Engaging with Diversity: Community Consultation and the State Public Sector

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Abstract

Traditionally, government policy, program and service delivery planning and development, in Australia as elsewhere, have involved a narrow range of community members. Those who are harder to reach, or are not comfortable with current methods of consultation, are too often not involved in the decisions that directly affect their lives. A significant group that is missed in traditional community engagement activities is people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. There is a need to broaden many government agencies' approaches to diversity and inclusiveness and to develop models that demonstrate inclusiveness in a more coordinated way. This paper discusses a recent research project that gathered data on how Queensland Government agencies could improve the understanding and capability of public sector community engagement practitioners to engage inclusively with linguistically and culturally diverse peoples in Queensland by providing an evidence base of what works, for whom and in what circumstance. The results show that mandates from executive staff and strategies at all levels of planning and operation that recognise members of CALD communities, as part of the core business of the agency can have positive outcomes, especially where these are combined with appreciation that cultural communities are not homogenous. The results can inform relevant agency structures, policies and practices (that is, institutional arrangements and practices) at state and local levels in a way that encourages more inclusive and enabling engagement practices. The data gathered by the researchers has been used to identify the skills, capabilities and knowledge already being used by community engagement practitioners, and to explore the gaps in institutional capacity that existed. The project is crucial therefore to sharing knowledge within and between agencies and to developing effective practices of engagement.

Keywords

Cultural diversity, planning, state, inclusion, institutional culture

Introduction: The *Engaging With Diversity* project

In Australia, the state government of Queensland believes that cultural diversity is an economic and social benefit to the state and is committed to developing strategies to promote equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for every Queenslander. However, those who are difficult to reach, or are not comfortable with current methods of consultation, are too often not involved in the decisions that directly affect their lives. As a consequence, the Department of Communities joined with Multicultural Affairs Queensland, to request that three researchers

from the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland undertake the *Engaging with Diversity* project. Engagement was understood to cover many forms and levels of interactions between the state and citizens from service provider relationships with clients to information sharing, community consultation and active participation in government decision-making processes. The project focused on groups that are often missed in conventional community engagement practices and full findings are contained in the interim and final reports of the project. While it is recognised that this applies to many population groupings including Indigenous Australians, women, disability groups and rural residents, the aspect of the research reported here is limited to institutional arrangements and practices for engaging people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who may face considerable difficulties in participating in government processes and structures. The project aimed to improve understanding of the perceptions and experiences of public sector middle managers and community engagement practitioners of relationships between people from CALD backgrounds and government and so of current practices in the public sector for positive and productive engagement with these target groups. This would provide a coherent framework on which to base effective and inclusive consultation tools, as well as an appreciation of the barriers to effective consultation. Beyond such applied value in enhancing the capacity of the public sector, the research has relevance to current debates in the social sciences about pluralism, inclusion and participation in liberal democracies.

Background

Local communities in Queensland, as elsewhere in Australia, are increasingly made up of people from diverse backgrounds with different skills and life experiences. The cultural and linguistic diversity of the state's population is revealed in *The People of Queensland. Statistics from the 2001 Census* (Multicultural Affairs Queensland 2003) and illustrated by the fact that 17 per cent of Queensland residents were born overseas — coming from 150 different countries — with almost half of them from a non-English-speaking country. Seven per cent of Queenslanders speak a language other than English at home. The most common of these languages are Italian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, German, Greek, Spanish and Tagalog (Filipino). Even those born in Australia have diverse cultural affiliations with 15 per cent of them having one or both parents born overseas. Queensland is home to adherents of 40 different faiths. Further diversity results from factors such as the different age mixes in different cultural groups, different gender profiles for different places of origin and different countries of origin for people with similar cultural heritage as well as the patterns of geographic distribution of these non-Anglo-Celtic settler groups and their descendents. Thirty-five local government areas in the state have over ten per cent of their residents born overseas — in the case of Logan almost one-quarter are overseas born, many of them being from Samoa. While the south-east corner of the state is home to the largest proportion of most of these communities, it is possible to identify some specific concentrations such as of Vietnamese and Samoans in Ipswich, Papua New Guineans in Cairns and Townsville, Italians

in Stanthorpe and Mareeba, Germans in Herberton, people from The Philippines in Bowen and Mt Isa and Japanese at the Gold Coast and in Cairns. This project was exploring engagement with these widely dispersed and varied people with some cultural or linguistic identification other than the dominant Anglo-Celtic.

A number of policies and processes exist in Queensland that publicly endorse the need to engage with diverse groups (notably the Multicultural Queensland Policy). There are also a number of specific programs intended to implement this policy and regular reporting of them. Examples gleaned from our research and from the *Report on the Implementation of the Multicultural Queensland Policy 2003-2004* (Multicultural Affairs Queensland, 2005) include the State Library of Queensland's Multicultural Services Consultative Committee and their *Making Libraries Multicultural: protocol for consultation* which guides the ways libraries interact with their multicultural client groups. Education Queensland likewise has had an Equity Directorate since the early 1990s and a *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Education Policy* (1995) with individual schools responsible for implementation. In more economic fields, the Department of State Development and Innovation offers support services to ethnic small business while the Department of Employment and Training has a multicultural employment strategy and runs a migrant work experience program. Health too provides relevant programs such as the Interpreter Services Unit of the Princess Alexandra Health Service District. In respect of law and law enforcement we find the Queensland Police Service operating an innovative Police Liaison Officer Scheme and having a Police Ethnic Advisory Group while Legal Aid Queensland has a Domestic Violence Unit to respond to issues in CALD communities and Justice and the Attorney General have published the *Equal Treatment Benchbook.* It is evident that many state government Departments and agencies have recognised the need to engage with diverse groups and our research revealed an impressive variety of ways to involve people from the communities in the planning and implementation of these programs and a range of benefits accruing from that involvement. The aspect of the *Engaging with Diversity* project reported here did not, therefore, set out to provide a comprehensive audit of state government practices and policies since there is already a substantial record of this. Nor was this research intended as an evaluation of the success of policies and resultant practices since this would require additional data including enquiries among users of state services and people who have participated in consultation processes and other forms of engagement from CALD communities. Rather, this research attempted to construct the perceptions of middle managers and community engagement practitioners in the public sector about how policies and programs are being implemented and the related challenges and success factors.

Methodology

The specific focus on the meanings and perceptions held by state employees charged with implementing policies and programs requiring community engagement in this *Engaging with*

Diversity project, suggested the need for qualitative research with agency staff, especially those at middle management levels. A number of related issues were designated as the focus of separate, future or concurrent, research projects. For example, complementary insights would be gained by exploring the perceptions of service users and other members of CALD communities engaged in government programs, especially since effective engagement implies positive outcomes for both parties. Likewise comparative evaluations of various engagement strategies would yield specific data to supplement the success factors and challenges identified in this research. The research was concerned with developing an understanding of agency engagement practices through the experiences of participants significantly involved in communicating and implementing social policy in their roles as middle managers or community engagement practitioners in the Queensland public sector. This was done through listening to participants' stories based on their experiences and perceptions of specific government programs. This approach to understanding the experience of participants was taken because, if we are to understand change in the public sector, we need to know the subjective meaning of that change to officers within the context of the interactive processes of their everyday professional lives. While recognising there are multiple constructions of reality, and that no individual constructions are 'true', the researchers sought a range of perceptions arising from the social and cultural situation of individuals from a cross-section of government departments. The resultant data then provides an authentic insight into the experience of Queensland public servants, especially middle managers and allows us to understand the dynamic involved in translating legislative frameworks and policies into practice without singling out individuals or individual work units. The study was therefore conducted using a multi-methodological approach of in-depth interviews, library and internet research, focus groups, and case studies.

For the first step of in-depth telephone interviews, initial contacts were asked to nominate people in their agency across levels and with various depths of experience in engaging with members of CALD communities. Letters were sent to Department heads asking for cooperation, which resulted in further nominations. Despite difficulties contacting suitable participants in some agencies the sample includes 33 participants across 20 agencies with a range of levels represented (PO3 to SO1).[1] A large sample was not needed since there was no intent to establish frequency or location of specific practices so the research ignores quantitative imperatives in order to generate depth of data from a restricted sample. The interviews explored how each research participant's agency engaged with CALD communities, using a set of questions provided by the Department of Communities and Multicultural Affairs Queensland. These questions explored themes such as: engagement strategies employed; useful resources (including data, skills and support systems); barriers to engagement and perceived successes. Each interview took between 30 and 45 minutes and

[1] Levels in the public service are categorised as Policy Officer (PO) and Senior Officer (SO) with 1 indicating the lowest ranking in the category.

most were recorded. The in-depth interviews provided a social understanding of people's professional world and also provided interviewees with the opportunity to reflect on their professional context. Rather than being simply a process to collect information, interviews became an opportunity for the production of knowledge and understanding in relation to that information. They also provided an opportunity to identify potential case studies.

Comprehensive library and internet research was conducted to compose the literature review to establish global trends in community engagement strategies with members of CALD communities, and to ascertain contemporary theoretical issues and frameworks concerning marginalised groups and their relations with the state. Three focus groups were conducted to enable a range of public sector staff who were currently effectively engaging with community members, to interact and reflect on the ways in which the contributors' agencies were working well with members of CALD communities, to consider a range of experiences and contexts and so suggest the framework and principles needed for their successful actions to be duplicated. The case studies were identified from the in-depth interviews. Further detailed discussions then took place with key staff to obtain data about how the agency specifically engaged with members of CALD communities. The analysis reported in this paper draws on this documentary, interview and focus group data. The data collected during the course of this research remains confidential in recognition of privacy laws and ethical research practices. The intention has been to protect the identity of the various participants in the research process, in order to facilitate open and honest communication about systemic issues. Identification of individuals and organisations in case studies and examples has been minimised. Where it occurs, it uses material on the public record or approved for public release in the context of this research.

Findings

Literature review findings

The literature review examined issues surrounding the interaction of members of CALD communities with the state from a strategic and a practical needs approach. The literature was not limited to that detailing the Queensland experience, since the dearth of such material prompted the research. Rather, it drew on studies across a number of comparable, predominantly Anglo-Celtic, multicultural democracies. It explained why members of CALD communities should be targeted for attention by the state, and what the public sector needs to do to respond to their needs and to enhance their participation in the Australian democratic process. It presented the specific issues that members of CALD communities may encounter in their interactions with the public sector, and examined the challenges that different state agencies confront when working to incorporate members of various CALD communities into their planning, strategising, and policy development as well as program delivery.

An overriding theme presented in the literature as important to enhancing the inclusiveness of current state government planning and policy development, was that government agencies need to socially recognise, validate and incorporate into planning processes, a nuanced understanding of diversity. This included dimensions of the diversity within and between CALD communities, the diverse concerns and needs of different members of different communities at different moments in time, and the need to release the all-encompassing concept of 'communities' in order to better design, plan for, and incorporate into projects the heterogeneity of people within social groups. This requires not only awareness of cultural differences of gender, ethnicity or religion, but also of the resultant structural difference that positions people unequally in political and social processes. In Queensland policy, as Carrell and Mann found in the US, diversity is "used to imply a non-specific organisational multiculturalism" (Carrell and Mann 1995, p. 100) rather than recognising, understanding, and addressing different people's varied interests and needs within a range of different communities and the unique problems they may encounter when engaging with public sector staff. The tendency to include "individual citizens in a single discursive public with other undifferentiated citizens who leave behind their particular social situations to seek their common interests" (Young 2000, p. 82) should be countered "by taking account of the specificities of differentiated relationships" (Young 2000, p. 87).

It is necessary to understand that there is not a unified, single social organizing category of a 'CALD community' that can be conceived as the focus for state planning and policies. It is crucial to recognise the diversity and complexity of CALD people's ways of thinking and being. For instance, in determining how to satisfactorily engage with sections of communities such as women of a specific ethnic, linguistic or cultural group given the enormous variety of situations in which individual women in CALD communities live their daily experiences. There are scholars who argue that some divisions of social life such as into 'domestic/female' versus 'public/male' domains are not relevant to many CALD communities where women operate in both domains. As well, the perception of women as separate and different to men in numerous cultures does not necessarily imply inferiority or subordination to men (Johnson 2002; Karim 1995). Gender relations in many societies have been radically altered due to the impact of colonisation, Westernisation, and global capitalism. Some studies note that economic development and wage labour make women more dependent on men by undermining local customary systems where women have, in the past, enjoyed a certain amount of control over production and reproduction (Benería and Bisnath 2001; Fenster 1999; Takunani abd Havini 2004). Other studies refer to the 'myth of male dominance' in statements that represent women as less powerful than they actually are in their daily lives (Rogers 1989). They propose that although men have been represented as dominant in many societies, many women possess and wield considerable power and influence. Women may possess power that is complementary to, rather than in overt contestation with, male power. In this case, being aware of the different ways that women are perceived, how they perceive

themselves, and how women then choose to act is a useful conceptual tool for staff in public sector agencies and important when working to incorporate women into state planning and policies. Such awareness also requires identifying the variety of social relations that exist across cultures between women and men, i.e. relations of 'gender'. Likewise a critical awareness of other differences within and between cultures based on factors other than gender such as life experiences, age, ability, religion, or language is fundamental for effective state government agencies.

Another equally pervasive contingency relates to the institutional context or 'culture'. Significant literature shows how attitudes can affect professional behaviours towards members of CALD communities, from Rosenthal and Jacobsen's (1968) study of the relationship between teacher expectations and student performance; the classic examination of gender stereotyping and definitions of mental health (Broverman et al. 1970); the study of political attitudes and the diagnosis of mental disorders (Wechsler et al. 1970); work on racist evaluations of family relations (Jones and Seagull 1983); to studies of racism in public hospitals (Krameret al. 1972; Turner 1985; Yamamotoet al. 1968). These studies advocate genuine attempts to engage with peoples from other cultures via the development of non-ethnocentric modes of thinking and practice, that is, those that do not presuppose the validity of only one way of life but explore the different ways there are to be human through mutual respect (Brown 2000, p. 213; Diller 2004; Helliwell 1993).

Other research shows that community services are underused by members of CALD communities (Diller 2004, p. 1) for a number of reasons. Most pertinent to this research in Queensland is the finding that staff in public sector agencies may inadvertently make members of CALD communities feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. On the other hand, perceptions of members of CALD communities themselves can also be influential even if based on past experiences with different and harsher government systems. This may result in lack of trust in the motives or abilities of public sector staff and lack of familiarity with the kinds of services available (for example, police and justice are conceived differently in many cultures; social security provisions may not exist). As well, members of CALD communities may believe they will not be understood culturally or will not have their needs met in a helpful manner. Although these dimensions of community members' perceptions were not explored in this research, there are implications for the behaviours of public sector employees that are examined here.

Studies suggest that institutional racism (evident in inadequate funding for instance) results in misinformation and/or inaction as it clouds the judgement of the average service provider and government representative in responding and relating to members of CALD and Indigenous communities (Daly 2002; Pettman 1996). A lack of coordination between government agencies is also seen as confusing and often intimidating to clients, and significant work still

needs to be done to make programs available to specific communities for instance those in rural and remote areas. Such outcomes suggests that public sector staff who wish to improve community engagement and participation should critically appraise government conceptions of diversity and targeted service delivery (Adams and Hess 2001, pp. 14, 16; Castles 1997, p. 20; de Carvalho 1998). Institutional racism and a lack of awareness amongst public sector staff about the needs of those in CALD and Indigenous communities, have meant that project designers have not always recognised that people in such communities are capable of active human agency, staff are often unaware of their different needs and goals, or that people in Indigenous and local communities may engage with, then reject, state-sanctioned socio-economic development as unsuitable.

While few public sector staff engage in active discrimination, broader research suggests that discomfort with government agencies can be linked to their lack of sensitivity to the differences and different needs of members of CALD communities (Diller 2004, p. 3). This may include public sector staff being unaware of a) their prejudices and how they may inadvertently be communicated to members of CALD communities; b) differences in cultural style, interactive patterns, and values, and how these may lead to miscommunication; c) that many of the theories taught during training by members of the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture (and also by selected CALD community members) are culture-bound; d) differences in cultural definitions of whatever service the public sector agency is offering and the existence of traditional cultural ways of dealing with problems (for example, through elders and/or traditional healers); and e) the need to match services to the cultural style of members of CALD communities or of adapting practices to their specific cultural needs.

Jakubowicz (2002) suggests that diversity can be valued by reciprocal tolerance, mutual recognition in order to overcome exclusion, acknowledging of difference, recognising others with more than tolerance and less than unqualified acceptance, and understanding that cultural recognition does not resolve issues of economic inequality and distributive injustice. Furthermore, the significant expertise that has developed from public sector staff working with Indigenous communities could be more effectively transposed to interactions with members of CALD communities. For example, Blagg and Ray (2000) have reported that Indigenous communities have difficulty translating their requirements into the language demanded by government agencies in funding applications, have problems with the complexity of funding arrangements, have to deal with lack of coordination between funding sources that include Commonwealth and state grants and subsidies, and the ‘silo mentality’ where individual agencies focus on one particular problem thereby restricting cooperation and collaboration between agencies (Fitzgerald 2001). Robertson describes this problem as the product of “confused and contradictory legislative responsibilities” that are further complicated in Australia by three levels of government and a “serious lack of intergovernmental collaboration

and cooperation which has led to duplication of services and wastage of money" (Robertson 1999, p. 109).

A range of key issues permeates the literature describing how members of CALD communities encounter staff in public sector agencies. They are:

- Differences among clients from the same community must be recognised. Differences may be due to class, age, gender, ableness, language etc. The usual indicator of cultural insensitivity is the belief that all members of a particular groups share similar characteristics and circumstances
- The terminology often used by public sector staff can possess subtle connotations and implicit value judgements that may have been used to oppress or demean culturally devalued groups, but terminology can also serve as a powerful source of empowerment and pride. Staff need to discover what terms are preferred by the members of the specific cultural communities with whom they are engaging, both as individuals and community members
- Limited awareness of the harsh realities of daily life for members of CALD communities
- Lack of collaboration with traditional cultural members, e.g. elders or male leaders where female engagement in the non-domestic sector is inappropriate. However staff need to recognise conflicts with 'traditional' identities. Unintentional socialisation into the ways of mainstream culture may produce conflict with peoples' home culture.
- Unknowing perpetuation of dependence rather than helping CALD members learn to function independently. 'Helping' is most useful when it facilitates members of CALD communities' own interaction with the system on *their* terms and in light of *their* cultural values and needs, i.e. empowerment
- Cultural stereotyping on the part of staff — often produced by clients' mistrust, fear, and/or deference to public sector staff.

Depending on cultural values it may help to raise specific issues as a topic of discussion. Or, where possible, provide a staff member of the same cultural background as research shows that clients are most comfortable with professionals from their own culture (Atkinson 1983; Jerrell 1998; Diller 2004). The issues all suggest adoption of appropriate counter-measures by public sector staff including possible capacity building for diverse members of a range of CALD communities. Members of CALD communities need to be educated in the services and opportunities available, the possible consequences of various forms of engagement, and then enabled to make their own informed choices.

The literature also suggests that engagement with members of CALD communities be recognised as requiring cultural competence, a mode of interacting that is not within the capabilities of every public sector staff member. Weaver (1998) contends that cultural competence requires three elements, that the service provider a) must be knowledgeable

about members of CALD communities by way of having a sense of the communities' histories, values and norms, the ways they choose to identify themselves and relate to their cultural identity, and the significance of this to the issue for which they are seeking state assistance; b) must be self reflective, recognising the biases they may have within themselves and their profession so they do not impede service providers; ability to communicate with and provide appropriate services; and c) should be able to integrate their knowledge and reflection with the practical skills they already enjoy. As significantly, studies suggest there has been no assessment to date of the number of services using 'cultural competence', nor any evaluation of their effectiveness in addressing the needs of members of CALD communities, aspects that were also beyond the scope of this research.

In sum, the evidence from the literature review suggests that state government agencies must recognise the importance of questioning why inequalities are maintained in the face of discourses about universal human rights and multiculturalism. Australia's social structures, institutions, and values as well as norms, customs, rights, and laws all link with economic institutions such as local and global markets to shape relationships between different social and cultural groups, to form their socially expected roles, and to influence what resources people have access to, what activities they can or cannot undertake, and how they may participate in governance, in broader Australian society and in the economy.

Hence, the diversity of perspectives and needs must be acknowledged, assessed, validated and valued by public sector staff, then written into consultation strategies, and project and policy design. For state government agencies to develop effective processes they must understand the complexity of the lived experiences of people from CALD communities, and the broad range and interlocking character of their personal, familial, and social differences, rather than working with a uniform concept of a cultural community. It is also important for state government agencies to develop effective networks with a broad range of communities, and working relations with a diverse array of cultural and community groups, in order to more fully integrate people from CALD communities into policy design and community consultation processes, and ensure that such networks and relations are adequately resourced.

In-depth interviews

Despite rhetoric about employing a variety of engagement strategies, a narrow range of techniques predominate. They include agency-driven community forums including Ministerial regional meetings, use of e-democracy, direct contact and newsletters, use of regular surveys, and project based and/or stakeholder consultations. Some agencies perceive little reason to target specific engagement with CALD communities, or consider them only as forming part of the mainstream community.

Understanding of members of CALD communities was based predominantly on data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, other state and federal government departments and non-government organisations as well as surveys conducted for project planning purposes. These were supplemented by informal sources including the agency's own staff (who conducted volunteer work in the community in their personal time). The most effective outreach strategies were the use of liaison officers who spoke the target communities' language, face-to-face and personal contact, and significantly, the establishment and maintenance of long-term relationships with members of CALD communities.

Agencies reported that communication with members of CALD communities were most effective when they used visual aids, interpreters and translators, an open honest and committed communication style, and, where possible, the community's language. Barriers to effective engagement were the high staff turnover rates in the public sector (as effective personnel sought career trajectories); language barriers; E-communication (considered unsuitable due to lack of computer skills or resources in CALD and remote communities); the expense and limited availability of interpreters and translators; lack of staff confidence in how to engage with CALD communities; formality of processes (which were perceived as forbidding to members of CALD communities); and insufficient time and financial resources to adequately engage people on their terms. Strategies for effective engagement with members of CALD communities were usually community-centred and included the provision of good workshops, techniques tailored to the communities' needs rather than those of public service staff, and one-on-one communication strategies.

The skills needed to effectively engage with members of CALD communities were to embed CALD awareness and sensitivity into mainstream practices — particularly project design and planning -- by providing training that gives public sector staff an awareness of CALD experiences, and effective leadership and/or champions of cultural sensitivity in all agencies especially at the executive level. Important support systems to facilitate this included a directory of resources that is easily accessible and well advertised; profiles of CALD groups in specific areas (including cultural information such as gender and age roles in specific cultural groups) and good information sharing systems. There was also a perceived need to employ more people from CALD backgrounds in the public sector, provide more liaison officers for CALD communities, provide more cross-agency coordination, provide information on how to apply cultural awareness training in each agency, and showcase successes.

The findings from these interviews demonstrated that the ideal of engaging with diversity is notionally supported in Queensland government agencies and highlighted the value of executive leadership and building relationships with a broad cross-section of communities to ensuring that policy and goodwill are implemented.

Focus groups

The focus groups were conducted to enable contributors to reflect on the ways in which their agencies were working well with members of CALD communities and how successful actions may be replicated in other programs or agencies. Contributors' responses were grouped thematically. In the full project report, specific agency examples with potential for wider application were included and each section concluded with recommendations for further action, however this level of identification is not reported here. Rather this highlights general principles for cultivating a framework within the public sector conducive to effective engagement. The themes were:

Mandate and leadership is required

A mandate from each agency is required so that consultation with members of CALD communities becomes part of regular business and part of planning and process, rather than a specific project. Engagement has to be linked to appreciation by the Senior Executive level that, as service providers, staff must enact federal and state government policies about access, equity and participation in order to provide democratic services, and engagement should be specifically expressed in strategic plans and contracts against which performance of leaders and sections is evaluated.

Recognition of differences between public sector agencies

The freedom staff have to pursue initiatives and the role of the staff members in some agencies as diametrically different to that of staff in others, is a factor that influences engagement strategies employed and their success. Some agencies have a generic approach in terms of respect for other people's opinions, others have guidelines on diversity that focus on their own workforce. Priorities for allocating resources such as funding and time also differ across agencies.

Structures — Creation of Cultural Diversity Units or Designated Officers

When agencies have some form of mandate, there are various structural manifestations including establishing a number of advisory groups and a state-wide or even national framework for the ways agencies interact with CALD communities in providing a wide variety of services. Queensland Police was identified as one of the agencies that have moved beyond being culturally aware of difference, to develop state and even national competency guidelines, and education and training.

Co-ownership of ideas and projects

While productive engagement was seen to occur and good ideas to be generated by collaborative discussions between stakeholders, the local community and agencies with genuine devolution of decision-making power, the difficulties of enacting this ideal were

articulated. Landcare was cited as a successful approach and model for collaborative discussion.

Recognition of diversity within and between communities

Recognising the different nature and specific needs of various CALD communities was emphasised, with a wide variety of strategies necessary given the diversity of communities, and especially to the imperative to provide mechanisms for engagement with people without imposing authority on communities or groups within them. Some agencies worked to obtain representatives from women's, men's or youth groups in relevant religions or cultures, others used Community Groups as effective grass-roots contacts that provide mechanisms for community engagement.

Recognition as separate and different versus mainstreaming

In some situations specific targeting of individual cultural or linguistic communities is challenged, in that such identification as separate could marginalise them. However, a mainstreaming strategy need not preclude separate monitoring, awareness training, and reporting.

Obstacles: Time and resource limitations

Staff members circumvented some of the structural obstacles they encountered by referring colleagues to the legislative framework, leadership and agency culture mentioned above. However limited time and resources remain a challenge for many. Project planning is a key area where time for reflection and consideration of previous monitoring and evaluation data needs to be built into the project planning process. Agencies should develop realistic benchmark outcomes and build in time and resources to evaluate their achievement.

Relationship building and trust

The need for trust within public service agencies and between agencies and members of CALD communities is considered an absolute, particularly to overcome initial doubt within various communities about specific agencies, then to develop trust in broader government agencies. The focus group participants reiterated views expressed in the interviews and in the literature about the value of building on-going relationships and goodwill between public sector staff and CALD communities and their representatives. Time and resources invested in informal familiarisation had long-term benefits. One such benefit of "feeding off" ethnic community representatives is the ability to "filter out", disseminate, the resultant cultural knowledge and information (Dooley et al. p. 34).

Use of skills of members of the broader community

Using the potential and skills of local communities was seen as imperative, via schemes that enable members of the broader community to work *with* public sector agencies rather than

against them, and to assist with agencies' tasks. For instance asking elders of local communities to support and contribute, where possible. Non-government organisations provide examples such as using bilingual home care workers for the aged. This approach should ensure suitable recompense and be reciprocal with community capacity building programs, employing a partnership model wherever possible.

Moving beyond gatekeepers

Gatekeepers were seen to be official representatives through whom communities may be accessed. As some gatekeepers were seen as stereotypic in their understanding of their cultures, staff should recognise that one representative is rarely appropriate. The potential for engagement is limited or compromised if always involving the same few, recognised, community leaders or organisations, especially if they are selected because they share the values of staff. There need to be further strategies to move beyond groups to people who do not have a connection and to ensure coverage of fragmented and internally differentiated communities.

Contributors distilled many of the aspects outlined above to key success factors and prerequisites for wider replication. An example was the *Creating a Healthier Queensland* workshop designed by the Queensland Nutrition team to upskill frontline health professionals about their knowledge of nutrition so they can deliver information to the general public. The well-received package comprises a training manual, handouts, and resources for the participants. Its modification for different cultural groups involved numerous multicultural networks and various cultural and community groups

The research shows that there have been many efforts to soften the 'bureaucratic face' of state agencies and that many public sector staff are working to better engage with members of CALD communities. The focus groups offer a range of recommendations that can be adopted and adapted by various agencies, but also identify principles that should underpin any specific guidelines and improvement strategies within individual agencies.

Case studies

The case studies also suggest that mandates and strategies that recognise members of CALD communities as part of the core business of the agency are essential in enriching the scope and reach of the agency's activities. Programs that have significant funding, time, and personnel provided by upper management, can have positive outcomes. Two of the four case studies provided in the final report are summarised here.

Queensland Art Gallery (QAG)

The Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) has a successful history of engagement and enjoys solid relationships with CALD communities. Such engagement is regarded as enriching the scope

and reach of the QAG's activities. For example, staff have liaised with Pacific Islander communities and with a range of Asian communities in Southeast Queensland for the Asia-Pacific Triennials. They have also liaised with local and northern Indigenous communities for artwork displays.

QAG's relationships with CALD communities are strengthened by the Director's understanding of the need for and benefits of engagement, an understanding that permeates to all staff. As a consequence, initiatives are well resourced in money and time. QAG ensures that transport is provided for community consultants to reach the gallery, and provides food and beverages during meetings. QAG staff do not presume that members of the community have the time to engage in consultation, and have familiarised themselves with the economic and social difficulties facing many members of relevant CALD communities. Also, staff showing an aptitude for CALD engagement are maintained and supported in their positions so that medium to long-term relationships can be established with communities while avoiding the confusion generated when new staff make contact. Staff employ their personal contacts with relevant members of CALD communities, for example, when engaging with Pacific Islanders by working with the pastors in the communities' churches to make contact and validate their projects. Other techniques include an email database of 'Friends of the Gallery', and recruiting members of specific CALD and Indigenous communities as volunteers and paid assistants at public events and exhibitions.

Townsville Police Service Liaison Officers

In Townsville, the Police service attempts to engage in culturally sensitive wayswith members of a range of CALD and Indigenous communities. Townsville Police have linked with their local Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) to obtain a more detailed understanding of specific communities who comprise their local CALD communities than can be provided through ABS statistics. Police staff attend monthly meetings with the MRC, at the request of MRC leaders, to ensure the police remain abreast of issues relevant to members of various CALD communities. Police have worked with the MRC to employ two local Police Liaison Officers (PLOs) who accompany officers when problems arise within the CALD communities in the area. The PLOs have proven to be a successful initiative in that they provide face-to-face interaction with the communities, show that the local community policing staff are broader than the dominant white community, and enable CALD community members to provide culturally-sensitive information that CALD community members may not wish to divulge to regular policing staff. Five Indigenous PLOs are also employed and are regularly seconded to surrounding townships. All PLOs have more work than they can manage as 'bridges' between the dominant 'white' community and people of 'colour' in the region. These measures have resulted in improved safety in participating communities, greater cooperation of CALD communities' leaders and better respect for Police officers and relationships between them and members of CALD communities.

Conclusions and recommendations

Public Sector Staff Engagement with Members of CALD Communities: Problems and Benefits

Despite the success stories explored in the case studies, the focus groups and interviews revealed some serious concerns about the current practice of community engagement with members of CALD communities. These were largely consistent with issues identified in the literature review. The research showed there are many challenges for staff in public sector agencies in providing optimum engagement with members of CALD communities. Where staff do engage there is concern that staff engagement may be inappropriate, culturally insensitive, and/or cause offence to members of the CALD community they are targeting. Other staff operate in agencies where they perceive a lack of a mandate to involve members of CALD communities in agency programs, and a lack of leadership in showing how this should be done in arenas where staff are operating with limited resources such as time and funding. There is also concern that public sector agencies continue to maintain a 'top-down' approach to community engagement rather than ensuring that people are involved as a key component of participatory democracy, that those groups who have proven worth as contacts are over-engaged, and that CALD communities are frequently assumed and portrayed to be homogenous and 'harmonious', overlooking that there are factions and divisions. This includes a lack of awareness about gender difference and of the different ways in which women and men from CALD communities may engage (or not) with the public sector. High staff turnover rates, language barriers, the unsuitability of government's push towards

electronic communication, lack of interpreters and translators, and the forbidding formality of processes to members of CALD communities, are further causes for concern. Nonetheless, focus groups and case studies show that there are significant strategies within many agencies and a strong will to better engage among dedicated staff.

One of the key benefits of effective engagement is the rollout of projects that have the approval of the target group(s) and/or staff satisfaction that the best outcome has been achieved in discussing and planning a project. In addition, the research highlighted specific engagement strategies and dimensions of public sector practice that enhance professional performance and relations between public sector agencies and broader society. Providing opportunities for service providers to connect with 'clients' and reflect on their practice can improve public sector performance as well as improve sustainable community well-being by easing social and ethnic tensions, increasing participation, trust and confidence via vertical and horizontal relationships in the community.

To effectively engage with members of CALD communities and women it is necessary for agencies to operate with the assumption, in an increasingly multicultural Australia, that engagement with a range of members of CALD communities constitutes a key component of their 'core business', and that involvement of this diversity of people is essential in improving agencies' effectiveness in community engagement and participatory democracy

Recommendations

This study has contributed a more nuanced understanding of issues important for implementing effective planning and policy strategies and enhancing current state government approaches to engaging with a wider range of community members. This is required to protect the legitimate claims of people of various cultures and language groups to have a specialised 'voice', that is, an opportunity to present the uniqueness of their perspective (Dooley et al, 2000). As well all citizens, as groups and as individuals, are entitled to representation, to projects embedded in their respective communities, to an opportunity to contribute to initial project design, and to be consulted on an ongoing basis.

The research shows that many public sector staff are working to better engage with members of CALD communities and suggests a range of recommendations that can be adopted and adapted by various state agencies in five areas. These provide the framework for appropriate engagement practices. First, it is important for public sector employees to familiarise themselves with the economic, social and cultural realities of the lives of those with whom they seek to engage and give due consideration to the skills and resources at their disposal to commit to engaging with the state. They should avoid conflict with people's roles and responsibilities and also reinforcing stereotypes. With this awareness of people's lived experiences and structural relations (especially of privilege and disadvantage) they should

ensure accessibility and cultural acceptability of schedules, venues, transport, catering and styles of engagement activities proposed. Considerable potential exists to use people within the broader community to assist agencies with engaging successfully and with the full range of their tasks, but community members should be suitably recompensed for such activities.

Such sensitivity to the group identity and circumstances that people share should not however, be based on denial of differentiation within and across groups. Agencies should never assume that members of CALD communities are homogeneous but should recognise the diversity, 'factions' and social divisions between and within cultures and communities and plan successful engagement processes by taking account of such differences. As well, flexibility is needed because of the differences between public sector agencies.

A third important dimension relates to learning. Training of new and current staff in cross-cultural communication, cultural sensitivity and gender awareness should be an ongoing activity to develop cultural competence. Good translation services, language skills and understanding of specific cultural practices and values supplement these skills. Public sector staff should receive ongoing training to become aware of CALD communities' different epistemological frameworks via background papers giving anthropological theoretical reasons for their difference. They should also have opportunities to participate in workshops about how to 'build bridges' between CALD cultures and dominant Australian ways of being, and to participate in follow-up sessions that enable staff to build and retain contacts with similarly trained staff to engage in progressive problem-solving. In the long term, the professional organisations of public sector staff should constitute awareness of CALD issues as a necessary component to membership, and as a core component of ongoing professional development.

A fourth consideration is the key challenge of building institutional capacity and commitment across all state government agencies. This requires a mandate and leadership from the top as well as facilitating structures such as designated units or officers. Adequate provision must be made for time, money and materials. As well recruitment strategies must provide the requisite staff resources including liaison officers, staff from CALD backgrounds and bi-lingual workers where appropriate. Cross-agency coordination is vital to share successes, ensure integration and avoid duplication. Finally, agencies should endorse, resource and reward long-term relationship-building activities with a broad range of identified communities, community groups and individuals that move beyond gatekeepers. Effective networks and relationships embodying rapport, trust and mutual respect are the basis of productive collaboration.

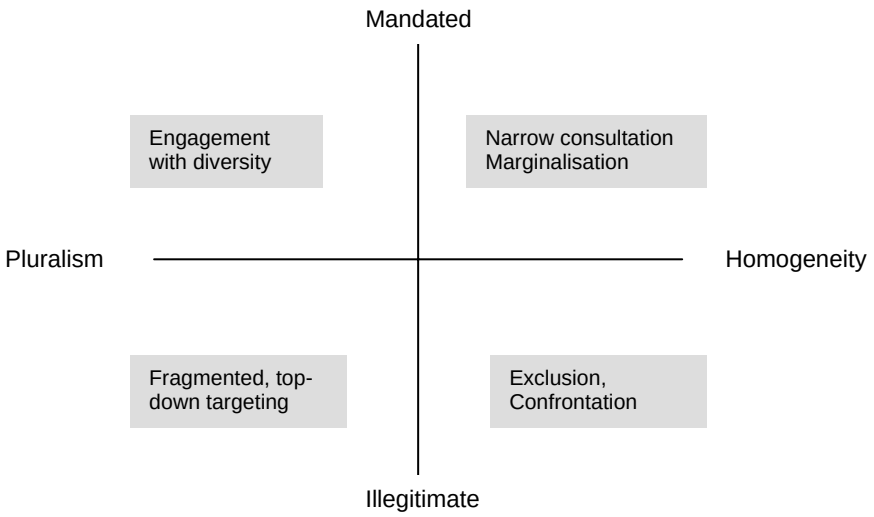

Figure 1. Modes of interaction

Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the scope of possible modes of interaction between state agencies and CALD communities, encapsulating these findings. The horizontal axis represents a distinction between agencies with full recognition of diversity and cultural competence and those blind to difference and diverse needs. The vertical axis indicates the degree of institutional endorsement of outreach activities from fully mandated by the highest authorities to lack of recognition of this as a legitimate activity. Some possible types of program and policy outcomes are indicated within each domain of the diagram. While it was not the objective of this research to locate specific departments or agencies in Queensland in these quadrants, it is clear that in practice there is a complex and overlapping mélange of current strategies rather than a simple distribution of Queensland agencies across these four hypothetical categories. Equally clear was the contribution of these two dimensions to successful engagement.

Concern that some groups have been excluded from full participation in public deliberation has led to a desire for wider community engagement. However, too often the democratic ideal that all persons affected by a decision be included in the process of major decision-making, has been compromised. As Young (2000, p. 83) has argued “A democratic process is inclusive not simply by formally including all potentially affected individuals in the same way, but by attending to the social relations that differently position people and condition their experiences, opportunities and knowledge of the society”. As well as corroborating this argument, the *Engaging with Diversity* research demonstrated that without a foundation in the cultural awareness, capacity and commitment of state agencies, and without a sophisticated understanding of diversity, no ‘toolkit’ of participation strategies or inclusive engagement techniques will prove effective.

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