

Community engagement in urban animal management

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Community engagement (or consultation) is now a core activity in local government and increasingly in animal management. Whether it is preparing an animal management plan, developing a dog park, reviewing open space requirements or reviewing local laws, engaging with stakeholders is a crucial part of the process. Done well and it can be extremely worthwhile achieving good outcomes and satisfied stakeholders. Done poorly however and it can be a disaster – both politically and for its outcomes in animal management.

Virginia will look specifically at community engagement in animal management: which tools are appropriate and in what circumstances, the pitfalls to watch for and tips for optimising outcomes.

Community consultation/public participation/community engagement¹ – whatever you call it, it is a fact of life in local government. The community expects to be involved in public decision-making and in many cases their involvement is required by legislation. The literature on this topic is extensive. I don't propose to review this – or provide a “how to” manual for urban animal management. This is because there is extensive information about the tools available from other easily accessed sources. Instead, I will focus on the insights gained from my involvement in consultation in UAM in particular over more than 15 years. I have grouped these around what I call 7 Key Insights.

These Key Insights are:

1. Think ahead – well ahead.
2. Write a Community Engagement Plan.
3. Be careful writing surveys questions.
4. Make evaluation of feedback an explicit step.
5. We wary of conclusions you can rightfully make.
6. Report back.
7. Look out for secondary benefits.

However lets start with the basics. I like the Shire of Mount Alexander's summary of the outcomes of good community engagement which says [that it should]:

- Lead to better decisions;
- Ensure stronger community ownership;

- Mean there is greater likelihood of sharing the benefits and reducing win/lose outcomes;
- Build stronger relationships between Councils and their communities;
- Encourage a significant number of stakeholders to participate; and
- Build community leadership and resilience.

Engagement in UAM is no exception. Done well and it can achieve all these objectives.

However, I have also seen it done poorly leading to:

- Knee jerk reactions to poorly managed consultation – decisions made for the wrong reasons.
- Biassed feedback having undue influence on outcomes.
- Poorly executed tools resulting in important mistakes and omissions.
- Low participation rates in the consultation.

Done poorly and the whole exercise can be waste of time. It can reduce future chances of community involvement, can tarnish the reputation of the organisation and lead to consultation fatigue.

Key Insight 1: Think ahead – well ahead

A consultation might take 3 months to plan and execute. However you need to start thinking about it before then so you don't miss useful opportunities or clash with times of the year that will make it difficult to adequately consult. The following are some examples from UAM.

What resources do you have available? Do you need to ask for more? Does that need to fit into the annual budget cycle?

What data will you need? Does this need to be gathered over a longer time period?

Should you form a Community or Internal Reference Group to oversee the project? If so, what requirements are there on how to form such a group?

Councils often have often generic or UAM specific mail outs, events/festivals and annual surveys you can use to gather feedback.

¹ In this paper I use the terms interchangeably.

Are there events or periods that might be a problem for your Council? School holidays and forthcoming Council elections need to be considered.

I remember one multi-tasking Ranger who was also the Fire Protection Officer in his remote rural Council. That severely restricted the times of the year he could be involved in the UAM consultation.

If you are a tourist area how will you tap into absentee owners, day trippers and holiday makers? Does this mean you should bring some part of your consultation forward?

Will you be wanting to undertake an in park survey of dog owners? Will there be any meaningful numbers to survey if you do it in the depths of the Victorian or Tasmanian winter?

Key Insight 2: Write a Community Engagement Plan (CEP)

The second insight I have gained is possibly the most important. You need to write a plan for your community engagement exercise. It needs to address the questions you are seeking answers to, the resources you have available, the tools you will use and importantly consider all the risks.

It needs to be a written document. It needs to be detailed. It needs to include a statement as to what the purpose of the consultation is. Importantly, I believe it needs to be completed before you start not developed as you go. This includes writing the press release, advertisement and sample letter, drafting the survey questions, developing the list of invitees to meetings etc.

Some things to think about initially might include:

- Is there a legislative or statutory requirement to consult?
- Does your Council have a Community Engagement Policy?
- If you don't have a policy, consult the many Council policies that do exist?
- Who has gone down this road already? Can you pick their brains?
- What tools are available to you already? Is there a community advisory panel you can tap into? What about an annual Council survey?
- What are your objectives?
- What will you do with the feedback received? Will it help shape decision-making? Will it only be useful background? It is critical to decide this prior to consultation commencing and to be clear about it with participants so they are not disappointed. It also builds trust.
- What questions are you seeking answers to?
- How sensitive politically are the issues likely to be?

- What engagement tools will you use?
- How will you tell people about the consultation?
- How long will you be open to take feedback?
- Are you going to elicit comment before or after you make the recommendation or prepare the draft? (You can consult before and after).
- Will you brief the Council before you start? Will you obtain their sign-off on the CEP?

Care should be taken to ensure all affected parties are identified. Some interests may be less immediately obvious than others, but may be just as important. Are there groups in the community who traditionally have not participated because of language, age or mobility issues?

Think about what you already have access to. For example many Councils have an annual survey of residents. Some Councils have a Household Panel eg the City of Manningham in Victoria has a panel of residents registered to be consulted on particular issues.

Think about the scale of the project – or horses for courses. The scale of your engagement plan should be commensurate with the scale of the project.

You then need to decide which the tools you will use. Appendix 1 contains a list of the main tools available. This is taken from the Victorian Local Governance Association's Consultation Guide (Let's Talk: A Consultation Framework). The table includes the main application for each of the tools and how they can go wrong.

In deciding which of these tools you will use for your consultation, you need to consider the following questions:

- How will this tool meet the consultation objective/s?
- How well will it reach our target participants?
- What is the cost and do we have the budget for it?
- Do we have access to the people with the necessary expertise and resources to carry it out?
- Do we need to go externally to find the skills and resources to implement the tool successfully?
- Will it meet legal requirements?
- Does the tool have a good track record in this kind of situation or these types of audience?
- Are there any special circumstances that could affect the use of this technique?
- How will you report back to participants?

You then need to carefully plan each tool you will use. The questions below apply to the planning for face to face meetings. You need to go through a similar exercise with each tool you use.

- Who are the attendees?
- Do you need a balance of attendees – how will you achieve that?
- Is it invitation only?
- If not how will you reach attendees?
- How much notice do you need to provide?
- How will you encourage people to attend?
- How long will the meeting go for?
- If the meetings are by invitation only, how will you handle requests from others to attend?
- What is the best time/s of the day?
- Will you ask for RSVPs?
- Where is the best location/s?
- How will you plan the meeting if you have no idea how many will attend?
- How will you arrange the room – theatre style, round tables, large conference type table?
- What Council staff will attend? What role will they play?
- Will elected officials be present? If so what role will they play?
- Who will open and close the meeting?
- Will you record the names of attendees? If so how?
- How will you record feedback?
- What facilities are required? eg microphone, use of powerpoint?
- Will you provide refreshments?
- Will attendees have difficulty finding the room?
- What will you promise attendees at the end – will you write to them to advise them of the outcome, will you send them a draft or will you tell them to keep an eye out on Council's website for further information. Will they have another opportunity to have a say?
- Think about the issues that will be discussed and questions asked. What can you promise and/or commit to?
- What are the risks? How will you manage these risks? eg what if no one turns up, what if the feedback received is unbalanced, what if the meeting is dominated by one or two individuals, what if there are complaints about the date/time/location.

As you can see, my mantra for consultation is that *The Devil is in the Detail*.

Ask yourself every possible “what if” type question you can think of. This will help you foresee all the ways it might go “pear shaped”. It will also ensure the meeting proceeds as smoothly as possible lending

you more credibility and hopefully goodwill from attendees.

Whilst I'm talking about meetings – there are 2 key requirements for a good meeting. The first is a good facilitator who will keep the meeting on track and ensure everyone gets a say, that the topics you want covered are covered and that you don't get bogged down in one or two issues.

The second requirement is to have someone who takes good notes. This is harder than it sounds. You need someone who can take detailed notes, who won't drift off or get so absorbed in the discussion that they stop taking notes. I can't tell you the number of times I have looked across and the appointed scribe is not taking notes. The other option is to tape proceedings but this raises the problematic question of consent.

The overall CEP needs to provide a justification for the tools you are going to use and a detailed design for how you will use them. This will be very helpful when the inevitable queries arise about why you did this or that.

The next step for the CEP is a detailed timeline and task allocation list. Who else needs to be involved – communications, IT, Councillors, executive staff, the media. Who needs to be briefed? What sign off do you need? What are their deadlines?

Again, the devil is in the detail.

I was once involved in running 2 evening focus group meetings. No one turned up. We later discovered the front door had been locked at 6pm without us knowing and the attendees couldn't get in or contact us. Not a good look! The simplest of mistakes but it derailed the meeting.

Depending on the size of your community engagement project, you may wish to consider using project management software such as the GANTT Chart (available online). It will make your planning a whole lot easier.

Key Insight 3: Be careful devising survey questions

There is a whole science around writing survey questions.

The 5 common faults in question design are:

- Asking leading questions;
- Asking double questions;
- Using ambiguous wording;
- Providing inappropriate response options;
- Providing missing response options.

Lets take an example of a seemingly simple question that might be asked in UAM:

Do you think Council should introduce compulsory desexing for dogs and cats?

First, this is a leading question that survey theory tells us will return biased responses in favour of compulsory desexing. A simple adjustment would add the words “or not” to the end of the question.

Second, it is a double question because it asks about both dogs and cats.

Third, it includes ambiguous wording – what does “introduce” mean? Does it mean for all cats and dogs? Could there be caveats to a respondents’ yes or no answer (eg only with a statewide requirement, only for new registrations, only for non breeders).

Fourth, will the ordinary resident know what compulsory desexing is? And if they do know what it is, will they have thought about the costs and benefits of introducing such a requirement? Without wanting to sound condescending many respondents may have only ever thought generally about the issue.

Fifth, without a Don't Know option they are likely to draw on what they might know about the topic eg previous questions you have asked them, what they might have heard about the topic, what answer they think you might want, how they answered an earlier question even the tone of the researcher if it is a person to person survey.

Sixth, this question does not measure intensity of their opinion. It could be improved by asking a follow up question “How strongly do you feel about that?”

A better series of questions might be:

- Have you heard of compulsory desexing?
- What are your views about compulsory desexing of cats?
- Do you favour or not favour compulsory desexing of cats? (Yes No Don't Know)
- Why do you favour or not favour compulsory dexing of cats?
- How strongly do you feel about this? (Very strongly, fairly strongly, Not at all strongly).

Some additional issues to keep in mind are set out below:

- The relationship between what respondents say they do and what they actually do is often weak.
- Respondents’ attitudes, beliefs, opinions, habits, interests can be contradictory.
- A small change in wording will sometimes produce major changes in responses.
- Respondents commonly misinterpret questions.
- Answers to earlier questions can affect respondents’ answers to later questions.
- Changing the order in which response options are presented sometimes affects respondents’ answers.

- Respondents’ answers are sometimes affected by question format. For example open-ended questions often produce quite different results from closed ended questions that force respondents to select a response from a pre-set list of alternatives.
- Is it appropriate to seek answers to questions that are marginally relevant to respondents or about which they have thought or know very little? For example it has been found that up to 25% of respondents will answer a question when a Don't Know option is not offered but check Don't Know when it is offered.

Key Insight 4: Make evaluation an explicit step

What do you do with the feedback you receive? Obviously, you evaluate it and feed it into your conclusions, where appropriate.

I believe its important however to make evaluation an explicit and separate step in the process.

What does the feedback mean for this project or plan. It might result in further investigations being required. You might need to obtain preliminary sign off (from senior management or elected officials) on key conclusions -- for example we will or we won't be making this recommendation.

Depending on the size of the project you are consulting on, you may wish to prepare a separate report on the consultation.

I believe you should stop and evaluate the feedback received.

Key Insight 5: Be wary of conclusions you can rightfully make

First, it should be obvious but I continually see conclusions drawn from small sample sizes. 60% support for an issue is not statistically valid if you have only 100 completed surveys if it's a community wide issue. And in most cases, in UAM, even this small number is problematic since it is usually drawn from the people who are most interested in the issue.

Similarly, if the same issue is mentioned several times it can't necessarily be concluded that it is a hot issue or represents the views of the community particularly if only a handful of people attend your meeting.

Second, do not assume the views of key stakeholders (eg veterinarians, breeders) are the same as views of groups they supposedly represent (their clients).

Third, accept but don't forget potential biases from the feedback you receive. This will apply to feedback from face to face contact, self-administered surveys and social media. If you understand the potential for bias, you are in a better position to properly evaluate the feedback received.

Fourth, community consultation theory tells us you are likely to get different results from different

consultation tools eg meetings/written submissions/surveys. You need to keep this in mind in drawing conclusions. Is it possible you might have received very different results if you used a different tool?

Fourth, question the basis for some people to express opinions about some issues. For example you might hold a meeting of internal stakeholders. Council officers who answer the phones can talk knowledgeably about the people who ring in with animal related queries. Their input can be invaluable. They are often the first point of contact with people contacting Council about a UAM matter. However their feedback should really be confined to that specific experience with UAM and not extend to their opinions about other issues. This might happen if you are having an open discussion with a group of internal stakeholders for example.

Key Insight 6: Report back

Consultation 101 says you should report back to the people who participated in a consultation. What feedback did you receive? How was it evaluated and fed into the final decision making process.

Hopefully you would not have created false expectations about the degree of influence participants are able to have.

Key Insight 7: Lookout for secondary benefits

Community engagement programs are an opportunity for your staff to stop and hear first hand from your community. I believe this is really useful.

Done well, it can result in stronger connections with your community and stakeholders. It can also result in improved goodwill and understanding from the community - they might better understand the dilemmas you deal with. I remember at the conclusion of one very fiery public meeting many years ago, a few people thanked us for the opportunity to speak and said they now understood how difficult the issues were.

It should include ways to spread the responsible pet ownership message. Wherever possible, include links to relevant electronic material and provide copies of your brochures at face-to-face meetings.

Finally, you might use the exercise to help promote the importance of animal management to your powers that be within the Council hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

Community consultation is not necessarily that hard but it does require careful planning. And we are increasingly expected to do it well using an array of suitable tools. I hope this paper will assist those who have been through the process before as well as those embarking on it for the first time.

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

From Victorian Local Government Association *Lets Talk: A Consultation Framework*

TECHNIQUES	DESCRIPTION	BENEFITS	WHAT CAN GO WRONG
	Information Provision		
Letters	An addressed letter to all affected people. It outlines issues and requests participation and/or invites comments or provides a comment form.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits comment • Good for a targeted consultation • Can reach a wide audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only as good as your stakeholder list • Materials may not be read • May get lost in all the "junk mail"
Newsletters	Consultation information provided in a regular publication. Any article should both inform and encourage feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach a large target audience • Encourage feedback • Progress reports possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee it will be read • More likely that those with strong views will respond
Brochures	A special publication with information on the consultation and issues. Ensure it allows feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach a large audience • Allows feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be relatively expensive to produce • Materials may not be read
Issue papers Fact Sheets		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be quite inexpensive • Can reach a large target audience • Allows for technical discussion of the issues • Provide context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs a good distribution method • Materials may not be read

Technical Reports	Technical documents that report research or policy findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Permits comprehensive discussion of the evidence/reasons for a decision or options ▪ Full costings and benefits can be given ▪ If well written, can empower citizens ▪ Permits community wide distribution ▪ More likely to be noticed as part of the newspaper than it would be if distributed separately ▪ Can allow feedback ▪ Can reach a broad audience of the reading public ▪ Can increase its importance in the public eye ▪ Inform the media ▪ Can influence a feature story as the content is often used directly by the media for stories ▪ Potential to reach an audience that may prefer listening or viewing to reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May be difficult to understand ▪ May present more details than many people want ▪ Expensive
Newspaper Inserts	A sheet of information provided within the local newspaper. Should encourage public feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be expensive ▪ Local papers aren't always distributed to all households ▪ Message can be lost in all the ads 	
Advertisements	Paid advertisements in newspapers or magazines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be expensive ▪ Must be kept short 	
Feature Stories	A story written about the project or consultation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No control over the content or when it is published 	
Media Releases		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Media may not use it ▪ May be placed in a poor location in the paper or at a poor time on radio or TV 	
Television or Radio Interviews, etc	To be part of the consultation process, the interviewee must explain that feedback is welcomed and advise how people can comment on the issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May have less control over content, depending on the questions 	
Information Gathering			

Mailed Surveys or Questionnaires	Mailed randomly to sample population or to all households, to get specific information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide statistically valid, quantitative data, which often is seen as more "valid" • May get people who don't attend meetings • Provides input from a cross-section of the population, not just activists • Many people find it a more comfortable way to share their thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response rates are usually low • Expensive to ensure getting statistically valid results • Can get lost in all the "junk mail" • Difficult for people from CALD backgrounds or those with literacy issues
Telephone Surveys	A random sample of the population by telephone to get specific information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide statistically valid, quantitative data, which often is seen as more "valid" • May get people who don't attend meetings • Cross-section of the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More expensive and involves more labour than mailed surveys • Low response rates • Many citizens dislike the invasiveness of phone calls to their home • Many people screen phone calls • Declining number of people with landlines
Internet Survey	Web based survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May attract people who don't attend meetings • Gets input from a wider range of the population • Higher response rates if well promoted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't control the geographic area of response
Face to Face Questionnaire	Can be completed at home or at events etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides good data • Can reach a range of people • Can be more personal • Can get more in-depth information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Can be difficult to organise • People may not be interested

More Interactive Methods		
Stakeholder Interviews	One-on-one meetings with stakeholders to gain information to help design public consultation or to work on consensus building. Facilitated meeting process to draw on best practice, past and present, and set the stage for innovative visualisation of the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for in-depth information exchange Permits feedback from all stakeholders Solicits full participation in change Encourage commitment to change as a process Time and labour intensive As stakeholders bring only their views and issues, needs to be combined with other techniques
Appreciative Inquiry		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard for those who prefer a "problem solving" focus
Critical Incident Technique	When reviewing services etc a facilitated process that requests a story about the best and the worse incidents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows a full range of information to emerge on a service or issue
Citizen Juries	Before a public audience, a small group of citizens forms a panel to learn about an issue from expert witnesses, cross examine witnesses to explore the issues, and make recommendations to the decision-maker.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good opportunity to thoroughly explore an issue before the public Public can identify with the jury members Good way to gauge public opinion Requires high level of labour and a sufficient number of experts
Charrettes	A group exercise in which participants re-design project features or create options around an issue. Usually undertaken over a number of days. A common method used in urban design, it also is appropriate as a process of multi-stakeholder planning for the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good for problem solving and creative thinking Brings together lots of information with stakeholders and decision-makers working together Participating stakeholders may not be seen as representative Labour and time intensive

Community Fairs and Events	A central community event with multiple activities to provide project information and raise awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focuses public attention on the issue ▪ Invites media coverage ▪ Allows for information sharing at a number of levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public must want to attend ▪ Requires sufficient resources to do well ▪ May be expensive to do, if using professional displays ▪ Requires good facilitation to be productive ▪ Can be hijacked or dominated ▪ Only vocal people will speak up ▪ Can polarise people – unpredictable outcome ▪ Can be difficult to get people to attend unless the issue is of major interest
Community Meetings or Forums	Formal meetings, often with presentations at the start.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If well planned, provides participants with the opportunity to learn and speak out ▪ Opportunity to hear a range of views ▪ Can be cost effective 	
World Cafes	A meeting process with simultaneous conversations among groups of 4, using predetermined questions. People randomly change tables at set intervals. A good debrief is required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fosters open and significant conversation on specific subjects ▪ Can draw out shared issues ▪ Provides a range of perspectives ▪ More comfortable for participants than a formal meeting ▪ Allows people to work in small groups without facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Groups can get off track from the topic if not well planned ▪ Can only cover a small number of topics ▪ Good planning needed to ensure the data is collected and fed back to participants
Open House	A facility with several exhibit spaces, each devoted to a separate issue. People can tour at their own pace or have guides to take them through the exhibits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage one-on-one or small group discussion ▪ Can help to increase the credibility of the decision-maker ▪ Can have technical experts present to answer difficult questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quite staff intensive ▪ May draw activists ▪ Viewers may not provide input

e-Consultation	Electronic discussion groups or chat rooms etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can allow decision-makers to engage with citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cannot control the geographic reach ▪ Some people may not have access to computers or the internet
Consulting with existing Community Groups	Small meetings or can be in conjunction with another event.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunity to engage in in-depth conversation in their space ▪ Accessing already existing networks ▪ Can work well to clarify expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May be narrowly focused ▪ Special interest groups can be confrontational ▪ Depends on the extent of networks and relationships
Delphi Technique	To elicit information and judgements from experts or participants to facilitate problem-solving, planning and decision-making. Information is exchanged via mail, facsimile or email.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Takes advantage of participants' creativity ▪ Capitalises on the merits of group problem-solving ▪ Minimises the liabilities of group problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relies heavily on one person – the coordinator ▪ Labour and time intensive for the coordinator
Expert Panels	Public meeting with a panel of experts who are questioned – by media, a facilitator, or the public. The experts should have different perspectives on the issue, project or options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public can participate after the formal questioning session ▪ Permits a more balanced discussion ▪ Clarify technical information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires extensive organisation ▪ May increase visibility of issues of public concern

Focus Groups and Work shops	Groups of between 5-20 people to obtain input into a decision. Usually led by a trained facilitator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Works well for a selected target audience ▪ Generates a range of opinions ▪ Can explore issues in-depth ▪ Can explore issues brought up at the time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need a skilled facilitator to avoid domination by a minority or one person ▪ Many people aren't comfortable speaking in public ▪ Can miss out on issues when engaging more narrowly in in-depth discussion ▪ May be difficult to analyse all the information ▪ Time consuming ▪ Not representative
Future Search Conference	Focuses on the future. A planning tool that involves stakeholders in a carefully managed process (usually 2 days) that emphasis communication, mutual learning and participants undertaking agreed outcomes. The goals are achieving consensus on desired outcomes and an action plan to achieve them. Can involve large numbers of people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involve large number of people in making major change decisions ▪ Each individual becomes better informed in this process ▪ Can create change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Takes 2-3 days ▪ Logistically complex ▪ May not get complete commitment from all stakeholders ▪ Expensive
Open Space Technology	No predetermined speakers or topics. Participants identify the topics for discussion and others participate according to their interests. Can be used on very large groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides opportunity for people to be creative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Important issues can be lost in the process ▪ Not productive if not carefully prepared around a strong focus

Real Time Strategic Change	Large groups of stakeholders with diverse knowledge and competing needs are brought together and through a designed series of interactive steps, are enabled to align their needs, become motivated and move towards necessary change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each group has a piece of the jigsaw to contribute to creating a decision, option or solution for the community or organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labour intensive May not achieve consensus May not get full commitment from all parties
Simulation Games	Exercises that simulate project decisions to test solution or explore a situation to determine appropriate responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permits debate, especially on difficult subjects Allows people to explore issues from other perspectives Can be used as a training tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires time and good preparation People may not be willing/comfortable engaging fully in role-playing May not lead to consensus Decision-makers or committee sponsors must be flexible and listen Community may not see the Committee as representative Requires time and resources May be political appointments
Steering or Advisory Committees	A group of representative stakeholders, sometimes with representatives of the decision-makers, who provide advice on a specific project or issue (steering committee) or on an ongoing basis (advisory committee).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides expertise and permits move in-depth analysis Participants gain understanding of other perspectives, encouraging consensus building Easy, regular access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of participants is determined by logistics Can invite protesters
Tours and Field Trips	Provide tours for key stakeholders, elected officials, advisory group members, media etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to develop rapport with key people Makes the choices more familiar and less likely that people react strongly to the unfamiliar 	

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Victorian Local Governance Association Lets Talk: *A consultation framework*

About the author

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