

“Community participation occurs when consumers, carers and community members are meaningfully involved in decision making about health policy and planning, care and treatment, and the wellbeing of themselves and the community.”

Doing it with us not for us: Strategic direction 2010–13, Victorian Government Department of Health, Melbourne.

Developing and implementing a Community Participation Policy is a common and important way for organisations to support consumers, carers and community member to have meaningful input into organisational decision making.

This Community Participation Policy template has been created as a practical example for organisations who do prevention and project work in the health and community sector. It is based on HealthWest Partnership’s Community Participation Policy and on the lessons learned during development and review of the policy. It is intended as a guide only, and should be modified based on the needs of organisations and communities.

Read more about HealthWest Partnership and our work at www.healthwest.org.au.

Steps to develop your Community Participation Policy:

Step One: Develop a clear vision for community participation at your organisation.

Your vision can depend on many different factors including government policy, funding requirements, the type of work your organisation does and the communities you serve. Your vision should align with your organisational mission and strategic directions, and be supported by organisational leadership.

Step Two: Seek a clear understanding of how this vision can be applied in practice.

Ensure you talk to staff, community participants and your diverse communities to gain an understanding of current community participation and work practices, as well as areas for improvement. Look at how other organisations put community participation into practice.

Step Three: Create a policy that works for your organisations and community.

Your policy needs to be supportive, inclusive and practical. Align your policy with other organisational policies, use policy examples and templates where appropriate and seek feedback from staff and community.

Step Four: Support staff to implement the policy and the procedures it describes.

Your policy should not be developed in isolation. Train staff in community participation and procedures, develop accompanying resources and create accountability measures.

Step Five: Review the policy regularly.

Your policy should be a living document that evolves as internal processes and external expectations change. Review the policy regularly, and ensure that community participants and staff from different levels of the organisation are involved in the review process.

Community Participation Policy

<To develop your community participation policy, modify this template by substituting and/or removing blue text as appropriate.>

Purpose

Communities have the right to be included in decisions which impact on their health. <The organisation> recognises our local communities as valuable partners in improving the local health system.

The community participation policy has been developed to:

1. Promote the participation of community members in <the organisation's> activities.
2. Support staff and community members to work together in a positive, inclusive and consistent manner.

Community participation is a priority for <the organisation>, as outlined in <insert relevant organisational documents including mission, strategic or operational plans, community engagement framework>.

Policy

Staff should aim to include community participation in their work. <The organisation> will support staff members to do so. Staff should be guided by these general principles at all times:

1. Community are valuable partners that possess knowledge, expertise and experience. Staff should recognise and build on community members' strengths.
2. Community participation should be strategic and have a purpose. This purpose should be clearly communicated to participants. The organisation discourages tokenistic participation, or 'participation for participation's sake'.
3. Participation should benefit community members and/or their community. No community member should be placed at risk, marginalised or disadvantaged for having partnered with the organisation.
4. Participation should be inclusive and seek to reflect the diversity of our communities.

Community participation can take many forms and falls along a spectrum where community have increasing impact on decision making. It is important to include multiple types and levels of community participation, however staff should try to work at the high impact end of the spectrum where possible.



The [IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum](#) has more information and examples of these levels of participation.

Procedures

1. Planning

Community participation should be strategic and planned.

- 1.1. Community participation should occur during project planning, implementation and evaluation. Project plans should reflect this. An appropriate level of community participation can be decided by the staff member and their line manager.

1.2. A range of engagement techniques should be considered to include marginalised and difficult-to-reach community groups where possible. Staff should engage community members in spaces where they are comfortable. This may include reaching out to existing community groups or via social media platforms. If direct community participation is not appropriate or could lead to further disadvantage, staff should seek other means of community input such as results from existing consultations.

1.3. Sufficient project funds should be budgeted to support community participation.

2. Communication

All communication with community should be understandable, relevant and appropriate to its audience.

Communication should follow health literacy principles.

2.1. Consider the characteristics of your intended audience (e.g. languages spoken, reading ability and cultural background). <The organisation> encourages the use of interpreters or translations for spoken and written communication when required.

2.2. Use varied and appropriate methods of communication when engaging communities. Consider using networks, peak bodies, word-of-mouth, social media and traditional media.

2.3. When communicating with community participants, negotiate a preferred method (e.g. text message, email or post). Participants should not be excluded because they are unable to use a staff members' preferred means of communication.

2.4. Communication should comply with <list relevant documents e.g. communications policy, style guide, social media policy. Ensure listed documents incorporate health literacy and inclusive communication>.

3. Recruitment and support

Community participants should be recruited, supported and reimbursed in a manner appropriate to their role.

3.1. All community participants should be provided with a clear role description. This will ensure all involved have a shared understanding of a community participant's role.

3.2. All community participants should be asked if they have accessibility, literacy, dietary, family, religious or other needs, which should then be accommodated.

3.3. Recruiting community participants to positions that are ongoing or involve a high degree of responsibility should follow a pre-determined recruitment process.

3.4. Community participants should be offered and provided with any reasonable support to fulfill their role. Support that can be offered includes:

- Orientation
- Briefing and debriefing practical aspects of their role, and emotional support
- Training and professional development
- Supervision or mentoring.

It is the responsibility of staff working with the community participant to ensure that appropriate support is discussed and provided.

3.5. Community participants should be reimbursed for their time when they provide a specific service that will benefit <the organisation>, at the request of <the organisation>. Reimbursements should be budgeted for and approved by a line manager.

Further guidance can be found in the following procedure documents:

- *Recruiting Community Participants* <see example procedure below>
- *Supporting Community Participants* <see example procedure below>
- *Reimbursing Community Participants* <see example procedure below>

4. Feedback and recognition

Community participants should be provided with both feedback and recognition for their input.

- 4.1. Community members who participate in any <organisation> activity should be provided with feedback on the result of their input. This is a simple communication about what was achieved, how they made a difference or similar. It is important to help 'close the loop' of information and falls under *Inform* on the Spectrum of Public Participation. Examples include providing a workshop report, a copy of the resource they contributed to or a follow-up phone call.
- 4.2. Community participants who partner with <the organisation> in an ongoing role should be provided with regular project updates regarding their role where possible.
- 4.3. Recognition means acknowledging and thanking a community participant for their contributions to a project or activity. It is important to recognise community participants' contributions. This can be done in many ways, e.g. an email to project stakeholders, a thankyou card, acknowledgement in a project report or morning tea during the final project meeting.

Definitions

<Insert relevant definitions below. Example definitions have been included>

Community participant: a community member who is working with <the organisation> in any capacity. This can refer to once-off or ongoing work.

Community participation occurs when consumers, carers and community members are meaningfully involved in decision making about health policy and planning, care and treatment, and the wellbeing of themselves and the community. (Department of Health 2011, *Doing it with us not for us: Strategic direction 2010–13*, Victorian Government Department of Health, Melbourne.)

Related Documents

<List relevant documents and policies here>

Additional Information

<Fill in relevant information below>

Responsibility:

Approved by:

Date Created:

Version:

Date Last Reviewed:

Date of Next Review:

Procedure template: Recruiting community participants

When recruiting to positions that are ongoing (medium- or long-term) or involve a high degree of responsibility, it is important to plan and follow a recruitment procedure.

1. Develop a clear role description that includes:

- Project background in plain language.
- Applicant requirements (e.g. experience, interests, locality).
- The requirements of the role (e.g. attend meetings, represent a specific group, provide written reports).
- Support available to participant (e.g. interpreters, nominated contact person, briefing and debriefing, buddy systems).
- Contact details of a key staff member for further information about the role.
- Provide clear instructions how interested community members can express interest.

2. Advertise for expressions of interest from community members

- Develop a short and appropriate advertisement.
- Circulate the advertisement and role description through appropriate networks (e.g. consumer groups) and other means (e.g. local media).
- Timelines for this process must provide community members sufficient time to respond.

3. Select and appoint community participants

- Choose a selection process which is appropriate for the role. Be mindful not to place a burden on community members. This may include one or more of: Written application, telephone interview, face-to-face interview, reference checks.
- Discuss the selection process with interviewees.
- Advise all community members who expressed interest on the outcome of their application.

4. Police checks

<The organisation> does not generally require police checks for community participants, as they can be a potential barrier to participation.

- In some specific projects a police check might be part of a risk management process. In this situation, a police check should be just one part of a broader process.
- If the community participant will be working with children, a Working With Children check may be appropriate.

*This procedure has been developed to support the Community Participation Policy.
Resources and templates for recruiting community participants are available <insert location>.*

Procedure template: Supporting community participants

It is the responsibility of staff working with the community participant to ensure that community participants are supported to fulfill their role.

1. Orientation

Community participants in a regularly or ongoing role should receive an orientation. The purpose of an orientation is to help the new community participant feel welcome and provide them with the information they need to perform their role effectively.

- The orientation should be conducted by a staff member, who may work with an experienced community participant. It should be conducted according to <insert relevant resource here e.g. [Community Orientation Manual](#)>.
- It must include a building and OHS orientation if the community participant will regularly work onsite.
- A record of orientation activities should be kept by the staff member.

2. Briefing and debriefing

Community participants should be offered the chance to be briefed and to debrief about their work. This can include questions, discussion and active reflection.

Debriefing is particularly important if the project area is sensitive, polarising or contains potentially distressing content. Be aware of support services you can refer community members to, if more than a standard debrief is required.

3. Additional forms of support

Community participants may require or benefit from additional forms of supports to perform their role.

This may include:

- Assistance with transport
- Appropriate training (personal or professional development)
- Mentoring and supervision
- Access to an interpreter.

Staff should discuss this with community participants, and ensure costs are budgeted for and discuss these with their line manager.

This procedure has been developed to support the Community Participation Policy.

Resources related to supporting consumer participants are available <insert location>.

Procedure template: Reimbursing community participants

HealthWest values the contribution of community participants. Reimbursing community participants for their time is one way that we support and recognise their contribution.

1. When is reimbursement required?

- Community members should be reimbursed for their time when they provide a specific service that will benefit HealthWest, and at the request of HealthWest.
- Reimbursement is not required when the community member is performing an undemanding task, has volunteered their time or is being compensated by other means.

Activities requiring payment	Activities not requiring payment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Sitting on a committee✓ Presenting at an event✓ Sitting on an interview panel✓ Providing feedback on resource or plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Filling out an evaluation✗ Activities open to the general public✗ Attending a voluntary training event✗ Attending a short community consultation where food and transport is provided.

2. Reimbursing other costs

Out of pocket expenses directly associated with participating should be reimbursed. Participants should discuss any expenditure with a staff member before spending any money.

Costs associated with travelling to or from an activity are generally not reimbursed. However they may be reimbursed under special circumstances and at the discretion of the project worker. Taxi vouchers may be provided where the venue is inaccessible by public transport.

3. Reimbursement amounts

Community participants should be paid according to the Community Participant Payment Guide provided.

<Develop a payment guide and provide details. The [Health Issues Centre's Paying and reimbursing consumers position statement](#) is a recommended source.>

4. Providing reimbursements

Any reimbursements (for time or other costs) should be discussed and agreed on before the participation or expenditure occurs.

HealthWest's preferred payment methods are <insert payment options and details>. Payment details should be negotiated with community members.

All reimbursements should be budgeted within the relevant project budget.

This procedure has been developed to support the Community Participation Policy. Reimbursement resources are available <insert location>.