summary

The NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning has commissioned this draft two-part report into community consultation, to be released in conjunction with the White Paper on modernising the plan making system.

This report presents ideas for achieving better community consultation, as a strategic arm of the reform of the plan making system in NSW. We are seeking your feedback on this draft report.

Part 1 (Principles) of this report identifies a range of challenges facing plan makers as they try to integrate public input into the plan making process, and help communities identify with and participate in complex procedures of government.

This Part offers three key ideas for achieving better community consultation. These are:

- engaging principles for effective community consultation
- collaboration, and
- basing consultation methods on a four-step model.

This Part also deals with the question of selecting participants in a consultative process. Where representativeness is important, the application of random selection is recommended. Arguments supporting random selection, and means of achieving it, are outlined.

In this context, the specific challenges to plan making faced at the State, regional and local levels are discussed, so that practitioners can determine clearly how the proposed skills offered in this Part will help them undertake better community consultation.

Part 2 (Procedures) describes a range of consultative methods. Some relative advantages and disadvantages of each method are outlined, to assist plan makers and government agencies determine which method would be appropriate for a particular consultative challenge at any given moment.

The methods discussed in Part 2 complement the principles outlined in Part 1, and together these proposals offer dynamic and flexible options for enhancing community consultation in the planning process.

The focus of this draft report is on proposing innovative and dynamic solutions, to energise and activate community consultation by government agencies in NSW.

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A discussion on principles for making consultation work

Ideas for Community Consultation

The goal: Improved community consultation

The NSW Government is implementing changes to the plan making system in NSW to make it easier to use and understand. The new system is designed to facilitate economic development and the creation of jobs in the context of a vision for an ecologically sustainable future.

The previous plan making system had many strengths, which are to be retained in the reformed plan making system. These included the formal recognition of State, regional and local interests through the tiered structure of policies and plans, and the existence of formal opportunities for public participation in the making of plans. The effectiveness of these strengths, however, has in the past been limited by perceived weaknesses in the setting of overall strategic planning goals, and the generally low level of public input in the early stages of developing a plan, combined with minimal opportunities for public comment.

A central component of the reforms initiated by the NSW Government is the coordination of a number of government agencies and community representatives in streamlining the plan making process. During the conduct of the review which considered options for these changes, many respondents expressed the view that community involvement in preparing plans which affected them was important, and that individuals and interest groups are demanding to be more effectively involved in the planning process. Earlier engagement of the community to help develop ideas and concepts is likely to give rise to a more collaborative approach to plan making, and a greater sense of ownership, support and legitimacy of the plan which emerges. It has also been suggested that Councils be provided with the flexibility and mechanisms to adopt consultation practices relevant to the needs of planning processes at the local level.

For this to happen, it has been suggested that better community participation techniques should be facilitated at all levels of plan making, through preparing best practice guidelines for practitioners. Such guidelines will help to ensure the new system is dynamic and proactive; a system where community members can identify with and gain access to the planning process at an early stage and make a difference; a system where the opinions, expertise and concerns of the community as a whole matter. For this to happen, it is essential that consultation mechanisms are practised which ensure all members of the community feel empowered. In particular, innovative consultation mechanisms need to be capable of more effectively involving young people, the elderly, people with disabilities, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal communities.

Important new mechanisms for community consultation have been successfully developed in recent years, both in Australia and internationally. These mechanisms are designed along the same principles of inclusion and sustainability which inform the NSW Government reforms to plan making. Gaining knowledge about the rationale behind, and the means of implementing, these processes is therefore an essential component of making consultation in the new plan making system work.

Community consultation can 'work' for both the consulter and the consulted. It can bring new levels of expertise and information to the consulter, in a dynamic, cost-effective and integrated way. It can make the consulted feel that they are being listened to, that their opinions matter, and that they can be involved in decision-making that affects them. Importantly, over time it also educates the consulted in plan making processes which affect them. Consultation therefore has the ability to develop the 'deliberative capacity' of both the consulter and the consulted.

This report is designed to provide its users with the skills needed to enhance the success of community consultation at State, regional and local levels. Potential participants in the consultative process include individual community members (some with greater and some with lesser degrees of 'expertise'), community organisations, industry groups, government agencies and planning professionals.

This report has been designed in two parts. Part 1 presents ideas on best practice community consultation — the rationale behind consultative methods and mechanisms. Part 2 outlines a variety of procedures of community consultation, incorporating some of the newest international developments in consultative methods. Combined, these volumes add a wealth of knowledge to the consultative process.

The reports have been designed for YOU — planners, councils, government agencies, community members and industry groups — to improve your ability to consult and be consulted effectively in plan making in your State, region and local area.

Why is community consultation important?

The NSW Government's modernisation of the plan making process aims to streamline the resolution of planning issues at State, regional and local level, in the context of a vision for a sustainable future. The five key outcomes of this process are:

- improved coordination and integration
- reduced complexity
- better communication and participation
- effective land use controls and
- the development of efficient processes for plan making and review.

These goals will be achieved via collaboration; maximising the combined efforts of a range of government departments, agencies, industry groups, community organisations and individuals.

The achievement of the specific goal of achieving better communication and participation faces a number of obstacles, on a range of levels. At a macro level, those who decide which services should be provided are not the same people as those who actually provide the service. This is a tension inherent in any process of governance and it presents a challenge to those interested in enhancing community participation. Understanding this tension means locating efforts at achieving community consultation at the right juncture within processes of governance, so that the consultation is meaningful in the sense of having an impact on decision-making, and also effective in terms of having an impact on service delivery.

Other obstacles are inherent to the strategic planning process. These include the presence of conflicting values amongst participants, uncertainty about outcomes, the difficulty of defining responsibilities, and the controversial nature of sustainable land use management (Institute for Sustainable Futures, forthcoming).

Combined with these inherent difficulties is a dissatisfaction with conventional consultation methods such as public meetings, formal submissions and public hearings. Many of us remember poorly attended meetings, a feeling among participants that they haven't been heard, suspicions that valuable time and resources had been spent less effectively than they could have been, and a general sense of wondering if improvement was possible. This dissatisfaction emanates from many quarters.

Government authorities entrusted with making consultation happen may, in the past, have questioned its relevance and struggled with its implementation. Interest groups have felt frustrated by their perceived lack of impact, experts have criticised the appropriateness of outcomes, and the broader public has felt disempowered (Institute for Sustainable Futures, forthcoming: 4).

We're all aware of the reasons people give for *not* consulting: 'we don't have enough time', 'it costs too much', 'people won't understand the complex issues involved', 'people won't agree', 'it might encourage dissatisfaction' and so on (UK Cabinet Office 2000).

The good news is that many of these doubts and difficulties can be overcome. Differences of opinion are inevitable. However, successful management of these issues is possible, by developing a strategic, integrated and involving approach to consultation and participation. The principles outlined in Part 1 of this report, and the procedures for community consultation offered in Part 2 of this report, outline how it is possible to develop and implement consultation that really works. Public involvement in strategic planning and visioning requires *extended* participation methods; the ability to become involved — and sustain an involvement over time. Done well, community consultation can feel real, committed, integrated and influential. An overview of the ways in which the skills provided in these reports can help overcome the problems identified in achieving best practice community consultation is provided in the conclusion to this report.

It is important to remember that community consultation neither can nor should in any way replace the appropriate process of decision-making by elected, and accountable, public representatives. Central to any democratic system is the idea that the power to make decisions is linked with due process and is ultimately tested against public opinion in elections. Elected officials are, rightly, sensitive to the problem of legitimating decision through formal democratic procedures, such as elections and parliamentary debates.

However, community consultation can help elected officials to understand and to incorporate public preferences and concerns into their decision-making. Community consultation should not replace a democratic, electoral process; it should be an integral part of it (Renn 1993: 199–200). Indeed, contemporary planning practice can be reconceptualised as a communicative, engaging and negotiated process, rather than largely a decision-making one (Kerkin 1998: 294, 300). For such planning practice to be successful, clear legislative backing is needed to uphold the legitimacy of community involvement and concerns (Kerkin 1998: 293, 300).

Another important consideration is cost. For consultation to be effective it must be adequately resourced. Costs may include consultants' fees, participants' travel, relief wages, child care, interpreters and translators. Perhaps surprisingly, community consultation can be carried out in very cost effective ways. For example, costs might be able to be offset with sponsorship, the voluntary participation of some members, by spreading costs across a number of agencies, by pooling available resources and coordinating consultations, by using peak bodies where appropriate, or through other creative means. Many of the procedures outlined in this report, if implemented creatively, can incur much lower costs than might be expected. In the longer term, effective consultation may also be capable of minimising costs, either because consultation has already taken place or where a consultation infrastructure has already been developed and maintained.

This report offers three elements essential to achieving community consultation that works. These are:

- basing community consultation on 'principles for effective community consultation'
- collaboration, and
- utilising a four-step model for community consultation.

These three elements will be explored in the next sections of this report.

Element 1: Principles for effective community consultation

[1] These principles for effective consultation have been adapted from Carson 1999, UK Cabinet Office 2000 and UK Local Government Association 2000.

By focussing on the following principles for effective community consultation, consultation *can* be involving, meaningful, useful and effective. These principles for effective community consultation provide a useful starting point for making consultation work[1].

Make it timely

Participation should not be so late in the life of an issue that it is tokenistic, or merely confirms decisions already made. The timing should occur when citizens have the best chance of influencing outcomes. Give people enough time to express their views.

Make it inclusive

Participants should be selected in a way that is not open to manipulation, and should include a cross-section of the population — as individuals and as groups. Random selection offers the best chance of achieving this.

Make it community-focussed

Ask participants not what they want personally or what is in their self-interest, but what they consider appropriate in their role as citizens.

Make it interactive and deliberative

Avoid reducing questions to a simplistic either/or response. Allow consideration of the big picture, so people can really become engaged.

Make it effective

Although decision-making can strive for consensus, complete agreement need not be the outcome. Be clear on how the decisions will be made so that participants know and understand the impact of their involvement. Make sure all participants have time to become well-informed about and to understand material they are unlikely to have a prior familiarity with.

Make it matter

It is important that there is a strong likelihood that any recommendations which emerge from the consultative process will be adopted. If they are not, it is important that a public explanation is provided. Faith in the process is important by both the power holders and the participants.

Make it well-facilitated

It is important that all participants control the agenda and content because this will give the process more credibility. An independent, skilled and flexible facilitator with no vested interest is essential in order to achieve this.

Make it open, fair and subject to evaluation

The consultation method should be appropriate to the target group. Evaluation questions should be formulated in advance. Decide how the 'success' of the consultation will be measured. Include factors beyond the adoption of recommendations. Feedback to the community after consultation is over is essential.

Make it cost effective

It is difficult to measure community satisfaction, or savings in costly litigation that could arise in the absence of consultation and participation. However, factors can be considered including how many and which types of community members should be consulted on a given issue. Some questions will require broader consultation, others more targeted consultation. Costs will vary and are adaptable, but the process selected must be properly resourced.

Make it flexible

A variety of consultation mechanisms exist. Choose the one which best suits the circumstances. Try a variety of mechanisms over time. Think how to reach all your users, including those with special needs (e.g. language, disabilities, the elderly, the young). Different communities and different questions will produce better responses with different forms of consultation. Mix qualitative and quantitative research methods.

These ten principles for effective community consultation should be applied in every consultative situation. They provide a framework for making community consultation effective and meaningful, and help practitioners avoid some of the most common pitfalls of consultation. This is the first element of achieving community consultation that works.

The second element essential to achieving community consultation that works is collaboration. This will be discussed in the next section.

Element 2: Collaboration

[2] 'Planning thus becomes a process for collectively and interactively addressing and working out how to act, in respect of shared concerns, about how far and how to 'manage' ... change.' (Healey 1996: 245)

The second element essential to achieving community consultation that works is collaboration. Effective collaboration involves 'planning through debate' (Healey 1996: 234). This means ensuring interaction and encouraging collective reasoning and deliberation among a range of participants who reflect the social diversity of the community being consulted.

Making a commitment to ensuring real collaboration in the plan making process means making a commitment to planning as a democratic enterprise. A renewal of the plan making process which incorporates best practice community consultation is capable of reviving elements of participatory democratic practice. Conceiving of planning as a communicative enterprise changes the way in which consultation and planning are understood.

It also opens up the process and outcomes of consultation to new possibilities in terms of reaching understanding. When participants collaboratively discuss, they each bring their own views and understandings of the world to the table. This results — inevitably — in a multiplicity of views, not all of which appear immediately compatible. By collectively justifying and enlarging upon these views and understandings, it becomes possible to begin to understand commonalities and differences in more effective ways. In this way, elements of conflict and elements of agreement can be identified which are based on the issues being discussed, instead of being based on misunderstandings between participants.

Instead of living 'together but separately', communicative deliberation allows the development of ways of finding agreement in order to address collective concerns. In this way, principles for action are actively constituted by the members of a deliberative community (Healey 1996: 242–243)[2].

Collaboration, then, is respectful discussion which values, listens and searches for real and effective understanding between participants — understanding that benefits the plan making process enormously.

The third element essential to achieving community consultation that works is the four-step method. This is outlined in Element 3.

Element 3: The four-step model for community consultation

A model of community consultation which embodies vision, maximising the input of specialist, or 'expert', knowledge and the integration of community values was originally devised by Ortwin Renn in Germany. The model developed by Renn was used to consult on controversial projects including the siting of a high-temperature incinerator (Renn et al 1993). This method has been adapted by Lyn Carson to add a fourth step — evaluation and feedback (Carson 1999).

The four-step model has been outlined here as an overall structure for plan making in NSW, a 'big picture' context for plan making in the whole State, and over a significant period of time. It is the context within which plan making will take place.

Each of the procedures outlined in the accompanying Part emphasises a different aspect, or Step, in the four-step model. The procedure selected for each community consultation will depend on where the specific consultative procedures fits within the overall structure for plan making provided by the four-step model.

The four-step model utilises three groups of actors, who represent three forms of knowledge (Renn 1993: 190), and thus allows for the integration of groups into the decision-making process who might previously have been thought by authorities, or who might themselves have felt, unable to contribute due to lack of specialist knowledge. This is an important consideration in effectively involving groups such as Aboriginal communities, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, young people, the elderly and people with disabilities.

The first group of actors utilised is a group which shares knowledge based on common sense and personal experience. This is a broad group determined by random selection.

This group participates in *Step 1: Visioning*. This step involves the creation of a vision or goals by the participant group, and the establishment of values and criteria for measuring the success of the consultation. These criteria may include elements of both process and outcome. Process criteria could include the degree to which participants learnt about the planning issue under discussion, whether they felt their deliberative capacity or knowledge and understanding of the plan making process had been enhanced by their involvement, or how well-facilitated the group dynamics were in order that their opinion could be heard. Outcome criteria could include to what extent the group's recommendations were integrated into the plan making of authorities, and whether sufficient explanation was provided to the general community if they were not.

The second group of actors utilised is a group which shares technical expertise or specialist knowledge. This overcomes the common complaint in community consultation that the community doesn't know enough to participate meaningfully. However, in this model specialist knowledge is 'cushioned' between two stages of consultation involving randomly selected citizens. The specialist knowledge is integrated into the whole process and neither dominates nor is marginalised. At the same time, this model allows for the community being consulted to learn about the issue under discussion, and expand their 'deliberative capacity'. In this model, the role of the specialist or 'expert' is to convert the community's vision to action, and then to check back with the community to see whether the plan is in accord with the community's original vision and values. The term 'specialist' or 'expert' is intended to include any community member with specific knowledge of an area — they do not need to have certain educational or professional qualifications. A community member with considerable experience of an issue qualifies as a 'specialist' or 'expert', as would many interest group representatives.

This group participates in *Step 2: Operationalising*. Specialist knowledge is called upon by the broader participant group, which works with the information provided in the first step and, for example, devises options or an action plan of how the goals identified in Step 1 may be achieved, and how viable their achievement is. Putting the vision into action, into operation, is an essential step in the process. Excessive deliberation can be as harmful to a project as not consulting.

The third group of actors utilised is a group which shares knowledge derived from social interests and advocacy. Integrating this kind of knowledge into the decision-making process allows for specific community groups to be heard and have input.

The Institute for Sustainable Futures [ISF] at University of Technology Sydney has recently been involved in two regional projects — one with the Hunter Region Organisation of Councils (HROC), the other with the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA). The HROC project involved an inter-disciplinary project working group drafting a set of indicators across social, economic and environmental issues that would monitor and advance the vision of making the Hunter a 'regional centre of excellence in sustainability.' The project has created a nucleus for ongoing dialogue on a range of sustainability and other strategic issues across the Hunter Region and has strengthened links between HROC, its member councils and community and industry groups. The 'Hunter Region Sustainability Indicators Report Card' contains 15 indicators. A steering group drafted the indicators and public input was achieved at a workshop forum (Banfield 2000).

The SCA project involved SCA staff and environment groups, with the assistance of ISF, developing a set of 17 sustainability indicators to monitor the SCA's progress in managing and protecting Sydney's water supply catchments to provide clean and safe drinking water. The project builds on SCA's existing environmental indicators by including social and economic measures of SCA's performance (a 'triple bottom line' performance appraisal). Like the HROC project, this project has also created a nucleus for ongoing dialogue by SCA staff, environment groups and the community on sustainable management of Sydney's water catchment region. Indicators drafted by a steering group have been exhibited for public comment (Banfield 2000).

This group is called upon in *Step 3: Testing*. In Step 3, the proposals or options put forward in Step 2 are put to the community, and their acceptability is assessed. The community to which the proposals are put forward is broader than the participant group created in Step 1. The community as a whole is provided an opportunity to comment at this stage of the consultation process, including groups with specific interests such as government agencies, industry groups, planning professionals and community group members.

At this point, the four-step model becomes dynamic and flexible. If the participant group decides that the options proposed in Step 2 are unacceptable in light of the community values they established, the process returns to Step 1 and a new process of visioning is undertaken. This is necessary in order for the process to be accountable and meaningful, and not a 'rubber stamp' for procedures already decided elsewhere. If the process returns to Step 1, all steps must be undertaken again.

If the participant group decides that the options proposed in Step 3 are acceptable in the sense that they reflect the community values established earlier in the process, the process moves on to Step 4.

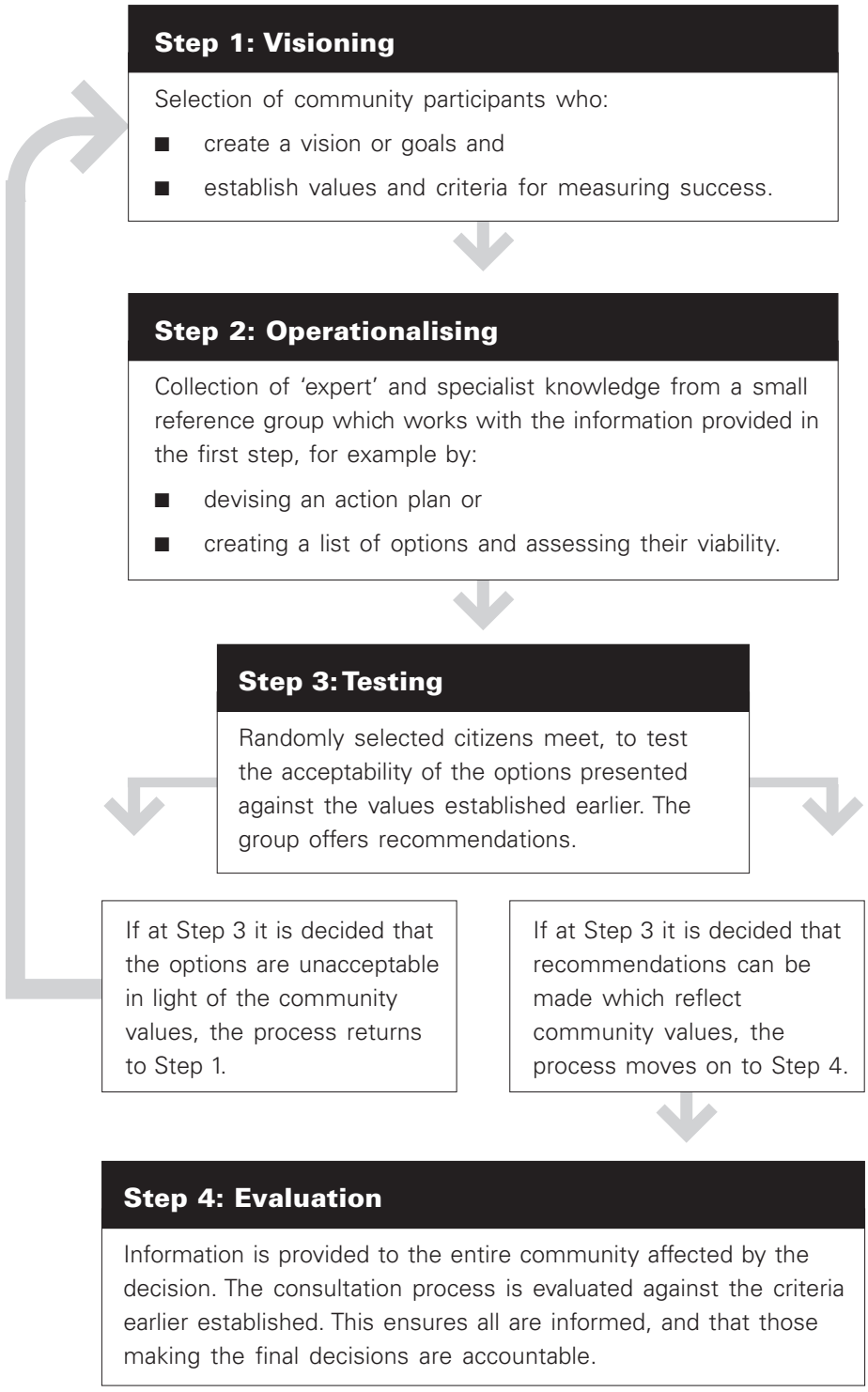
Step 4 is Evaluation. Once the recommendations have been made, information is provided to the entire community affected by the decision. This allows for community evaluation of the plan and the plan-making process. It also ensures that those making the final decisions are accountable to the community which they consulted. At the same time, the consultation process itself is evaluated by the participant group against the criteria for success established in Step 1.

The seven methods for community consultation described in the accompanying 'Procedures' report provide different ways of putting this four-step model into practice. Each method emphasises a different aspect of the consultation process, and has its own advantages and disadvantages. Each method will invoke a different cost. Taken together, these seven methods provide a wealth of resources for use in community consultation, drawn from the four-step model provided, achieved collaboratively, and based on the principles for effective community consultation outlined above.

Evaluation and Indicators

Evaluation is often perceived as a particular challenge in community consultation, because prescriptions are difficult to establish for drawing up criteria by which the 'success' of a consultation may be measured. In the four-step model outlined here, evaluation is undertaken against criteria set by the community itself. These criteria can be any kind of indicators, developed by the community being consulted. Community indicators are based on the incorporation of human values and quality of life measures into the evaluation process. They are an effective way to build community identity, because development of the indicators allows communities to come together to define and monitor progress toward their goals for a sustainable future. They can be of particular use in regional areas, because of the general absence of institutions and other processes for regional identity building.

The range of criteria which can be incorporated into community indicators is almost limitless. Ideas include the proportion of green space and built space, the number and type of jobs created within a given time frame, park acreage per population, attendance at local community events, retention rates at high school, public expenditure on a service per head of population, average times spent commuting, tons of waste produced per capita, how safe people feel on the streets at night, rates of use of public transport, whether community members are able to name at least two members of Council, amount of volunteer hours donated by community members, or how well citizens feel they understand the plan making process in which they are consulted.


Step 1: Visioning
Selection of community participants who:
create a vision or goals and
establish values and criteria for measuring success.
Step 2: Operationalising
Collection of 'expert' and specialist knowledge from a small reference group which works with the information provided in the first step, for example by:
devising an action plan or
creating a list of options and assessing their viability.
Step 3: Testing
Randomly selected citizens meet, to test the acceptability of the options presented against the values established earlier. The group offers recommendations.
If at Step 3 it is decided that the options are unacceptable in light of the community values, the process returns to Step 1.
If at Step 3 it is decided that recommendations can be made which reflect community values, the process moves on to Step 4.
Step 4: Evaluation
Information is provided to the entire community affected by the decision. The consultation process is evaluated against the criteria earlier established. This ensures all are informed, and that those making the final decisions are accountable.

How should participants be selected?

Before commencing a consultation, it is important to identify whether the group to be consulted is required to be *representative* or not. Where the consultation is designed to assess a proposal or options against community values, representativeness is important. Where the consultation is designed to gauge the attitudes of or to gather information from a specific, well-informed group of people, representativeness is not important. If this is the case, consultation procedures can be utilised which are not reliant on random selection.

Where representativeness *is* important in the participant group of a consultation, a useful method by which participants in community consultation may be recruited is 'random selection'. Random selection provides a method of selection of general community members which is both fair and seen to be fair (Carson & Martin 1999: 15). The term 'random' is intended to mean that each member of a community has a statistically equal probability of being selected to take part in a consultative process. Random selection is an essential component of most of the recent innovations in models for community consultation.

Random selection does not automatically produce fairness, and must be used with judgement. To obtain an approximation of attitudes amongst a whole community, it is standard to use random selection to pick a sample of the population. Although it is marginally possible that all of the sample group represent only one, or a minority, point of view, this is statistically unlikely to occur. It is the case that even in a large population, a random sample usually gives a fairly accurate result (Carson & Martin 1999: 25). Ensuring that the sample has the same characteristics as the population as a whole (by age, place of residence, gender, income level, education level, etc) helps to minimise the potential for bias or false results. Another way in which consultation can become biased is by asking leading questions or only proposing certain options. These difficulties are overcome by adopting the four-step method outlined in this report.

Random selection does not provide a guarantee that groups which have historically been uninvolved in plan making will become involved. Participation is still voluntary, and older people, young people and indigenous community members, even when selected, may decline to participate. If the sample remains unrepresentative, it may be necessary to supplement a random selection strategy with active and direct recruitment of representatives of specific community sectors. Direct recruitment can occur via the 'snowballing' technique (see Method 1: Search Conferences, in Part 2).

When consulting with indigenous communities it is often important to develop and maintain long-term relationships, and to provide a longer lead time in order to have successful involvement. Other factors which can assist in involving indigenous community members include using jargon-free information, providing evidence of outcomes, being aware within regional areas of the need to involve members of a number of different communities, understanding that the history of contact between Aboriginal people and community service providers can impact on trust in the consultation process, and acknowledging that broader issues face Aboriginal communities (Far North Coast Community Consultation Project 1996: 29–34). Also, entering into a consultation without preconceived ideas, being prepared to spend some time discussing personal and life experiences, being a patient and active listener, maintaining contact with the community after the initial consultation period is over, and seeking permission from Elders to work on their land are important (Blomeley 1996).

Young people are often difficult to research, in part because they are highly mobile. Many young people respond to techniques which generate a sense of ownership of both the process and results of a consultation, and planning issues which are genuinely interesting and relevant. Tone and content are important here (Marks 1998). Involving young people may also be helped by selecting venues appropriate to them (e.g. youth centres), paying them for their attendance, and providing food and refreshments which they will like. Other historically marginalised sectors of the community, such as people from non-English speaking backgrounds or the elderly may also be hard to recruit. In the accompanying Part, some consultative methods have been noted as particularly useful for one or some of these community groups.

[3] This information is adapted from Carson 1999: 14.

Some methods of achieving random selection include[3]:

Face-to-face

Once a profile of the population has been developed to suit the issue being discussed, e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, housing tenure, occupation, geography, religion, recruiters find participants by approaching people door-to-door, in shopping centres, and so on.

Targeted advertisements

Advertisements are placed in relevant newspapers asking for participants and specifying the issue to be discussed. Respondents are asked to write a brief explanation of their interest and are selected according to diversity.

Non-targeted advertisements

Advertisements are placed in relevant newspapers which provide no detail other than that participants are sought. Those who express an interest are surveyed by telephone, and then matched to a profile.

Random letter writing

Letters are sent to citizens randomly selected from the electoral roll inviting them to participate. Respondents complete a questionnaire to provide demographic data, and are matched to profile criteria.

Personalised letter writing

Invitations are sent to citizens randomly selected from the electoral roll. This is followed up with a telephone call or a personal visit. Suits a small community.

Random telephoning

Citizens are randomly selected by telephone number. They are called and invited to participate. Respondents complete a questionnaire to provide demographic data, and are matched to profile criteria.

Any one of these methods, or a combination, can be used to achieve a random sample where it is considered appropriate to the procedure for community consultation selected by the commissioning authority.

Consulting at a State, regional and local level

In 1998, Fairfield City Council adopted a place management framework as a way of developing solutions to complex community planning problems. Councillors adopted a vision which included a 'clean and green' Fairfield, attractive residential areas, employable young people and revitalised urban centres. The City has been conceptualised as four broad 'places' and two specific 'places' (the main streets of Cabramatta and Fairfield). Each place has a Manager who works closely with the Councillors and local community, and has direct input into the Council's planning processes. Community participation in decision-making has improved under the new management system. The Place Manager has flexibility to modify plans to achieve the best result for a place, and is responsible for implementing activities that achieve the vision and meet local priorities for the place (McLean 1999).

Some problems are not confined to one place, but span an entire system (e.g. creeks, open space). These 'systems' are also placed under the responsibility of an officer, who is accountable for improving the system in line with the vision agreed upon by Council, with public input (McLean 1999).

The place management system has improved role clarity, staff ownership of resolving problems, leadership, accountability, communication and recognition of good performance (McLean 1999).

The NSW Government's modernisation of the plan making process envisages the development of integrated regional planning to achieve a coordinated approach to environmental, social and economic management, and to achieve better outcomes. The basis for this approach is a partnership between state and local government, business and the community as a whole. Integrated regional planning is intended to address some of the complexities faced by the parallel operation of the EP&A Act alongside specific environmental and natural resource legislation. This has resulted in the preparation of separate issue-related plans, including catchment, coastal, water, biodiversity, environmental, metropolitan, and land management plans.

The new plan making system proposes changes to how consultation is carried out, and identifies new consultation outcomes at State, regional and local levels in the context of a NSW Government 'place management' (Crofts 1997; Mant 1998) approach to plan making. Place management emphasises the participation of local communities in setting visions and solving problems in their own area, recognises the separate qualities of individual places, and is based on a wholistic, multi-disciplinary planning and implementation process.

State, regional and local levels have their own specific needs and challenges. Below, some of these needs and challenges have been outlined, in order to provide a framework within which it is possible to apply the three elements of effective consultation outlined thus far in this report to specific areas.

State

At a State level, the aim of the NSW Government reform of plan making is to bring together in one place all State government environmental planning policies. This will:

- provide State context for regional planning
- produce a whole of government, issues-based planning document
- contain vision, policy and regulatory provisions
- be compiled by a cross-agency committee
- be approved by the NSW Government.

State level planning policies are implemented on issues that are of social, cultural, environmental or economic significance to the State, such as the protection of littoral rainforests, koala habitats and major employment generating development, and matters that require a wide application of policy such a housing for older people, or where existing plans need to be uniformly amended. In these kinds of cases, State Government Ministers have the power to prepare new planning documents or amend existing ones.

At the State level, there is considerable potential for community involvement in envisioning the issues to be addressed. Depending on the scope of the policy or amendment, the range of issues raised, and the timeframe available, this consultation could utilise a range of procedures appropriate to opening up the agenda to public input at an early stage, including a consensus conference, a focus group, or a search conference. Involvement of the community at this early stage in the planning process has the potential to identify concerns, and allows the community to identify with and own the plan making process.

At later stages in the plan making process, formal community consultation is provided for in the form of submissions to exhibited documents. It is important to utilise consultative procedures at this point in the planning process which do not duplicate or overlook consultation already undertaken. To do either or both of these things would render any previous consultation less meaningful for the participants, increase costs and duplicate resource expenditure.

At this point in the planning process, it would be useful for practitioners to consider integrating less formal opportunities for comment on exhibited documents with the formal, written submissions allowed for under the EP&A Act. This would allow the input of community members or groups who feel unable or unwilling to prepare such submissions. Some of the procedures outlined in Part 2 of this document would be appropriate for this, such as a deliberative poll, a citizens' jury, or quantitative assessment of community attitudes based on a Residents' Feedback Panel.

Where a policy requires development or amendment 'without delay', scope still exists for community participation in a number of ways. Some of the consultations mechanisms outlined in Part 2 of this report require considerably less time than others to implement. For example, if a State authority already had a Residents' Feedback Panel in place, even an urgent plan making process could utilise a quantitative research method (such as a mailed out questionnaire) to provide for public input into the plan making process, and allow for early community involvement with and ownership of the policy which would eventually emerge.

Regional

At a regional level, the NSW Government reform of plan making will provide for the creation of a single regional strategy, providing coordinated policies and strategic direction. This strategy will:

- provide context for regional actions and local planning
- be a whole of government, place-based strategy which involves business, local government and the community
- contain vision, policy and an action plan
- be drawn up by a Regional Forum
- be approved by the NSW Government.

Planning at a regional level provides the unique challenge that no specific level of government exists to facilitate the procedure. However, the lack of a formal level of government does not equate with an inability to consult, or to plan.

In 1995 the NSW Premier's Department set up a Regional Coordination Program, in an attempt to improve the management of issues and coordination of government service delivery in rural and regional NSW. Also, a variety of regional plans have been established which offer experiences which can be usefully adapted to other regions.

In the new NSW plan making system, integrated regional planning is favoured as a means of achieving improved coordination and integration in plan making. It has been recognised that coordination is needed to achieve sustainability, ie to balance social needs with the needs of the natural environment. Coordination can be achieved via the involvement of multi-disciplinary teams at a regional level, with State and local government, and direct involvement through the Regional Forum process of catchment management and community representatives.

There is a particular need for stronger links between land use management and natural resource management at the regional level, because regional planning is capable of dealing with issues that transcend local government boundaries, and are unable to be identified in a State-wide planning process. This is particularly the case with issues of natural resource management, which typically have a trans-boundary capacity. Regional plans developed in the past in NSW have dealt with issues including land use distribution, transport corridors and the protection of river catchments.

A great deal of regional planning has already been undertaken in NSW. An excellent example of this is the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy, a strategy to manage growth and development in a way that integrates land use, social and economic planning and seeks to maintain the quality of life and environmental integrity of the Northern Rivers region. The strategy was developed by Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC), the Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Organisation (NOREDO) and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP). It has involved extensive community consultation with State and local government, regional organisations, business, industry and community groups as part of a planning exercise (see *http://www.nrrs.org.au/*). Because regional level planning involves more than land use planning, the four-step consultation model outlined in this report is particularly applicable because it allows for community involvement in envisioning 'big picture' strategic planning.

Local

At a local level, the NSW Government reform of plan making will allow for the development of a single plan, providing the context for all local decisions and actions. This will:

- provide rules and context for all actions on the ground
- coordinate the goals, the policies and the activities of councils
- contain vision, policy, an action plan and regulatory provisions
- be drawn up by the council in consultation with the community
- be made, by the council, subject to the Minister's concurrence
- be directly amendable by the Minister.

The review of the plan making process in NSW identified the need to promote a more integrated approach to environmental management, systematically preparing State directions and undertaking regional planning to set the scene for development and land management decisions at the local level. This will provide much needed context and guidance for local planning.

Local planning decisions include land allocation, conservation of local heritage, protection of environmentally sensitive land and the acquisition of reserve land for public purposes.

It is imperative that local government areas are provided with a flexible and adaptable range of consultation methods, which can be called upon and put to use as and when they are considered appropriate to the plan making at issue.

Conclusion

practice: n. action as opp. to theory; repeated exercise; apply
practice: v. apply in action, exercise

This report has outlined elements of best practice community consultation.

A number of challenges inherent in the process of governance and the planning process, a range of specific criticisms of standard consultation methods, and a number of common objections to consulting have been identified. This report provides a framework and system within which to overcome these problems with dynamic and proactive solutions.

The three elements essential to consulting successfully are:

- basing community consultation on 'principles for effective community consultation'
- collaboration, and
- utilising a four-step model for community consultation.

These three principles and mechanisms offer a framework for solving problems of consultation in the following ways (see page 28).

With this report in hand, those with an interest in and desire to enhance community consultation in the NSW plan making process have a wealth of resources at their disposal, to make community consultation work.

Ultimately, however, best practice community consultation will only occur if the skills and knowledge of the practitioners are commensurate with the will to make it happen.

Identified problem group	Specific problem	Solution/s
Processes of governance	■ those who decide which services to provide are not those who provide the services	■ build a bridge of communication between the decision-makers and the service-providers, by engaging the community in consultation
Obstacles inherent to a strategic planning process	■ conflicting values amongst participants ■ uncertainty about outcomes ■ the difficulty of defining responsibilities ■ the controversial nature of sustainable land use management	■ allow diverse representation via random selection ■ establish criteria for measuring success at the beginning ■ at 'Step 1', responsibilities are clarified ■ consultation will improve understanding of differences of opinion and allow constructive feedback
Dissatisfaction with conventional consultation methods (e.g. public meetings, formal submissions, public hearings).	■ poorly attended meetings ■ feeling among participants that they haven't been heard ■ suspicions that valuable time and resources had been spent less effectively than they could have been	■ don't rely on public meetings as primary consultation tool ■ 'Step 3' and 'Step 4' of the four-step model overcome this ■ a variety of methods allows for less costly consultation where the method is appropriate to the issue
Reluctance to pursue consultation	■ we don't have enough time/it costs too much ■ we might raise expectations too high ■ people who participate are not representative ■ people will never agree ■ people aren't interested ■ it might encourage complaints ■ people won't understand the issues ■ we don't know how to consult	■ utilise a variety of methods, some of which require few resources once established ■ expectations are set by the community itself ■ random selection ■ people don't have to agree with the decision — consultation is a process, as much as an outcome ■ innovative methods will attract new people ■ feedback and evaluation allow constructive criticism ■ consultation enhances 'deliberative capacity' ■ this report shows you how!

A discussion on procedures for making consultation work

Ideas for Community Consultation

Introduction

Part 2, 'Community Consultation — Procedures for making consultation work', has been designed to complement the accompanying Part 1, 'Community Consultation — Principles for making consultation work'.

This Part provides all those practitioners interested in improving community consultation in plan-making in New South Wales with the concrete tools for making it happen. It draws on some of the most innovative and dynamic research taking place internationally, to provide those involved in the plan making process with best practice information.

This Part outlines the characteristics of seven innovative methods of achieving community consultation. These methods can be used in conjunction with the more traditional forms of community consultation that are already built into the NSW plan making system, such as exhibitions and calling for formal, written submissions.

The innovative methods presented here draw on the three elements of effective consultation outlined in Part 1. They are:

- search conferences
- deliberative polls/televoting
- citizens' juries
- consensus conferences
- focus groups
- charrettes
- residents' feedback panels.

The relative advantages and disadvantages of each method are outlined, so that plan makers and government agencies can assess which method would be appropriate for a particular consultative challenge at any given moment. A consideration of the use of new technologies in consulting is included. Towards the end of this Part, a table suggesting when to utilise each particular method is provided, to make the selection process easier.

The methods provided in this Part complement the principles outlined in the accompanying Part, and together provide dynamic and flexible options for enhancing community consultation in the planning process.

Method 1: Search conferences

Search conferences are conducted at the beginning of a planning process, when it is important to focus on a specific issue and work out a specific question. They can make an important contribution to the visioning of a project.

Recruitment takes place by 'snowballing' — a practitioner asks around to get to know who the experts in a particular field are. Each time the practitioner asks someone who they think would be an appropriate person to contact, they get a picture of who the experts in the field are. By word of mouth, the practitioner convening the search conference eventually develops an understanding of who the experts in the field are, and the strengths they would be able to bring to the process under question.

The snowballing recruitment method may be of particular use in reaching community members with whom the practitioner has little direct contact, such as indigenous people or people from non-English speaking backgrounds. By utilising the snowballing method, the practitioner can develop trees of contacts into previously untapped community sectors.

Once potential recruits have been identified, the convenor invites the people they consider important and able to contribute constructively to participate in a search conference. The conference undertakes a 'futures search', a big picture visioning exercise. It considers long-term questions such as, 'Where do you want to be in five years' time?' in order to establish a long-term vision.

Once the vision has been established, the search conference works backward to develop long-, medium- and short-term action plans essential to achieving the vision. The outcomes are geared towards collaborative action around identified and shared goals. At some later stage these outcomes would need to be tested against the values of the broader community, by undertaking a different consultative method.

CASE STUDY[1]: VICTORIAN ROADS CORPORATION

In mid 1990, the Victorian Roads Corporation commissioned a team, led by Consultant Transport Engineers, to explore the allocation of arterial road space in Melbourne as part of a much larger study of Melbourne's traffic. A Search Conference was run in conjunction with this project to explore all related issues at the beginning of the study, and to stimulate debate beyond issues of traffic and engineering. Economic, social, environmental and urban form issues were to be considered, as were the needs of different user groups and conflict between competing needs.

The study lasted several months. The Search Conference was held during the first weeks of the study, and was fully analysed within two weeks. The objectives of the Search Conference were to:

- search for ideas and uncover problems
- form cooperative networks for further work
- seek ways of implementing principles of ecologically sustainable development
- provide guidance for a larger study into Melbourne's traffic.

Participants who attended represented a range of disciplines and the community. On the day, small groups brainstormed ideas which were reported back to the plenary. Then a role play simulation to negotiate about sharing arterial roads was undertaken. This was followed by debriefing and identification of areas of conflict and agreement, and further small group work to discuss what needed to be done, what were the next steps, who was responsible, criteria for measuring success and accountability. Criteria for measuring success included the development of a sense of agreement and common cause, pride and pleasure in the new ideas and insights that arose from the consultation, clarity of articulation of issues, warmth developed among participants, and community ownership of the road problem.

The outcomes included moving the debate beyond previously intransigent and polarised opinions, and allowing participants' views to be incorporated into planning.

[1] As described in Sarkissian & Walsh (eds) 1994: 179–198.

The main characteristics of search conferences are that:

- recruitment is targeted by a convenor seeking to establish feedback from a small and knowledgeable group — the group is not representative
- individuals are selected on the basis of particular strengths in terms of knowledge and constructive collaborative ability
- it is a relatively small group (20–50 people)
- it meets once, over one to two days
- the group has input into developing the parameters for long-term plan making
- the group provides its convenor with a concrete set of action plans and long-term goals which form the parameters for long-term plan making.

Advantages

One advantage of a search conference is its ability to make use of the particular skills and knowledge of a small group of people to help set the parameters for long-term planning. Another advantage is that a search conference is action-oriented; it is geared towards producing outcomes geared to collaborative action which can be explored and tested against community attitudes over a significant period of time. Search conferences are an extremely creative endeavour.

Disadvantages

A search conference cannot substitute for broader community consultation because it draws on a small number of people who are not representative of community attitudes. A search conference may only be undertaken as a precursor to broader consultation.

When is this method useful?

It is useful to undertake a search conference at the very early stages of a planning issue, when it is important to envision future scenarios and plans of action.

Method 2: Deliberative polls/ Televoting

CASE STUDY[2]: TELEVOTING IN NEW ZEALAND
A New Zealand Televote was sponsored by the New Zealand Commission for the Future and funded by the NZ Parliament.

Four alternative futures for New Zealand were voted on by over 1000 participants, recruited through a nationwide Televote network coordinated by three universities. Another 4000 New Zealanders filled out Televote brochures printed in 12 newspapers nationally. Radio networks ran talk shows discussing the Televote.

The Televote resulted in increased awareness and community debate over the future for New Zealand. A few years after it was conducted, an academic who had been involved in coordinating the project expressed the view that the Televote had accurately predicted a general shift in public opinion regarding preferences about how the country should move into the future. Three years after the Televote, election results appeared to reinforce this shift as a new government was voted in.

[2] As described in Becker & Slaton 2000: 71–72.

Australia's first deliberative poll was trialed at the time that Australia was considering whether to become a republic in October 1999. A number of deliberative polls have also been conducted in the USA and the UK. The creator of this process is James Fishkin.

A deliberative poll is like an enhanced opinion poll, that overcomes many of the limitations of conventional opinion polls. Participants are usually selected randomly via telephone numbers, and then come together to discuss the issue. The main characteristics of a deliberative poll are that:

- participants are randomly selected using one of the mechanisms outlined in the 'Principles' report, typically by telephone
- the profile of participants can be structured so as to provide a representative sample of the whole citizen group being consulted (by age, place of residence, gender, etc)
- it involves statistically significant numbers of citizens (usually several hundred)
- it requires informing participants well by giving them briefing material in advance
- it includes extended small and large group discussion when participants meet
- it is preceded by a poll and
- it also leads to a vote or series of votes at the end (which may be compared with the poll conducted prior to the deliberations).

Advantages

A deliberative poll overcomes the primary weakness of conventional opinion polls — that participants have too little information and too little time to consider issues. Deliberation and information are built into the procedure.

The organisers construct an agenda, but because the procedure is open and rests on informed debate, the results are usually not easily manipulated.

A variety of debating formats can be used throughout the session, including small groups, and the hearing and questioning of witnesses in front of the entire group.

Finally, a deliberative poll is extremely representative.

CASE STUDY[3]: TELEVOTING IN AUSTRALIA —CONTAINER DEPOSIT LEGISLATION

In 2001 a combined televote and citizens jury is planned for NSW. Dr Stuart White from the Institute for Sustainable Futures (University ofTechnology, Sydney) has been appointed to conduct an Independent Review on Container Deposit Legislation (CDL) in NSW.

In order to gauge the attitudes of the wider community to CDL, approximately 400 people will be randomly selected from across the state, and asked to participate in a televote. They will be sent written information about CDL and asked to talk with friends, neighbours and colleagues about the idea. Their attitudes will be surveyed at the beginning and at the end of the process, which will take approximately one month. Participation will occur by telephone from participants' homes.

A cross-section of 15–20 people drawn from the pool of 400 will later meet together over a weekend to participate in a citizens' jury, ask questions and deliberate guided by an independent facilitator. This panel will write recommendations.

The use of the televote in combination with a smaller consultative mechanism is designed to ensure the attitudes of a larger, more representative sample are gauged.

[3] As described by White 2000.

Disadvantages

Deliberative polling can be costly because participants are brought to a single site for one or two days, and their expenses are paid. The use of televoting overcomes many of the major organisational problems of a deliberative poll, and retains many of the advantages of the method, although the poll is less deliberative when this occurs. With a televote, participants are sent information and encouraged to discuss the issue with family and friends. They do not meet together as they do in a deliberative poll. A televote is really an informed opinion poll, with a deliberative component.

When is this method useful?

When one would normally consider an opinion poll, the use of a deliberative poll or televote would be useful because it overcomes the weaknesses described above. It might be useful for the resolution of a contentious planning issue, especially if it is important to reach a decision within a relatively short time frame. However, if the issue is very complex a method which requires the involvement of fewer participants may be more appropriate and more cost-effective. This method has general application for larger planning issues.

Method 3: Citizens' juries

CASE STUDY[4]: WOLLONDILLY SHIRE COUNCIL CITIZENS' JURY

A citizens' jury, called a 'community panel', was convened by the Wollondilly Shire Council, and organised by Twyford Consulting, to develop a social plan to describe the local community, summarise the key issues facing the community, and recommend strategies to address identified needs.

After advertisements were placed in local newspapers, residents interested in participating as jurors or presenters were provided with an information kit. Those who then lodged a formal application to participate were selected according to demographic criteria to achieve representativeness. Participants were reimbursed for their travel and child care costs.

Presenters were asked to prepare handouts with their main points. They were briefed in advance as to the key questions which were to be addressed, and tips on presenting including allowing time for questions and using anecdotes to explain complex or new ideas to jurors.

Jurors were briefed as to the procedures involved and order of events, told that they would be given time to ask questions of presenters, and provided with the key questions to be addressed.

The key lessons from the jury were that greater lead time was needed to involve indigenous community representatives, jurors' capacity to absorb information was high and they felt they had learnt a great deal from their involvement, and this increased knowledge was due in part to the provision of good briefing materials and clear frameworks for discussion. It was also noted that the commissioning body was committed to respond to the jurors' report, which ensured the outcomes did not disappear but were acted on. This enhanced the importance of the process.

Costs were lower than anticipated because Council contributed resources free of charge. The consultancy fee was less than $10 000.

[4] As described in Hardy & Ruecroft 2000.

Citizens' juries have been tried for over three decades in the US and in Germany (where they are called 'planning cells'), and more recently in the UK (Coote & Lenaghan 1997) and Australia. In a citizens' jury, participants are brought together to deliberate in an informed way on a planning issue.

A citizens' jury is created by a commissioning authority which has power to define an issue and act on the jury's recommendations. The commissioning authority recruits witnesses, arranges selection of a panel via random selection which matches a required socio-economic profile, and gathers briefing information. The convening of the jury, and the topic they will deliberate over, are widely publicised.

When the jury meets, deliberations are held and expert witnesses are called. A report is prepared for the commissioning authority outlining the jury's recommendations.

The main characteristics of a citizens' jury are that:

- participants are randomly selected using one of the mechanisms outlined in the 'Principles' report
- the profile of participants can be structured so as to provide a representative sample of the whole citizen group being consulted (by age, place of residence, gender, etc)
- it involves relatively small numbers of participants (usually 12–25), although a number of juries could be convened simultaneously (the 'planning cell' model)
- it requires an independent and skilled facilitator
- it is interactive, participants meet for 2–4 days
- participants are provided with written evidence before they meet
- participants call in 'expert' witnesses (who are usually nominated by the organisers), which allows the infusion of higher levels of knowledge and experience into the process
- recommendations are published in a formal report
- either the recommendations are implemented, or sufficient grounds must be provided publicly to explain why they will be not implemented.

CASE STUDY[5]: 'OUR BALLINA'. A NON-URBAN, TOWN-BASED CITIZEN'S JURY.

In 1994, Lyn Carson was asked by the Ballina Information Service to conduct a visioning exercise to gauge community opinions and ideas on development within the Central Business District. A decision was made to train interested volunteers as an exercise in community capacity building.

First, general information was distributed to all residents in a mailbox drop. Then names were randomly selected, and those selected were visited in person by the coordinators of the project. A venue was booked, catering was organised, informational material gathered and speakers organised.

Some citizens selected were reluctant to participate — particularly older women who felt they had little to contribute. On the day of the consultation, fifteen participants turned up out of an expected twenty. The majority were older residents, reflecting the ageing population of the area.

After introductions, participants were given time to look at the displays and develop some initial thoughts about the meeting process and the topic under discussion. Then a town planner, a lecturer in planning, an employee of the tourist information centre, a member of a local environmental society, a high school student and a shire councillor each spoke and were available to answer questions. During discussion time, residents took the opportunity to air their own concerns.

This was followed up with small group work, involving modelling with clay, crayons and other craft materials. This session was very successful and animated, and developed some innovative suggestions. Each small group reported back to the group as a whole on the key elements of their discussion, and agreed on a list of five things they valued and wanted retained in the planning process, and five things they would like to change. Priorities were voted on, and volunteers agreed to compile a report for the local Council, the participants and the media.

In the weeks that followed, participants continued to enquire as to the status of the report. They said they found the process enjoyable and successful. The report was used to lobby the local government to act on the group's recommendations.

In this case, because participants and organisers were volunteers, the costs of the jury amounted to only $400.

[5] As described in Carson & Martin 1999: 83–84.

Advantages

This method allows for the inclusion of expanded levels of expertise, knowledge and skills in the deliberative process. This works because the participant group is smaller than the other methods discussed in this report. Deliberations can be more in-depth and complex. Also, because the participants submit a written report with recommendations on completion the results of the community consultation are tangible, and evaluation of the usefulness of the consultation in achieving the needs of public participation and involvement in the decision-making process is relatively straightforward.

Disadvantages

The disadvantages of a citizens' jury are minimal; it is a very useful consultation method. Although there may be significant costs involved in participants meeting over several days, and calling witnesses, because the number of participants is smaller than in other methods these costs can be contained. It is also possible to engage in creative cost-sharing or sponsorship initiatives which can offset costs. Costs of engaging this method are very small when it is practised by a self-organised and voluntary community.

When is this method useful?

When the questions to be deliberated over are relatively clear in advance, a citizens' jury is useful. This method is useful when the issues involved are particularly complex, and expert involvement is required in order that participants fully understand the process.

Method 4: Consensus conferences

Consensus conferences are very similar to citizen's juries, but with some important differences. Australia's first consensus conference, on gene technology in the food chain, was held in old Parliament House, Canberra, in March 1999 (Renouf 1999). Consensus conferences have been held throughout the world, with Denmark having led the way in developing this consultative method.

In a consensus conference, participants are brought together to deliberate in an informed way on a planning issue.

A consensus conference is created by a commissioning authority which has power to act on the jury's recommendations. A coordinator convenes an advisory group to arrange selection of a panel via random selection which matches a required socio-economic profile, and gather briefing information. The convening of the conference, and the topic they will deliberate over, are widely publicised. When the conference meets, participants develop their own criteria for how to make the decisions that will lead to recommendations. Deliberations are held in plenary and smaller groups, and a report is prepared for the commissioning authority outlining the conference's recommendations.

A consensus conference takes place over a longer period of time than a citizens' jury. A consensus conference generally involves preparatory weekends prior to the holding of a deliberative, decision-making meeting. The agenda and key questions to be deliberated are decided by the participants, and participants also decide who to call in as key witnesses. The period of time from conception of the general issue, to participant selection, identification of the key questions, deliberation and preparation of a report may be one to two years. A consensus conference therefore requires a considerable devotion of resources.

It is also possible to re-convene the same panel some years after the conclusion of a consensus conference. This 'mini consensus conference' could then re-visit planning issues as circumstances change.

The main characteristics of a consensus conference are that:

- participants are randomly selected using one of the mechanisms outlined in the 'Principles' report
- the profile of participants can be structured so as to provide a representative sample of the whole citizen group being consulted (by age, place of residence, gender, etc)
- it involves relatively small numbers of participants (usually 12–25)
- it requires an independent and skilled facilitator
- participants are provided with written evidence before they meet
- participants decide who to call in as 'expert' witnesses, which allows the infusion of higher levels of knowledge and experience into the process
- it is interactive, participants meet for preparatory weekends and then a deliberative meeting of 2–4 days
- recommendations are published in a formal report
- either the recommendations are implemented, or sufficient grounds must be provided publicly to explain why they will not be implemented.

Advantages

This method has the same advantages as the citizens' jury. It allows for the inclusion of expanded levels of expertise, knowledge and skills in the deliberative process. This works because the participant group is smaller than the other methods discussed in this report. Deliberations can be more in-depth and complex. Also, because the participants submit a written report with recommendations on completion the results of the community consultation are tangible, and evaluation of the usefulness of the consultation in achieving the needs of public participation and involvement in the decision-making process is relatively straightforward.

The consensus conference has the added advantage of participants having greater control over the agenda. This makes the process more involving and meaningful for participants, and provides the commissioning authority with richer community input.

A consensus conference is ideal for planning at a regional level, where citizens can be drawn together for new or complex deliberations.

CASE STUDY[6]: AUSTRALIA'S FIRST CONSENSUS CONFERENCE ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Australia's first consensus conference was held on March 10–12, 1999 at Old Parliament House, Canberra. The conference was initiated by the Australian Consumers' Association, convened by the Australian Museum and overseen by a Steering Committee of 17 people chaired by Sir Laurence Street. 14 citizens participated on the lay panel, 13 experts on the speaker panel and the conference was independently facilitated. Experts included representatives from the CSIRO, the Gene-Ethics Network, the Organics Federation of Australia, the Australian Food and Grocery Council, corporations, scientists, farmers, religious/ethical groups, nutritionists, public health officials, and consumer groups.

The conference was convened to give consumers a voice in the future of genetically modified foods in Australia. It was covered extensively by the media.

The experts had to engage in dialogue with lay people, answer questions, restrain themselves while listening to others' points of view. The lay panel demonstrated citizens' ability to come to grips with complex issues of science without becoming 'irrational', a willingness and pride in contributing, stamina and perspicacity.

The conference produced a report containing recommendations, most of which were directed at government. (The report is available at the ACA website at *www.choice.com.au*)

[6] As described in Renouf 1999.

Disadvantages

There are greater costs involved in a consensus conference than in a citizens' jury. However, because the number of participants is relatively small, these costs can be contained.

When is this method useful?

A consensus conference is more useful than a citizens' jury when the agenda can be opened up for public input, or where the issue is so complex or new that a commissioning authority does not yet know what questions it wants asked. This method is useful when the issues involved are particularly complex, and expert involvement is required in order that participants fully understand the process. This method can be used for consultation in major strategic planning processes.

Method 5: Focus groups

CASE STUDY[7]: DEVELOPMENT OF AN AFTER HOURS CRISIS SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

A NSW government agency convened a series of focus groups to develop a model for an integrative after hours crisis service that was being planned for young people. An independent facilitator was commis–sioned to meet with separate groups of young people and service providers.

The young people were paid $20 to attend. The service providers attended as part of their work. The facilitator led groups of 10–15 participants through a series of pre-prepared questions: e.g. What do you know about the issues? What's happening now? What of that is good? What is not so good? What should happen? The responses were noted and a report was written for the commissioning government department. In the findings it was noted that the young people involved thought very creatively, and brought a fresh range of ideas to the table.

Because young people were involved, particular care was taken to situate the focus groups in an appropriate environment — in this case a youth centre — or a service with which young people were familiar. Refreshments were provided. There were fourteen focus groups in all — 8 with adults (service providers) and 6 with young people (the service users). Each focus group cost between $500 and $1000 (including facilitator's fees, report, participants' fees, refreshments).

[7] Information provided by Grace Leotta, Affirm Organizational Development and Training, Sydney.

A focus group is made up of people who are already involved in an issue and know what is happening on the ground. They may be interest groups, support groups, or see themselves as 'watchdogs'. They tend to have a particular interest, and also to have strong views on a subject. A focus group should therefore not be the only method of consultation used over the life of a plan making process, but can be useful if used in conjunction with other methods, because it can help to uncover areas which require more research, more consultation, or more preparation. A focus group can be used early in a plan making process to formulate an agenda, or to discover what is not in accord with community values in a region or area.

The groups from which members are selected may be identified through local library, through local voluntary or non-government agencies. The kinds of interest groups which might warrant specific consultation include people with disabilities, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, or the elderly. 'Snowballing' would be another possible recruitment strategy, if it was important to recruit people with a high level of knowledge of the topic (for an explanation of 'snowballing', see Method 6: Search Conferences).

The main characteristics of a focus group are that:

- it does not provide a sample of the community as a whole, but rather of a particular set of interests within an issue area and random selection is not usually used to select participants
- it is a relatively small group (up to 25 people)
- it can meet once, several times, or at regular intervals depending on the needs of the consultation
- the group can provide particular information that may not be readily available in the broader consultative methods
- informal verbal or written feedback derived from the group is fed back to the commissioning body.

Advantages

Because the group meets and possesses a prior working knowledge of the issue under discussion, views can be explored in depth in a relatively faster period of time than that required in some other consultation methods. Also, the group's knowledge tends to mean they often develop innovative ideas and solutions.

CASE STUDY[8]: NSW MEALS ON WHEELS ASSOCIATION — REVIEW OF PILOT FOOD SERVICE PROJECT

Between February and June 2000, the NSW Meals On Wheels Association, in partnership with three corporate partners: Goodman Fielder, Macquarie Valley Juices and Dairy Farmers, piloted a new breakfast and snack food service. The service was piloted by seven local Meals On Wheels services throughout NSW.

The consultancy firm, GHD, was contracted to review the pilot and provide the partners with findings and recommendations about:

- the effectiveness of the program for clients
- the impact of the program on participating services
- the effectiveness of the resources provided to assist services
- the implications of rolling the program out state-wide, for the partners and service providers.

The review was undertaken using a combination of stakeholder interviews, data collection and a series of focus groups with representatives of participating services.

Three focus group meetings were held on one day. These were with:

- service coordinators
- representatives of service management
- volunteer workers from each service.

Each focus group had 5–10 participants, and its own independent facilitator. The facilitator also took notes which formed the basis of a report to the commissioning agency. Participants were not paid, but refreshments were provided.

Each group worked through a series of questions about their experiences. Some common questions were used with each group, as well as questions designed to deal with some specific issues relevant only to each of the groups. Questions included: What, if any, barriers did you encounter to implementing the pilot? What difference did participating in the pilot make to your relationship with your clients? In hindsight do you think you had enough information about the project before it began? What strategies did you use to introduce the program to clients? Which of these strategies worked for you and why?

[8] Information provided by Liz Evans and Jo Manion, GHD Consultants, Sydney.

Disadvantages

Interest groups contain motivated people, but they are not necessarily representative of the group as a whole. Also, considerable time may be involved in finding participants and maintaining their involvement.

Because this method involves tapping into already-existing knowledge and skills, it does not invoke deliberation and enhance deliberative capacity in the same way as other methods.

When is this method useful?

This method can be useful for gauging the attitudes of a specific, targetted group of people and when broader community consultation will not provide the desired information. It tends to be useful in areas where the relevant interest groups are relatively easily identified.

Method 6: Charrette

A charrette is an intensive, consultative planning process. The term 'charrette' is derived from the French word for 'little cart'. Students at the École de Beaux-arts in Paris from the mid 1800s to the 1930s were asked to produce work weekly. The work was handed in by being placed in the 'charrette' as it trundled across the studio. It was adapted by a US architectural and planning firm, Duany and Plater-Zyberg, for producing high quality urban design solutions within a short period of time (Forseyth 1997: 83).

A charrette involves a rapid and dynamic interchange of ideas between planning practitioners, stakeholders and the general community. To prepare for a charrette, a convening team of planning practitioners publicises the issue under discussion widely, and books venues for large public meetings. On day one, the convenors draw up some preliminary issues for discussion. On the evening of day one, a public meeting is held to allow the general community to identify options and desired outcomes from the planning process, via discussion both collectively and in smaller, facilitated groups. On day two, the convenors meet with stakeholder groups, such as landowners, developers and those with an interest in the region at issue such as environmentalists. This allows for 'expert' input into devising planning options. On day three the convenors draw together a list of options by combining their understanding of community concerns with the preferred outcomes of the interest groups. These options are produced in a format which is open to public inspection by the community and the stakeholders concerns. If the convenors feel some of the options suggested are unviable or conflict with community values, they can incorporate this into the planning options they put forward. Focus meetings are held with stakeholders and interested community members.

CASE STUDY[9]: THE VILLAWOOD CHARRETTE.
The Villawood Charrette was held from 13 June to 17 June 1996. The charrette discussed the commercial centre of Villawood. The centre was originally designed in the 1950s, and identified problems included lack of pedestrian space, poor commercial location vis-a-vis main road traffic, complicated car entry, inadequate seating and shading, and run down buildings. It was undertaken after the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning and the Minister for Housing jointly requested Fairfield Council and the Department of Housing to undertake an integrated planning study of vacant land, shops and transport in the area.

A Steering Committee, consisting of the General Manager and Director, Environmental Services of Fairfield Council, and the Director, Regional Manager and Villawood Place Manager from Fairfield Council, managed the project.

Before the charrette was held, local developers and residents were informed and invited to attend charrette meetings. Pre charrette consultations identified the problems to be discussed and gathered data to be disseminated.

On the first day of the charrette, charrette teams visited the site. An open public meeting was held with a presentation from the charrette leader, and the public was invited to discuss their likes, dislikes and ideas (in small groups which then reported back to the whole group).

On day two, identified stakeholders met and formulated a policy statement. Focus meetings between stakeholders, members of the public and consultants enabled in-depth exploration of issues. The outcomes of these meetings were fed back to the charrette teams.

On day three, a design studio was opened to the public, and a design meeting was held to discuss potential outcomes and their feasibility. On day four these meetings continued. On day five, a public presentation was held to present findings and recommendations to the general community.

Following the conclusion of the charrette, follow-up meetings of the Steering Committee were held to confirm management support for the outcomes. The outcomes were reported to the Minister and Fairfield Council, and a Town Centre Redevelopment Task Group was established by Council to advise on the implementation of the options suggested by the charrette. The options were also publicly displayed and further feedback encouraged.

It was felt by the organisers that a charrette was most useful when there was broad public support for 'doing something' in an area, and when all stakeholders were involved. The Steering Committee held the charrette to budget. The Villawood charrette cost approximately $80 000 to $100 000. Preparation time required at least three months. Providing the public with a design, which was easy to look at and understand, was preferable to producing a written document.

[9] As described in Miesen 1996: 89–95.

On day four the convenors hold a detailed and intensive workshop to formulate the preferred outcomes from the previous day into concrete planning proposals. On day five this process is completed, including (if applicable) the production of sketches and materials for presentation. On the evening of day five, another public meeting is held to present the planning proposals to the general community. If this brings up strong public opposition to the proposals made, an extra day may be necessary to respond to this criticism.

Charrettes may be split over two weekends, or held on consecutive days. The actual number of days may vary.

The main characteristics of a charrette are that:

- it is convened by a team of planning practitioners, who work intensively with the options put forward by all other participants to draw up feasible planning proposals and who facilitate the meetings
- it involves consultation with the general community via well-publicised public meetings
- it involves consultation with stakeholders and special interest groups via meetings with the convenors
- the community takes part in initially devising options, and is given the opportunity to assess the outcomes, thereby cushioning the specialist input
- it takes place over an intensive one week period
- it produces concrete planning proposals in a rapid period of time
- to be successful, prior community agreement that 'something should be done' is required
- it resembles a rapid four-step model.

Advantages

A charrette is a rapid planning procedure which produces concrete results within one week. The community is involved both in envisioning the outcomes at an early stage, and in assessing the planning proposals at the final stage. There is the opportunity for the community to have input at a number of stages in the planning process. Community involvement is therefore meaningful and well-placed. A charrette is also relatively cost-effective.

New technologies can be easily and very usefully incorporated into the charrette model, for assistance with design of sketches and production of materials for presentation.

Disadvantages

Because the charrette takes place in a short period of time, there is a possibility that some participants may feel they had insufficient time to understand the process or the issue fully. Also, a charrette does not involve random selection and is unrepresentative of the community as a whole. Broad community consultation is undertaken via public meetings, which are likely to be attended by those individuals who feel strongly about the issue under discussion. It is therefore difficult to involve groups usually marginalised from the consultative process.

When is this method useful?

This method can be useful when a plan in a region or area or involving a particular site needs to be drawn up within a short period of time, and some community consultation is still desired. A charrette acts like an intensive four-step model of its own.

Method 7: Residents' feedback panels

CASE STUDY[10]: BOULDER, COLORADO, USA. A CITY-BASED RESIDENTS' FEEDBACK PANEL USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH SURVEY METHODS.
A Residents' Feedback Panel was created to discuss Boulder's transportation system. Under discussion was the appropriateness of an extensive highway system, vis-a-vis facilities for cyclists, pedestrians and public transport users. The project was supported by the Transportation Advisory Committee [TAC], the organisation responsible for creating a Transportation Master Plan.

Participants in the RFP were randomly selected. Seven hundred residents were selected, stratified by location and housing type, to receive an invitation from the mayor to participate in the RFP. [This is the 'personalised letter writing' method of random selection outlined in the accompanying 'Principles' report.] Responses were received from $^1/_3$ of these people, and a panel of 147 participants was formed. Participants were told in advance that the project would require a commitment of approximately 12 months.

A variety of quantitative survey methods were then used, including mailed questionnaires, a telephone survey, and two face-to-face interviews at the residents' homes. Each participant was interviewed by the same interviewer both times. During the 12 month period, only 10% of participants withdrew.

The project was run by a policy analyst and a team of interviewers, who developed information materials, designed and administered the surveys, collected and analysed data, and presented the findings in written form to the TAC. Participants reported favourably on their experience.

The TAC used the panel's feedback in four ways:
- where applicable, as evidence of community support for its policies
- as a means of resolving differences among the committee when the community expressed clear support for one of two or more options
- to revamp or relinquish policies with demonstrably weak community support
- to justify and explain its policies where community support was weak.

The panel therefore affected the direction of planning and the mode of decision making of the TAC.

[10] As described in Carson & Martin 1999: 84–86

Residents' Feedback Panels [RFPs] may also be called People's Panels, Citizens' Panels or Quick Response Citizens' Panels. An RFP establishes a pool of potential respondents within any given area. This pool of respondents may then be called upon for a range of *quantitative* research methods — telephone surveys, face-to-face interviews or self-completion postal questionnaires — on any issue on which it is important to consult. They may also be called upon to participate in one or several of the *qualitative* consultation methods outlined in this report — citizens' juries, deliberative polls or consensus conferences.

A database of participants in the RFP is maintained, and confidentiality assured, by a relevant government agency, at State or local level.

RFPs have been put in place by the Brisbane City Council (who called it 'Your City Your Say') and by Tony Blair's Cabinet Office in the UK, as well as dozens of local Councils in the UK.

The main characteristics of an RFP are that:

- participants are randomly selected using one of the mechanisms outlined in the 'Principles' report
- the profile of participants can be structured so as to provide a representative sample of the whole citizen group being consulted (by age, place of residence, gender, etc)
- it involves a large number of citizens (from 50 to several thousand)
- it is typically maintained over a long period of time (2–4 years)
- it does not require participants to meet in person
- participants progressively gain a greater understanding of the planning process over their period of involvement
- the research findings are published, via newsletters to participants and also via broader media so that the whole community has access to them.

Advantages

An RFP has many advantages. It allows for the involvement of a cross-selection of citizens in any given area, and thus provides an element of representativeness in the responses received. Also, because the RFP is maintained over a long period of time, this method allows for changes in community attitudes towards planning issues to be tracked over a period of time. This advantage is not provided in any other method.

CASE STUDY: BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL 'YOUR CITY YOUR SAY' A CITY-LEVEL RESIDENTS' FEEDBACK PANEL USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH QUANTITATIVE SURVEY METHODS.

Brisbane City Council governs approximately 820 000 residents. It initiated the Your City Your Say project in 1998. The panel was designed to enable public input into developing strategic direction for Brisbane (Peel 1999). (The large size of Brisbane City Council means it is equivalent to some smaller State government areas.)

Newsletters were sent to all Brisbane residents calling for residents to join the panel, and providing background information relevant to strategic planning (such as environmental issues of concern, community infrastructure, and the financial state of Council). Attached to the newsletter was a registration form asking for the name and address of registrants, as well as some representative information such as their age group, sex and occupation.

Around 6500 residents are registered in the panel, and some have participated in visioning activities and focus groups on issues such as traffic and transport. The Council has had to target young people, indigenous people and women for involvement, because they remained under-represented following an initial invitation to join (Peel 1999).

Every few months newsletters are sent to registrants, containing information on community projects and how to get involved. Survey questionnaires are often included in the newsletters, which can be folded and posted back to Council free of charge. Survey results are published in later newsletters.

Questionnaires have sought feedback on issues including people's definition of their understanding of 'community', the importance of a range of facilities and services, uses and ways of improving the Brisbane River, and traffic and transport issues.

The 'Your City Your Say' project utilises new technologies to enhance accessibility, and can be viewed online at *www.brisbane.qld.gov.au.*

Another advantage is that the participant group can be very large, which allows for responses in different regions to be compared. An RFP allows for the development of strong public confidence in decision making.

Finally, an RFP is an extremely convenient consultation method. This is particularly the case for community members who find it difficult, or do not wish, to leave their homes — such as the elderly or parents with young children. Not having to travel to a place of consultation can be strong factor in encouraging and enabling contributions from these citizens.

Disadvantages

Maintenance of an RFP database requires the devotion of resources on a long-term basis by the relevant government agency. Also, because the RFP is maintained over a long period of time mechanisms must be put in place to replace participants who lose interest, die or move to another area and cease to be involved.

When is this method useful?

This method is ideal for consultation on cross-sectoral issues and is most commonly used to conduct surveys. However, this method has great potential for use over a longer period of time, in building up shared community knowledge and understanding of the planning process and in tracking increases in shared knowledge and changes in attitudes. This method is appropriate for general strategic planning uses.

Using new technologies to increase accessibility

CASE STUDY[11] : THE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN PLANNING: BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY COUNCIL

A public hearing was held in 1998 to discuss the Council new draft Local Environmental Plan 1997. The planning documentation and thousands of submissions were placed on computer. During the public hearing the stored maps, submissions and aerial photography were projected onto large screens and information was manipulated using split screens to show submissions and planning constraints simultaneously. It offered clear visual demonstrations for those in the public gallery of Council's and residents' proposals, coupled with maps and photographs that allowed constructive dialogue to take place.

The draft LEP 2000 has built on the 1997 process. New technologies have enabled improvements in the accuracy of the information and visuals that can be stored electronically. The draft LEP 2000 is soon to go on public exhibition when residents across the Blue Mountains local government area will have an opportunity to interact with an electronic work place, via computers placed in various locations. The LEP, once gazetted, will also be available on CD and via the Internet. BMCC hopes that it will soon be possible to gazette an LEP from this purely electronic form.

Estimate of cost: including public exhibition in 1997, public hearing in 1998 and work completed since then (e.g. technology importation and development, laser scanning and other specialist studies) is a minimum of $350 000 (excluding staff time).

[11] As described by Grimson 2000.

Increasingly, new technologies are expanding the options available to practitioners in developing consultative techniques. Some examples of the integration of new technologies into consulting methods are provided here.

In Western Australia, Fremantle City Council provides a link on its home page to 'current projects for public comment', which invites interested members of the public to have their say. The home page also contains a 'quick poll' where virtual visitors can vote on a straightforward issue, combined with a link to viewing the poll results. From the home page, members of the public can participate in the 'Fremantle Forum', a Local Government community forum for interactive deliberation over ideas and topics. To join in an online discussion, participants register in the topic/s of their choice (see *www.fremantle.wa.gov.au*).

From the Brisbane City Council home page, members of the public can link to the 'Your City Your Say' project, and engage in other consultative mechanisms as well. 'Having Your Say Online' is a related initiative which allows people to suggest topics for discussion, to participate in mediated discussion forums and special event chat sessions, and to comment on development issues (see *www.brisbane.qld.gov.au*).

Although new technologies can not substitute for representative community consultation, they can play an important role in reaching some sectors of the community in an accessible, cost effective and user friendly way. There are disadvantages of relying on new technologies; for example not every household will have internet access, and not all members of the public feel comfortable interacting via isolated computer terminals.

Choosing your consulting method:

At a glance

To make it easier to choose which of the previous methods is best for your specific circumstances, the following table sets out the strengths of each. It is useful to consider first whether or not the question or key issue to be deliberated over has already been framed, or whether public input is desired for envisioning a planning strategy. This question has therefore been placed first on the table. If a consultative process is required that allows participants to help to determine the key questions, practitioners should select either a search conference, a consensus conference or a charrette. From here, further selection can be made. If a consultative process is required within which the key questions are already determined, practitioners should select either a deliberative poll, a citizens' jury, a focus group or an RFP. Then, further selection can be made.

Method Title	**Do participants help to determine key questions?**	**Does it use random selection?**	**Number of participants**	**Do participants meet?**	**Time involved in face-to-face meetings**	**Time required from inception to findings**
Search conferences	Yes	No	20–50	Yes	1–2 days	A few weeks to a few months
Deliberative polls	Not usually	Yes	Several hundred	Yes	One to three days on site	6 months
Citizens' juries	No	Yes	12–25	Yes	Two to four days on site	2–6 months
Consensus conferences	Yes	Yes	12–25	Yes	Two to four days on site plus 2 preparatory weekends	12 months
Focus groups	No	Not usually	Up to 25	Yes	One day, or several days depending on needs	1–3 months
Charrette	Yes	No	Up to several hundred at public meetings, up to 20 in stakeholder meetings	Yes	2–5 days	Several weeks
Residents' feedback panels	Not usually	Yes	From 50 to several thousand	Not necessarily	Can be undertaken without face-to-face meetings, if desired	RFP exists for 2–4 years, and may be called upon for consultation on a variety of specific issues during that time

Type of outcome	Are findings published in a report?	Are 'experts' brought in as witnesses?	Focus on which step in 4-step model?	Key uses
Long-term vision, broken down into short-term action plans	No	No	Step 1	At early stage, to set parameters for plan making in a region
Votes recorded before and after deliberation	Yes, by commissioning authority	Yes	Step 1 or 3	More informed opinion poll
Written report of findings	Yes, by commissioning authority	Yes	Step 1 or 3	Complex issues requiring lengthy deliberation
Written report of findings	Yes, by participants	Yes	Step 1 or 3	When process can be opened up for public input, issue is complex
Informal verbal or written feedback	Often, yes	No	Step 1 or 3	**1:** To help set agenda at early stage. **2:** Discover what is not in accord with community values. **3:** Gauge attitudes of a specific group of people
Planning proposals, with sketches and maps if appropriate	No	Yes	Step 2	Intensive, fast planning decisions with community involvement on a specific issue
Usually quantitative survey data, unless some other consultative method is used in conjunction	Yes, by commissioning authority	No	Step1, Step 3 and Step 4	**1:** Track changes over long period of time. **2:** Use as database for other consultative methods

Conclusion

This two-part report provides practitioners with a range of skills to achieve, and methods of achieving, community consultation. The focus of this report is on providing solutions to make proactive participation by the community in plan making a reality.

For this goal to be achieved, it is important that practitioners also are prepared to experiment, be flexible and try something new.

Good community consultation can help create community members who are able to see themselves, and be seen, as active and engaged citizens who are resourceful, gifted and creative. Engaged citizens are people with whom planners can constructively collaborate. Conversely, good community consultation can help practitioners to see themselves, and to be seen by the community, as engaged citizens as well — who can readily and enthusiastically respond to their fellow citizens' desire for collaboration.

You may be surprised — effective community consultation can produce stronger public support for government initiatives, deepened community ownership of planning problems and their solutions, enhanced capacity for involvement of previously unheard community members, and cost effectiveness.

Resources

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Brisbane City Council's community consultation techniques online: *www.brisbane.qld.gov.au*

Centre for Deliberative Polling: *http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/delpol/cdpindex.html*

Consensus Conference in Denmark on agricultural production: *http://www.tekno.dk/eng/publicat/f94lgree.htm*

Consensus Conference in New Zealand on plant biotechnology: *http://www.consumer.org.nz/tech/index.html*

Fremantle community consultation online: *www.fremantle.wa.gov.au*

International Association for Public Participation: *www.iap2.org or http://pin.org/*

Northern Rivers Regional Strategy *http://www.nrrs.org.au*

The Loka Institute's page on US citizens' panels *http://www.loka.org/pages/panel.htm*

The Loka Institute's page on worldwide consensus conferences *http://www.loka.org/pages/worldpanels.html*

UK Government's people's panel web site: *http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/*

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