



# ENGAGEMENT IN PROGRAM OR SERVICE LEVEL CO-DESIGN

## How to use this tool

Use this Tool when planning new programs of services or when undertaking significant re-design in the lead-up to major procurement processes.

This is the level at which most Co-Design initiatives in WA have been undertaken to date. Sometimes it is in the context of new programs or services being developed, but more often it is in the lead-up to contract re-tendering.

In either case, allowing sufficient time for effective engagement of stakeholders is critical.

Stakeholders include the internal Departmental stakeholders from each of the areas involved, including policy, service delivery, contract management, executive, evaluation and maybe even IT. These should have been engaged in the preparation for Co-Design (see Government Co-Design Preparation Tool) but it is also important that they stay engaged throughout and not just wait for their part of the process. If they do, then critical decisions affecting their role may have already been made. This is particularly important for participation of service delivery staff, procurement staff and evaluation specialists.

External stakeholders include other Government Departments (including Commonwealth Departments in some cases). Engagement of other Departments usually involves some

degree of formality and inter-Departmental correspondence, but early officer-to-officer engagement will ensure requests for participation will not come 'out of the blue'.

Approaches to other Departments need to make the scope of the Co-Design clear, emphasise the nature of the experience you want them to bring, and outline the advantages to their Department of participation (in particular the opportunity to avoid unintended or flow-on consequences from the changes being planned.)

Often engagement with other Departments and (outside) service providers can be about clarifying what is the (local) service system that service users may already be interacting with (or need to be referred from or to.) It can also be about the overlaps in responsibility and where there are the gaps in coverage.

Depending on the relationships and complexity of the service system, other Departments might be only involved in the initial scoping workshop, or have ongoing participation in service design.

Existing service provider organisations, both not-for-profit and for-profit, are key stakeholders to be engaged early in preliminary discussions about scoping the nature of the Co-Design.

Initial engagement needs to emphasise the distinction between the Co-Design stage which is open, collaborative and participatory, and the

procurement stage which is formal and probably competitive.

Invitations to participate must make it clear that while there are advantages to organisations being involved in the Co-Design planning stage, it is not compulsory and will not be a factor in consideration of the merits of their subsequent

## ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS

All (it's certainly hard to think of an exception) Co-Design initiatives should seek engagement from relevant Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. In some cases these agencies may be tendering or part of a collaborative tender, but in others their input is being sought because of the unique insights they bring in relation to delivery of services to Aboriginal people and to Aboriginal communities.

This kind of request for involvement of Aboriginal organisations – usually quite small organisations with resources already stretched in meeting the needs of their clients – can be difficult for them to respond to. They will generally need to be convinced that their voice will be heard and that the Co-Design will lead to real benefits for their clients.

While it is not usually possible to pay organisations for participation in the open forum elements of the Co-Design, payment of consultation fees for one-to-one interviews or to make a presentation at a Co-Design workshop should be considered.

Some Aboriginal organisations may also be interested in acting as a conduit to their clients and facilitating Co-Design work with them, if resourced to do so. Care needs to be taken where parallel or separate processes are being undertaken. It should be a choice made by the Aboriginal participants or participating organisations and should not replace Aboriginal involvement in the other Co-Design activities. A process for sharing outcomes between parallel processes is essential.

tender or grant application.

It is very important that other community organisations also be invited to participate. This should not be limited to organisations identified as potential competitors for the tender, but should include others with special expertise who can add value to the planning. This might include related sector Peak Bodies, specialist consumer advocacy organisations (e.g. a disability consumer organisation at a housing Co-Design), representatives of CALD communities, small specialist organisations working with discreet cohorts of clients, and representatives of local collaborations or networks.

Most, if not all, areas of service delivery have experts outside of community and government agencies who can provide added value to the Co-Design processes.

This includes private consultants who may have many years of experience working in the relevant sector and who can bring knowledge of the issues, the clients and the service providers. Many will be willing to see participation as a pro-bono contribution to a sector they are passionate about. For others it will be an opportunity to network with existing and potential clients. In either case their contribution can be very valuable.

This also applies to academic researchers and specialists for whom participation has the added benefit of keeping them abreast of current thinking within the local sector. The unique value they can add to the Co-Design is in making the links with evidence from local, national and international research.

It is important however to make sure that the voice of 'experts' is not privileged over the lived experience of consumers and service providers. This can be achieved by having their input in the preparation of background materials or in presenting evidence as an early part of the workshop stage, rather than being a full participant in the service design discussions.

Deciding to involve external 'experts' will be influenced by the particular context and by their individual characteristics, in particularly their history of respectful engagement with consumers.

The most important expertise to have in the room when programs and services are being designed is that of the people for whom the services are intended.

People are the experts in their own life. If services are to lead to improvement in life then that expertise is an essential part of the mix.

There are many ways in which service users can be involved in Co-Design of programs and services. Generally their involvement should include both consumer representatives and current or potential or former service users.

Consumer representatives are service users or former service users with a recognised role in speaking to the experience of themselves and others. They may be affiliated with a representative or advocacy body and may even have had training in advocacy and communication skills to assist them to carry out their role.

It is normal practice to pay consumer representatives for their participation, including in the open forum or workshop elements of the Co-Design. A number of Peak Bodies and consumer representative bodies have recommended fees and should be consulted to ensure recruitment of appropriately skilled consumer representatives.

Consumer representatives may be included at all stages of the Co-Design, including in preparation of the stakeholder engagement model.

In order to ensure the Co-Design reflects the diversity of lived experience among consumers it is also important to have a process for broader consumer engagement. This can include consultation with individuals or groups, surveys, workshops, and/or participation in the Co-Design workshops with others involved in the planning.

The key to successful engagement with consumers is in matching the processes used to the skills, strengths and interests of the particular consumers or groups of consumers. Most are interested in themselves and the services which support them, so many will be willing to engage.

Their ability to do so will be influenced by their physical and intellectual capacity, their location, their other obligations (family, employment, cultural, etc.), their prior experience and many other factors.

The most important factor influencing their capacity to engage is your flexibility in responding to those other factors.

This may involve engaging with them in their homes or where they access services. It may involve working through their carers or families. It may involve a creative approach to workshops and focus groups, for example including physical demonstrations, craft constructions, graphic arts, play-acting or improvisational theatre sports.

Or it may just involve careful and mindful listening.

In Co-Design of significant programs or services it is recommended that a number of different strategies (interviews, site visits, creative scenario exercises, focus groups, etc.) be used in combination with Co-Design workshops to get input from the potential end users of the services.

Advice on the best methods to use can be sought from consumer representatives, Peak Bodies, service providers, the consultants engaged to facilitate the Co-Design and consumers themselves.

