



International Association
for Public Participation
AUSTRALASIA

State of the Practice Report Card

An Assessment of Public Participation in Victoria

March 2010

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This State of the Practice Report is a first.

As such it has all of the hallmarks of a brand new development - excitement, pride, commitment, and a few rough edges. It is our intention to polish the rough edges as we rollout the initiative across Australasia, learning as we go. It is a new development that we are committed to.

We are committed to this development as part of our organisation's strategic direction to advance the practice of public participation in Australasia. To advance the practice, we need to know where we stand now, what progress we are making and where best to focus our efforts.

It is our role as a practice and professional leader to communicate this to other stakeholders, communities and decision makers so they too can reflect on their practice of public participation.

IAP2 Australasia intends to take a regular snapshot of the state of the practice in each Australian state and in New Zealand.

Our sneaky purpose behind the report and the project is to over time use this as a lever and talking point to advance our practice to more communities, more organisations and to have greater impact in those communities and organisations.

We will do this, as you would expect, by engaging members, decision makers and community members. Our questions are simple: Are the foundations in place for good practice? Does the practice reach into all organisations and communities? and ... Does the practice make a difference to the decision making influence of people and the decision making of organisations?

My thanks to the practitioners, members and volunteers of Victoria for letting us start in your state. We are grateful for your leadership in this area.

Over time this work will be both a repository for the stories and evidence of the impact of public participation and will become a lightning rod for those interested in taking our practice even further.

Anne Pattillo

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Background

This 'snapshot' of public participation in Victoria was created in March 2010. It was the first attempt by IAP2 Australasia to 'measure' the state of the practice of public participation.

This report card was created using a replicable, evidence-based, participatory evaluation process informed by a range of qualitative and quantitative data.

In the context of increasing public and private sector interest in effective public participation and growing community demand for a more meaningful voice in decision making, it seemed timely to take stock of the ways in which community engagement is being practiced. IAP2 Australasia took the lead by initiating a project that aims to produce a short and informative 'State of the Practice report' for public participation in Victoria. This report card is part of a broader effort to expand the evidence base around the impact of community engagement and ensure that the practice is transparent and robust. It is the intention of IAP Australasia to conduct similar 'snapshots' of the state of public participation practice across all states and territories of Australia and New Zealand and deepen initial findings by repeating this process regularly in the future.

This report was derived from findings from a reflective workshop, held over one day and attended by a variety of public participation practitioners. A list of participants can be found in Appendix 1. Named an 'Evaluation Summit', participants undertook a rigorous process in piloting newly developed methodology, analysing qualitative and quantitative data, and debating appropriate key outcomes and issues. The workshop culminated in the development of recommendations for future practice. The evaluation process ensured that judgments made accurately reflected the values and priorities of those people who work in community engagement roles with Local and State Government as facilitators, project managers and consultants.

Key questions this report aims to address are:

1. What are the foundations of community engagement in Victoria? In particular:
 - *What interest is there in learning about public participation in Victoria?*
 - *What training and support is available to practitioners?*
 - *What are the barriers to building the foundations of public participation in Victoria?*
2. What is the reach of public participation in Victoria? In particular:
 - *Who is initiating community engagement?*
 - *What type of engagement is happening?*
 - *What are the barriers to reach?*
3. What is the quality of public participation in Victoria? In particular:
 - *What is the quality of practice like at each level of the IAP2 Spectrum?*
4. What is the impact of public participation in Victoria?
 - *What are the key positive and negative impacts of public participation in Victoria?*
 - *Examples of impact on communities*
 - *Examples of impact on organisations*
 - *Examples of impact on decision makers*

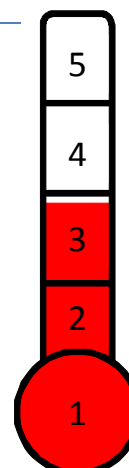
Foundations

What are the foundations of community engagement in Victoria? In particular:

- *What interest is there is learning about public participation in Victoria*
- *What training is being undertaken by practitioners*
- *What are the barriers to building the foundations of public participation in Victoria?*

Public participation appears to be at a pivotal turning point in Victoria. Membership of IAP2 has increased dramatically over the last few years; there are now 178 members in Victoria and local IAP2 events attracted over 280 people in 2009. Many events were sold out. Increasing numbers of people are undertaking training through a dozen different external service providers, as well as building their capacity through new media tools.

With the growth in opportunities for capacity building in community engagement comes a need to ensure that the potential of quality public participation is not undermined by a lack of leadership, tokenistic or compliance focused use of the principles of engagement and the disparate understanding of practitioners.



Reach

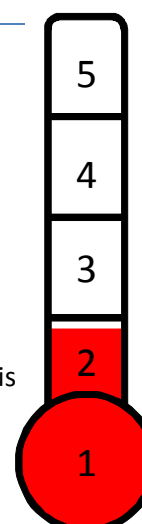
What is the reach of public participation in Victoria? In particular:

- *Who is initiating community engagement in 2009?*

Within Victoria an encouraging spread in the reach of public participation principles across State and Local Governments as well as the private and NGO sectors is being demonstrated.

These principles are increasingly being expressed in the form of published community engagement policies. Across Victoria, 38% of Councils have public participation policies in place or under development and many have dedicated human resources in this area. There is also an increasing demand from communities to be engaged in issues that affect them in more meaningful ways.

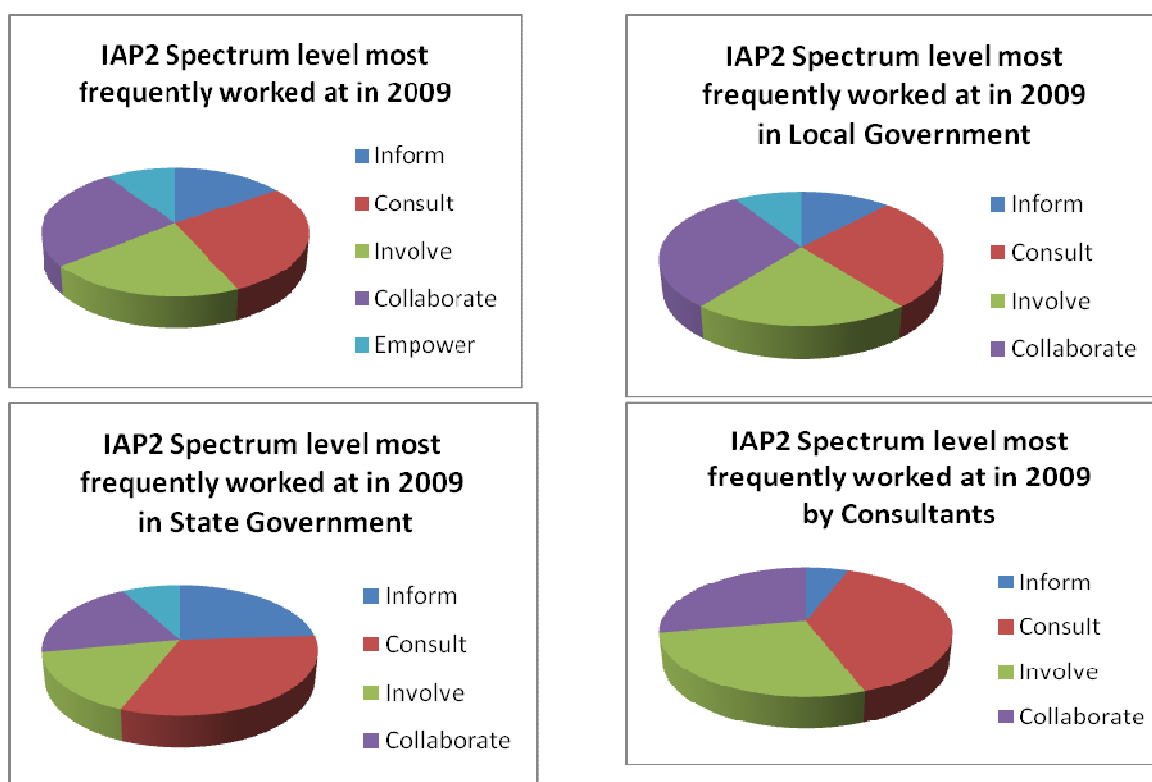
It is also encouraging to note that there are a large number of community engagement roles being advertised, with 39 positions being advertised online in one month alone in Victoria.



- *What type of engagement is happening?*

Engagement at all levels of the IAP2 spectrum is reported. The use of the language of ‘community engagement’ is becoming more common and at least four major State Government Departments have adopted IAP2 principles in various ways.

The following pie charts summarise the types of community engagement carried out by workshop participants. They may not, however, represent Victorian practice. Some participants believe that activity at the involve-collaborate-empower end of the IAP2 Spectrum is over reported, perhaps because workshop participants did not constitute a representative sample of practitioners.



- *What are the barriers to reach?*

It appears that the breadth of exposure to the principles of public participation is yet to be accompanied by a high level commitment to effective practice. While the penetration of public participation at a project implementation level is reported to be reasonably good, it does not appear to be reaching into the heart of State Government policy making. Much community engagement is conducted in an *ad-hoc* fashion with limited reflection or strategic guidance. Conversely, there is considerable informal community engagement being conducted successfully at a local level that may not be being recognised or captured effectively.

The reach of community engagement often also seems to be limited to those community groups that are easy to access and the key stakeholders in the issue rather than the wider community.

Quality

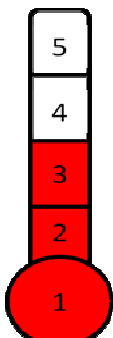
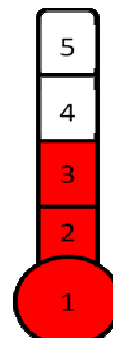
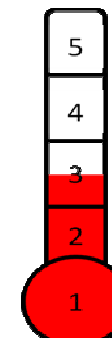
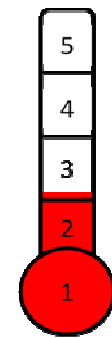
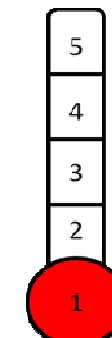
What is the quality of public participation in Victoria?

The quality of public participation in Victoria is generally viewed positively with the majority of participants rating the quality of the practice in their workplace as greater than 5 out of 10. Victorian practice also compares favourably nationally. Two (out of three) of the winners in the 2008 IAP2 Core Values awards came from Victoria. Practitioners reported that the highest quality practice involved meaningful public input into an initiative from design phase through to delivery, in ways that are responsive to stakeholder concerns and engage them conceptually.

Poor quality practice was identified as engagement that did not reach beyond active citizens into the wider community or failed to influence decision makers. It was also associated with particular sectors of governance, such as policy development, that remains relatively closed to meaningful public participation. Many practitioners identified internal barriers to improving public participation, particularly the need for greater opportunities to build relationships across internal silos.

While there appears to be growing efforts to take community engagement seriously, it still appears that organisations are not engaging early enough. Evidence indicates that while engagement may be on the rise, many communities are still not receiving feedback with regard to how their engagement has influenced the outcome.

- *What is the quality of practice like at each level of the IAP2 Spectrum?*

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Inform quality rating	Consult quality rating	Involve quality rating	Collaborate quality rating	Empower quality rating
				
Reason for rating	Reason for rating	Reason for rating	Reason for rating	Reason for rating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informing is generally done to minimise risk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decision makers fear losing power and managing risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plans and commitments around public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confusion around what collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • few examples of this occurring • examples of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> informing is often not done in a way that creates public understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discussions overly limited by non-negotiable elements results of consultation can be more clearly communicated poor information makes consultation ineffective disingenuous consultation. 	<p>involvement are not always acted on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involvement is too generic to be seen by the public as valuable 	<p>means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> issue is getting decision makers involved in the process and owning the outcomes then delivering on commitments. 	<p>empowered communities might not meet other criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> there are options for delegated decision making such as the citizens' jury in Surf Coast Shire
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Impact

What are the positive impacts of public participation in Victoria in 2009?

At the workshop, participants shared stories about the impacts of community engagement. A selection of these stories, lightly edited, appear as vignettes in Appendix 2.

There are numerous examples of how public participation influenced decision making. Examples came from various jurisdictions and include:

- outcomes from participatory summits remaining in the Local Government community plan despite a new Council that is hostile to the previous process of the (commissioning) Council
- decision makers implementing the recommendations of a 'working group'
- engagement of the service providers and hearing unexpected information that influenced the direction of the thinking of a Council

There are also examples of where engagement has influenced community strengthening; in one example the community was brought together and was said to have 'found its voice'. In another case participants changed their positions with regard to an issue on learning more about the topic.

There are also concrete examples of how engagement has led to tangible outcomes such as a key local heritage asset being saved and a new library being built. In other cases the positive impact of engagement was reduced project risk.

What are the key negative areas of impact in Victoria in 2009?

There are also some examples of negative impact from poorly executed public participation. Negative impacts included citizens feeling excluded and a loss of trust. In one case, negative views regarding Government by community were reinforced. In other cases, poor engagement led to project failure, adverse media coverage, and increased financial cost.

Some examples of significant impact in Victoria

"[As a result] of citizens being excluded from a process that they were not seen to be a part of from the start ... 3 years of work ... now needs major revision and it was an awakening for that town in terms of participation, the likes of which people hadn't been seen for 10 or 15 years, when people

tried to block McDonald's from coming into that town. So it was a great catalyst for community action and community togetherness to find a voice for itself" [Vignette 1]

"For me it is a reminder of the under estimation of a community and its power to mobilise ... The community had identified ... a goal, they knew how to get there, they had access to resources internally within its own members. It also knew how to get, through those members, access to resources out of its reach at that particular time. So they went ahead and did it." [Vignette 2]

"The biggest change ... wasn't just that there was an increase in understanding and that there wasn't the fear there anymore. With climate change a lot of people initially thought it was something to be scared of, it was something we couldn't address, it was something out of their hands, but these women felt empowered that they could change behaviour" [Vignette 3]

"One of the difficult things in any organisation is about renewal and transference of the learning they can get out of these things. Since we held that large community summit [Port Phillip Speaks]... we have not only got a new Council, we have a new set of executives, we have a new executive level ... and about half our managers are new. So the key decision makers were not around when we did that innovative community summit, so it is like we have had to re-expose them to what we can do. So being able to bring back the [polling] technology and being able to demonstrate the processes again [at smaller summits about trees and open space] was terrific. Councillors were a little bit cynical about [the process] but I think [they] really saw how engaged the community was, and how they enjoyed it. So I think it has been very positive." [Vignette 4]

"[The answer] is all about getting the decision makers scoping up the project right from the start, and that wasn't done. So because of that, basically senior management and Councillors were playing a back seat role until they saw that they weren't going to get what they wanted, and then ... it was a very big learning curve – oh yeah. One of the first two things that we talk about now in our process is: "Do you have internal commitment?" [Vignette 5]

"By giving them that right information we were able to make the case back to Council for a budget increase ... We haven't started to build yet [but] the community is still asking how their library is coming on. Everyone felt very proud: instead of being battered into community engagement, there is a sense of pride, connection and ownership. I don't think we will be taken to VCAT on this; I think everyone will be happy." [Vignette 6]

"So they wanted to do an event, announcing this Neighbourhood Renewal thing coming to town, and also the announcement of funding that might come with it ... I was able to influence and turn it into ... a community expo. ... I had in my mind this vision, of all these Neighbourhood Renewal program kind of people and all these bureaucratic officials sitting in the front row seeing this and really feeling 'hey, there is a lot in this community that we are building on here that we really need to acknowledge and report'. [Vignette 7]

Recommendations

At the conclusion of the reflective workshop on the state of public participation in Victoria, participants developed the following recommendations for future practice.

1. Make training more accessible and tailored to different levels

To ensure that public participation reaches the next level of maturity in Victoria, community of practitioners need more sophisticated training and professional support services, a higher degree of systemisation and agreed quality ratings for both training and practice. A review of the current training on offer is recommended with a view to making training opportunities more accessible and recognising varying levels of public participation expertise. Specifically it is recommended that:

- training costs are reduced
- one day and online training options are developed
- higher level training programs are developed
- training materials reviewed to include more examples and exercises that are relevant to Australia.

2. Advocate to key decisions makers

A need was identified for more targeted and strategic advocacy around public participation in Victoria that aims to engage key decision makers and potential leaders in the area. Specifically it is recommended that:

- higher profile deliberative marketing to Local, State and Commonwealth Government agencies, CEOs and Directors are targeted for attendance at key events
- a Victorian Charter for Community Engagement is considered for development.

3. Ensure Tools/Resources send the right messages

Design graphic of IAP2 Spectrum to show:

- participation process as less linear
- the collaborate/empower areas as 'do-able' versus high risk

4. Research

- Conduct an environmental scan/audit of legislation for the word 'consult' and check if what is meant is really a public notice – e.g. Local Government community plans and budget

5. Build the evidence base

There is a lack of persuasive evidence around the benefits of public participation. It is recommended that this area be investigated and pursued by IAP2:

- specifically collect more case studies of practice
- offer guidelines on how to evaluate community engagement
- collect an evidence base of evaluations that have been done in Victoria
- explore additional secondary data sources.

It should be noted that reach cannot be defined solely by the adoption of formal community engagement strategies and frameworks. Thought also needs to be given to how to effectively reflect ongoing informal community engagement work. To gain a better picture of how far and wide the principles of public participation have spread, a systematic measurement of projects involving community engagement against agreed on industry bench marks is needed. These bench marks would relate to acceptable practice or an indicator matrix to measure evidence of meaningful and genuine public participation. Due to the distinctive way different sectors work, it would be valuable to measure and understand the diverse ways the principles are being applied sector by sector. For IAP2 members this could be recorded by IAP2 in a data base.

There are number of existing mechanisms that could be employed more systematically to collect data on the reach of public participation principles including the Victorian Government community satisfaction survey. New mechanisms worth exploring would include resident feedback panels, State and Local Government audits, and a census covering breadth, depth and meaningfulness of engagement.

In order to fully understand capacity building needs and to confirm the anecdotal findings, more structured research around current practice is needed. Additionally, stronger evidence around why community engagement is important and the real and hidden costs associated with it would create a more robust foundation for advocating for the process within organisations. This should include evidence about the cost of not engaging and look at engagement across organisations as well as with citizens.

Appendix 1: Participants in the Workshop

The Evaluation Summit Workshop to pilot the process and evaluate the state of public participation practice in Victoria was held on 26 March 2010 at the Centre for Adult Education in Melbourne.

The following 36 people took part.

Carol	Bartley	Abigroup
Keith	Greaves	AKA Projects
Amy	Hubbard	Capire Consulting Group
Deb	Ganderton	City of Boroondara
Geoff	Robbins	City of Casey
Desley	Renton	City of Melbourne
Jennifer	Stone	City of Port Phillip
Lindy	Amos	Collective Possibilities Pty Ltd
Fran	Woodruff	Context Pty Ltd
Chad	Foulkes	Deakin University
Frankie	MacLennan	Department of Sustainability and Environment
Ty	Newton	Department of Planning and Community Development
Mark	Noonan	Department of Planning and Community Development
Dr Jess	Dart	FACILITATOR
Bethany	Davies	FACILITATOR
Katherine	Teh-White	Futureye
Sandra	Jerkovic	Hydro Tasmania Consulting
Heather	Barton	IAP2 Australasia
Moira	Deslandes	IAP2 International
Stephanie	Boone-Shaw	IAP2 International
Terry	Koch	IAP2 International
Gale	Simpson	IAP2 International
Amelia	Shaw	IAP2 International
Jane	Kuchins	City of Knox
Nicole	Biscan	Melbourne Water
Allison	Watt	Nillumbik Shire Council
Anne	Pattillo	Pattillo
Bruce	Turner	Phoenix Facilitation Pty Ltd
Vivian	Garde	South East Water
Lucy	Cole-Edelstein	Straight Talk Pty Ltd
Kimbra	White	Thorne Partners
Annie	Bolitho	University of Melbourne
Lyn	Carson	University of Sydney
Kim	Sweetnam	Warrnambool City Council
Simon	Wright	Wellington City Council
Toni	Meek	Yarra Valley Water

Appendix 2: Vignettes about Impact of Public Participation

Participants in the Evaluation Summit Workshop verbally recounted their stories relating to the impact of public participation in Victoria. A selection of lightly edited stories are included here as vignettes.

Domain: Community

Vignette 1

Community found its voice

This is a story that started when a rural Council was [addressing] a land use planning issue. As Councils do in Victoria, they needed to say to the government where they will accommodate growth and how much growth they will accommodate. This Council was looking to identify a huge long term growth in a corridor and it paid a group of consultants to come in and produce a detailed framework for 1km and a more overarching plan for a larger distance.

The community engagement involved in this project was initially very minimal and was limited in the numbers of people and numbers of opportunities citizens had in the processes that lead to these two plans, and the structure plan didn't have anything that was an alarm for the community at this point in time. However, looking at such a large piece of land and talking about a population that would double or triple the size of the town, which had doubled or tripled in the previous 10 – 20 years, was of alarm to the community.

A four-day inquiry-by-design process was run by the consultants and there was extremely limited citizen participation and extremely limited participation by landholders who weren't represented by developers. When it came to the final day of enquiry, when the consultants were making decisions and capturing ideas on paper and recording everything to present to Council, the consultants asked everyone who was not a landowner and everyone who was not a developer, to leave the room. So the few citizens that were in there were then marched out of the room unceremoniously.

At this point there was already a lot of community outrage, and a couple of action groups had been formed against it ... that turned into over 2,800 submissions to council. It resulted in national media attention, on television and in newspapers, and this was sustained over a six-month period. There was a protest rock concert put on which a couple of thousand people attended, hundreds of people in red shirts who had nothing to do with the issue turned up to Council meetings and when the issue was dealt with Council had to hold the Council meeting in a venue other than their offices because it couldn't accommodate in the gallery, the number of people who wanted to attend.

[As a result] of citizens being excluded from a process that they were not seen to be a part of from the start, at the point of decision making [this] led to this pressure of 2,800-plus submissions and numerous phone calls and subsequent public meetings by Council once the consultants had left. Council started to take hold of some of the community engagements that were happening.

At a public meeting where they were considering the plan, Council resolved unanimously to throw out the proposal that the consultant had done at substantial expense and not to start again but rather to acknowledge that some work had been done, and to go back and visit the earlier structure plan (from two years previous) work that had been done and undo quite a bit of work that had been happening over a 2 – 3 year period. So in terms of impact, it was three years of work that wasn't lost

but now needs major revision and it was an awakening for that town in terms of participation, the likes of which people hadn't been seen for 10 or 15 years, when people tried to block McDonald's from coming into that town. So it was a great catalyst for community action and community togetherness to find a voice for itself, which it had lost or wasn't sure of. There were some really great community strengthening benefits to this process.

The consultants I don't think will be used again by council in the short or hopefully long term. These consultants were a group of people who had all of the different types of expertise that were needed in land use planning, environment sensitivity, heritage, etc. but they didn't have anyone that was listed as a facilitator or a community engagement person. This was just seen as something the consultant group could take upon themselves to deliver - but they couldn't. It was the largest and most public community engagement failure in the recent history of the Council.

A by-product or unexpected outcome was the community finding its voice to the tune of over 2,800 submissions, which stopped the planned development progressing, and the Council deciding to re-consider its position in a substantial way.

Council is about to re-visit its growth plan and has involved handpicked citizens from a range of community groups in framing the project structure. The involvement of citizens at this stage was perceived by these citizens as a worthwhile exercise and several of them agreed to put their name to official Council media releases stating the project is about to start and that they are happy with the direction it is headed.

Postscript: The Council employed a project manager, distributed targeted requests to tender to deliver the community engagement part of the project and gave potential tenderers less than one week to respond. And this for a project which is investigating growth patterns to the year 2050. So have they learnt anything? Perhaps yes, perhaps not enough.

Vignette 2

The community realised they could take control

The engagement process was fundamentally about community infrastructure and shared spaces. I guess it was a partnership between State and Local [Governments] and a range of community members and a not-for-profit organisation (NFP). [The] engagement was led essentially by the NFP organisation so it was really a bottom-up process, but what became evident was that the people involved in ... generating the engagement, weren't thinking broadly about roles, potential partners, the political landscape, the capacity of the community and the individuals themselves. And then, I guess in lieu of that, they ran a series of engagement workshops, I would say loosely, to go about determining what the priorities were and what that might look like.

Suffice to say that [around] the middle of that, the community self-mobilised, came up with its own processes. Quite articulately it developed its vision, its actions, and strategies. They then hired a consultant to write it up and presented this to the range of authorities that had been leading [the engagement]. Then ... the story was ... carried forward if you like by a range of stakeholders and presented to Government. It was then funded and ended up in a shed facility that was shared by, I think, community services, a range of community authorities and local clubs. For me it is a reminder of the under estimation of a community and its power to mobilise and utilise which asset is needed. But then, there is also the professionalisation of the expert in these particular circumstances, riding in on a white horse [saying] "we will come in and make this thing". [The community] didn't need to be saved, it had moved on. The community had already identified ... what they had as a goal, they knew how to get there, and they had access to resources internally within its own members. The community also knew how to get through those members to get access to resources out of its reach at that particular time. So they went ahead and did it. Organisations were too big, too slow;

governments were too big, too slow; [the community], they just got on and did it, and what do you know, it got done.

Vignette 3

Change: women empowered to create change

I am talking about a project called the Rural Women Dry and Climate Change Project. It is a project that has been funded by Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) and the Office of Women's Policy. We did an evaluation of the project in late 2008 and 2009. There was an interim evaluation and the final evaluation was completed in July 2009. Because the two stages of evaluation demonstrated the success of the project, there has been ongoing funding.

I will talk a little bit about the program and what the evaluation told us. The project involved five Co-ordinators across Victoria being appointed by DPCD. Their role was to engage with local women through local networks to get them to initially talk about climate change and drought and some of the concerns that they have, because they are all in an information vacuum in rural communities. A lot of the information goes to the men folk, but it doesn't actually go to the women.

We found initially that women didn't understand climate change, they didn't want to ask questions, they didn't know where they would ask the questions, or who they would try and ask the questions of. So the project itself involved the five Coordinators really mobilising the women in their areas. They used resources to design and implement their own engagement or education strategies, so there wasn't 'one size fits all', there were a whole range of engagement techniques used from lunches in the Barwon South region, to road trips on buses in lower Mallee, to discussion groups to on-line forums. So there was a whole broad range of tools and techniques used across the state.

The role of the Co-ordinator was to support, disseminate information and just to ensure that there was momentum. In the end some of the Co-ordinators really took a step back and the community members were designing up their own tools and going out and rolling them out.

So we came in and we did the evaluation. It was a very successful program and the success was really about the women designing the engagement process for their own women on behalf of their own women in that region, and the flexibility in the terms and techniques and the fact that it was really just volunteer time. That was all they needed plus the overarching support of the Co-ordinator.

The biggest change we found in the communities was from interviewing the women who had been involved with all the Co-ordinators. It wasn't just that there was an increase in understanding and that there wasn't the fear there anymore. With climate change a lot of people initially thought it was something to be scared of, it was something we couldn't address, it was something out of their hands, but these women felt empowered that they could change behaviour – so it was a sense of empowerment - that is what has been achieved.

The Co-ordinators were in permanent positions or, towards the end of the funding period, but what they found was that when the Co-ordinator came in, they would engage a group of women in a certain community, and then the Co-ordinator would step back and provide advice or information and then move to a new community. A lot of these groups just ran by themselves, women supporting women. It was great – and it created a whole lot of other benefits, because of the social isolation, and sharing of resources and there is a lot of depression in regional areas as well. So there were some other benefits with the projects as well.

Domain: Organisations

Vignette 4

Internal skills development

This story is about [some impacts of] the 2007 City of Port Phillip community summit called “Port Phillip Speaks”. It was a process that had 750 [demographically representative] participants, and was co-designed with America Speaks. People were given documentation weeks beforehand as background reading that framed the full day sessions, and people got to discuss in round-table format, debate different points of view, then personally reflect and cast their own vote on a number of issues [using a polling technology]. [The summit] ended up [with] a prioritised list for action that informed the development of the community plan ... It was a huge undertaking, a really large investment, but it was perceived as being worthwhile because it was for a 10 year plan.

We have made a film about it, and one of the most powerful things in the film is the people who are being interviewed as they came out. They gave up a whole day of their weekend and they were tired but they were really energised, really. It was like they had learnt a lot ... the evaluation results were 85% learnt new stuff and something like 75% changed their minds on the issues. I think that was pretty powerful ... [Despite a new Council that has distanced itself from the work of the previous Council that sponsored Port Phillip Speaks, the summit’s actions are still underway] the core values of the new plan and still live on.

One of the difficult things in any organisation is about renewal and transference of the learning they can get out of these things. Since we held that large community summit [Port Phillip Speaks]... we have not only got a new Council, we have a new set of Executives, we have a new Executive level ... and about half our Managers are new. So the key decision makers were not around when we did that innovative community summit, so it is like we have had to re-expose them to what we can do. So being able to bring back the [polling] technology and being able to demonstrate the processes again [at smaller summits about trees and open space] was terrific. Councillors were a little bit cynical about [the process] but I think [they] really saw how engaged the community was, and how they enjoyed it. So I think it has been very positive in terms of the people working in open space, engaged in a brand new way of getting this solid input from the community ... on some of those very grass roots issues that people really care about ...

I put out invitation to every staff member in the organisation for people who were interested in either utilising their present skills or learning new skills around facilitating a conversation [by] being table facilitators [at the tree summits]. I have now got a body of about 30 people who put their hands up; I am providing training courses and support for them now, and they volunteer each time we do one of these [gatherings]. They can have paid time in lieu, they get pats on the back and they are really enjoying it and getting lots out of it ... so it is really starting to build a momentum for us, building on this sort of work in the organisation. It is us building the capacity in-house rather than buying it in.

Vignette 5

Implementing a Key Step to Clarify the Parameters of Community Consultations

My example is a strategy, an art strategy. The area needed an art strategy, it ... was an urban plus regional sort of place, so [a] very broad, very diverse community. An art strategy was seen as important. A consultant was engaged, briefed, [then] consulted with a whole range of arts groups as well as recreational type groups. It was a very broad consultation event and it was really looking at these questions – ‘What have you done? What do you need? How can you work better together? What are your aspirations?’ - that sort of thing - so it was a really good community based consultation.

That came together in the strategy, and the strategy included stuff like, ‘listen [to] what you guys really need [to think] about in supporting the community, and these are some of the ways you might do it, and ... here are the ways that you can use some of your facilities ... better and really support local [initiatives]’. It was all about supporting local community arts types of activities, from craft, to performing arts, painting and stuff.

When it got to presentation stage to Council, Council said ‘Where is our Arts Centre?’. So the project was stalled dead. It was a real problem; the problem lay in the scoping and the difference in expectations of the administration, the Councillors and the community.

[The answer] is all about having the decision makers scope up the project right from the start, and that wasn’t done. So because of that, basically senior management and Councillors were playing a back seat role until they saw that they weren’t going to get what they wanted, and then ... it was a very big learning curve – oh yeah.

One of the first two things that we talk about now in our process is: ‘Do you have internal commitment? ... Has there been a resolution of Council, or a decision of senior management that has passed this responsibility on, and what are the parameters?’ [Then] it is very clear that you understand what the project is and you understand who is making the decisions. So [once] all your ducks are lined up, you have your decision makers in place, the project is scoped.

Domain: Decision Makers

Vignette 6

Budget Increase Approved for a Community Preferred Plan

My story is about a Local Government capital works project. We have Camberwell Centre which is large, to the extent it was used for Town Hall dances, swap meets, and rug sales. It was a great community asset that was under-utilised and it was leased out to Spotless Catering. [At the same time] we felt that there was a strategic need to find a home for the Camberwell Library and to create more office space ...

So [Councillors] decided that we could build but just what would be the scope of the project? They wanted us to go into the community and find out. Did the community want a performance space or not? Did they think it would be an appropriate home for the library? If so, what did they want to see in the library, particularly a library of the future? ...

We have 7,000 library users a day and they wanted to be consulted. They are very passionate ... We decided that we would run a couple of sessions at the library with the architects to do an overview of what we thought we had heard from our [previous work on] strategies; what the needs were? So

we sort of did a stakeholder analysis [and there were] the library users and the librarians, there was also the Heritage Society members who wanted to be involved; there was also the internal staff ... The kind of questioning that we wanted to do was: 'what you would like to see in the library?' We did visuals of styles of furniture, styles of art. We wanted to know whether it was sleek or modern, or whether it was baroque, chic or shabby chic or whatever. So we tested that in a number of forums, including e-kiosks [in] five libraries. We had many, many hits from those but particularly from [kids] in the 8 – 16 year old range, a sector that we don't normally engage with. They just got it, and we also had a lot from grandparents. You can just imagine the kids saying 'what are you doing? Oh, let me look at this' because it was highly visual. So we have now adopted that, we have bought five kiosks, and we program them for all of our consultations, to capture that market, the old and the young.

We ran forums for library users. We just did a random selection to invite 200 – 250 [people by] special invitation to air their views, to have a conversation around what they would like to see in the library, to test our thinking and to also look at [whether] they want parts of the rooms kept, the performance space, and community meeting room. We had a very, very draft Concept Plan, so we were willing to throw it all out ... We did it café style, we asked people's permission to photograph and videotape and they did butchers paper and stuff like that. Again really rich information and we then repeated that for library staff ... The feedback? They still go back to all of our libraries now [saying] 'I feel so special just being invited'.

We had oodles of posters out, everyone was invited to a community event over a couple of weekends, and anyone else could come in and look at the plans and have their say. What this meant was we could get an independent report back to Council from a research point of view that did not make judgments, did not make excuses, but said they wanted a 'high tech' library, they wanted open space, a lot of natural light, and they wanted a café, and a quiet reading space. They recognised that children would like to have quiet reading spaces and that mums and dads wanted to have a look at those play areas, but they didn't actually want to be co-located reading a book.

The result is that we have now got a plan that has two separate quiet areas, with heaps and heaps of glass, we have had to increase the budget and change the plans because of our need for natural light and we need to go to 5-star environmental sustainability- this came out as a high priority. By giving them that right information we were able to make the case back to Council for a budget increase.

We haven't started to build yet [but] the community is still asking how their library is coming on. Everyone felt very proud: instead of being battered into community engagement, there is a sense of pride, connection and ownership. I don't think we will be taken to VCAT on this; I think everyone will be happy.

Vignette 7

Realising community strengths

Neighbourhood Renewal was announced for Flemington fairly recently, towards the end of last year (2009)... With Neighbourhood Renewal coming to that location [this] meant that there was going to be a lot of activity around place management and some [new] resources going into that community. And what it also tends to bring is a fairly template approach to governance and civic participation and I guess a particular view from government about what that really looks like; fairly standardised in terms of how it is measured.

So the point that I was keen for people to understand was, that maybe the Mill is not the only thing in town. There are a lot of groups and it is a highly participatory community. So this newest thing that was coming along wasn't, well, starting from scratch. There is that assumption, blank slate; community just waiting for something to be done to them ...

So they wanted to do an event, announcing this Neighbourhood Renewal thing coming to town, and also the announcement of funding that might come with it – 'we are going to fund this and that' sort of thing. But I was able to influence and turn it into [something else], giving them the opportunity to do that but also highlighting [and] celebrating the participation that is happening within the community. We turned it into a community expo. So there were displays of dance, and singing, sporting groups [and] there were little stalls all around the sides of the hall, there were kids, old people, cultures, Vietnamese women doing their dance; it was a really exciting, happy event.

They [Government] got to get up and do their announcements stuff ... They had these announcements of funding coming in for different projects but they were a bit overshadowed by these larger celebrations of the community. I had in my mind this vision, of all these Neighbourhood Renewal program kind of people and all these bureaucratic officials sitting in the front row seeing this and really feeling, 'hey, there is a lot in this community that we are building on here that we really need to acknowledge and report'.