



# Better practice guide for inclusive engagement

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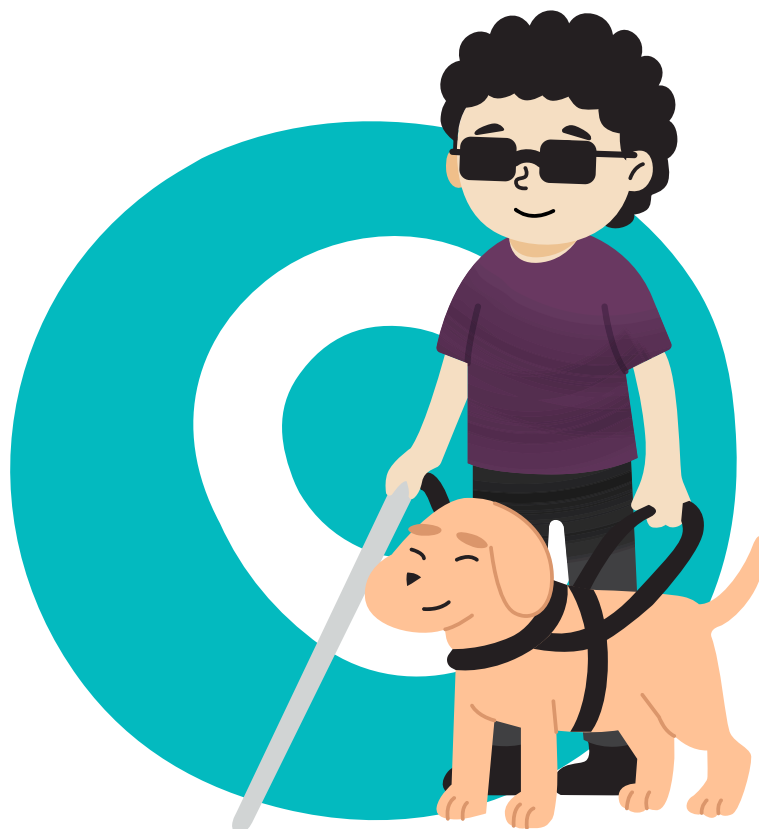
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# Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which this guide was created. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge their continuous spiritual and cultural connection to these lands and waters.

We acknowledge the importance of the Treaty process in Victoria and its potential to create a future based on self-determination and justice for Aboriginal communities.

Sovereignty was never ceded. This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

## Other acknowledgements

This guide was written by the Public Engagement branch in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. We thank all the specialists across the Victorian Public Service who contributed their expertise.

### Artwork

This artwork celebrates diversity, equality, and cultural inclusion. It was designed by Ahmed Shaie of Shaie Designs.

Ahmed wanted the artwork to portray people from a range of backgrounds, highlighting the importance of acceptance, unity, and respect within our community. It serves as a reminder that despite our differences, we all share a common humanity.



# Introduction

This guide can help you engage with community in a more inclusive way. You can use it before, during and after your engagement.

It has information about how to engage with communities in Victoria. This includes:

- First Nations people
- LGBTIQ+ people
- multicultural communities
- people with disabilities
- veterans
- older people
- young people.

## Why we created this guide

There are many reasons why sometimes we cannot engage with communities. But a fear of doing it wrong should not be one of them.

Avoiding engagement for this reason can make it difficult to build and maintain trust with the community. The annual [Edelman Trust Barometer](https://www.edelman.com/trust/trust-barometer)<sup>1</sup> shows that most Australians have declining trust in institutions.

We can build trust by understanding the needs and aspirations of the people affected by the decisions we make. We can involve them in the decision-making process. And we can be inclusive.

This is what will lead to the best outcomes.

Inclusive engagement means we can:

- create better policy
- improve service delivery
- find practical solutions to problems
- gain and grow trust
- improve quality of life for Victorians.

At its highest level, engagement can lead to greater community leadership and ownership. A resilient community can respond to and manage social harms, shock and stress.

We hope this guide gives you the confidence to engage - and keep engaging - with all members of the community.

## Who this guide is for

This guide is for anyone who engages with the community. This includes people who work in:

- local council
- state and federal government
- not-for-profit
- communications, campaigns and advertising agencies.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.edelman.com/trust/trust-barometer>

# How to use this guide

This guide can help you:

- engage better with communities
- strengthen existing good practice in your organisation
- co-design or co-create with communities
- learn more about priority communities in Victoria
- monitor and evaluate your projects.

To plan and develop your engagement, you can use our [Templates<sup>2</sup>](#).

## Create more opportunities for engagement

### Apply an intersectional approach

Many people can experience discrimination related to their identity or a personal attribute.

Intersectionality is a way of analysing interconnected and overlapping forms of discrimination. It helps us understand the effect this has on individuals and communities. It can also help you understand the barriers to engaging that organisations can create.

Organisations can create barriers in their engagement when we:

- limit time and funding
- use only one or two communication channels for promotion
- write in a way that is hard to understand
- use inaccessible or culturally unsafe physical and digital spaces
- use only one language to engage
- engage the community without allowing them to influence change
- engage the same community members every time
- do not address power imbalances between organisations and communities
- do not consider power imbalances between and within communities.

Organisations must remove these barriers for the community to engage with us. If we focus on the most marginalised and excluded people, it can help us create solutions that work for everyone.

People have busy lives and are often time poor. Many take part in engagement activities on top of work and caring responsibilities. You will need to give them enough time to:

- understand the context of the engagement (e.g. read a strategy, report or legislation)
- gather their thoughts and opinions on the matter
- share all their feedback.

Applying an intersectional approach to your engagement process will help you consider someone's unique experiences. This will help your engagement be more inclusive, accessible and equitable.



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

### Example: People with a caring role in Victoria

A person with a caring role is someone who provides unpaid care and support to partners, family, friends or community members with care needs.

In Victoria, there are more than 700,000 unpaid carers who:

- are majority women (3 out of 4)
- can be children as young as 4, with no upper age limit
- may have care needs themselves because of age, disability or illness (4 in 10 report living with disability themselves)
- have different literacy levels and may speak more than one language (1 in 5 Victorian people with a caring role were born in a non-English speaking country)
- have significant daily expenses which limits formal paid work opportunities.

## Be an inclusive organisation

If you work with community often, you or your organisation should invest in your skills. This can give you and your team the confidence to engage when there is an opportunity.

Before you begin, organise training or reflective sessions. You can organise training in:

- cultural competency
- embedding self-determination
- trauma-informed engagement and responses
- inclusion and intersectionality
- facilitation
- subconscious bias.

You can learn more about training opportunities at [The Engagement Institute](https://www.engagementinstitute.org.au/training)<sup>3</sup> and [place-based approaches](https://www.vic.gov.au/place-based-approaches)<sup>4</sup>.

To learn about creating culturally safe services and workplaces for First Nations people, consult the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework)<sup>5</sup>.

## Overcome common challenges

Doing 'best practice' engagement may not always be possible. But engaging the community should always be part of your work.

When you don't engage, you can risk:

- significant time and budget spent on work that does not meet community needs and aspirations
- relationships with stakeholders who are not supportive of the output
- declining trust from community.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.engagementinstitute.org.au/training>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/place-based-approaches>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework>

This table gives you ways to include engagement depending on the challenges you face.

Challenge	Examples
We don't have time to engage	What time can you dedicate to engagement? Even some limited engagement is better than none if it is genuine, inclusive and accessible. You can host at least one focus group or roundtable with key stakeholders or community representatives.
We don't have budget to engage	Identify opportunities for the community that do not require a lot of their time. This could be a short survey or online focus groups. People can be recognised for their time in a focus group with a gift card. You can also join existing engagement.
We want to engage but we don't want to change any of our plans or outcomes	See <b>Identify what can be influenced.</b> Remember, best practice engagement means the community can influence something. Otherwise, you're sharing information.
The community gives us feedback that we think is not relevant	Feedback from community and people with lived experience is always important to hear and consider. People who do not know the boundaries or technical language of policies, programs and funding are often overlooked. You may want to support training for community in how your institution works. This can also help build trust.

## Be aware of tokenism

If we do not establish **why** we are engaging communities, it can feel like a 'box ticking exercise'. This is when you engage communities to create the appearance of inclusivity. Often this is without providing opportunities for genuine power or influence. This is referred to as tokenism.

To avoid tokenism:

- consider whether the community will benefit from engagement – the project may not impact them
- involve the community early and consider them a key stakeholder
- engage a diverse group within that community, for example young people with disability
- engage people who experience multiple forms of discrimination and inequality. For example, young people with disability
- be clear about the scope for influence or change
- keep the community updated as the project progresses
- provide a final report, or a summary of how their insights were used
- consider opportunities for ongoing engagement, like in evaluation processes.





## Building trust

Less than half the Australian population has trust in business, government, media, and non-government organisations<sup>6</sup>.

There are many ways you can build trust with community. You can:

- attend community gatherings, meetings and events
- collaborate with local council
- acknowledge past engagement attempts
- use facilitators with relevant lived experience
- share your own connection to the issue
- listen with curiosity, empathy and compassion
- be sensitive to the cultural load of leaders – they might feel they have to represent their whole community
- respect significant cultural or religious dates.

## Maintaining trust

- Develop a culture of engagement in your organisation which values community.
- Create clear and open lines of communication.
- If previous engagement has been done, address known tension, fears and grievances.
- If your main project contact changes, do a handover with community.

For big organisations, maintain a central database of community engagement. This can prevent duplication and consultation fatigue.

## How to engage with community

The first step to engaging with community is choosing your approach.

Approach	What it means
<b>Inform</b>	The community receive information but have no direct influence on the decision.
<b>Consult</b>	The community is heard but have a low to moderate influence.
<b>Involve</b>	Community feedback is considered throughout the process. They have moderate influence.
<b>Collaborate</b>	Partner with the community in decision making. They have high influence.
<b>Empower</b>	Decision making and resources to deliver are placed in the hands of the community. High influence and ownership.

Source: [Engagement Institute \(IAP2\) Public Participation Spectrum](https://engagementinstitute.org.au/resources/iap2-public-participation-spectrum/)<sup>7</sup>.

You will know you are meaningfully engaging if the community:

- has their feedback considered
- can influence the decision or outcome
- can be part of or share responsibility for the solution
- can co-design the engagement and outcome with your team.

When both parties benefit from the engagement, it can build trust.

There are **basic**, **better** and **best** practices for engagement.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.edelman.com/au/trust/2025/trust-barometer>

<sup>7</sup> <https://engagementinstitute.org.au/resources/iap2-public-participation-spectrum/>

# Basic practice

## Identify what can be influenced

This is the first step of engagement.

Share what is negotiable, and what is non-negotiable in the work. This prevents misunderstandings and potential disputes. It also respects people's time.

To plan your engagement, you can use our [Engagement plan](#)<sup>8</sup>.

## Reflect with your team

Before you begin engagement, it is important to reflect with your team on:

- what you understand about the community
- your assumed knowledge
- unconscious bias
- what has been overlooked in past engagement.

Reflection will help you unpack your assumed knowledge about the community or project. It can then guide your research and help you reflect throughout.

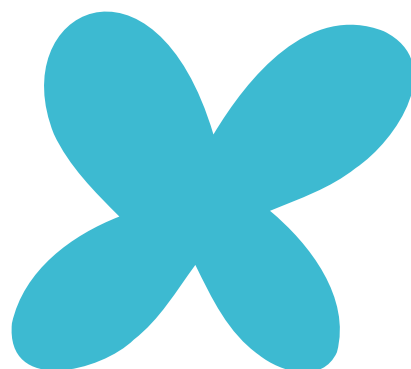
## Do your research

The next step of community engagement is to research:

- the community or audience you want to engage
- other engagement being done with the community in the sector
- existing data and information from your organisation or others
- existing advisory groups or forums
- stakeholders and organisations who have a trusted relationship with community.

This is sometimes considered optional, but it can have a big impact on the success of your engagement. Dedicate the time at the start. Some resources that can help you learn more about your audience include:

- [Community profiles](#)<sup>9</sup>
- [Language data maps](#)<sup>10</sup>
- [ABS Community profiles](#)<sup>11</sup>



8 <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

9 <https://www.vic.gov.au/community-profiles>

10 <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/mapping-languages-spoken-victoria>

11 <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data/about-census-tools/community-profiles>

## Stack engagement

Many communities are over consulted. This happens when they are asked the same questions by different organisations.

You can 'stack' your engagement with other organisations in the sector. This is because they are:

- collecting similar information
- engaging the community on the same problem
- engaging the same community on different problems.

What this could mean in practice is regular, scheduled engagement. You might plan quarterly meetings with a specific community group instead of engaging as projects or issues arise.

If you 'stack' your engagement, it can build your relationship with that community without burning them out. It also helps you and your stakeholders achieve the same goal or identify an opportunity for co-design.

If you work in a large organisation, you could keep track of engagements with the community in a calendar. This can help you 'stack' engagement over time.

## Create a plan

This should include:

- the **background** of your project
- the **aim** of your engagement – **why** are you engaging? **What** do you want to learn?
- which **organisations** work with this community with contact details
- existing **data** and research
- the level of **influence** community can have on the outcome
- how you will **engage** i.e. surveys
- how it is **inclusive and accessible** i.e. creating translations
- cross-community impact
- how you will **measure** progress
- how you will **evaluate** the project and report on the outcome
- how you will **close the loop** with community.

Keep your plan open to changes. This will allow you to assess the best information you have and adjust the plan accordingly. If you are involving community in every step, this is likely to happen.

For help creating your plan, consult the [Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025](#)<sup>12</sup>.

## Use plain language

Plain language is an internationally recognised way of writing that puts the reader first. It is a technique used across many sectors including health, legal and government.

It is not just about simplification, but about clarity. It considers:

- what readers want and need to know
- readers' level of interest, expertise and literacy skills
- the context in which readers will use the document or service.

**Source:** [International Plain Language Standard](#)<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of your audiences' literacy levels, plain language can help you engage the most people.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/public-engagement-framework-2021-2025/how-guide-public-engagement>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.iso.org/standard/78907.html>

## Plain language word tips

Tip	Explanation
Use everyday words	Use words people easily understand. Swap out complex words with everyday words. Example: 'more' instead of 'additional'.
Use the active voice	Speak directly to your reader. Examples: 'you', 'we', 'us'.
Explain acronyms and initialisms	If uncommon: write in full at first mention and again on long pages.
Cut unneeded words	Swap out long, complex phrases with shorter, simpler ones. Example: 'if' instead of 'in the event of'.
Write at a low readability level	Aim for a readability level under grade 8. To measure this, you can use <a href="https://hemingwayapp.com">Hemingway App</a> <sup>14</sup>

## Plain language format tips

Tip	Explanation
Write clear headings	Keep them accurate, specific, and short.
Shorten sentences	Average 15 words. Mix sentence lengths.
Use bullets for lists	Use bullets for unordered items. Use numbers for process steps.
Put important information first	Assume people won't read much.
Create white space	Give your reader's eyes and brains a rest. Break up content to create white space.

For more tips on accessible writing, visit the [Australian Government Style Manual](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/writing-and-designing-content/clear-language-and-writing-style)<sup>15</sup>

## Audience checklist

How does your audience:

- relate to government or institutions?
- find your information?
- like receiving information?
- know what you want them to do?



<sup>14</sup> <https://hemingwayapp.com>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/writing-and-designing-content/clear-language-and-writing-style>

# Better practice

## Involve community early

This can give you time to:

- learn more about their needs and priorities
- identify key stakeholders
- understand the different types of community leaders (formal and informal)
- ensure under-represented groups are included as well as established leaders. For example, young people, people with disability or women
- manage risks
- determine accessibility requirements
- allocate funding and resources appropriately.

When you involve community early, you must be realistic about their scope of influence. This means communicating clearly about:

- what can be influenced in the approach
- how power can or can't be shared in decision making
- how they can change the outcome.

If it is an option, you could give the community a 'list' and ask them to select the issues they want deeper engagement on. People want to be consulted when an issue is relevant and important to their world.

Often, we only engage on an issue when it is important to us. This can make people feel unheard.

## Spend time designing how you will engage

Doing engagement poorly can often be worse than not doing it at all.

Standard approaches may not work for everyone. This includes surveys, focus groups, interviews and roundtables.

If community is not engaging, they might not care about the issue. This might be an opportunity to reflect on the problems you are addressing, and what matters to community.

To design your engagement, you can use our [Checklist](#).

You can also create a [Social Story](#)<sup>16</sup>. This can be a useful tool for engaging people with disability, neurodivergence and young people.

## Pay people

When we pay people, it shows we value their time, resources and expertise. Community and lived experience are recognised forms of expertise.

You can learn more in our [Payment guidelines template](#)<sup>17</sup>



<sup>16</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

## Close the loop

One of the most important parts of community engagement is the final step – closing the loop. This means that you get back to the community with:

- how you will use their insights
- the next steps
- how their engagement influenced the decision/outcome/approach.

Closing the loop with community strengthens relationships. It shows them that you care about their feedback and respect their input. It also shows community that you can follow up on what you have promised.

There are many ways you can close the loop. You could:

- ask participants to confirm if their feedback has been accurately recorded
- schedule regular emails
- keep the community updated through key stakeholders or leaders
- involve community in your evaluation
- publish and share the results of your project
- provide a report on how their insights have been used.

You can find an example of how to close the loop at [Homes Victoria](https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/news/community-shapes-designs-new-homes-elgin-towers-carlton)<sup>18</sup>.

## Best practice

You can do basic and better practice engagement well and do meaningful community engagement. Best practice is applying a strengths-based approach. It is focused on:

- resilience
- growth
- empowering community.

Best practice engagement for First Nations communities is guided by principles of [self-determination](https://www.vic.gov.au/co-design).

## Co-design

Co-design, or co-creation, is a collaborative process. It involves sharing power, knowledge and decision-making with community from the start.

Solutions are designed with the people who will use or be affected by them. This ensures solutions are relevant and meet real needs. Before you begin, you can check if co-design is the right [tool for your engagement](https://www.vic.gov.au/co-design)<sup>19</sup>.

### Benefits

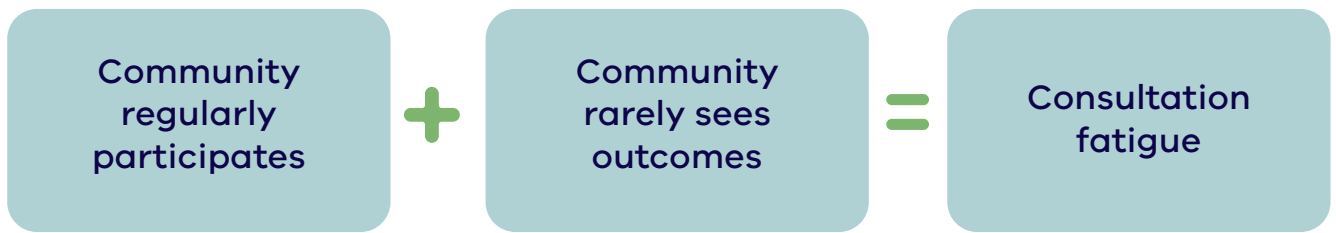
Co-design can help you:

- build trust
- build stronger relationships
- manage power imbalance
- hear underrepresented voices in community
- avoid consultation fatigue.



<sup>18</sup> <https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/news/community-shapes-designs-new-homes-elgin-towers-carlton>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/co-design>



When people help shape your project, they are more likely to:

- feel ownership
- be satisfied with and engaged in the outcome
- understand your working environment
- benefit from future engagements with your organisation.

Being part of co-design also means that the community member can:

- use their knowledge, expertise and experiences to create solutions
- build their own capacity
- develop new skills
- add their engagement to their resume for future work opportunities.

### Co-design is sharing power

Do not call a process co-design when it is not. This can reduce trust in the community.

Co-design can require a significant investment of time, money and support for participants. Consider other forms of engagement if you do not have available resources to do it meaningfully. You may also need to be open to a different way of doing things.

If you cannot apply co-design to the whole process, consider what parts it can be applied to. You could ask the community what their priorities are.



## Before you begin

- Understand co-design principles and practice.
- Set expectations for the scope of the project.
- Engage external partners to design and lead a culturally safe process.
- Define everyone's roles.
- Build development opportunities into the co-design process. This could be teaching community members new skills or growing their professional networks.
- Have funding to pay people for their time.
- Be clear about what community can expect from their involvement. If they identify a need that you didn't know about, how will you respond?
- Set up clear channels of communication.
- Use existing connections to community and leaders.
- Schedule enough time. Co-design is usually a longer process but can be more efficient in the long term.

## How to recruit participants

To recruit participants, you need to prepare a brief. The brief should:

	Description
<b>Demographics</b>	This could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• young people aged 18-35</li><li>• casual workers</li><li>• people with a multicultural background (be specific – which cultures?).</li></ul>
<b>The commitment</b>	This could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• focus groups</li><li>• interviews</li><li>• a working group.</li></ul>
<b>Accessibility adjustments</b>	This could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• accessible buildings for face-to-face engagement</li><li>• accessible meeting materials.</li></ul>
<b>Payment details</b>	Participants should be compensated for their time.
<b>Contact details</b>	Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Email</li><li>• phone number.</li></ul>
<b>A recruitment plan</b>	Where will you share your ad? How will people find it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social media i.e. Facebook or Instagram.</li><li>• Messaging services like WhatsApp.</li><li>• Community services.</li><li>• Local libraries.</li></ul>



## How to co-design

Community can be involved in:

- identifying the problem and what success would look like
- making decisions
- identifying, testing and scaling solutions
- ongoing monitoring of outcomes.

In this process, you might establish unique ways of monitoring success. For your organisation, it may look like a report or publishing data. For the community, it may be:

- attendance at a town hall
- use of a service
- education and employment opportunities
- independence
- safety
- community pride.

It can be more meaningful to co-define success with community members from the beginning. This will strengthen your investment of time, resources and funding.

To learn about co-design with multicultural young people, see the [Centre for Multicultural Youth's Good Practice Guide](#)<sup>20</sup>

## Advisory groups

An advisory group is great for ongoing engagement with a community. It is important that they represent the diverse lived experiences of that community.

You can empower your advisory group to do more than give advice. They could have influence over decisions made and scope to identify issues.

Some people may wish to join an advisory group as a pathway to leadership or advisory roles in their community. You can help members to achieve this goal through by budgeting for:

- professional development opportunities
- networking events
- joining statewide bodies.

Where possible, remunerate advisory group members fairly and consistently See our [Payment guidelines](#)<sup>21</sup>

You should always provide advisory group members with access to support services. It can be difficult to share lived experiences. This could look like:

- access to your organisation's psychological support services
- having a psychological support person present at all meetings.

Learn more about engaging [people with lived experience](#)<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/getting-it-right-improving-co-design-practice-with-multicultural-young-people>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/lived-experience-engagement-guidance-government-workers>

## Recruitment

When you recruit for your advisory group, you should:

- be clear on the purpose of the advisory group
- clarify the scope of the role and representation – will they give advice or make decisions? What projects will they work on?
- explain the time commitment – including if work or reading is expected outside of meetings
- encourage applications from people with relevant or lived experience to the work they will do
- tell people what they will be paid
- share what support will be available
- write the position description in plain language aiming for a reading level of grade 8
- promote the recruitment through organisations that work directly with the community.

You should also explain that some projects may have distressing topics. This is important if those applicants have lived experience of the issue. It is important that they feel comfortable and ready to share their story.

As part of the application process, you could ask:

- what motivates you to join this group?
- what do you want to achieve in this role?
- do you feel ready and safe to participate?
- are you comfortable listening to the experiences and views of other members? They may be distressing to hear.
- what type of support do you need to participate?
- do you have any legal or privacy considerations that might impact your ability to join?

## Manage engagement

Other people in your organisation or in the sector may want to work with your advisory group. They may want advice for their own projects. In those cases, it is important that you set boundaries, so the group is not over-consulted. You also want to make sure the projects they work on have tangible results.

To manage engagement requests with an advisory group, see our [Engagement request](#)<sup>23</sup>

# Communities

When we engage community, we need to consider their needs. Consider an [intersectional approach](#) as much as possible.

## First Nations

### Self-determination

Self-determination is the most fundamental of all human rights. It is grounded in the idea that people have the right to control their own destiny.

First Nations people as decision-makers on issues that affect their communities is central to the principle of self-determination.

Self-determination looks like systems and services designed by community through a transfer of:

- power
- funding
- resources.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

In practice, self-determination is guided by principles including cultural **integrity, decision-making, empowerment and investment**<sup>24</sup>.

Other ways you can use the principles of self-determination to guide your engagement are to:

- allow time to build trust
- support truth-telling (but not relying on communities to relive trauma)
- create opportunities for First Nations people to build on their strengths and capacity
- create opportunities to listen to feedback
- address trauma and supporting healing
- use **place-based approaches**<sup>25</sup>.

By transferring power, you can deliver policies and services are culturally safe, relevant, accessible and responsive.

## Plan your engagement

Colonisation has an ongoing impact on First Nations people. You will need a **trauma-informed approach**.

First Nations peoples have a significant amount of knowledge and understanding regarding their own communities. They are best placed to develop solutions. Where possible, they should lead the conversations with a focus on respectful and deep listening.

Avoid being a '**box ticking**' exercise. We must respect First Nations peoples time, resources, cultural knowledge/responsibility and connection to Country. If your engagement relates to a statewide project or service, engage diverse First Nations mobs and language groups.

When you plan your engagement with First Nations stakeholders:

- identify appropriate contacts from the specific First Nations mobs and language groups you wish to engage
- plan for early and repeated engagement (do not presume what they need or present a finished product)
- set clear expectations of roles and the level of influence stakeholders will have. This supports a greater understanding of each other's priorities, expectations and available resources
- identify and be prepared for engagement activities that may require more time and resources
- ensure agreed processes for managing disputes
- be aware of existing differences or disputes between Traditional Owner groups
- have ways to collect feedback and measure for progress and evaluation.

Your evaluation should be culturally appropriate. Consult information about **Indigenous evaluation**<sup>26</sup>.

When appropriate, remunerate First Nations peoples fairly and consistently. This should be appropriate to the time spent in sharing their cultural knowledge and participating in activities. See **Payment guidelines**<sup>27</sup>.

Make sure you get permission from the artist before using First Nations artworks or language. This respects First Nations people as custodians of their culture, and their intellectual property.

## Communicate respectfully

Communities can have different cultural communication styles.

It is important to use culturally aware, strengths-based respectful language. Avoid acronyms to describe community - this is a colonial practice.

There are non-traditional ways of communicating that can be powerful. This includes:

- music and dance
- audio and video
- storytelling.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/place-based-approaches>

<sup>26</sup> <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/about/indigenous-evaluation>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

Storytelling is a powerful communication tool. It makes your messages more compelling, culturally respectful and informative.

It is not just entertainment. For First Nations communities, it is a method to teach and learn, and to preserve language, culture and identity. You can also:

- hold discussions rather than use written communication. This continues the rich history of oral traditions in First Nations communities
- call people rather than email for outreach
- offer different options to engage in culturally safe and accessible ways rather than just online
- open the conversation by asking “what’s on your mind?”, to understand community priorities before delving into the specific agenda.

For any communication, do community testing. It confirms that your content is accurate, respectful and appropriate. You can also use your community testing to share your message and build trust.

According to the 2021 Census, 50 per cent of First Nations Victorians are under the age of 25<sup>28</sup>. See the Young people section for more tips for this age group.

For translations and interpreting services, visit the Indigenous [Interpreting Project](#)<sup>29</sup>.

## Acknowledgement of Country

An acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity to show respect for Traditional Owners. It recognises the continuing connection First Nations peoples have to Country.

Victoria has a strong and proud First Nations history. It comprises of complex ownership of land stewardship systems stretching back many thousand years.

Anyone can provide an Acknowledgment of Country. It is recommended to give one when you engage First Nations people. A heartfelt and specific Acknowledgement of Country is encouraged.

### Traditional Owners

Where possible make sure you identify the relevant Traditional Owners for your Acknowledgement of Country.

Generally, this will be the Traditional Owners of the land in which your event occurs.

[Learn the Traditional Owners of where you are](#)<sup>30</sup>. If you are unsure, just ask.

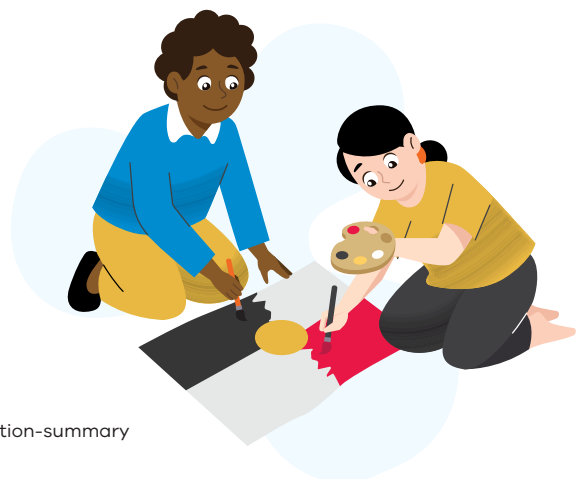
If there is not a formally recognised Traditional Owner group for the place your event will be held you should Acknowledge the Traditional Owners generally at the beginning of the event.

For online events you should Acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands in which you are joining from and extend that Acknowledgement to Traditional Owners from where other participants are joining from.

For further guidance, visit [First Peoples State Relations](#)<sup>31</sup>.

### In-person

If you are doing in-person engagement, you can also display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags to indicate a safe space.



<sup>28</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/australia-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-population-summary>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.naati.com.au/about-us/projects/indigenous-interpreting-project>

<sup>30</sup> <https://achris.vic.gov.au/weave/wca.html>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au>

## LGBTIQA+

LGBTIQA+ communities in Victoria include people who are:

- lesbian
- gay
- bisexual
- trans
- intersex
- queer
- questioning
- asexual.



The plus sign acknowledges that there are identities not included. You can identify with multiple and your identity can change over time.

It is important to recognise the diversity of LGBTIQA+ communities. Not every LGBTIQA+ person has the same experiences and needs. Being part of this community may only be one part of a person's identity. For example, in Victoria, more than 38 per cent of the LGBTIQA+ community [has a disability](#)<sup>32</sup>.

When you engage with LGBTIQA+ communities, you can:

- introduce yourself with your pronouns, ask for others' pronouns and include space for pronouns on name tags
- use [inclusive language](#)<sup>33</sup>
- provide gender neutral facilities, like toilets
- coordinate with trusted community members to lead conversations
- display the Pride flag
- be aware of diverse family structures, like rainbow or chosen families
- ask people what would make them feel safe and welcome.

When you use LGBTIQA+ people, messages or imagery to promote a service, program or agenda, it does not mean it is genuinely inclusive.

An example of this would be asking LGBTIQA+ people to appear in the images for your campaign. This can be paid work that community members are invited to be part of. It should also represent real inclusion at the heart of the campaign, not just pictures.

For more helpful information, you can visit [Minus 18](#)<sup>34</sup>, [Queerspace](#)<sup>35</sup>, and [Rainbow Health Australia](#)<sup>36</sup> and the [Better practice guide for including trans and gender diverse talent in your campaigns](#)<sup>37</sup>.

## Inclusive language

Language is powerful. For LGBTIQA+ communities, it can shape belonging, access and the confidence to live openly and safely.

It can also provide people with the ability to describe their identities and experiences. We should be mindful of this and be aware of inclusive language in context.

For example, older LGBTIQA+ people may not use the term queer or consider it a slur, while many young people use it.

You can learn more about this in the [LGBTIQA+ inclusive language guide](#)<sup>38</sup>.

32 <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcs/shs/work/private-lives-3>

33 <https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide>

34 <https://www.minus18.org.au>

35 <https://www.queerspace.org.au>

36 <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au>

37 <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-including-trans-and-gender-diverse-talent-your-campaigns>

38 <https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide>

## Multicultural and multifaith

Multicultural and multifaith communities can include people who:

- were born overseas
- have parents or grandparents born overseas
- speak a language other than English or multiple languages at home
- identify with different faiths.

### According to the 2021 Census<sup>39</sup>

- more than 1.7 million Victorians speak a language other than English at home
- 290 languages are spoken in Victoria
- the number of households who speak only English at home is decreasing
- more than half of Victorians have at least one parent born overseas
- 50 per cent of Victorians follow one of more than 130 faiths.

## Research the community

Think about which community you want to engage with, and why.

There is no one 'multicultural community' so it is important to be specific. You could look at the majority cultural communities of a particular council area. Or you might want to reach people with limited English proficiency or people of a particular faith.

Once you have identified the communities you want to reach, you can build partnerships with:

- representative community organisations
- community leaders
- ethno-specific organisations
- local council groups.

These groups have influence in their communities. They can provide you with reach beyond translations.

You should also be aware of prayer times and significant cultural or religious holidays. This may impact your ability to engage.



<sup>39</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/census>

## Be inclusive

Multicultural communities have diverse needs that traditional processes do not always meet. If you do not reach them, many Victorians will not be able to participate in your engagement.

Consider:

- using plain language aiming for a reading level of grade 8
- sharing your message via WhatsApp, local community radio, places of worship or ethno-specific media
- working with facilitators who are part of community or the same gender if the topic is sensitive
- offering practical support like childcare, free transport and paying people for their time
- scheduling engagement outside of business hours with safe and accessible transport
- hiring familiar venues that are culturally safe, like a place of worship or cultural centre.

For more advice, consult the [Better practice guide for multicultural communication](#)<sup>40</sup>.

Be aware that some topics may become distressing. See [People who have experienced trauma](#).

You should also consider the specific needs of engaging multicultural and multifaith women.

Learn more in our section on [Women](#).

## Translators and interpreters

Book interpreters to arrive early and brief them. If there are sensitivities around the topic:

- you can request that an interpreter is a specific gender.
- you can also request an interpreter from a different area to where your engagement is being held. Otherwise, the interpreter may be someone they know, and they may not feel comfortable speaking openly in front of them.

Remember not everyone can read in their language. Use pictures, videos, voice messages or conversations to share information.

## Work with community leaders

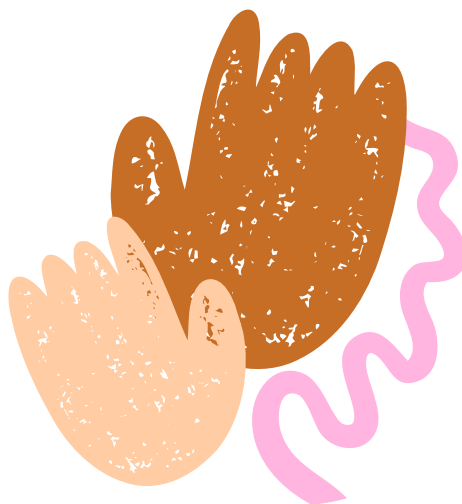
Community leaders are critical friends when engaging with multicultural and multifaith communities.

It is important to have a broad idea of who a community leader can be. Leaders can include women, young people and underrepresented voices within a community.

For example, if you are working with multifaith leaders, you should consider intersectionality. Involvement with a diverse group of multifaith leaders can build trust and improve engagement from community.

If you do your research on the community, you can identify community leaders. This can help you reach isolated and underserved groups. It can also help you avoid engaging the same voices every time.

Bicultural workers can play an important role in identifying hierarchies within community. They can work in schools, hospitals and for government. They can help connect you with marginalised or isolated groups.



40 <https://www.vic.gov.au/communicating-multicultural-communities>

## Consider refugees and people seeking asylum

Refugees and people seeking asylum have often newly arrived in Australia. To engage with them:

- choose venues that people already visit, are local to them and are culturally safe
- use clear, respectful and trauma-informed language
- be careful of body language or gestures that may be offensive or misunderstood in certain cultures
- engage on issues that are relevant to them
- ask people directly about their needs
- pay people for their time
- provide free childcare if in-person
- have support referrals on hand should a distressing topic come up. You can also engage specialist facilitators or psychologists.

It is also important to understand their visas and what they can access. Is your service only available for Australian citizens or permanent residents?

If you are representing government in your engagement, it is important to:

- reassure people that it will not impact their immigration outcome
- be clear about how their information will be used and shared
- be clear about how their privacy will be protected.

## Older people

We live in a state with an ageing population. Older Victorians include people 60 years and over and First Nations people 50 years and over.

Older people are diverse. Their interests, abilities, needs and priorities can vary significantly. Your experience of ageing can be impacted by your gender, sexuality, cultural background and disability.

More than half of Australians over the age of 65 have a disability. One quarter of the 700,000+ unpaid carers in Victoria are aged over 65.

When you write about age, use inclusive and respectful language. You can use terms like older people, retired people, retirees or seniors. It is important to avoid:

- referencing age if it isn't relevant
- words that carry stereotypes, like 'elderly'.

## Be accessible

Older Victorians have different accessibility needs that intersect with other communities. This is important to consider as it will help you reach the most amount of people.

To include seniors, you can:

- consider using large text in digital and print materials
- use plain language, aiming for a reading level of grade 8
- have a phone contact (as well as email and in-person) on all promotional materials
- have clear instructions, tips and a digital support person for online engagement
- understand that some older people might process information slower than others.





For in-person engagement, you can:

- consider scheduling the event in the morning
- ensure your venue for in-person engagement is accessible for people with walking aids
- ensure your venue is near public transport or arrange private transport
- use a microphone
- request a venue with hearing loop facilities.

## People experiencing social and economic disadvantage

People experiencing social and economic disadvantage are most likely to need our programs and services. They are rarely reached in community engagement.

You can offer incentives for people to participate. You can also make it as easy as possible for them to hear about your engagement and have their voice heard.

### Pay

To participate, someone might have to take time away from work, caregiving and an otherwise busy life. If we do not include them, we could be missing out on valuable information. This is why it is important to offer compensation.

You could offer to cover:

- transport
- time (payment or a voucher)
- accommodation (for longer engagement or remote locations)
- childcare (or include it for free during the engagement).

### Access

Local council is an important stakeholder. They can help you arrange transport, meeting spaces or childcare.

To recruit participants, you can also engage:

- Neighbourhood Houses
- Men's Sheds
- LGBTIQ+ organisations
- libraries
- community health centres
- disability support services.

You might consider engaging nearby to these organisations.

For online events, you should include a question about access. You can ask what support someone needs to participate.

They might say:

- free WiFi
- a computer
- printed materials
- captioning or an Auslan interpreter.



## People who have experienced trauma

### What is a trauma-informed approach?

There are many events that can give a person trauma. These experiences can include:

- car accidents
- bushfires and floods
- long term financial insecurity
- sudden illness or death in the family
- crime, abuse or violence.

When we engage with people who have experienced trauma, we want to make sure we have a trauma-informed approach. This means we understand that trauma can impact their abilities, behaviours and responses.

A **trauma-informed approach**<sup>41</sup> considers:

- where engagement takes place (safe, familiar environments with known people are best)
- who facilitates the conversation (trusted people, specialist facilitators, organisations or services)
- topics of discussion (know when something is going to be triggering to talk about and give people support).

You must also be clear about what the community can influence from the start.

### Safe spaces

To create a safe space, you can:

- invite people to have a support person attend
- have a psychologist, counsellor or allied health professional available at the session
- be prepared for people to disclose current experiences of family or sexual violence
- refer people to appropriate counselling services afterwards
- offer a follow up session if required
- give plenty of opportunities for breaks
- offer a separate quiet space for reflection.

It is best to consult with people directly, to find a place, time and day that works. This will ensure it is accessible and works for when people are available.

The session should be structured in a way that gives people power and ownership of decisions. A trauma-informed facilitator can help with this approach. This is important if people disclose experiences of or use of family violence.

### Victim survivors

Victim survivors of family violence will need to:

- be given a choice to share their story or experiences
- work with a trusted person or service to share information
- have practical support information on hand for those who need it
- have a separate space or multiple breaks during engagement if the topic is distressing
- know who to go to during and after the session for support
- feel empowered throughout the engagement.



<sup>41</sup> <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/framework-trauma-informed-practice>

People who have experienced family violence may not have felt empowered in the past. It is essential that they have agency throughout engagement.

A key concern for victim survivors is privacy and safety. Be aware that they might need to:

- leave with short notice
- keep some personal information private
- have flexible engagement options if they do not feel safe in some locations.

## After an emergency

Emergencies can cause a range of emotions in people. This includes shock, disbelief, exhaustion and confusion. An emergency can influence a person's ability to think and process information.

When engaging with people who have been through an emergency or disaster:

- ask people how regularly they want communication
- only provide necessary, accurate and relevant information
- keep information short and repeat it frequently
- use plain language aiming for a reading level of grade 8
- use positive or strengths-based language wherever possible. For example, use 'survivor' or 'affected person' rather than 'victim'
- provide information in various formats. This includes printed material that people can read later, newsletters or town halls.
- provide one contact point to direct people to, for example a website, hotline or contact person.

For more advice, visit the [Australian Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/resources/resources-for-agencies/#recover)<sup>42</sup>

## People with disability

When you begin your engagement, you should consider accessibility requirements. If someone has access needs that can't be accommodated, you should give them another way to engage.

Remember, these changes often benefit everyone. For example, offering multiple ways to engage can help:

- people with disability and chronic health conditions
- parents and carers
- people needing to engage outside office hours.

Many Victorians have permanent or temporary disabilities. This can include visual, auditory, cognitive, speech, psychosocial, neurological or physical disabilities. Some ways you can include everyone, is to:

- ask people what their accessibility needs are for in-person engagement and online (e.g. Auslan interpreting or visual aids)
- ask the facilitator to do a rollcall of everyone present, so blind and vision impaired are aware of who is in the room
- have speakers say their name before speaking and describe what they look like
- use accessibility tags on PDFs
- use accessible colour contrast in online or printed content
- use accessible [Word document formatting](https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d)<sup>43</sup>
- describe images with alt text
- have captioning for online sessions
- use plain language aiming for a reading level of grade 8 and Easy Read translations of documents
- if there are speeches, display a PowerPoint slide with key messages from the speech
- offer multiple ways to engage.



42 <https://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/resources/resources-for-agencies/#recover>

43 <https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>

## In-person engagement

Think about accessibility early. You must provide suitable facilities for in-person engagements. You could start by checking if:

- the venue is accessible, including ramps, lifts, microphones and bathrooms
- the venue is quiet, and has appropriate lighting
- there is access to disabled parking and public transport options
- interpreters or support workers can be brought on site
- someone can meet and greet participants at the door, or outside if possible
- food and drink is physically accessible including providing straws
- childcare or support workers can be arranged to help carers participate.

For some in-person engagement, we recommend completing a social story. A social story is a short, descriptive narrative about the event. It can be helpful for everyone, especially people with intellectual disability, neurodivergence or low literacy. Be as detailed as possible, and include:

- who will facilitate the session
- who the support people will be
- what the location looks like including the room setup
- what you will talk about.

You can use our [Social Story](#)

You can also:

- offer name tags. You can offer ones with a sunflower for people with [hidden disabilities](#)<sup>44</sup>
- use interpreters and closed captions
- be very descriptive and talk about what is being shared on screens for people with vision impairment
- assign numbers to tables so people can share their name and table number at the start of the session
- have scheduled and regular breaks, including from sitting or standing
- ensure instructions around service animal needs are clearly addressed (where to go to the toilet or where to find a low-sensory space).

When directing people to bathrooms, exits and quiet/prayer rooms, you can:

- have clear signs
- announce facilities that are available and location of exits
- put clips on tables that point to the exit
- describe where they are in detail at the start of the session for vision impaired people.

## Use language that centres the person

Use strength-based language when talking about people with disability. This puts people first. You can do this by using neutral language to describe someone's disability. For example, someone might use a wheelchair, not be 'wheelchair bound'.

Be respectful and ask how people want to be referred to. For example, someone might prefer to be called deaf rather than hearing impaired. People who are neurodivergent could also prefer to be referred to as having a disability.

You can learn more about inclusive language at [Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022 to 2026](#)<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> <https://hdsunflower.com/au/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/state-disability-plan/our-language/person-first-and-identity-first-language>

## People with a care role

Consider the needs of people with a care role when planning engagement. This needs to be considered when you engage:

- people with disability
- people with chronic, mental or terminal illness
- older people.

People with a care role may need an online option to engage, or flexible times of day. They can also have intersecting needs themselves if they have a disability or speak other languages.

You can:

- provide a venue map that includes information about disabled parking and public transport
- be clear when adjustments are being made for activities
- provide a contact person for questions and accessibility requests.

## People who live in regional and rural areas

Over 1 million Victorians live in **rural and regional communities**<sup>46</sup>. Regional and rural areas in Victoria are increasingly culturally diverse. When we engage with people living in these areas, we must consider new and emerging communities.

People in new and emerging communities have often newly arrived in Victoria. They may have a low English proficiency. They often have limited:

- connection to and understanding of government services
- community support
- internet and digital connection.

Emerging communities in Victoria include:

- Afghan
- Indian
- Broader Burmese
- Indonesian.

You can use data from the 2021 Australian Census to identify key communities. You can also consult our **Community profiles**<sup>47</sup>.

## Recruitment tips

To recruit people in regional and rural areas, you can:

- work with local and grassroots organisations
- use existing, familiar spaces where programs and activities take place in the local area
- use existing community networks to share information
- remove barriers to engaging including travel time and access, internet connection and social isolation. Many people also have employment and caring responsibilities.
- write in plain language aiming for a reading level of grade 8.

Research the community that you are visiting or engaging with. This includes the Aboriginal land it exists on, the history of colonisation in the area and cultural information.



<sup>46</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/diversity-victorian-government-board-guidelines/key-considerations-cohorts/people-living-rural-and>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/community-profiles>

## Veterans

Veterans have unique experiences and needs shaped by their service.

When we engage with veterans, we want to make sure we are respectful and inclusive. We also want to make them feel recognised for their service and contributions. To do this, you can:

- use facilitators who understand military culture, [trauma-informed practice](#) and are experienced in veteran engagement
- invite veterans to bring a support person or peer
- offer breaks or quiet spaces during sessions
- provide information about veteran-specific support services.

It is best to consult with veterans directly to find a time, place, and format that works for them. Your engagement should be structured to give veterans a sense of ownership and control.

### Veterans with experiences of trauma

Some veterans may have experienced trauma during or after their service. They may need to:

- feel respected and not pressured to share personal stories including about their service
- engage through trusted services or advocates
- have flexibility to leave or pause the session if needed
- know who they can speak to for support during and after the session
- know that stepping away is okay and that their wellbeing is the priority.

## Women

Women have an important role in every community. Many experience multiple, intersectional barriers to engagement. There is no single experience of being a woman.

We can create barriers for women when we:

- hold engagement during work hours or during school holidays
- engage in one language or with only written materials
- hold engagement in spaces only accessible by car
- do not factor in childcare and other caring responsibilities.

Women are more likely to experience:

- gendered power imbalances in their community or workplace
- family and sexual violence
- social and economic disadvantage (especially as they age)
- being a single parent
- living with a disability for longer
- homelessness.

When your engagement is accessible to women, they can share important insights. It ensures your outcomes are equitable and inclusive of everyone.

There are ways you can engage women, many of which have been mentioned in this guide. You could offer different and flexible ways to engage.



This includes:

- different times of day
- as part of an existing forum, activity or group
- online engagement or at familiar venues
- a facilitator who is the same gender
- a women-only engagement session if topics may be sensitive
- options like surveys, interviews and anonymous feedback.

You can reach out to stakeholders who work with women to help your engagement. This includes women-only ethno-specific organisations, health and wellbeing organisations and peak bodies.

Finally, women are often leaders in their communities in unique ways. Their opinions and experiences are valued and respected. Redefine what you think a community leader looks like. They might:

- run smaller community events like cooking classes or support groups
- lead a local ethno-specific organisation
- head a committee that has influence.

Where possible, provide opportunities for the women you engage to gain new skills and connections. This could be through networking, training, leadership programs or mentoring opportunities.

## Young people

Young people have diverse experiences and expertise. Some can feel that they have limited opportunities to effect change. This could be because they:

- are unable to vote (for people under 18 years old)
- live at home
- may not have their own car and rely on public transport
- can feel less empowered to speak up.

When you engage young people, you can:

- consider the age group you wish to engage with and what competing commitments they may have (such as school and work)
- co-create your approach and communication materials
- ensure cultural and psychological safety
- include regular breaks after 45-60 minutes
- engage with them separate to elders in the community. Speaking up in rooms with community elders present may not be considered culturally appropriate
- focus on clear, positive and honest messaging
- send information in advance where possible so people feel prepared
- ensure content is appropriate for this audience and that they can influence change
- provide skill development opportunities
- get informed consent, including information about their rights
- work with influencers, youth organisations and community services to help reach your audience and ensure underrepresented young people are included
- address the power imbalance of engaging, especially if you represent government. Show that their insights are valued and unique.

Your engagement also must be consistent with **Victoria's Child Safe Standards**<sup>48</sup>.

48 <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/the-11-child-safe-standards/>



For more advice, consult the:

- [Young Voices toolkit](https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices)<sup>49</sup>
- [Youth Engagement Resource platform](https://www.yacvic.org.au/yerp/)<sup>50</sup>
- [Wayipunga resource for First Nations young people](https://koorieyouthcouncil.org.au/wayipunga/)<sup>51</sup>
- [Inclusive Organisations Good Practice Guide | Centre for Multicultural Youth](https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/inclusive-organisations-good-practice-guide/)<sup>52</sup>
- [How to ask someone about their access needs](https://www.yacvic.org.au/yerp/diversity-equity-inclusion/questions-for-people-with-disabilities/)<sup>53</sup>

## At-risk young people

While these tips can apply to all young people, it is important to consider them when engaging with those who are at-risk.

- use peer-based or youth-led models where possible. Young people are more likely to trust and engage with peers
- work with organisations or people they already trust, such as youth workers or school staff
- have mental health and social support available as part of the engagement
- keep in-person engagement short, interactive and relevant
- use storytelling, music, art or digital media to engage
- give options for how to engage, for example text rather than email. This is also inclusive of young people with insecure housing
- offer safe, non-judgemental spaces to engage. This could be online, drop-in centres or youth hubs
- provide or reimburse transport and food
- provide incentives like vouchers where needed
- be consistent and follow through with results of the engagement.

# Report and evaluate

## Data collection

You can work with communities to identify the most user-friendly, inclusive and meaningful ways to collect data from the project.

This data can be used throughout the project to:

- make sense of what is or is not working
- understand what we are learning along the way
- adjust our approaches or expectations.

For multicultural communities, capturing qualitative data can be more familiar and meaningful. This could look like conversations, case studies or quotes. Use this data to illustrate powerful points of engagement and impact.

When you collect data that is identifiable, it is important to have permission from community.

49 <https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices>

50 <https://www.yacvic.org.au/yerp/>

51 <https://koorieyouthcouncil.org.au/wayipunga/>

52 <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/inclusive-organisations-good-practice-guide/>

53 <https://www.yacvic.org.au/yerp/diversity-equity-inclusion/questions-for-people-with-disabilities/>





## Reflective practice

Reflective practice is a great way to decide how you will report on your engagement. You can ask yourself or your team:

- How will we know if we've been successful? What would this look like?
- How will community know if we've been successful? What impact will it have on their lives?
- Can we improve our current relationship with key stakeholders and community leaders?
- What do we know about community? How can we learn more?
- What impact do we want to have on long-term issues?



## Measure success

Ideally, community should inform what your success looks like. You might aim to:

- build a stronger relationship with community and stakeholders
- get engagement with your programs, services and awareness raising campaigns
- use community insights for your decision making
- offer paid professional or leadership opportunities
- create better community engagement practices in your organisation for future projects
- share a report with the community of the impact they have had on the project
- hire people with lived experience.

Remember, negative feedback does not mean your community engagement is a failure. Successful engagement is not determined by whether the feedback was positive or not. It should not determine if you report back to community or continue to engage with them.

## Find practical solutions

Sometimes, the community is looking for practical solutions. If you involve community early, it can help you to identify what these solutions or suggestions are. You can then build these measurements into your evaluation.

The outcomes you seek for a project may not align with what the community immediately needs. Prioritise community-led outcomes that will make a short-term difference to build trust.

## Report back

If a future service, program or initiative is informed by your engagement, consider sharing this with community.

The community can see how their feedback created a tangible impact beyond a report. This can be a powerful way to build trust for future engagement.

## Celebrate

Celebration is an important way to close engagement with community. You should recognise and celebrate what you have achieved together. This will continue to build trust and respect.

It is also an important part of closing the loop. You will know how successful you have been if the community wants to celebrate their success.

# Appendix

You can view, download and use our [Templates for your engagement](#)<sup>54</sup>.

The templates include:

- Template 1 – Engagement plan
- Template 2 – Engagement request
- Template 3 – Payment guidelines
- Template 4 – Social story

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/better-practice-guide-inclusive-engagement/resources>

# Checklist

## Data collection

Question	Mark with an X
Which community/ies are you engaging? Why?	
Will all voices in that community be included? For example, young people, women, older people and people with a disability.	
Do we need to engage? Does this information already exist or is someone already doing this work? How will this build on previous engagement?	
Are we giving community enough time to decide to engage?	
Are we giving community enough time to speak to their peers or read materials?	
What is in scope to influence the final decision? Have we communicated this clearly?	
Are your engagement activities relevant, respectful and co-designed with community input?	
Are there any upcoming significant dates to consider (e.g. religious holidays, cultural events, Sorry Business or reconciliation events)?	
Are your communications in plain language aiming for a reading level of grade 8? Are they translated?	

## Promotion

Question	Mark with an X
Have you used multiple and relevant channels (e.g. WhatsApp, local radio and newspapers, ethnic media, posters)?	
Have you shared a stakeholder pack with community organisations and leaders?	
Are there different ways to participate (in-person, online, one-on-one)?	

## Promotion

Question	Mark with an X
Is the venue physically accessible and culturally safe? For example, you have considered wheelchair access, parents rooms, gender-neutral toilets and prayer rooms.	
Have you addressed barriers such as transport and childcare options, digital access, time of day, or gendered settings?	
Are facilitators reflective of the communities you're engaging?	
Have you arranged for interpreters (including Auslan) or translated materials if needed?	
Have you asked for names (including spelling and pronunciation), pronouns and honorifics?	
Have you planned how to support participants who may become distressed? This is important if the topic is sensitive.	

## In-person

Question	Mark with an X
Do an Acknowledgement of Country (it can also be done in other languages)	
Does your facilitator have lived experience or a connection to the community?	
Have you limited the number of representatives who are attending from your organisation?	
Have you provided transport, parking or reimbursed travel costs?	
Is food and drink provided? Does it consider dietary and cultural needs?	
Have you allowed time for introductions, breaks and informal chats?	
Encourage everyone to speak openly and with respect. Actively listen to participants.	
Is there room on name tags for pronouns?	
Do you have psychosocial support available if needed on the day?	
Do you have a quiet space or breakout area available if needed?	

## Online

Question	Mark with an X
Do an Acknowledgement of Country (it can also be done in other languages)	
Does your facilitator have lived experience or a connection to the community?	
Is your platform easy to use and accessible?	
Have you tested the platform with community reps beforehand?	
Have you provided joining instructions? Is there support for people who need help to join?	
Have you used visuals and live captioning where possible? Are interpreters visible?	
Have you allowed time for introductions, breaks and informal chats?	
Encourage everyone to speak openly and with respect. Actively listen to participants.	
Share your pronouns next to your name on screen.	
Have you followed up with a summary or recording after the session?	

## After

Question	Mark with an X
Have you shared a person to go to with more feedback, questions or concerns?	
Have you followed up with a summary or recording after the event?	
Have you shared back what you heard and how it will be used?	
Have you offered ongoing opportunities for input and feedback?	
Have you documented and celebrated community contributions?	
Have you measured success in partnership with the community?	

# Fast-tracked engagement checklist

If your time and resources are limited, you can offer a lighter-touch option. Use this approach for small, local conversations if you are unable to do any other engagement.

## Week 1

- Confirm purpose and scope of the conversation with community.
- Book a venue already familiar to participants (for example, local youth hub, mosque, sports club).
- Identify one to two helpers from your organisation or a partner (for example, a note taker and a facilitator).
- Promote the engagement through stakeholders, community leaders, WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, newsletters, or local council.

## Week 2

- Host a short session (45–60 minutes max).
- Use a circle seating format with ice-breaker questions.
- Capture notes on key themes.
- Thank participants verbally; offer simple refreshments (tea/coffee).
- Send “thank you + what’s next” message within 48 hours.
- Close the loop once you know how their feedback will be used or influence the outcomes.
- Send participants the final product.

