

July 2009

Talkback

Feedback on the discussion document *It's More Than Talk*

Building Better Government Engagement
Reference Group

The views in this report are those of the Reference Group and are not Government policy.

The Building Better Government Engagement reference group would like to thank everyone who provided comments on the discussion document *It's More Than Talk*.

Available online at www.ocvs.govt.nz:

It's More Than Talk

Talkback

*From Talk to Action:
Government engagement with citizens and communities*

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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 The purpose of this work

The Building Better Government Engagement reference group is seeking to identify actions for building skills, knowledge and values in the public service about effective engagement with citizens and communities.

This report summarises and responds to feedback on the discussion document *It's More Than Talk. Talkback* is background to the reference group's final report *From Talk to Action: Government Engagement with Citizens and Communities*, which contains the reference group's conclusions and recommendations.

1.2 The process

The BBGE reference group comprises nine people from community and government agencies, who have a particular interest and expertise in community engagement (see Appendix A). The group is providing advice to the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS) on ways to enhance central government engagement with citizens and communities.

In December 2008, the reference group's discussion document was released. Over the following three months, feedback was sought via:

- written submissions
- five meetings held with invited participants from the community and government sectors in Waitakere, Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch
- one meeting with a Wellington-based government stakeholder engagement managers' network
- an on-line discussion forum on the website Bang the Table.

Respondents were asked to respond to the following questions about the discussion document:

- Do you think the engagement issues outlined in Section 2 are accurate?
- Do you agree with ideas for the way ahead in Section 4?
- Do you agree with the summary of possible actions suggested in Section 5 and if so, which do you consider to be the top priorities?

The reference group's final report responds to the feedback received, and will be forwarded to the Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector, the Hon Tariana Turia, for her consideration.

1.3 The extent of responses

Feedback on the discussion document was received from the following sources.

- 105 people who attended the six face-to-face meetings. These meetings were specifically targeted at people with particular interest and expertise in community engagement. Attendees were primarily from government and the community and voluntary sector, were from a variety of population groups, and a range of sub-sectors (social services, sports, environment and so on).
- 28 written submissions were received, four of which were from central government, three from local government, 16 from community and voluntary organisations, and five from individuals not representing organisations.
- The Bang the Table online discussion forum was viewed by 1,376 unique visitors, with comments posted by 34 people.

2. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK - OVERVIEW

2.1 Overall comments

This document summarises the feedback received on *It's More Than Talk*. Alongside the feedback, the reference group's preliminary response is outlined. This is developed further in the final report *From Talk to Action*.

In the main, the responses to the BBGE initiative were overwhelmingly positive, for instance:

“(The paper) highlights a range of critical issues that cut to the heart of our democracy”

“(The submitter) applauds the attempt to improve the democratic process in New Zealand in ways that are practical and cost effective. It's critical that this initiative is indeed 'more than talk'”

“The discussion paper is an important first step towards developing more meaningful central government engagement with citizens and community organisations”

“(The paper) accurately identifies many of the issues and...presents a comprehensive overview of concerns”

Having attended a consultation meeting, one submitter said “our written submission has been influenced by the discussion, which is a good example of effective consultation in practice”.

Many of the original issues were endorsed, such as the need for high-level Government commitment to a collaborative culture in government agencies. Many of the original ideas for improving public service skills and knowledge were supported, while new ideas were also offered.

There were also comments that challenged the focus on public service capability. Many submitters remarked on the need to consider the capacity and roles of all sectors.

Submitters endorsed the importance of collaboration across central government agencies, local government, hapū and iwi, and the private sector to achieve positive societal outcomes. The importance of empowering community-led action, and respecting the needs and perspectives of diverse population groups, came through strongly.

The feedback received has shaped and broadened the reference group's thinking, and demonstrates the value of wide-ranging input. While it has not been possible to fully investigate every aspect of the ideas put to the group, it is hoped that the final report paints a broad picture that inspires further initiatives and deliberation.

2.2 Critiques of the overall approach

The focus on public service capability

Some commentators questioned the BBGE focus on the public service, suggesting that the focus needed to be on fostering strong community decision-making.

BBGE comment: The project was established to improve government engagement practices, and most feedback did consider this a valuable focus. The reference group does, however, agree that community-led decision-making also requires attention, as addressed later in this report.

The focus on engagement with citizens and community organisations

At one meeting, a participant suggested that there is a tension in combining discussion of engagement with community organisations and engagement with citizens in the one document, and that separate documents would be preferable.

BBGE comment: The reference group had many discussions about the focus of the project. In the end, it was concluded that issues of citizen and community engagement are intertwined. The reference group chose to focus more widely than community and voluntary organisations because participatory democracy cannot be achieved by solely engaging with intermediary bodies.

Funding issues are more pressing

One written submission suggested that the most important issue to be tackled was levels of funding for community organisations, particularly those organisations that do not provide essential services. Another submitter wrote:

“We need to acknowledge that attempts at engagement frequently take place between parties whose relationships are defined by competitive commercial contracting. This impacts on the perceived power and behaviour of the parties and can only be overcome where the asymmetries of power resulting from these primary relationships are acknowledged and strategies employed to counter them”.

BBGE comment: Effective engagement is important in all contexts, including in funding relationships. Funding issues and the specifics of relational contracting (an approach to contracting that seeks to build positive relationships) are the target of other projects within OCVS and other agencies. The BBGE project is particularly concerned with community engagement in policy development and service delivery decision-making.

Reference group membership

Some concerns were expressed that the membership of the BBGE reference group was not sufficiently diverse, particularly because there was no Pacific Island membership and only government membership on behalf of tangata whenua.

BBGE comment: The reference group acknowledges the limitations of its membership. The group was set up by the OCVS as a small group with expertise and interest in community engagement. It does not represent all populations groups, all parts of the country, or all sub-sectors of the community and voluntary sector. For this reason wider input was sought through consultation before finalising the group's thoughts.

Breadth of consultation

There was also feedback that the BBGE consultation processes needed to be specifically tailored for particular population groups, for instance by having meetings organised by and for Pacific peoples, separate processes targeting youth, and more targeting of rural communities.

BBGE comment: The project received useful comments in relation to various population groups. However, the needs and issues of these different communities are worthy of further attention, separately from this project, by the appropriate "population-based" ministries.

2.3 Comments on “Setting the scene”

It's More Than Talk discussed the purpose of community engagement, the potential benefits, and different levels of community participation. Comments on the Setting the Scene section of the discussion document highlighted the importance of:

- clarifying the purpose of community engagement and why the community would want to be engaged
- emphasising that community engagement is a tool not an outcome, and that the focus must be on successful change
- understanding what is “genuine” consultation (and when people do not get the outcome they want, do they inevitably criticise the process?)
- teasing out issues of participatory and representative democracy
- clarifying the difference between engaging citizens and engaging organisations
- acknowledging the political element of engagement (for instance, what are the hidden agendas; who controls the process?)
- recognising the limitations of participatory processes, especially processes that marginalise some parts of society or exacerbate conflict
- encouraging deliberation processes that safely bring together people from diverse backgrounds
- re-visiting definitions for community engagement and considering definitions from such sources as the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

BBGE comment: The reference group agrees that community engagement must be undertaken with clear understanding of how the process will contribute to the policy or service delivery outcomes. Wider understanding of community engagement theories and practices is desirable, and the points above are all worthy of elaboration in such guidance material as www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz.

3 THE ISSUES

3.1 Issues generally agreed by submitters

The written submissions and consultation meetings generated considerable discussion of the issues outlined. Generally, respondents agreed that the issues were accurate, although some areas were pinpointed for greater attention. There was broad support for the core issue outlined in *It's More Than Talk* of:

central government agencies are not yet sufficiently committed to, and skilled at, collaborating with citizens and community organisations in order to jointly tackle societal problems.

Culture of government

In particular, respondents strongly agreed that the culture within government is a barrier to effective engagement. Some took a bleak view, illustrated by the following comment.

“The whole system works against public servants who want to have open, meaningful discussions with community stakeholders. Ridiculous deadlines, often unrealistic expectations of Ministers, political point scoring (especially via the Parliamentary Questions process), chief executives and department managers who want to micro-manage every possible risk and turn when they hear a dissenting view, and a lack of really good information sharing, are all factors that make it difficult for public servants to take collaborative, open approaches that they know will give them better, well-informed results.”

Community organisations repeatedly commented that the culture of government does not encourage public servants to recognise and respect community input. There was general agreement that central government agencies do not have sufficient organisational commitment to achieving genuine, purposeful community engagement.

Constraints on public servants

Some government agency comments noted constraints that can impact on engagement processes, particularly in the current economic climate. For instance:

“Officials barely have time to look up and get input. They are doing what they can in the time they've got... Public servants are there because they want to do better (but) time and money are constrained.”

“The money available for consultation and for engaging with groups around the country is being monitored closely. The number of committees and consumer representative groups funded by departments is also being reviewed.”

“There is a need for a strong, clear purpose for an engagement process, and consideration of costs. It's important to avoid 'talk fests'.”

Need for improved practices

Many submitters commented on the need for wider understanding of good practice in community engagement. For instance, it is important that:

- engagement occurs at an early stage in any project
- consultations are genuine
- timeframes are sufficient
- feedback is provided by government on how the information is used.

Need for upskilling

Respondents broadly agreed that engagement skills are not sufficiently weighted and valued within government agencies. One commentator said that:

“The quality of emotional intelligence, communication skills and honesty, on both sides of the fence, impacts on the relationship.”

Another noted that:

“Public institutions should be looking for people who have competencies in interpersonal and cross-cultural communication skills as much as they have technical planning/policy skills, etc.”

Insufficient evaluation and monitoring

There was also wide agreement that there is a lack of evaluation and monitoring to learn lessons from engagement processes and assess whether good practice is being followed.

BBGE comment: In accordance with the feedback received, the above issues will be addressed in the final report.

3.2 Issues needing greater prominence

Feedback suggested that various issues were considered understated in *It's More Than Talk*. The issues were around:

Recognition of the Treaty

- the central role of the Treaty of Waitangi and the implications of this for engagement with Māori

Internal management issues

- concern about management styles that hinder effective communication within government agencies, and consequently influence external engagement styles
- high turnover of frontline government staff, resulting in community organisations needing to frequently bring new government staff up to speed

Coordination and collaboration

- the need for more collaboration at the local level between central government, local government, community organisations and citizens
- limited coordination between central government agencies when undertaking consultation, contributing to consultation fatigue in communities
- strains on the external relationships of regional offices of government due to changes in instructions from national offices

Building local capacity

- capacity issues within the community and voluntary sector

Wide and culturally appropriate engagement

- the need to improve government engagement with groups such as children and young people, people with disabilities, Pacific peoples, other ethnic communities, and rural and isolated communities
- the need to avoid capture by some voices more than others

Consistency around payments for involvement

- inconsistency around payments for community members involved in government-led processes (such as committees), in terms of whether they are paid or not paid, and the amount involved.

BBGE comment: The reference group notes these issues need greater attention. These themes are elaborated in Section 4 where desired changes are discussed.

4 MOVING FORWARD

There was broad support for most of the actions outlined in *It's More Than Talk*. A few of the original proposals were controversial, and a number of additional areas for potential action were drawn to the reference group's attention.

4.1 Actions generally endorsed by submitters

Ministerial support

There was a strong call for an indication of high-level (eg Prime Ministerial) commitment to effective engagement. An online comment suggested:

"I want (the Prime Minister) and his senior Ministers who share his Cabinet table with him to come out and say they think community engagement is important and they want it to be happening better in THEIR government of OUR country."

All the consultation meetings reflected this view, for instance:

"There is a need for top-to-bottom commitment: Cabinet, chief executives, senior management. Leadership from the Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector is important." (Waitakere)

"This work requires a Ministerial champion and political endorsement from the Prime Minister and senior Ministers." (Wellington)

Questions were raised about the status of the *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship* (SOGI), which was signed by the Prime Minister of the previous Government, and includes a commitment to effective participatory processes.

BBGE comment: Respondents' desire to see a high-level Government commitment to effective engagement with citizens and communities will be reflected in the reference group's final report. One way to achieve this would be for the Government to endorse a set of principles for effective engagement.

Cabinet Office guidance

There was support for a stronger emphasis in the Cabinet Office *CabGuide* on consultation and engagement with community and voluntary organisations and iwi/Maori.

BBGE comment: Support for revision of the *CabGuide* is noted. This action will be proposed in the reference group's final report.

Government agency accountability

There was a strong desire to see government agencies individually indicate a commitment to effective engagement in strategic documents. One online comment reflected the sentiments of many:

“If there are not clear goals and performance indicators written into Statements of Intent, and other high level accountability documents, nothing will change.”

Regular auditing or measuring of the effectiveness of central government engagement processes was sought, for instance:

“There needs to be compliance checking – eg random auditing of the community engagement that departments report they undertook... (otherwise) departments will contract ‘wordsmiths’ to write their annual reports so that ‘a paper bag sounds like a silk purse’.”

BBGE comment: Ministers and communities need assurance that community engagement is taken seriously and evidenced in public reporting documents. Mechanisms need to be developed that ensure accountability by government agencies, while avoiding overly-onerous compliance or meaningless “tick-box” responses.

Evaluation and learning from experience

There was also an emphasis on government agencies building evaluations into their community engagement exercises, to support learning from experience.

Learnings can be shared through web information and seminars. There was support for continued promotion by OCVS of good practice and case studies via seminars and the OCVS Good Practice Participate website. The possibility was raised of collaborating with continuing education facilities in universities to enable a speaker in one locality to be viewed from other localities.

BBGE comment: Continued development of website material and seminars is desirable, including information on evaluation. To the extent possible within resources, this should include seminars outside of Wellington, run in conjunction with local hosts.

Human resource policies

There was broad support for the discussion document suggestions around:

- recruitment and performance management processes that recognise community engagement skills
- inclusion in induction programmes of information about community stakeholders and engagement practices
- secondments and exchanges between government agencies and community organisations
- encouragement of employee volunteering. One suggestion was that public servants be encouraged to work a nine day fortnight and volunteer on the tenth day.

BBGE comment: The widely used “Lominger” competencies¹ could be reviewed to ensure sufficient emphasis on engagement skills, and to promote a focus on

¹ “Lominger” competencies outline measurable characteristics of a person related to success at work. It can be a skill, an attribute, or an attitude.

engagement competencies within government recruitment and performance appraisal processes.

The OCVS could also develop short presentations for government agency induction programmes on the nature of the community and voluntary sector, and key tips on building stakeholder networks and effective engagement. Where government agencies have systematic ways to induct new staff into a positive engagement culture, this could also help reduce the difficulties community organisations reported to this project about dealing with frequent staff turnover.

The reference group understands that the OCVS has undertaken work on a draft guide to employee volunteering. This should be completed and circulated.

4.2 Options which were controversial

Joint Ministers' group

The option of a joint Ministers' group, to ensure government agencies improve their relationships with community organisations, received a mixed response. Respondents were unsure whether such a group was the best approach to providing a collective Ministerial response, or whether the existing Cabinet committee system could readily address the whole-of-government issues raised in this work.

BBGE comment: As indicated earlier (page 10), there was wide support for high-level endorsement of the value of effective engagement. The Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector could consider the best mechanism for gaining wide Ministerial support for effective engagement with citizens and communities.

Conference, scholarships, awards, guidelines

There was little support for:

- a triennial government-organised engagement conference
- scholarships for public servants to study participatory techniques.
- new awards for effective engagement. Many felt that there were already sufficient awards available, including from the Institute of Public Administration New Zealand and the International Association of Public Participation.

BBGE comment: As a result of feedback, these areas will not be the focus of recommendations.

Hard-copy guidelines

This idea received some support, but there was also a counter view that hard-copy "toolkits can be costly, time-consuming and ineffective".

BBGE comment: Given the breadth of information already available on-line, detailed hard-copy guidelines may not be necessary. There could, however, be value in short written guidelines focussed on actions that government agencies can take to ensure that principles of good engagement are followed.

Training

Encouragement of training for public servants in engagement practice was a controversial area. Many people endorsed this, with comments in favour including:

- a desire to see greater uptake of International Association of Public Participation training, but concerns about the cost
- calls for joint training between government and community organisations
- suggestions of greater use of continuing education and adult education avenues to promote training for government and community staff

- the need for inter-cultural skills training
- a proposal by the Public Service Association that a joint project develop a training package on management styles that encourage high trust and inclusive decision-making
- one suggestion that more public servants join Toastmasters.

However, there were also comments that:

- spending time and money on training public servants would exacerbate power imbalances
- upskilling of public servants by encouraging community experience was the best approach.

BBGE comment: Training for public servants would ensure that partnership and power-sharing approaches are better understood. Joint community-government courses would be particularly valuable, to help build mutual understanding. The OCVS should continue to promulgate information on existing training, and could approach tertiary institutes to encourage development of locally designed courses.

Government agencies should be encouraged to include community organisations in their training programmes to help build community capacity and enhance mutual understanding. Secondments to community organisations and staff exchanges would also support this.

Mentoring/ advice

There was a mix of comments around increasing accessibility to mentoring and advice on engagement. The range of ideas included:

- appointing/identifying engagement champions or specialists within individual agencies
- encouraging networks for people with particular interest in engagement (such as the Building Better Connections government engagement specialists' network, and International Association of Public Participation local networks)
- identifying one government agency to be primary contact for engagement advice, in addition to specialist advice available from the population-based ministries
- establishing a "Centre of Excellence" in engagement advice and behaviours to encourage experimentation in new engagement methods, to lead engagement work, and to track the results of engagements.

BBGE comment: Public servants are more likely to get processes right when they take advice from community partners and have access to good advice within their own agencies. Networks for sharing information on good practice are also valuable.

It would be valuable to have a place for both government and community organisations to go to, when seeking advice on engagement practices. A non-government "centre" to provide advice to government and community

organisations on engagement practices would be difficult to fund in the current economic climate.

The State Services Commission might be an appropriate body to encourage government agencies in effective engagement of citizens, given its whole-of-state sector focus and previous support for good practice in online methods. However, the location of any future support for online good practice is unclear following recent restructuring.

The primary mandate of the OCVS relates to community organisations rather than citizens more generally, though its seminars and website material on community engagement have taken a wide focus. The small size of the OCVS limits its ability to provide mentoring advice to individual agencies. The Government should give consideration to future resourcing of support for good practice in both online and face-to-face engagement.

4.3 Additional themes raised

There were a number of areas where additional ideas were put forward, as detailed below.

Legislation

There were some comments that central government should have similar legislative requirements to engage as local government.

BBGE comment: The reference group has not fully investigated the implications of this proposal. Local government has a legislative requirement to consult communities about long term planning. There are a number of statutes that contain requirements for central government agencies to consult, although much of the consultation undertaken is discretionary. The value of central government working more closely with local government processes is noted later in this document.

Coordination within central government

There were calls for better coordination between central government agencies when undertaking consultation. Several comments were made on the need for a central system for recording consultations. Most public servants are probably unaware of the little-used Consultations page at <http://newzealand.govt.nz/participate/have-your-say/>. One action suggested was that “feeds” from agency websites could be used to populate the page.

BBGE comment: Action is needed to ensure government agencies register their consultations on this site. This would ensure better information for citizens and community organisations, and would make coordination between government agencies more possible.

National-regional office interfaces

Several of the BBGE consultation meetings referred to problems at the interface between national and regional offices of central government. Some regional offices indicated that they felt stymied in doing what they think best. This could involve regional staff being asked by national office to change course or end an engagement process, with little warning or consideration of the impact on local relationships.

Some comments focused on the issue of how best to systematically convey on-the-ground information from regional offices to national offices of government agencies. One suggested electronic databases for regional offices to log information. Another suggested teams of “solution brokers” to seek out solutions to social problems from the ground up and move these up to government policy level. Another suggested that facilitators be appointed to collect community views and be accountable to the relevant Ministers.

BBGE comment: The reference group notes the importance of effective communication between national and regional offices, and the value of mechanisms for conveying local information to central government. Government agencies need to consider what mechanisms will best facilitate this, in the context of the Government's moves to ensure that the "front-line" is strengthened.

Collaboration across sectors

Some submissions focused on the value of multi-sectoral collaborations at the local level between central government, local government, community organisations and citizens. Central government/local government/community partnerships were seen as an effective way to deliver on community engagement:

"...Not only would funds be saved but communities would benefit from effective networks, upskilling in engagement practices, (and) better democratic processes..."

Other submissions focused on collaboration between particular sectors. For instance, some focused on building more of a partnership approach between government and community organisations. Others expressed a need for public servants to better understand communities' agendas and timetables, and to be prepared to negotiate 'terms of engagement' with communities.

Some focused on the central government interface with local government, suggesting that if this were improved this could:

- reduce duplication of community engagement
- provide central government with useful community contacts and information on issues
- give central government the benefit of local government engagement skills
- support collaborative implementation of Long Term Council Community Plans
- build civic trust in participatory processes.

One submission suggested that local community boards should be the first port of call for any consultation processes.

There were comments that government agencies should use community organisations or local authorities to organise and run engagement processes. Some comments referred to "collaborative learning forums" where government agencies and community organisations can learn together.

BBGE comment: Good practice guidelines should include encouragement for central government agencies to build local relationships and seek support from local partners when seeking to run engagement processes.

Government agencies need good understanding of the community and voluntary sector and local government in order to engage effectively. OCVS seminars on strengthening community-government relationships are useful, as are the resources and seminars provided by the Interface Facilitation Team at the

Department of Internal Affairs, which supports central and local government working together for community outcomes.

Strengthening community organisations' capacity

Various comments suggested that community organisations are under-resourced to engage with government and each other, and that they have some of the same needs for training in engagement as public servants. Some comments indicated that the capability of the public service was a lesser priority than the ability of community organisations to lead change in their own communities.

BBGE comment: The capacity of community organisations to engage is vital. While this is a wider question than the focus of this project, the reference group suggests that the following actions would assist:

- government agencies need to ensure that the expenses of community partners involved in engagement processes are reimbursed
- as mentioned earlier, joint training in engagement between government agencies and community organisations would support community capacity
- the OCVS continues offering joint community-government seminars on engagement and these should be extended beyond Wellington.

Devolution of power to communities

Some comments focused on devolution of decision-making to community organisations, with minimal government involvement. One submission suggested that “government agencies could take a community development approach to nearly all social issues” and “direct more funding for holistic initiatives in particular geographic areas and neighbourhoods...to support and mobilise local assets...” However, another submitter posed the question:

“The (idea of) community taking responsibility for achieving what are essentially national outcomes is a great one, but is the population at that stage where they truly believe that there are alternatives to Government providing all the answers?”

There was also some comment that more central government resources should be devolved to local authorities “so that local solutions can be developed that are more responsive than national programmes”. One person suggested that there was a need to “develop a plan for devolving central government resources to local authorities so that local solutions can be developed that are more responsive than national programmes”, although there was also acknowledgement of a risk of reducing national consistency.

BBGE comment: There is an important underlying question about when decisions should be made at Parliament, in central government, local government or in community organisations. The reference group would like to see wider discussion of this, perhaps led by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Community-led development is increasingly gaining focus as citizens seek greater community self-reliance in the face of such challenges as climate change. The Department of Internal Affairs could assist other government agencies to understand the principles of community development and develop case studies illustrating ways that government agencies have usefully supported community-led initiatives.

The Budget 2009 announcement of funding for the Community Sector Taskforce to engage with hard-to-reach populations is intended to develop the strength of local community networks and should be evaluated as it progresses.

Engagement with iwi/Māori

The discussion document noted that the Treaty of Waitangi places an additional responsibility on government to facilitate Māori participation in policy development and service delivery. Feedback indicated that this area needed greater prominence:

“The role of Te Tiriti o Waitangi needs to be central... and must underlie any commitments to engagement.”

Te Puni Kōkiri’s submission distinguished between Māori rights to be consulted or engaged as citizens under Article 3 of the Treaty, and engagement with Māori as Treaty partners under Article 2, noting that “distinguishing between these two circumstances is sometimes tricky”.

One submission suggested that “staff members who interact with the public and community organisations should receive mandatory training in basic Māori cultural issues and Treaty education”. Another commented that Māori engagement skills should not be limited to specialist teams.

BBGE comment: Issues of public service capacity to engage with iwi/Māori parallel many of the issues raised in this report, and have implications in such areas as recruitment, training, and availability of cultural advice. It would be useful for Te Puni Kōkiri to consider options for enhancing its advice on good engagement practices.

Diversity considerations

Various comments highlighted the need for government to more actively seek engagement with groups and citizens that may be difficult for an agency to access, for instance:

- people living in rural and isolated communities and outside metropolitan areas
- people with disabilities
- children and young people
- senior citizens
- ethnic communities.

For rural communities, there was a desire for government agencies to travel to remote areas more often for face-to-face engagement, and for greater use of online technologies.

One submission, focused on the needs of people with disability issues, commented that:

“The main barriers to engagement are simple – finding out about things, having the time, energy and resources to respond, having people who support you to respond, getting to and into meetings, getting and reading the information, hearing and understanding it, being able to give feedback, having your input and your story heard, being regarded as credible, and believing you will be taken notice of.”

The submitter highlighted the importance of government agencies:

- utilising the guidance available from the State Services Commission and Office for Disability Issues
- using engagement strategies that draw on people with experience, target the most vulnerable groups, use government staff who know the target communities, and are open to everyone
- making sure the basis of decision-making is clear, including being transparent about how input has been used
- being innovative – including use of co-governance arrangements between the disability sector and government.

Other comments received focused on the importance of culturally appropriate engagement models. For instance, it is important to engage with Pacific peoples using Pacific models, and to focus on issues identified by those communities rather than within the walls of a government agency.

One submission emphasised the dangers of government agencies listening more to particular voices than others. For instance “service providers views are often prioritised over those of local communities or service users”. In the submitter’s view, this was particularly apparent in relation to dialogue with Pacific communities.

BBGE comment: The importance of adapting engagement to meet the needs of different audiences is clear, as is the need to avoid “capture” by a small set of groups. Government agencies that specialise in addressing issues and promoting understanding of particular communities include the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministry of Youth Development, Office for Disability Issues, Office for Senior Citizens, and Office of Ethnic Affairs. Further actions may be required by some agencies.

Education for active citizenship

One submitter advocated for greater support of adult and community education organisations as vehicles for ensuring better informed and engaged citizens, and in running engagement processes on behalf of government. Another comment emphasised the value of citizenship education in schools.

BBGE comment: There is an important question about how citizens can best be encouraged to be active and engaged. It is valuable for citizenship education to be encouraged at all levels of the curriculum and in continuing education programmes.

Projects that focus on aspects of active citizenship include Promoting Generosity (convened by Philanthropy New Zealand, Volunteering New Zealand and the OCVS), and Growing Active Citizens work (coordinated by Local Government New Zealand). The Ministry of Youth Development has a number of useful initiatives that encourage youth participation.

Given the focus of the BBGE project on public service capability, full investigation of this matter has been outside of the project's scope.

4.4 Next steps

A separate document *From Talk to Action: Government Engagement with Citizens and Communities* contains the reference group's key findings and recommendations for government on the way forward.

APPENDIX A: REFERENCE GROUP

Members

Sue Driver	ChangeMakers Refugee Forum
Tony Mayow	Community Waitakere
Charlie Moore	Families Commission
Tina Reid	NZ Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations
Mary-Jane Rivers	Inspiring Communities (Community-led Development Trust)
Anne Shaw	Department of Internal Affairs
Laura Sommer	State Services Commission
Roger Tweedy	Wellington City Council
Hata Wilson	Te Puni Kōkiri

Project manager

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Project members

Judith le Harivel	Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector
Hannah O'Donnell	Department of Internal Affairs