Citizens' engagement in policymaking and the design of public services

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Executive summary

• The theory and practice of public administration is increasingly concerned with placing the citizen at the centre of policymakers’ considerations, not just as target, but also as agent. The aim is to develop policies and design services that respond to individuals’ needs and are relevant to their circumstances. Concepts such ‘co-creation’ and ‘co-production’ have emerged to describe this systematic pursuit of sustained collaboration between government agencies, non-government organisations, communities and individual citizens. The Australian Government’s report Ahead of the Game—the 2010 ‘blueprint’ for the reform of the Australian Public Service (APS)—is cast in this light.

• The APS has been involved in ongoing reform since the 1976 Coombs Royal Commission from which emerged a whole-of-government approach to public administration. This New Public Management invoked entrepreneurialism, outputs and metrics, the cutting of red tape, and a view of the public as ‘consumers’. Over the past decade, this view has been reframed to regard the public as ‘citizens’, whose agency matters and whose right to participate directly or indirectly in decisions that affect them should be actively facilitated. Such an approach honours the fundamental principle of a democratic state—that power is to be exercised through, and resides in, its citizens.

• In many democracies, citizen participation in policymaking and service design has been debated or attempted, but too infrequently realised. There have been some notable achievements, in both advanced and developing countries, and there is abundant public policy literature advocating thoroughgoing collaboration. But genuine engagement in the ‘co-production’ of policy and services requires major shifts in the culture and operations of government agencies. It demands of public servants new skills as enablers, negotiators and collaborators. It demands of citizens an orientation to the public good, a willingness to actively engage, and the capabilities needed to participate and deliberate well. These are tall orders, especially if citizens are disengaged and certain groups within the population are marginalised.

• Most especially, effective engagement by a citizen-centric public service requires political support for the genuine devolution of power and decision-making to frontline public servants and professionals—and to the citizens and stakeholders with whom they engage. Ministers and agency heads have a major leadership responsibility here.
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**Introduction**

Fundamental to any consideration of citizen engagement in policymaking and the design of public services is the recognition that the citizens in a democracy have both rights and duties, and that democratic governance provides opportunities for citizens to participate actively in shaping their world. Such participation is effected in multiple ways and at various levels, from informal local and community settings, through incorporated entities, NGOs and peak bodies, to such key institutions as legislatures, the courts and the public service.

Democracies are socially and culturally distinctive, developing traditions, conventions and structures that reflect the values and habits of their citizens. In an Australian context, the political scientist Graham Maddox has expressed the ‘idea of the democratic polity suited to the realities of the modern world’ in the following terms:

1. First, democracy should rest on a constitutional order, by which the power of any particular government of the day is limited to appropriate spheres of action.  

2. Second, it should have a ‘responsible’ executive which, though limited to appropriate spheres of action and to a definite term of office, is nevertheless sufficiently strong to fulfil all the functions of government and to help adjust the social order to the needs of the time.  

3. Third, the executive government should be counterbalanced by a constitutional opposition, to probe, question and help the community control the power of government.  

4. Fourth, all its political institutions, such as the legislature, the government and bureaucracy, the courts and all the statutory bodies of the ‘public sector’, should conduct their procedures according to the traditional ideals of democracy—in particular, justice, liberty, equality and community.  

5. And fifth, the whole political structure should rest on a pluralistic, participatory society, which maintains a vigorous group life.  

These five features together cover the main themes of modern democratic literature. For us to judge a community as ‘democratic’, we suggest here that all five features must be found together, as a kind of ‘syndrome’ to apply to any political system.  

Within the broad scope of such a democracy, public policy constantly evolves to manage social, economic and environmental affairs, to respond to the needs, preferences and desires of citizens, and to steer or nudge them in directions that are regarded as conducive to the nation’s general wellbeing. It is a complex and fluid endeavour.

We shape our world through public policy. This public policy is made not only by politicians, but by thousands of public servants and the tens of thousands of women and men who petition parliaments and ministers, who join interest groups, comment through the media or represent unions, corporations and community movements. All have a stake in public policy. The entire community is affected by public policy.  

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The theory and practice of public administration is increasingly concerned with placing the citizen at the centre of policymakers’ considerations, not just as target, but also as agent. To that end, public servants are being exhorted to collaborate, not merely consult; to reach out, not merely respond. This means engaging with people who are increasingly well-educated, attuned to their rights as citizens and voters, who have ready access to information and broad exposure to the voices of opinion-leaders, experts and advocates.

This is not to deny the challenges of engaging with marginalised or disaffected citizens and groups—a thorough consideration of which is beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose here is to acknowledge the growing expectations of citizens to be more effectively involved in policymaking and service design, and to explore the responsibilities and capacities of the Australian Public Service (APS) to initiate and facilitate such engagement.

Given that the language of choice and customisation permeates the consumer world of goods and services that citizens inhabit, such expectations increasingly frame their view about the content and delivery of public services. They want to have a say in how solutions are developed and services delivered beyond the general preferences they express when endorsing a party’s platform and electing parliamentary representatives to pursue their interests and concerns through the legislature.

Governments, in their turn, are recognising that they need more direct participation by citizens in order to govern well—to ensure stability, to facilitate people’s wellbeing and to manage environmental, health, security and energy issues into the future. Governments realise that they must harness the ideas, knowledge, wisdom and skills of the non-government sector—business, academia, the professions, and voluntary organisations. Failure to engage will waste resources and curtail opportunities.

In 2002, the Parliamentary Library published a Research Paper entitled *Shaping Relations between Government and Citizens: Future Directions in Public Administration*. It reported, among other things, ten initiatives ‘designed to facilitate the participation of citizens in the policy-making process’. This current paper is to some extent an update of that analysis, but it is primarily concerned with how the development of public policy might benefit from thoroughgoing engagement with citizens and other groups. It draws on the recent public policy literature, and on commentary and case studies, to describe the cultural and procedural changes that might be needed if the APS is to realise its vision of collaborative, democratically-legitimised policymaking and service design.

The paper considers current reform initiatives in the APS and examines the implications of citizen-centric ideals for the processes and structures of government agencies, for the attributes, skill sets

4. Ibid., p. 1.
and dispositions of public servants, and for the culture of the APS. It considers other jurisdictions’
experiences with citizen-focussed approaches, and takes a closer look at the notion of ‘co-
production’ as an exemplary exercise in citizen engagement in policymaking and the design and
delivery of services. The paper’s Appendix 1 contains various case studies where co-production and
other forms of citizen engagement have proven effective.

A philosophical framework for citizen engagement and participation

The adoption of a citizen-centric worldview in policymaking and service design is a manifestation of
the fundamental commitment to citizens’ participation in governance that characterises a
democratic polity. At its broadest, the commitment is reflected in efforts by activists and political
theorists to promote what has been variously labelled ‘deliberative’, ‘direct’ or ‘participatory’
democracy. At a more prosaic level, the commitment is reflected in the local and practical initiatives
that various governments, in Australia and overseas, have pursued to ensure citizens’ involvement in
decisions that affect them. Examples include such diverse matters as budget formulation, land
management and health care.

The deliberative / participatory democratic perspective

The philosophical basis for citizen engagement and participation is famously ascribed to 5th century
BCE Athenian democrats and claimed to be a defining feature of the intellectual and political
heritage of the West—although significant other sources of democratic thought and practice have
been identified in the early Muslim world.5

The modern turn to a concern for a genuinely citizen-centric politics can be traced to political
thinking in the wake of the Second World War—notably Hannah Arendt’s The Origins of
Totalitarianism (1951) and The Human Condition (1958). Arendt pursued a strong version of political
engagement which she considered to be a profound cultural achievement rather than something
emerging naturally from human nature. She regarded citizenship as a distinctive and consciously
adopted role, played out by citizens interacting and debating in a discrete public realm in which
everything ‘can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity’.6

During the last few decades of the 20th century, the debate on citizens’ participation in their own
governance tended to move away from the Arendtian strictures towards exploring and applying
more fluid and nuanced approaches. The German critical theorist Jürgen Habermas proved a
seminal influence on the debate, arguing for what he termed ‘communicative rationality’, whereby
competent and knowledgeable citizens engage with one another in good faith, and through the
giving (or assuming) of reasons arrive at a shared understanding about a situation.7 Habermas
contended that citizens will regard democratic governments—and thus the laws, policies and

interventions which issue from them—as legitimate only ‘insofar as the democratic process, as it is institutionally organized and conducted, warrants the presumption that outcomes are reasonable products of a sufficiently inclusive deliberative process’.  

In the last two decades, there have been heightened theoretical and practical efforts to secure a more robust place for citizens’ involvement in democratic governance. One leading theorist and activist, John Dryzek, contends that this latest deliberative turn ‘represents a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged by competent citizens’.  

A significant consideration for governments’ engaging with citizens—and an unsurprising one—is that modern democratic states are highly complex affairs, inextricably connected to market economics (writ globally), and charged with the governance of societies that are increasingly pluralistic in terms of ethnic and racial mix, religious and cultural variety, to say nothing of the array of individual personal and political values that such diversity implies. This makes involving citizens in deliberation about governance and the design of policies and services no simple task. As the prominent theorist James Bohman bluntly states: ‘It is certainly true that current arrangements ... do not promote the sort of public deliberation that is needed in complex and pluralistic societies’.  

Reformist public servants’ ethical perspectives  

It is the view of Australia’s most senior public servant, Terry Moran, that the engagement of citizens is ‘not only the right thing to do but will provide a rich new source of ideas to government’.  

His predecessor, Peter Shergold was also, and remains, a strong advocate of citizen engagement. Shergold is currently championing a large scale, practical and symbolic initiative in participatory citizenship—working title Australia Forum—to foster civic engagement in democratic dialogue.  

The Australia Forum’s rationale is that ‘Australia’s best future will be shaped through dialogue —and through facilities and technologies that are enabling, democratic and globally connected’. In a press interview elaborating his ideas about the importance of having ‘a place for public discourse’, Shergold argued that ‘in the 21st century, Western democracies are trying to find ways to re-stimulate and re-engage a participatory democracy’ and the Australia Forum ‘would symbolise that there are two sides to a democracy—the citizens’ representatives and the citizens themselves’.  

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13. Ibid.
There is a strong ethical ring to these public servants’ exhortations. Engagement is the ‘right thing to do’ because it goes to the heart of democratic governance and decision-making. It upholds a strong or “thick” concept of citizenship that goes beyond the minimal conception of a citizen as an ‘abstract, disconnected bearer of rights, privileges and immunities’. This “thick” concept of citizenship fosters a sense of collective agency and responsibility for the achievement of common goods or goals, and at a more fundamental level enables the development of shared understandings about the kind of society we wish to create and inhabit. It is these concepts and principles that resonate through the arguments for reform being urged upon the APS in the various reports and analyses discussed below.

There are, of course, reasons for community engagement other than the ethical imperatives of democracy and promotion of a strong conception of citizenship. By engaging with citizens, governments can benefit from expert knowledge beyond their immediate realm of information, expertise and advice, while creating at the same time opportunities to educate people about policy alternatives. Through engagement, governments can not only develop a better appreciation of public opinion, but might seize the occasion to challenge it, to inform and shape people’s preferences. Officials can also test the public’s likely reaction to a policy proposal.

But the most important reason for genuine engagement with citizens remains that of legitimising, in the strong sense articulated by Habermas, the decisions and policies that governments finally settle upon.

**An international perspective on citizen participation**

In its 2001 assessment of citizen engagement practices, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that, whereas considerable progress had been made in the provision of information, large differences remained between OECD countries when it comes to consultation. On the active participation front, ‘efforts to engage citizens in policymaking are rare, undertaken on a pilot basis only and confined to a very few OECD countries’. Notwithstanding the fact that governments’ engagement with citizens has ‘expanded ... as new techniques have been developed’ the situation in many countries remains ‘a patchwork of initiatives, experiments and established routines’. Again, the OECD’s assessment of engagement practices focused on the consultation practices and outreach efforts of governments, and much less so on the dispositions of citizens to engage and the particular challenges of connecting with marginalised groups.

Since 2001, several governments in OECD countries and elsewhere have genuinely sought to strengthen mainstream citizen participation in policy development and the design and delivery of

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17. Ibid.
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There are some regulatory and policy provisions for participation at the national and even the European Union (EU) level, but these are mostly experimental. Such attempts at citizen engagement are often shaped—and their success usually conditioned—by the kinds of civic traditions that are already in place in the country concerned. Not surprisingly, governments in countries with strong traditions of devolved governance and a vibrant civil society have been most successful in bringing citizens into policy and service design.

According to the European Institute for Public Participation (EIPP), there are three main requirements for successful public participation:

- a clearly defined constitutional framework for public participation. Only through an explicit, shared understanding between politicians and citizens can confidence be developed and public participation realise its democratising potential
- a systematic approach to public participation methods to help organisers of public participation processes choose the most suitable and effective methods, and
- rigorous and challenging evaluation of public participation in practice to develop a culture of learning about participation and advance the systematisation of participatory methods.

The report also highlights three important challenges for participation:

- the challenge of cost—including costs of time, money and potentially political costs if participation is poorly handled
- the challenge of complexity—discerning which participatory practices are suited to the scale of a problem and the technicalities involved, and
- the challenge of representativeness—involving a ‘mini-public’ that mirrors the broader society and adequately considers the interests of those with most at stake.

The disposition of a country’s leadership, too, has an impact on the extent and efficacy of citizens’ participation. For example, in the United States and the United Kingdom there have been some notable, highly symbolic statements and actions by these countries’ leaders that assert commitments to deep and genuine citizen participation. President Barack Obama, as his first executive action upon assuming office in February 2009, issued to all government agencies a *Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government* ‘to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration’.

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18. In 2009, the OECD updated and republished its *Guiding Principles for Open and Inclusive Policy Making*. These are reproduced at Appendix 5
20. Ibid., p. 4.
21. Ibid., pp. 8–9.
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During the 2010 UK election campaign, the Conservative Party Leader, David Cameron, said that he ‘extended an invitation to everyone in this country to join the government of Britain’. 23 As Prime Minister, he said that he was determined to implement his Big Society vision, putting it ‘at the heart of public sector reform’. 24 Describing building the Big Society as his ‘great passion’, Cameron has called for ‘a whole new approach to government and governing’ that ‘unleashes community engagement’, devolves decision-making and gives public servants ‘much more freedom’. 25

Broadly speaking, the question is not so much whether pressures for citizen engagement in policymaking and service design will intensify, but rather how far politicians and ministers will be willing to risk real engagement, and how successful public servants will be in enabling it to happen. Mirroring this question—and an issue considered briefly later—is that of the capabilities and inclinations of citizens who have been denied access to, or chosen to reject, those opportunities for engagement, however well-intentioned or thoughtfully designed those opportunities might be.

**Australian Public Service reform: a brief history**

In 1976, the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration chaired by HC Coombs produced a landmark report that promoted whole-of-government approaches across the public service and sought to give citizens ‘a greater sense of being in touch with the decision-makers’. 26 The report sparked a change in the culture and operations of the APS leading to ‘a wave of reform which surfaced in the early 1980s’ and persisted through the 1990s. 27 This reform process—experienced in several democratic polities in the Anglo-tradition and usually designated New Public Management (NPM) 28—encouraged, among other things, the application of private sector management practices to public service. It stressed ‘the importance of the three Es – economy, efficiency and effectiveness’. 29

The overall aim of NPM was ... to make the public service more flexible and efficient, and more responsive to government. Key components of NPM at the Commonwealth level in Australia have included making the work of public servants contestable; the introduction of performance management, including individual performance assessment and pay; the devolution of centralised managerial controls to individual agencies; the re-structuring of public sector industrial relations according to contract-based models; and the outsourcing of complex services.

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25. Ibid.
delivery to non-government organisations. Most people working within, and writing about, the public service during the implementation of NPM reforms, have accepted that these disciplines have improved its flexibility and efficiency.30

Much of the literature surrounding NPM invoked entrepreneurialism, a focus on outputs and metrics, responsiveness to clients and the cutting of red tape. Significantly, the model tended to characterise members of the public, in their relationship to governments and public service agencies, as ‘customers’ or ‘consumers’, whose service demands were to be met and whose policy preferences were to be satisfied.

The mid-1990s saw the emergence of ‘civic engagement ... as a focused series of initiatives’ whereby a ‘new language of community consultation, stakeholder participation and responsiveness ... modified the top-down character of NPM reform’.31 From around 2000, the customer/consumer orientation was gradually reframed, with the onset of ‘a healthy evolution ... that recognises the importance of taking a broader conception of the public as citizens’ whose agency matters and whose right to participate in decisions that affect them is not only inalienable, but should be actively facilitated.32 Such an approach honours the fundamental principle of a democratic state—that power is to be exercised through, and resides in, its citizens.

Such imperatives have become increasingly urgent as corporate and other sites of publicly unaccountable power seem to be exercising a growing, and potentially disastrous, influence over both states and citizens. One might, for example, regard the global financial crisis of 2008–9 as only the latest in a string of major events that have galvanised public concern about who really exercises control over our individual and collective lives, about the role of citizens in influencing policies, and about what citizens and governments might do together to regain the ability to secure the policies and outcomes that they prefer.

Reforms in the Australian Public Service 2001–2010

Over the past decade, many of the reforms to the public service have involved measures aimed at:

• economic efficiency (outsourcing, market testing, changes to procurement and the management of Commonwealth property)
• greater government use of information and communications technologies
• accountability and transparency
• strengthened corporate governance for agencies and statutory authorities, and

32. Moran, op. cit.
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• employment arrangements and accountability relationships, especially at senior levels of the public service.\(^{33}\)

Successive Australian Commonwealth governments have sought—with varying degrees of success—to enhance transparency and to improve agencies’ interactions with, and accessibility to, citizens. These have included:

• the launching in 2002 of [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au), a single entry point for government information and services\(^{34}\)

• the 2020 Summit (April 2008) to draw citizens into a consultative and advisory process to assist the government to identify priorities and shape policies\(^{35}\)

• the introduction of Community Cabinet meetings in 2008\(^{36}\)

• the establishment (September 2009) of an Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration to devise a ‘blueprint’ for reform of the Australian Public Service\(^{37}\)

• abolition in 2009 of the use of conclusive certificates to exempt certain material from release under freedom of information provisions\(^{38}\)

• the acceptance by government (March 2010) of the recommendation by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for the introduction of legislation providing protection for whistleblowers (also previously recommended by a Senate Select Committee on Public Interest Whistleblowing in 1994)\(^{39}\)

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- the government’s general acceptance of the recommendations of its Web 2.0 Taskforce about ‘open government’; the release of public sector information; technology use for citizen engagement in policy-making and service provision; and online engagement by public servants.

- the June 2010 Declaration of Open Government ‘based on a culture of engagement, built on better access to and use of government held information, and sustained by the innovative use of technology’ which stated, among other things:

  Citizen collaboration in policy and service delivery design will enhance the processes of government and improve the outcomes sought. Collaboration with citizens is to be enabled and encouraged.

- the appointment of the Australian Information Commissioner in February 2010 with oversight of freedom of information and privacy matters; reforms to the FOI fees and charges regime from November 2010; and the Commissioner’s promulgation in May 2011 of the ‘Principles on Open Public Sector Information’.

Since 2001, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) have all continued to interrogate and reflect on public service practice, pursuing several initiatives directed at achieving reform consistent with a citizen-focused way of doing business.

The APSC has contributed significantly to the reform debate by publishing analyses, better practice guides and comprehensive State of the Service reports. An increasingly prominent feature of these reports and guides has been their advocacy of engagement with citizens. The 2004 report Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia’s Priority Challenges declared that the ‘dialogue between government and its citizens as stakeholders is a fundamentally important part of our democratic system. The APS has a crucial role in this dialogue’.


Available at: http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications07/changingbehaviour.htm

Available at: http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications07/wickedproblems.htm
Practice Guide *Innovation in the Public Sector* also emphasised the relationship between citizen-focused service delivery and opportunities for innovation.\(^{48}\)

In 2008, largely as a result of a recommendation from the 2020 Summit, the Government established an Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration ‘to devise a blueprint for reform’.\(^{49}\) The Group, chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Terry Moran AO), prepared a discussion paper that noted the ‘increasing complexity of public policy issues’ and highlighted ‘concerns about the ability of the APS to provide innovative and creative policy advice to government’ in a strategic environment characterised by increasing public expectations around transparency, accountability and consultation.\(^{50}\)

One of the strongest statements about the need for the APS to engage with citizens, and the challenges involved, appeared in the Government’s 2009 discussion paper *Reform of Australian Government Administration: Building the world’s best public service.*

[We] consider a final essential ingredient for high performance as a public service is the paramount principle of focusing on citizens in the formulation of policy advice. This can mean making sure that citizens’ or clients’ experiences of engaging with the program, service or regulation resulting from the policy intervention is at the forefront of the policy maker’s mind. This will involve, where possible, actively engaging citizens and stakeholders in the policy formulation process so that their perspectives and ideas are taken into account. In many cases, it will involve weighing up benefits for one group of citizens against costs imposed on another group.\(^{51}\)

In March 2010 the Advisory Group published its report, *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for Reform of Australian Government Administration.*\(^{52}\) Describing itself as ‘an ambitious agenda to equip the Australian Public Service (APS) and the nation for the challenges of the future’, the blueprint declared, under the sub-heading ‘Creating more open government’, that the APS will:

*Enable citizens to collaborate with government in policy and service design*

- Develop and implement new approaches to collaboration and consultation with citizens on policy and service delivery issues.
- Make public sector data available to the wider public in a manner consistent with privacy principles.

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49. Ibid., p. v.
50. Ibid., p. vi, pp. 6–7.
Conduct a citizen survey

- Conduct a survey of citizens’ views on their satisfaction with government programs, services and regulation to inform government business.
- These surveys desirably would be expanded to include all levels of government. 53

In May 2010, the Government announced that it accepted the report’s recommendations in full—although resources initially allocated to the reform process were later considerably curtailed. This issue is addressed later in this paper.

A Secretaries Board was established, chaired by the Secretary of the DPMC. It comprises all departmental secretaries and is the pre-eminent forum for the discussion of issues affecting the APS. The Board is formally responsible for:

- making decisions on public sector management and reform issues
- identifying and progressing strategic priorities for the APS, and
- setting the annual work program for Board Subcommittees. 54

The then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, said that, of reform in four key areas, ‘the first is to forge a stronger relationship with citizens through better delivery of services, and through greater involvement of citizens in their government’. 55 Moran, as the person charged with implementing the reforms, has reiterated that ‘we need not only to consult citizens, but invite them to collaborate in the design of services and of policy. Citizen engagement in service and policy design is not only the right thing to do but will provide a rich new source of ideas to government’. 56

In a similar vein, the 2010 APSC report *Empowering Change: Fostering innovation in the Australian Public Service* argued for ‘openness in the development and implementation of government policy’. It noted, however, that this ‘will require a paradigm shift in the approach of many agencies where much development of new ideas is done in a climate of secrecy’. 57 The report stressed ‘external input’ and ‘partnering’ both for new ideas and risk mitigation purposes; that ‘new technologies are creating opportunities for government to improve the services it offers to citizens’; and that ‘collaboration with the public, industry, academia and other governments will be needed to identify the best solutions’. 58

53. Ibid., Appendix 4.
55. K Rudd (Prime Minister), Speech at the opening of the JG Crawford Building at the ANU, Canberra, 8 May 2010, viewed 29 November 2010, http://pmrudd.archive.dpmc.gov.au/node/6752
58. Ibid., p. vi.
The extent to which such aspirations have been realised is impossible to determine—although the reference to the need for a ‘paradigm shift’ by agencies suggests that progress is likely to be slow. As agencies are exhorted to do more with less, it seems likely that the human and financial resources needed to drive change both in business models and attitudes will prove harder to find.

It is certainly the case that the requirement for serious, sustained engagement between governments and citizens has been a persistent theme in the critique and commentary about public service reform throughout the decade to 2010. Especially since the publication of the APS blueprint, it has been made clear in the pronouncements and speeches of senior public service figures that the citizen is to be placed firmly at the centre of policymaking and the design and delivery of public services. The implications of that requirement for the culture and practices of the APS are profound.

**What does engagement entail, and why does it matter?**

The literature on public participation in governance, civil society and politics is voluminous, and the word ‘engagement’ is peppered throughout. Engagement, in the governance and policy context that concerns us here, connotes a relatively sustained and systematic interaction between the parties. It involves the sharing of information, the offering of accounts, the giving and receiving of reasons, and the articulation of values. ‘Engagement is not a single process or set of activities. It is an ongoing process or conversation that builds trust and relationships.’

‘Engagement’ is ... instrumentalist in character ... (It comprises) deliberate strategies for involving those outside government in the policy process. ‘Policy process’, in this context, means ways of making policy decisions and ways of implementing them. It encompasses, in particular, the processes of ‘horizontal’ engagement, through which those in government (the political and bureaucratic executives) relate to those who are not in direct power relations with them.

This is not to suggest that questions about relative power between the parties—citizen and state—are absent, nor that the process of engagement dissolves realpolitik via the alchemy of consensus. At its best, however, engagement results in the joint determination of outcomes and confers legitimacy upon them.

Typically, analytical discussions about the practice of engagement identify its various elements as follows:

- Information access
  - The ready availability and accessibility of relevant information from diverse sources is a bedrock condition for effective citizens’ participation. In recent decades freedom of

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Information legislation has helped create that condition, and the emergence of the Internet has encouraged the flourishing of the information society. The digitisation of non-electronic records is part of governments’ ongoing efforts to facilitate public access to information.

- In April 2008 the OECD Council adopted the *Recommendation for enhanced access and more effective use of public sector information*. It elaborated principles of openness, transparency, quality and integrity, use of new technologies, redress and fair pricing mechanisms, and international access and use. Australia participated in the development of, and is a signatory to, these protocols.

- It is now virtually unthinkable that an Australian government agency would not have a website enabling, as a minimum, public access to corporate and general agency information. Some agencies are exploiting Web 2.0 technology to facilitate interactive engagement, but by and large, information flows remain one way—from government source to passive receiver of information, with the source being the determiner of what information is made available, when, and at what level of granularity. 

**Consultation**

- Consultation has been described as ‘a second order of citizen engagement’ that aims to include ‘the interests of the addressees of policies and/or the general public in the decision-making process. ... The decision-making process remains in the hands of politicians’. The traditional green and white paper mechanisms, exposure drafts of legislation, focus groups and surveys are familiar ways of gathering citizens’ views about particular initiatives. On legislative or policy matters affecting citizens at large, plebiscites may also be used. Sometimes, where policies have a particular impact on certain categories of citizens, governments go to considerable lengths to consult with the affected target groups and those who defend their interests. Nevertheless, it remains generally the case that governments ‘define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the process’.

**Public participation**

- The etymology of participation conveys a strong sense of being an active agent, beyond being a mere responder or passive follower. The literature on participation highlights the normative aspect of its being “a good thing”. It reserves its highest accolades for deliberative participation which is information-rich, unhurried, rationally-grounded but attentive to values, providing genuine opportunities for learning and for individuals’ re-thinking of their positions. It is about preference formation rather than mere preference assertion.

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62. EIPP, op. cit., p. 6.
63. Ibid.
64. OECD, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making* 2001, p. 23
Participation is the highest order of public engagement. In public participation interactions, dialogue and, ideally, deliberation take place. Rather than simply exchanging information, members of both parties (sponsors and participants) allow the possibility of their opinions being changed.

In deliberative settings participants can come to a shared understanding of issues and solutions and can thus make substantially better decisions.\(^{66}\)

The International Association for Public Participation specifies seven core values for participatory engagement practices that cover both the normative and instrumental dimensions of participation and these are reproduced at Appendix 2.\(^{67}\)

Of the three components of engagement outlined above—information, consultation, participation—a gradient of increasingly democratic efficacy is apparent:

The democratising potential of information alone is limited, as decision-makers are not bound by it. Consultation is more influential, as citizens have greater access to decision-makers and are able to feed into parts of the decision-making process, though they do not have the power to ensure that their knowledge or opinions are taken into account. It is public participation, with its deliberative qualities, that is most likely to have positive democratic effects.\(^{68}\)

Any discussion about citizen engagement must continually affirm the public as a distinct and legitimate voice calling to account other sites of power. ‘Public participation as an addition to representative processes may provide an antidote to national political elites or technocrats. It can counter the over weighted influence of powerful lobbies. It may also offer an effective way to overcome a citizen’s sense of futility and powerlessness in the face of these larger forces.’\(^{69}\)

**Why engagement matters for Australian governments**

The APSC’s 2010 report *Empowering change: Fostering innovation in the Australian Public Service* captures much of the importance for governments of public engagement when it states:

> Citizens and businesses are especially important external sources of ideas. Not only are they outside the public sector, but they also directly feel the impact of new policies and services. Governments cannot effectively address needs and concerns that they do not fully understand.\(^{70}\)

In many respects, such a statement reflects the kind of thinking that is current in the market-place among businesses seeking to gain a competitive edge.

> User-led innovation is transforming the way many organisations develop new products, services and knowledge. Service-based organisations in particular can benefit from leveraging the

\(^{66}\) EIPP, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

\(^{67}\) See [http://www.iap2.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=4](http://www.iap2.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=4)

\(^{68}\) EIPP, op. cit., p. 7.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., p. 6.

\(^{70}\) APSC, 2010, op. cit.
participation of their audiences, customers and citizens. Today’s consumers have much greater input into the creation and dissemination of the products and services they consume.\textsuperscript{71}

The Australian National Audit Office’s Better Practice Guide, \textit{Innovation in the Public Sector}, takes the argument even further, highlighting the importance of citizen engagement as a way for public servants to mitigate risk when addressing complex issues.

The best results are likely to flow from a process of strategic and frequent engagement. Such engagement goes beyond what might be thought of as more traditional forms of consultation to establishing a positive, proactive relationship. Apart from enriching the development process, at the very minimum proactive engagement with clients and external stakeholders will confirm assumptions, identify unexpected issues and help build understanding and support for change.\textsuperscript{72}

Perhaps the reason most commonly cited in the literature for engaging citizens is instrumental—it maximises the flow of useful knowledge to government decision-makers. The prominent British public policy adviser and consultant to the Australian Government, Geoff Mulgan, stresses this knowledge imperative, and also notes that any government that underestimates its citizens does so at its peril.

[Governments] are bound up with the broader shift to a society and economy organised around the systematic creation and use of knowledge. A majority of economic growth derives from new knowledge and its application; so does most health gain, and most military might. ...

[Today’s] citizens are far more educated, more knowledgeable, and more confident than their predecessors. As they use scientific knowledge and evidence of all kinds in their own lives—everything from dietary choices to business decisions—they expect the same of their governments, are less willing to accept that governments have privileged insights, or that government is a mysterious dark art. Instead, in fields as varied as health care or climate change, they may have access to at least as much reliable information as government and are unlikely to respect governments which ignore what is known.\textsuperscript{73}

Several state, territory and local jurisdictions have articulated their commitments to citizen engagement in the form of specific, public declarations to that effect. Some have supplemented these with advisory brochures for citizens and with ‘how to engage’ manuals for public servants.\textsuperscript{74}

Such publications invariably set out the reasons and justifications for the government’s active...


\textsuperscript{74} One of the most comprehensive manuals is produced by Victorian Government’s Department of Sustainability and Environment, \textit{Effective Engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders, Book 1 (Version 3)}, 2005
pursuit of citizen engagement, and outline the benefits to participants. In summary, they state that engagement with citizens:

- improves the quality of policy being developed, making it more practical and relevant, and helping to ensure that services are delivered in a more effective and efficient way
- is a way for government to check the health of its relationship with citizens directly—to check its reputation and status
- reveals ways in which government, citizens and organisations could work more closely on issues of concern to the community
- gives early notice of emerging issues, putting government in a better position to deal with them in a proactive way, instead of reacting as anger and conflict arise
- provides opportunities for a diversity of voices to be heard on issues that matter to people
- enables citizens to identify priorities for themselves and share in decision-making, thereby assuming more ownership of solutions and more responsibility for their implementation, and
- fosters a sense of mutuality, belonging and a sense of empowerment, all of which strengthens resilience.

A recent example of a government’s public commitment to citizen engagement occurred in June 2011 in the Australian Capital Territory. In her first ministerial statement to the ACT Assembly, the newly-elected Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, committed herself to ‘Open Government’, which she defined as ‘a way of working [that]... rests on three principles; transparency in process and information; participation by citizens in the governing process and public collaboration in finding solutions to problems’.  

The general transparency measures announced included:

- creation of an Open Government Website, which will be used to release government background reports and reviews
- public access to material released through Freedom of Information and to submissions made during public consultation, and
- a weekly report on key issues discussed and decisions taken by the Cabinet.

The Chief Minister said that she ‘will make public access to information the default position of her government’. She also promised to convene Virtual Community Cabinets, where ‘all Ministers will answer questions and respond to issues on Twitter’. Only time will tell whether such initiatives prove effective in enabling substantive and meaningful dialogue between citizens and MPs, or drawing citizens into (real or virtual) modes of collaboration with government agencies.

76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
While statements of commitment to engage with citizens can be found throughout all levels of government in Australia, there is considerable variation in the extent to which the rhetoric matches the reality. According to the public policy literature, local, state and territory governments appear to have fared better than national government in engaging citizens in both the development and implementation of policy, and in service delivery, but the extent to which genuine engagement occurs depends very much on circumstances. In particular, the identification of discrete communities of interest, or of place, seems to be a key factor in whether engagement initiatives really succeed, and governments are well-advised to seek these out when planning their engagement strategies. Importantly, case studies have revealed that the skills and perseverance of on-the-ground public officials have been vital to achieving successful engagement outcomes. There have been some collaborative successes involving cross-jurisdictional activity that included national agencies, but these have been few and far between.

‘Wicked problems’ in policymaking

A powerful case for greater citizen participation in policymaking arises from the emergence of what have been called ‘wicked problems’. These are problems that are highly resistant to resolution. As noted earlier, the APSC was sufficiently concerned about the challenges of ‘wicked problems’ to devote a discussion paper to them in 2007. They are emerging in both the environmental and social spheres—for example the degradation of the river systems of the Murray-Darling Basin and the seemingly intractable problems of Indigenous disadvantage. At the global level, wicked problems such as climate change have earned the descriptor ‘diabolical’.

The APS describes the tackling of wicked problems as ‘an evolving art’ and highlights the need ‘to continue to focus on effectively engaging stakeholders and citizens in understanding the relevant issues and in involving them in identifying possible solutions.’ The bulk of the literature dealing with wicked problems stresses collaborative strategies and adequate time frames—but as the APSC notes, these may incur ‘significant’ transaction costs and will demand skills of collaboration that are ‘in limited supply’.

In worst cases collaboration can end poorly – dialogue can turn into conflict, hardened positions and stalemate.
Collaboration between policymakers and the public demands that both public servants and citizens possess high-level relevant skills and personal attributes. Sound consultative and participatory methodologies are vital. The Canadian Institute on Governance (IOG) is frequently cited as a source of advice on these matters, and these methodologies are summarised in Appendix 3.  

The challenges for public servants in enabling—and for citizens in experiencing—effective engagement are similar to those encountered in deliberative or participatory democracy settings more broadly. Advocates of deliberative democracy do not require the dismantling of the mechanisms of representative democracy as they currently exist, but rather the meaningful supplementation of those mechanisms to better involve citizens. They seek a more practical influence upon parliaments and the like through citizens’ engagement in structured deliberative processes. Nor do they have unrealistic expectations about citizens’ commitment to democratic political activity.  

A note on citizens’ capacity to engage  

The issue of how well Australian citizens are themselves equipped to engage in collaborative policy development and service design is a vexed one. Although the issue receives some attention in this paper, the focus of the discussion remains largely on the extent to which Australian public servants are, or should be, skilled in the art of citizen and stakeholder engagement.  

Citizens may be well or poorly disposed to engage depending on many things—the urgency of their own concerns, the relevance of the matter being addressed, the nature of their previous engagements with government (if any) and their ‘habits of heart and mind’.  

The kind of engagement usually envisaged between public servants and citizens typically requires of citizens a somewhat demanding set of attributes. Ideally, if reasoned and respectful public dialogue is to ensue, citizen participants should be well-informed contributors—independently minded but showing the self-command and restraint that facilitates the contributions of others. They require the courage to articulate and defend their views (and change them where justified), the civility to listen to and consider contrary views, and the reasoning ability to weigh evidence and assess claims. They should possess the capacity to defer immediate needs or personal preferences in the interests of longer term benefits or outcomes, or the public good.  

Such attributes depend largely on citizens’ socialisation and education. It seems reasonable to suggest that they are more likely to arise where people have enjoyed, for example, exposure in their families and schools to the discussion of preferences and ideas; the development of good communication skills and literacy; and a basic understanding of Australia’s system of government. An induction into the civic dimensions of life through sporting and cultural clubs, voluntary associations would also help.  

89. Institute On Governance (IOG), Ottawa, Canada, website, viewed 29 November 2010, www.iog.ca  
Many Australians’ situations are not congenial to the development of these capabilities and dispositions. Social exclusion and other deprivations are very likely to discourage many citizens from engagement, especially where inequalities of power and status prevail. This exacerbates the ‘problem of engagement’ so often lamented by those public servants, and others, who seek to initiate it. Fortunately, there is a growing body of research around effective engagement strategies, especially for engaging with ‘hard to reach’ groups and individuals. Although surveying this research is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief initial consideration of some of the issues seems warranted here.

When it comes to the pursuit by public service agencies of engagement with marginalised groups and socially excluded citizens the epithet ‘one size fits few’ seems appropriate.

Despite progress in the development of community engagement ... evidence suggest[s] that equality groups remain under-represented. Barriers can relate to social, cultural and financial issues, to the overall approach to engagement, to procedures and to practical arrangements (including specific aspects of this such as the tools used, and the attitudes of those involved). 91

The Australian Government’s social inclusion agenda and its corresponding APS Social Inclusion Policy Design and Delivery toolkit are predicated upon the fact that marginalised groups experience complex, often multiple, forms of disadvantage, and ‘varying levels of disengagement from social networks, employment and services’. 92 Moreover, ‘people finding themselves in a cycle of disadvantage will need assistance and support over a long period if they are to have any hope of breaking the cycle’. 93

Modern policy and service delivery responses to social exclusion have involved more rigorous analyses of the nature of disadvantage, and more tailored, personalised and place-based approaches. Some examples of these are described in Appendix 1.

But it remains the case that in situations of disadvantage and marginalisation, citizens are even less likely to possess the capabilities—knowledge, skills, dispositions—that would readily enable them to enter into dialogue and sustained deliberation with public servants and other professionals. There has thus emerged—in agencies such as Centrelink, for example—approaches ‘based on a model of empowerment of participants to identify their own goals and aspirations and participate in forming pathways to improve their circumstances’. 94 That is, the personal capabilities of citizens are considered an integral dimension of the engagement process and attended to respectfully.

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94. M Darcy et al., op. cit., p. 21.
There are encouraging signs that such approaches are working, building the personal and civic capacities of the citizens involved, and thereby enhancing the quality of the engagement and collaboration achieved. For example, the formal evaluation of the above-mentioned Centrelink program reported:

At the very least the personalised attention participants received increased their sense of wellbeing, and in most cases self-esteem. For most participants, just the feeling of being listened to for the first time was a positive experience. ... Other participants confirmed that the tailoring of services to meet their needs produced more tangible outcomes. ... These reports make clear that increasing the time spent supporting individual, marginalised customers has a positive effect, especially as experienced by participants themselves. The process of holistic interviewing, identification of needs and referrals was greatly appreciated by participants, who overwhelmingly wanted to improve their own circumstances. 95

It should be self-evident that nurturing the personal capabilities of marginalised and disengaged citizens is a fundamental aspect of enhancing both the prospects for, and success of, subsequent efforts at collaborative policymaking and service delivery.

Engaging with socially excluded and other marginalised people in order to design, with them, effective solutions and services requires considerable cross-agency collaboration—something which, as a rule, is notoriously difficult to achieve. Strong links with external service providers are also required. Better coordination is of itself rarely enough; additional resources are needed. 96 Even targeting is not without its dilemmas, given its potential to direct resources to one marginalised group over another in a zero sum game’, as well as being ‘invasive and stigmatising’. 97

But despite these challenges there are grounds for optimism in the successes of agencies like Centrelink. Moreover—as made clear in this paper’s account of the burgeoning interest in, and implementation of, collaborative approaches internationally— the capacity of citizens for genuine engagement in policymaking and the design and delivery of services should not be underestimated.

For those governments and advocates with a genuine commitment to citizen engagement, the terms ‘co-production’, ‘co-creation’ and their equivalents have become familiar. They express a distinctive commitment to collaboration in policy and services design, with public servants, citizens and relevant stakeholder groups working as partners across the spectrum of activity—from diagnosis and analysis of issues through to tactical and strategic considerations in pursuit of jointly devised outcomes. The following section explores ‘co-production’ as an exemplar of good engagement practice.

95. Ibid., p. 27.
97. Ibid., p. 25.
Co-production and co-design: in pursuit of ‘deep’ engagement

Peter Shergold, has been a passionate advocate of what he calls the ‘participation society’, with its ‘twin pillars of trust and engagement’, and whose realisation is ‘the holy grail of public and social innovation’.98 He insists that there are ‘forms of architecture governance that can enhance the development and delivery of public policy by engaging citizens in more engaging ways’, resulting in ‘a more inclusive and civil society, strengthened by new manifestations of social capital and marked by renewed interest in diverse varieties of social innovation’.99

I find that I can argue the case for greater citizen engagement equally convincingly from the perspectives of shifting power from the state to the individual (right?) or of building a more inclusive and caring society (left?). I can base my rationale either on the democratic rights of individual citizens (left?) or on the civic responsibilities that they bear (right?). I can posit the benefits of greater involvement of non-government organisations either from the perspective of creating competitive markets for the delivery of public goods (right?) or from that of enabling greater community engagement (left?). My point is simply this: the politics of participation is complex but not fatal. 100

Shergold is a self-confessed ‘enthusiast’ for co-production, eloquent in his justification of its transformational possibilities, attuned to its complexity and risks, but more worried that, in the cautious world of the public service, ‘bold initiatives will founder on timidity’.101

Co-production essentially redefines the relationship between public service professionals and citizens from one of dependency to mutuality and reciprocity. On such an account, citizens in receipt of services are conceived as resources of value to, and collaborators in animating, the system, rather than as mere beneficiaries of it. That is, users of public services are not defined entirely by their needs, but also by what they might contribute to service effectiveness, and to other users and their communities through their own knowledge, experience, skills and capabilities.

The term ‘co-production’ was coined in the 1970s by American political scientist (and later Nobel Laureate) Elinor Ostrom.102 It was promoted through the UK Institute for Public Policy Research during the 1980s, and developed and deepened during the mid-1990s by the American lawyer, activist and inventor of Timebanks, Dr Edgar Cahn.103

Since then, the desire by many democratic governments to promote social inclusion, build social capital, encourage more personal responsibility in matters such as health and retirement income

99. Ibid., p. 142.
100. Ibid., p. 143.
101. Ibid., pp. 153, 155.
security, and to broaden governments’ capacity to address so-called ‘wicked problems’, has created a very favourable political and social climate for involving citizens in the co-production / co-design / co-creation of public services.

The past two decades have witnessed successful examples of co-production, including in developing countries\textsuperscript{104}, which typically enable struggling communities and disadvantaged individuals to collaborate with service organisations in designing and implementing solutions to their problems. Some relevant case studies appear in Appendix 1. The terms ‘enabling state’ and the ‘ensuring state’ have surfaced in the literature.\textsuperscript{105}

According to recent studies, successful co-production of public services appears to meet people’s needs better, and to strengthen their personal and civic capabilities, ‘so [services] are more efficient, effective and sustainable. The evidence ... suggests savings of up to six times the investment made in new approaches’.\textsuperscript{106} In Australia, the integration of the Department of Human Services with Centrelink and Medicare appears to be motivated by the benefits of the co-production approach.\textsuperscript{107}

To the extent that ‘public administrations are vehicles for expressing the values and preferences of citizens, communities and societies’ co-production seems to be an eminently suitable concept for guiding reforms in public administration.\textsuperscript{108}

In recent years, there has been a radical reinterpretation of the role of policymaking and service delivery in the public domain. ... Policy is now seen as the negotiated outcome of many interacting policy systems, not simply the preserve of policy planners and top decision-makers. Similarly, the delivery and management of services are no longer just the preserve of professionals and managers—users and other members of the community are playing a larger role in shaping decisions and outcomes. ...

This is a revolutionary concept in public service ... Finally, it demands that politicians and professionals find new ways to interface with service users and their communities.\textsuperscript{109}

Because co-production entails a different division of power between public service agencies, private sector entities, civil society actors and citizens, questions of governance are especially important. New forms of accountability (which, like power, is also increasingly dispersed) are required, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107} D Lenihan and L Briggs, ‘Co-design: Toward a new service vision for Australia’, \textit{Public Administration Today}, Issue 25, Canberra, 2011, pp. 35–47.
\end{itemize}
must be made robust through governance arrangements that are suited to non-hierarchical, networked collaborations.

Governance ... speaks to how society makes decisions on issues of public concern, how citizens are given a voice in decision-making, and how social partners work together to create public goods... Increasingly, government provides the leadership, change agenda and democratic institutions, and governance is how the work gets done. ... This process is characterised by a broad dispersal of power and responsibilities in society. No one controls all the tools or possesses all the levers to address the complex issues that people really care about. ...

To be sure, government is a player like no others. Its actions affect the overall performance of the governance system ... and influence the behaviour of all other layers in society. There is no ‘sound governance’ without ‘good government’, well-performing public institutions and competent public servants.¹¹⁰

From what is emerging in the public policy literature, and the reported outcomes of both pilot and ongoing initiatives, the case for co-production is compelling. It embodies and promotes democratic principles; it maximises the inputs from expert and lay sources; it builds capacity and trust; it has proven strategically efficacious in policy areas that involve behavioural change at both societal and individual levels.

One well-known and proven success in co-production and collaboration is the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) program in New York. Its two fundamental principles are to help children ‘in a sustained way, starting as early in their lives as possible, and to create a critical mass of adults around them who understand what it takes to help children succeed’.¹¹¹ It involves professionals and public servants engaging closely with local citizens and their social networks to develop and implement major changes to health and educational outcomes in a defined area of Harlem. It includes pre-natal advice to pregnant mothers, parenting classes, pre-kindergarten activity centres (where parents are taught about the benefits of, among other things, reading to their children), excellent kindergarten schools and excellent middle and high schools with full support (breakfast clubs, computer classes, sports clubs, university preparation classes).

A rigorous Harvard study of the academic achievements of students at the HCZ schools—its results reported as a ‘miracle’ by the New York Times—found that the program produced ‘enormous’ gains.¹¹² For instance, the HCZ middle school produced gains of 1.3 and 1.4 standard deviations in students’ achievements—described as being ‘off the charts’. One of the Harvard economists who conducted the study, Roland Fryer, told the New York Times that the study ‘changed my life as a scientist’.¹¹³ The budget for the HCZ Project for fiscal year 2010 was just over $48 million, representing a cost of around $5,000 per child.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Bourgon, op. cit., p. 393.
¹¹³ Ibid.
¹¹⁴ HCZ website, op. cit.
But while co-production may be proving successful—potentially ushering in a new era of public services design, development and implementation—and while ‘user-centred approaches to public service design have been growing in prominence ... they are not without their problems and challenges’.¹¹⁵

**Some challenges of co-production**

This paper has repeatedly acknowledged the difficulties and complexities associated with achieving genuine citizen engagement. Co-production, with its multiple negotiated relationships, is especially challenging because questions of power and its redistribution lie at the heart of the endeavour. It is not hard to imagine, for example, the cultural, psychological and procedural shifts that are involved when professionals are expected to engage with ‘ordinary’ citizens in the co-design and delivery of services.

The difficulty for these new professionals is that they have to work in ways that seem, at first sight, opposed to the prevailing culture around them. Co-production demands that public service staff shift from fixers who focus on problems to enablers who focus on abilities. Their job is to re-define the client or patient before them, not according to their needs but according to their abilities, and to encourage them to put those abilities to work. This role is not recognised or rewarded within the management structures that are currently in place.¹¹⁶

People with hard-earned professional qualifications and official responsibilities might well be reluctant to share power with users and communities. They may be reluctant to trust the behaviours and decisions of ordinary citizens. They will likely be anxious not to offend their peers’ professional norms and concerned not to breach ethical standards or legal requirements of duty-of-care. In particular, the public servant who is inclined to take citizen engagement seriously may yet be uncertain of the robustness of the political and personal support of those to whom he or she is accountable. They know that ‘gone pear-shaped’ is anathema to departmental heads and their political masters. Ministers are typically risk-averse and senior public officials are often cautious as a result.

There is a broad consensus among theorists that co-production and citizen engagement is ‘not a panacea’.¹¹⁷ In particular, issues of governance will always need careful attention. Questions will inevitably arise about who qualifies as a stakeholder, who gets to participate, the balance of representation, and the risks of self-selection or volunteerism. Participation by outsiders in government policy and regulatory matters, especially by NGOs or industry groups, may prompt fears of capture by special interests. Moreover, a proliferation of participants may increase the chances of conflict and lead to protracted negotiations, possibly paralysing the overall process. But as one


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Australian researcher has observed, there is evidence ‘in recent decades ... that greater participation ... outweighs its associated problems’. 118

Accountability for the use of the taxpayer’s dollar is another tricky dimension. The very nature of co-production involves a willingness to break with orthodoxy, but this should not exceed the bounds of fiscal rectitude or the standards of acceptable stewardship of public resources.

[I]nstitutionalised coproduction implies blurring and fuzziness in ... the boundaries between public and private (in terms of organisations, resources, authority and so on). Where co-production occurs, power, authority and control of resources are likely to be divided (not necessarily equally) between the state and groups of citizens in an interdependent and ambiguous fashion. ... [Notwithstanding that] sharp, clear boundaries between public and private spheres are indicators and components of effective, accountable polities... some blurring of those boundaries may in some circumstances be the price of service delivery arrangements that actually work. 119

Framing all these concerns and potential barriers is the fundamental imperative of co-production, namely, that it ‘takes seriously the current political rhetoric about “devolving power” and “empowering communities”—because it challenges the costly but conventional model of public services as a “product” that is delivered to a “customer” from on high, and instead genuinely devolves power, choice and control to frontline professionals and the public’. 120

The second task, then, is to identify how policy needs to be radically rethought to support the wide spread of co-production, and what “achieving scale” means. 121

The literature’s account of the success of many co-production initiatives both internationally and locally provides strong grounds for optimism. The key message of the APS reform blueprint Ahead of the Game is wholly consistent with calls for a new public service ethos and a new type of public service professional who can work with devolved power, choice and control. The magnitude of the change in culture, and the enhancement of skills, required for a citizen-centric approach to public service cannot be underestimated. These are matters to which we have repeatedly alluded to, and to which we must now turn our attention.

‘Dilemmas of engagement’ and other considerations

In an article in The Times in March 1937 the economist John Maynard Keynes remarked sardonically: ‘There is nothing a government hates more than to be well-informed; for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult.’ 122 In a sense this remark goes to the heart of governments’ dilemmas about engagement with citizens, and has prompted the quip ‘if you

120.  Boyle, op. cit., p. 4.
121.  Ibid.
can’t handle the heat, don’t hold the consultation’. But, as this paper has repeatedly observed, the
days of no or little external policy input are well and truly over. Modern governments ‘have become
ravenous for information and evidence ... [T]heir success ... now depends on much more systematic
use of knowledge than it did in the past.’

But while ministers may wish to be regarded as people who listen to constituents and stakeholders,
governments ‘seldom want to devolve real power over the policy consultation process’. Such
control is ‘crucial ... both for political reasons (e.g. the political calculus of support and benefits from
implementing promises and party priorities) and for meeting the official audit requirements for
adhering to due process in public expenditure’. Thus public servants often find themselves in the
invidious position of having to navigate their way through what may be both a political and
accountability minefield as they try to facilitate genuine citizen participation.

The challenges are considerable, with ‘wider forms of engagement (in which ‘outsiders’ are
potentially directly involved in decision making)... often seen as impractical or risky, or both’.
Moreover, as Mulgan has pointed out, the communication involved in dealing openly and directly
with citizens ‘is rarely easy for officials who are used to operating out of the limelight and few are
skilled in its arts’.

The Australian public policy academic Jenny Stewart has described the complexities and subtleties of
public servants’ engagements with citizens, and the challenges for governments who choose a
genuinely consultative path. For Stewart, the ‘dilemmas of engagement’ eddy around issues of
‘power and control, risk and challenge’. Being well-equipped to recognise and deal with these is
essential.

The rewards of engagement are enhanced legitimacy and better information. The risks lie in
capture, backlash and confused accountabilities. Managing these risks means having a good
strategic perspective—that is, an overview of the costs and benefits of different courses of
action and an understanding of the realpolitik (knowing the stakes for politicians, agencies and
communities). ... The principal challenge for public servants in charting a forward course is to
balance formal and informal ways of communicating with stakeholders. The protocols of
accountability and control prescribe formal conversations: where what is said, and to whom, are
on the public record. On the other hand, public business would grind to a halt without the
informal conversations that establish context and hopefully clarify intentions. Effective

123. Stewart, op. cit., p. 52.
124. G Mulgan, Government Knowledge and the Business of Policy-making Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration,
126. Ibid.
129. Stewart, op. cit.
130. Ibid., p. 75.
engagement seems to require the experience, judgment and confidence to know which modality is appropriate and when to make the switch.\textsuperscript{131}

This is not just a matter of how personally savvy or professionally competent a public servant might be. The case studies described by Stewart ‘suggest that Australian public managers are not often in a situation in which they are able to choose their engagement strategy. The mandate and powers of their agency shape purpose and practice.’\textsuperscript{132}

This is where the existence or otherwise of joined-up government, genuine agency collaboration and progressive public service leadership will have a powerful effect on whether a particular group of public servants will actually be able to facilitate a successful engagement with citizens. Progressive leadership, in this context, refers to a style of leadership that is strategic, collegial, navigationally-competent, citizen-focused, not risk-averse, not turf-bound.

In stressing the importance of the personal attributes and professional skills needed by public servants if they are to make citizen-engagement work, it is important not to ‘exaggerate the role of citizens’ capabilities in meaningfully participating in complex policymaking processes’.\textsuperscript{133} Clearly, the efficacy of engagement is not solely a function of public service culture or the qualities of the officials involved. The disposition and knowledge of citizens who participate is a major consideration.

As discussed earlier, citizens may be well or poorly disposed to participate depending on the urgency of their concerns, the relevance of the matter being addressed, the nature of their previous engagements with government (if any) to say nothing of the personal qualities and habits of heart and mind that influence their dispositions. So-called ‘mainstream citizens’ are probably not so much ‘disengaged’ as ‘differently engaged’—with their own responsibilities and concerns in the busy atmosphere of contemporary life.

We have noted, too, that optimal outcomes emerge when participants are well-informed, can reason well, assess evidence and so on. On this account, engagement and consultation is not for the faint-hearted. We have also discussed how the dilemmas and difficulties of engagement become especially acute with respect to marginalised groups and individuals, or where cultural differences make communication problematic. Given that there is a growing literature on the challenges of engaging with, and meeting the needs of, marginalised, disenfranchised or dispossessed individuals and groups, public servants are not bereft of advice in this regard.

But once citizens—or indeed any stakeholder groups—embark upon collaborative policymaking or service design with public servants, there are risks that must be managed. Processes must be robust enough to ensure responsible and accountable decision-making, and expectations must be managed so that disillusion or disaffection does not set in.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., pp. 75–76.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{133} Fischer, op. cit., p. 208.
\end{flushright}
The key messages for [government] decision makers are that they should be very clear in stating the purpose of civic involvement in every proposed instance, they should select methods that are appropriate for the stated purpose, and they should avoid the rhetoric associated with other types of participation.\textsuperscript{134}

It is instructive to reflect on such considerations in the context of the \textit{Australia 2020 Summit}, convened by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in Canberra in April 2008. The Summit was a highly visible attempt by government to achieve public participation in strategic policy development.

The Government’s interest is in harnessing and harvesting ideas from the community that are capable of being shaped into concrete policy actions. Government, irrespective of its political persuasion, does not have a monopoly on policy wisdom. To thrive and prosper in the future we need to draw on the range of talents, ideas and energy from across the Australian community.\textsuperscript{135}

The event and its outcomes aroused both enthusiasm and cynicism. The final report on the Summit, which emerged a year after the event, drew mixed responses, and the perceived paucity of post-Summit action by government prompted critical press comment.\textsuperscript{136}

Nevertheless, it seems likely that Australian citizens would respond favourably to well-designed opportunities for greater participation in policy or services development. For example, a 2010 report on the not-for-profit (NFP) sector by the Productivity Commission noted that, in a single year, over 5 million Australians volunteered, and a survey showed that 80 per cent reported that ‘knowing that my contribution would make a difference’ was the most important factor in their decision to volunteer.\textsuperscript{137} Moreover, the voluntary sector seems to display a capacity for social innovation, suggesting that ordinary citizens are indeed a potentially rich source of ideas for more effective and efficient service delivery.\textsuperscript{138}

It should be remembered, however, that history has also shown that citizen-determined outcomes may not always be for the best. For example, the financial woes of California have been widely attributed to a 1978 citizens’ initiative on property taxes ( Proposition 13) that led to a constitutional change limiting tax on the real estate.\textsuperscript{139} But such unfortunate outcomes do not automatically condemn the democratic principles that facilitate citizen-initiated actions. Risks are inherent in any process of democratic decision-making. That said, those involved should both acknowledge and take

\textsuperscript{134} Head, op. cit., p. 106.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., pp. 237–9
ownership of those risks. The challenge is to ensure that consultative, decision-making processes are characterised by the most robust debate based on the best information and exposed to well-reasoned arguments. It is not simply the fact of engagement that counts, but the quality of the exchanges that mediate it.

Experienced advocates of citizen engagement are keen to dispel the myths that might prevail, and the hopes that might be entertained, among new enthusiasts for engagement.

It is easy to become enamored with a romantic notion of public deliberation as the ‘good old days of the town hall meetings’ held on the local common ... Moreover, the idea that all problems can or should be addressed through ‘dialogue’ or ‘talking them through’ can strike some as naïve, elitist, or simply unfeasible.

Citizen-centered adherents stress that although deliberation, dialogue, and discussion is important to citizen-centered public work, it is not enough ... “If people don’t see the results of all this deliberation at one time or another... (and) are just engaged in process and not results, it’s an empty promise. You have to link the process and outcomes.”

If realpolitik is an important consideration as part of a strategic approach to engagement, being real about engagement is even more important. The literature reveals trust to be a key ingredient, and it will readily evaporate if citizens discern an attempt by government to hoodwink them via a superficial consultation that seeks merely to defuse opposition or to evangelise the government’s point of view. For Stewart, using consultation ‘to claim legitimacy for a decision that has already been taken is a higher-risk strategy, because disappointed communities are likely to express their dismay politically. In these cases, consultation can damage trust, rather than helping to build it up.’

The public servant as broker, facilitator, coordinator

When public servants embark on a strategy of citizen engagement, there is little that they can do about the existing dispositions, attitudes and competencies of the citizens or stakeholders with whom they seek to engage. But guidance is available by virtue of, for example, the prescriptions for best practice outlined in Appendices 2 and 3. In short, the idea is to maximise communication, allow sufficient time for the engagement to occur, pass as much of the control of the process as possible to the participants, and ensure that the recording and feedback mechanisms are robust and intelligible. Public servants might also draw on the insights and advice of those involved in the successful exercises in co-production that have been described in the literature and included in Appendix 1.

As we have repeatedly observed, genuine engagement with citizens in policymaking and service design requires distinctive attributes and skills on the part of public servants. Deliberative participation—which many regard as the optimal form of citizen engagement—is both an art and a


141. Stewart, op. cit., p. 68.
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... science.\textsuperscript{142} It has a normative as well as an instrumental purpose.\textsuperscript{143} The successful, citizen-focused public servant will be one who understands this, and can deploy the kind of relational and navigational skills and emotional intelligence that keeps engagement on track.

The new paradigm of public administration involves a shift from a ‘command and control’ mindset — at both the political and managerial level — to one of collaboration ‘characterised by complex networks of multi-organisational, multi-governmental and multi-sectoral collaborations’.\textsuperscript{144}

For public sector executives, this emerging network governance model will require us to broaden our core responsibilities from managing people and programmes to also providing leadership in coordinating resources that deliver public value.\textsuperscript{145}

Moran has been forthright in laying out the scale of what is involved in order to realise the goal of a genuinely citizen-engaged APS:

The times have changed. The needs and expectations of the Australian people have changed. And the public service must change with them. ... It must deliver better services for citizens and better policy advice to government. And it must renew its commitment to putting people first. ... As our reforms propose change not simply to structures and procedures but to practices, attitudes and minds, they will take time to be embedded.\textsuperscript{146}

Moran has ‘no wish to call the past achievements or the ongoing dedication of the APS into question’ and notes its ‘long and distinguished record of service to successive governments’.\textsuperscript{147} But he is adamant that the kinds of changes he believes necessary have far-reaching implications for how public servants go about their work: ‘Public servants have to be better equipped and be given more authority to adapt to the needs of the communities they serve’.\textsuperscript{148}

The cultural changes anticipated by Moran and others have considerable implications for the way public servants are trained, organised, motivated and rewarded. There is scant evidence that the necessary shifts are occurring. The changes will require the active support and encouragement of portfolio ministers so that the somewhat elevated risks associated with innovation, devolution and collaboration do not constrain public servants who are traditionally conscious of political (and career) damage should an experiment fail or a mischief arise. The practical and attitudinal changes envisaged for a citizen-centric public service are substantial.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[145] Ibid.
\item[146] Ibid.
\item[147] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Increasingly, we will need to reward the capacity to work collaboratively both internally and with external partners no less than we reward the one-upmanship which often passes for high-quality policy advice. ... This means we will need to promote staff who achieve value through working with others as well as being able to stand out from the crowd because of their conceptual dexterity. We need to reward those who go the extra mile in assisting people to find their way through the incredible opaque maze that is often the public face of government agencies.

These are characteristics which are not evident in the large, complex organisations that dominate the public sector. They therefore require a conscious, sustained effort on the part of the leaders and managers to change the cultures of our agencies to make them the core behaviours which are valued and rewarded.149

Related themes have emerged in the literature that further elevate the challenges confronting public servants, namely, the discursive nature of the policy process, and the influence of policy narratives.150 Moreover, these narratives are influenced by cultural values and competing views about what the role of government should be in relation to certain issues. For this reason, at both the institutional and individual level, a reflective and self-aware approach to the framing of policy narratives is vital.

Policy is ‘as much a competition over social meanings as ... empirical outcomes ... a diverse, often contradictory, and shifting set of responses to a spectrum of political interests.’151 As far as policy narrative is concerned:

... the reliance on policy narrative is evident in even the most casual examination of policy discussions, whether in everyday or official form. Citizens, politicians—and yes, even policy analysts ... tell causal stories to convey the nature, character and origins of policy problems. Indeed ... policy controversies often turn on the underlying storyline rather than the apparent facts typically presented by the policy analyst. It is not that the facts do not play a role; rather it is that they are embedded—explicitly or implicitly—in narrative accounts. What frequently seems to be a conflict over details ... is in actuality a disagreement about the basic story.152

Stewart concurs: ‘If we see policy solely in terms of rational inquiry and report, we miss the felt sense of engagement, the stories that are told to illuminate or justify positions’.153

Given that public participation by citizens—as opposed to, say, peak bodies and industry groups—in policymaking is currently far from the norm, the burden of responsibility for initiating, facilitating and sustaining citizen engagement falls heavily on public servants. The magnitude of that ‘meaning-making’, ‘narrative-creating’ task can hardly be overstated. As expressed by the prominent public management theorist Robert Reich, the role of the modern, citizen-oriented public servant is no less than:

150. F Fischer, Reframing Public Policy : Discursive politics and deliberative practices, OUP, 2003
151. Ibid., p. 69.
152. Ibid., p. 169.
153. Stewart, op. cit., p. 45.
to provide the public with alternative visions of what is desirable and possible, to stimulate discussion about them, to provoke re-examination of premises and values, and thus to broaden the range of potential responses and deepen society’s understanding of itself.¹⁵⁴

Senior public servants like Moran and APS Commissioner Stephen Sedgwick are alert to the intellectual, structural and operational challenges for the APS that a vision such as Reich’s entails. In speeches and articles Moran often describes the impact of the APS blueprint reforms as ‘transformative’.¹⁵⁵ In particular, he has highlighted the crucial role of the senior APS leadership—the importance of strategic thinking, the need for courage and collegiality, and the imperative of recruiting and training the kinds of quality public servants who can work with citizens, placing them at the centre of their thinking.¹⁵⁶

To this end, the APS has established the Strategic Centre for Leadership, Learning and Development focused on ‘leadership, learning & development and talent management strategy, system design and thought leadership for the Australian Public Service’.¹⁵⁷ One of its core tasks is to ‘develop an interim learning & development strategy, based on priority leadership and management skills identified in the Blueprint for Reform of Australian Public Administration and other key APS materials’.¹⁵⁸ Such a strategy has no option but to directly address the fundamental training and leadership needs that a much more citizen-centric public service requires.

The ethical dimension of public service is also worth reiterating here. As one writer has put it: ‘nothing is more dangerous to the well-being of the body politic than a public official who is technically competent or strategically astute but ethically illiterate or unfit’.¹⁵⁹ The APS Values are currently under review, and the review’s discussion papers have drawn attention to the citizen engagement dimension of the APS blueprint reforms.¹⁶⁰ The existing APS Statement of Values deals with relevant professional qualities for effective consultation, but does not specify the attributes required for the kind of engagement being advocated here.

The APSC has recently sought comment on a proposed, simplified set of values ‘to give effect to a recommendation of the Advisory Group ... [for] a reformulation of the APS Values to create “a smaller set of core values that are meaningful, memorable and effective in driving change”’.¹⁶¹ Among five core values being proposed is ‘Respect’, which includes ‘respect for individuals and for

¹⁵⁴ R Reich, Public Management in a Democratic Society, Prentice-Hall, 1990, p. 9
¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
¹⁶¹ Ibid.
their diversity, and being open to ideas, especially in relation to policy-making and working collaboratively with the community'.\textsuperscript{162}

**Public servants, social media and online engagement**

There is no doubt that ‘the momentum for increased engagement with citizens is being assisted by innovations in information and communication technologies’.\textsuperscript{163} The emergence of Web2.0 as an interactive communications platform, offering new social media tools like blogs and wikis, has further heightened expectations. Australia’s Senator Kate Lundy, an internationally prominent advocate of e-government\textsuperscript{164}, conveys a view held by many: ‘Web2.0 is the democratisation of innovation and decision-making, and will make us all co-designers of civil society in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century’.\textsuperscript{165} Just how far we have come, or are likely to progress, along this path is a topic of considerable debate among both theorists and e-government practitioners.\textsuperscript{166}

In June 2008, the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) published its strategy document *Consulting with Government Online*, and by December 2008 a trial series of online consultations was launched.\textsuperscript{167} These included ‘a public consultation blog hosted by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy; the National Human Rights Online Consultation forum established by the Attorney-General’s Department; and an online forum on early childhood education conducted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations’.\textsuperscript{168} The findings of a study of these trials are discussed in more detail below.

In anticipation of the trials, the APSC issued interim protocols for online participation ‘focus[ed] on the application of the APS Values and the APS Code of Conduct in online communication’.\textsuperscript{169} It subsequently issued a formal guidance entitled ‘Protocols for online media participation’.\textsuperscript{170} The guidance is predicated on the acknowledgement that:

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item[(162)] Ibid.
\item[(163)] ANAO (2009), op. cit.
\item[(166)] For example, see the European Journal of ePractice at www.epracticejournal.eu
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushright}
Web 2.0 provides public servants with unprecedented opportunities to open up government decision making and implementation to contributions from the community. In a professional and respectful manner, APS employees should engage in robust policy conversations.\(^{171}\)

In June 2009, the Australian Government announced the establishment of its Government 2.0 Taskforce to examine the use of Web 2.0 tools and technologies to provide improved options for engagement between government and citizens. It was tasked to ‘build a culture of online innovation within government—to ensure that government is receptive to the possibilities created by new collaborative technologies and uses them to advance its ambition to continually improve the way it operates’.\(^{172}\)

The taskforce report *Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0*, which was published in December 2009, highlights many of the themes already discussed in this paper concerning effective engagement. These include responsiveness, the need for a major shift in public service culture, harnessing information and expertise, and encouraging innovation.\(^{173}\)

Interestingly for our purposes, in his final blog post the chair of the Taskforce, Dr Nicholas Gruen, attributes the accolades the Taskforce received from a prominent firm of IT analysts to the fact that ‘we foregrounded the role of public servants in Government 2.0 ... That just underscores the fact that, along with open data ... the way public servants engage online with the Australian community are the building blocks of Government 2.0’.\(^{174}\) Gruen nevertheless remains alert to the potential and the uncertainty that attends the pursuit by the public service of online engagement with citizens:

> Government 2.0 is ultimately about what individual agencies, and yes, individual public servants do to make it happen. Before them lies a vast field of promise, but one that is still new. It won’t always be easy to work out ways of being more open, more candid, more participatory at the same time as being just as professional and apolitical as public servants have always been expected to be.\(^{175}\)

The wider literature on digital engagement and e-government reflects the same potential and uncertainty expressed by Gruen. The situation is nicely captured by the title of a March 2010 issue of the *European Journal of ePractice* entitled ‘Government 2.0 - Hype, Hope, or Reality?’.\(^{176}\) Its editor wrote:

> In the space of two years, the “2.0” meme has risen from obscurity to mainstream in eGovernment policy ... Yet much of the debate is still on the potential opportunities and risks of Government 2.0, with evangelists emphasising the great benefits of crowdsourcing and of

\(^{171}\) Ibid.


\(^{173}\) Ibid.


\(^{175}\) Ibid.

\(^{176}\) *European Journal of ePractice*, No. 9, March 2010, viewed 8 February 2011, [www.epracticejournal.eu](http://www.epracticejournal.eu)
leveraging collective intelligence, and skeptics pointing to the risks of wishful thinking, to the limits of transparency, and to the hype about its impact.\(^\text{177}\)

There is a broad consensus, however, that online engagement opportunities for citizens, to be truly effective, require embedding in a broader context of government openness and transparency that includes robust legislative regimes for freedom of information, public service codes of conduct, public ownership and re-use of information gathered and generated by government, and society-wide access to high quality broadband networks. Australia appears to be making progress on all these fronts—and in some respects is already relatively well-positioned.

The Australian Government’s response to the Gruen Taskforce report accepted thirteen of the report’s recommendations, including:

- a formal declaration of open government
- the APSC to include in its annual *State of the Service* report details of agencies’ progress in implementing Government 2.0
- encouraging public servants to engage online, and
- making public sector information open, accessible and re-usable.\(^\text{178}\)

A valuable comparative analytical study of the Australian Government’s trial online consultations was published in 2010 by Professor Jim Macnamara, University of Technology, Sydney.\(^\text{179}\) Its findings reinforce the themes that have already been discussed with regard to citizen engagement generally.

- Senior policy maker involvement ‘is essential to ensure that online public consultation initiatives are not tokenism, providing little more than cathartic experiences for citizens. Such approaches are widely condemned ... as, in the open collaborative environment of Web 2.0, they are likely to be exposed and result in citizen abandonment of consultation sites’.\(^\text{180}\)

- Controversial issues ‘can overtake and hijack online public consultation, resulting in much online discussion being “off topic” and the consultation not achieving its objectives’.\(^\text{181}\) However, ‘within particular communities of practice and communities of interest consultation can proceed relatively smoothly and productively’.\(^\text{182}\)

- While public servants ‘express willingness to interact dynamically with citizens online’ they are ‘concerned at not being authorised to comment publicly’, leading to ‘delays incommensurate with the nature of online consultation’.\(^\text{183}\)

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177. Ibid. p. 2
180. Ibid., p. 233.
181. Ibid., p. 234.
182. Ibid., p. 239.
183. Ibid.
• Online initiatives ‘need to offer easily navigable and user-friendly environments’ that ensure ‘easy-to-follow layout, features for users with disabilities ... and considerations of multiple languages’.\textsuperscript{184} If the look and feel of a government site is very formal and official, it will ‘struggle to build a connection with readers’.\textsuperscript{185}

• Planning, managing and responding to online consultations requires adequate, dedicated resources, especially when it comes to processing and analysing large volumes of information. ‘If governments implement public consultation with genuine commitment ... listening can involve many thousands of Web posts and possibly emails and other communications [so] dedicated staff are required to acknowledge, categorise, process and respond to public comments, complaints and suggestions’.\textsuperscript{186}

Macnamara also raises as an important consideration that of government being the host to a consultation site as opposed to leveraging existing online discussion sites.

In the broader concept of online citizen engagement proposed, there is a strong argument that government should go to the people rather than making people come to it.

Opening up government consultation beyond formal government sites, and even opening up some government information and data to third party applications, is strongly endorsed by the UK Power of Information Task Force. This has both a pragmatic and social equity rationale. ...

A second reason for government departments and agencies to participate in public forums hosted by third parties is that discursive practices within government sites inevitably remain bound by a significant imbalance in power relationships which can limit participation levels and the effectiveness of government-hosted and managed online consultation sites.\textsuperscript{187}

Macnamara’s findings and advice about the organisational, resourcing and cultural requirements for successful online citizen engagement are consistent with the views expressed in the 2003 OECD report \textit{Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of online citizen engagement}.\textsuperscript{188} The OECD report also addresses the questions of capacity-building that this current paper has already highlighted.

The barriers to greater online citizen engagement in policy-making are cultural, organisational and constitutional not technological. Overcoming these challenges will require greater efforts to raise awareness and capacity both within governments and among citizens.\textsuperscript{189}

\textbf{The APS blueprint: a quick reality check}

When the Australian Government accepted the recommendations of \textit{Ahead of the Game} in May 2010, it also announced the allocation of $38.7 million over three years to enable the Australian

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., p. 236.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., p. 237.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., p. 235.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., p. 238.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., p. 9.
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Public Service Commission to support the implementation of the reforms—which included a citizens’ survey and more citizen-centric practices. Shortly before the 2010 federal election the Gillard Government announced that, if it were returned to office, the APSC would still undertake its expanded role as planned but would not receive the full extent of the funding specified in the Budget. Press reports indicated that the APSC would be left with only $6.9 million over three years—less than one-fifth of the original allocation.\(^{190}\)

The APSC’s Budget Statement for the 2011-12 Budget states that the APSC’s expenses ‘reduce in 2011-12 due to a decreasing level of funding for the APS reform Blueprint’\(^{191}\)—although there is an ‘increase in resourcing is for the operations of the Strategic Centre for Leadership, Learning and Development’.\(^{192}\) The Statement notes that appropriation revenue ‘will decrease by $4.3 million’ from the previous financial year, and that ‘this reflects reduction in the funding for the APS reform budget measure’.\(^{193}\)

The gap between the ideals of the APS engaging with citizens in a full-bodied way, and what is currently on the horizon in terms of political commitment and applied resources, does not give grounds for hope that reform will be rapid. In its brochure announcing ‘What to expect in 2011’, the Government lists only two activities under the heading ‘Meeting the needs of citizens’:

- further test scope to simplify online access to Australian Government services including a ‘tell us once’ capability in relation to requirements to submit personal information

- further work to consider scope to expand the use of Standard Business Reporting to reduce the costs to business of reporting to Government.\(^{194}\)

In a speech in February 2011, the Public Service Commissioner Steven Sedgwick, said:

> The Government remains committed to the Blueprint reforms, even though the Budget situation requires the Commission to implement them as far as possible within a more heavily constrained budget. Resourcing is a major challenge and will slow down—and possibly curtail—some of the implementation, but not the thrust of the government’s APS reform agenda or the reshaping of the strategic direction of the Commission.\(^{195}\)


\(^{192}\) Ibid., p. 339.

\(^{193}\) Ibid., p. 349.


Public servants rightly adjust their goals and allocate resources in response to government direction, but this means that the degree to which the APS ultimately integrates citizen engagement into its policymaking and service design practices will depend significantly on ministers’ enthusiasm for the approach.

Engagement concerns ... not the authoritative allocations implied by hierarchy, but the more fluid relationships implied by networks... While engagement can develop in its own way, and along its own lines, it is clearly an area in which the values of public servants (and their political masters) are of prime importance in determining the extent to which it occurs and the extent to which policy is altered as a result.196

In short, public servants will engage with citizens, and will collaborate in co-production of policy and public services, only to extent that ministers prescribe, department heads direct, and budgets allow.

As stressed throughout this paper, robust engagement with citizens is highly desirable, and a foundational element of democratic governance. But it can be bruising and frustrating, and it must accommodate the various modes of both online and face-to-face participation. Again, it is hard to overstate the cultural shift involved in creating a public service that is truly citizen-centric in its thinking and acting. It requires sustained political commitment from ministers, vigorous leadership from the Senior Executive Service and effective professional development and training for all involved.

**Conclusion**

Participation by citizens in the governance of their society is the bedrock of democracy. To the extent that the work of building and sustaining democracy is never completed—‘the price of freedom is eternal vigilance’—we should expect that the institutions through which our democracy is expressed should be themselves constantly renewed, recalibrated and re-imagined.

There is also much work to be done in acquainting citizens with, and building their capabilities for, participatory and deliberative practices of policy development and service delivery. This paper has acknowledged, without resolving, the challenges that this entails, and has noted the additional complexity encountered where marginalised or disempowered citizens and groups are concerned. It has also suggested that preparing citizens for engagement would not involve some kind of superficial induction course but rather a long apprenticeship to democratic decision-making through participation and socialisation within family, educational, social and work environments.

The Australian Public Service is one of our pre-eminent institutions. To remain robust, resilient and relevant it must continually evaluate its own performance and test its worth in the court of public opinion. The blueprint for reform, *Ahead of the Game*, is frank about this requirement. Citizens’ surveys are being designed. A Secretaries Board has been established to pursue reform and determine strategic priorities. The APS Values and Code of Conduct are being reviewed. “Citizens

196. Stewart, op. cit., p. 3
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first” has been proclaimed.\textsuperscript{197} But genuine participation by citizens in policymaking and the design and delivery of services cannot be achieved by proclamation alone.

Public servants, in frank and fearless mode, have a role in shaping the discourse of citizen engagement and influencing the attitudes of their ministers. The APS blueprint has already carved out some solid territory for such a discussion, and it is reasonable to assume that its advocates remain influential upon decision-makers. Meanwhile, the concept of co-production gathers momentum.

Public Service Commissioner Steve Sedgwick has defined the capability of the APS as ‘the combination of people, processes, systems, structures and culture.’\textsuperscript{198} A citizen-centric public service makes substantial demands across all these domains. It especially requires:

• people who are skilled listeners, negotiators and enablers
• processes that provide for adequate timeframes and negotiated milestones
• systems with good feedback loops
• structures that are accessible and minimally hierarchical, and most importantly
• a culture in which citizens recognise themselves as participants and public servants welcome them as partners—a culture which is collaborative, inclusive, self-critical, and with a deep hunger for the public good.

The APS will take its cue from government, and the challenges of its becoming truly collaborative and citizen-centric will be augmented or diminished in line with ministers’ willingness or reluctance to allow genuine devolution of decision-making to frontline professionals and the citizens with whom they engage.

The World Bank contends that collaboration is not a matter of style but rather one of stance. It is a useful differentiation because it attends to the crucial matter of perspective that informs the entire combination of elements that Commissioner Sedgwick has identified for success. The World Bank’s account of a collaborative stance is a convenient summary and reminder of what citizen engagement means in practice. The collaborative, engaging stance means that participants and stakeholders together:

• conduct the analysis and diagnosis of an issue, collaboratively identifying needs and the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies and service and support systems
• articulate needs and collaboratively set objectives

• decide in pragmatic terms the directions, priorities, the roles and responsibilities, thereby collaboratively creating the strategy that is to be pursued, and

• collaboratively formulate tactics, which includes overseeing the development of policy details, specifications, blueprints, budgets and technologies needed to move from the present to the future state. 199

These are tall orders for a traditional, or even a progressive public service. They represent the opposite end of the spectrum from a command-and-control stance, and indeed reach well beyond the consultative approaches to engagement that currently apply. Whether such challenges will prove a bridge too far is the question of the moment.

Appendix 1: Case studies of citizen engagement

This paper has noted that some Australian governments and local authorities have already taken steps to embed citizen participation, or at least substantial consultation, into their service design and delivery mechanisms. Some of the most striking examples, in fact, are to be found in developing countries—rural poverty alleviation in Albania; low-income sanitation and participatory budgeting in Brazil; energy reform in Colombia; communal irrigation in the Philippines. In the United States, some European countries, and in the UK in particular, there are examples of sophisticated endeavours to engage citizens in policymaking and the design and delivery of services, including in co-production. The following case studies illustrate various types of effective citizen and stakeholder engagement in the development of policy, and the design of services in particular. They reflect approaches to policy and services that have been pursued within, or are potentially relevant to, an Australian context.

It is apparent from these examples that there is no ‘best’ model of engagement that can be universally applied. Rather, there are common principles, grounded in democratic values and notions of active citizenship and self-efficacy, which inform approaches that can be used by governments to meet citizens’ needs and to facilitate their agency as authors of their individual and collective lives. What is also common is the existence of strong mutual commitments to making partnerships between agencies and citizens work, and allowing collaborations to proceed in a manner and a timeframe that suits both the people and the purpose.

New Zealand Department of Labour: community economic development

In 2000, in response to the NZ Government’s ‘clear signal ... to integrate public input into policymaking processes’, the NZ Department of Labour commenced a three-year collaborative project in community economic development involving departmental policymakers, researchers, community development workers, and three identified communities (rural, metropolitan, urban).

The expectation was that the knowledge and understanding of community economic development processes built over time through such active engagement with communities and community groups would contribute at many levels including:

– changing the policy makers’ understanding and concept of the “real” world
– enhancing the quality of the Department’s policy advice by ensuring that policy advice reflects the reality of what is happening on the ground
– meeting growing demand from communities, voluntary organisations, and groups of Maori for public participation in the policy process

enhancing community knowledge, understanding and awareness of various policy initiatives and the policy-making process.\textsuperscript{202}

The following is a summary account drawn from the report on the Community Economic Development Action Research project (CEDAR).\textsuperscript{203}

- The CEDAR team recognised the need to build strong personal relationships with the three communities and their members on the one hand, and government policy agencies and their staff on the other. The team spent ‘considerable time’ and a ‘staggered approach’ building relationships in three distinct phases—planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

- They began with conversations with key members of the community, applying a ‘snowball’ technique to expand the range of people engaged, building personal relationships with them while developing a holistic picture of each community. The team established an ‘ongoing cycle of feedback’ through individual conversations, visit reports and group meetings. They documented and conveyed initial discussions, observations and understandings to each community and invited them to comment on, respond to and debate the issues raised. Over a period of six months all participants ‘built a shared understanding of the project and its aims’.

- Having established mutual rapport, the community and the CEDAR team explored, collectively identified, and reflected on the issues that were impeding economic development. Meetings were held over several weeks, with the discussion and data gathered at each stage replayed into the discussions. ‘We worked at the pace of the community: we did not push the time frames, we did not push an agenda, and we did not push to arrive at common issues, but allowed it to emerge of its own accord’.

- The whole process was intended to be one ‘whereby policy agencies could obtain information from communities and use it to stretch the thinking of policy makers’. It contributed ‘to capacity building at both ends: policy makers learned about “real” issues and communities learned about the policy-making process’. The CEDAR team, having earned credibility to represent the communities’ views, initiated meetings with the policy team at the Ministry of Social Development, leading to relevant advice being sent to the Minister and later considered by Cabinet.

- The team continued to build bridges between policy and practice with ‘presentations to senior officials’ groups, dialoguing with relevant government agencies and ministers, and one-to-one discussions with key influencers’. The approach used by the CEDAR team achieved successful engagement and sound policy outcomes, along with significant growth in the policy-development capacity of both citizens and public servants, and nurturing new skills, new perspectives and enhanced critical thinking.

- Among the many lessons learned were that:
  - There needs to be a clear, shared understanding of the type of participation sought from all parties, especially where genuine co-production of ideas and strategies is sought.

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., p. 56.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
Skill development and capacity building is a vital element of participation and should be taken into account in funding the participation processes.

As communities became more familiar with policy processes, they pursued networks beyond their communities, and began interrogating their own community practices.

The time taken to collectively develop policy might risk missing an opportunity because a political or policy agenda has ‘moved on’. Scanning the wider policy arena for opportunities is imperative.

Policy issues invariably cut across different institutional boundaries.\(^{204}\)

The CEDAR initiative was ‘hugely resource-intensive and presented project management challenges that were unanticipated’.

This is likely to be an ongoing challenge and dilemma for any government engagement effort for two reasons. The terms of engagement cannot be fully identified at the beginning, and once the process has been initiated it will take the agency into territories that are beyond a government agency’s understanding or scope. The core principles of engagement such as mutual trust, reciprocity and commitment to the process mean that one cannot pull out of the engagement.\(^ {205}\)

**Centrelink: building citizen-focused, collaborative services**

Centrelink was established in 1997 as a one-stop-shop for the integrated provision by the Australian Government of various human services and social support payments. It rapidly earned an international reputation for its cutting edge approach to service delivery. While Centrelink’s statutory charter and institutional culture has ‘historically been dominated by universalism and rule-based compliance, Centrelink is now seeking ways to be ‘customer-centric, collaborative and flexible’.\(^ {206}\)

Increasingly, Centrelink has responded to the complex needs of its clients by pursuing ‘community engagement ... focussed on assisting the customer along a pathway to participation’.\(^ {207}\) Creating opportunities for participation ‘represents significant new ground for Centrelink and also best demonstrates the capacity of large government organisations to share resources and build community capacity’.\(^ {208}\) At the heart of this new model is ‘the development of relationships with other groups and individuals in the community’ so that Centrelink can ‘better understand who they are and what they offer’.\(^ {209}\)

\(^{204}\) Ibid., pp. 56–64.

\(^{205}\) Ibid., p. 64.


\(^{207}\) G Winkworth, ‘Partnering the 800 pound gorilla; Centrelink working locally to create opportunities for participation’ *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol.64, no.3, 2005, p. 27.

\(^{208}\) Ibid., p. 28.

\(^{209}\) Ibid., p. 29.
Relationships developed as a result of this ‘better understanding’ lead to shared initiatives to improve the accessibility of service delivery ... and then to collaborative efforts to address service gaps. ... 

What is unfolding are initiatives which move beyond the existing service system, to create, together with other groups, new opportunities for participation.

Partnerships at the so-called ‘creative level’ involve more broad ranging strategies to address emerging community issues... The most successful partnerships engage people all over the community. 210

Pursuing such collaborative approaches has challenged Centrelink ‘to bring about major cultural and institutional changes to support its partnership capability’ and to deal with the more complex operational issues arising from genuine collaboration with citizens and non-government partners. 211

Centrelink has already developed a strong track record of on-the-ground activity in achieving its four key aims of communicating, coordinating, collaborating and creating opportunities for participation. Relationships between agency staff and communities, and personal trust, ‘are critical to this process’. 212

Place based services: a Centrelink success story

As a service delivery agency with the widest and most direct contact of any federal agency with disadvantaged citizens, Centrelink sought to find a way to pursue the Australian Government’s social inclusion agenda through its local service delivery operations. The nature of Centrelink’s largely transactional role and its accountability to other government departments for implementing their policies had previously restricted both the incentives and opportunities for innovation.

Given such dispersed accountability for the use of funds, a small scale experimental, path-finding approach was seen as most feasible. The Place Based Services Program was established in 2008 ‘to determine the extent to which collaborative local approaches ... can improve social inclusion outcomes for participants, and also to test Centrelink’s ability to use such collaborative and locally based approaches to improve the capability of the service delivery system’. 213

Centrelink established six teams, operating in seven geographic locations, that were given a relatively free hand to develop holistic and customer-centric service delivery practices, and to build community capacity through collaboration. 214 The seven initiatives, each with a small budget, addressed the needs of people in geographically-concentrated areas of special disadvantage across metropolitan, provincial and rural settings. They included the long-term unemployed, youth leaving care, people with mental health problems, refugees, and itinerants sleeping rough. In one instance,

210. Ibid.
211. Ibid., p. 33.
212. Ibid., pp. 33–34.
those involved were not current Centrelink clients, nor accessing any local support services, notwithstanding their high level of need.

A governance structure comprising a national office planning team, monitored by a steering committee, developed a planning and evaluation framework, and facilitated (but did not manage) the initiatives, each of which was sponsored by a local Centrelink Area Manager. Local reference groups and action research teams assisted in monitoring the initiatives and helping to modify their practices as the work unfolded, as well as measuring and assessing the success of the innovations.

The initiatives proved strikingly successful. The University of Western Sydney evaluation concluded that all the initiatives demonstrated ‘the effectiveness of holistic approaches and a more collaborative approach’ and ‘the value of engaging participants’. The investment was considered to be ‘well justified by the direct benefits for participants and the benefits of the operational and strategic collaboration in local areas’. Participants were ‘overwhelmingly positive’.215

The staff involved ‘developed very significant skills, insight and knowledge and this should be recognised and shared ... to enrich work practices’. There were also ‘important policy implications arising from the program. These relate not only to the income support and mutual obligation system, but also the Commonwealth’s interest in employment, community development and integrated social policies ... These raise the issues of the role of Centrelink in being able to contribute to policy development through feeding back the experience on the ground and in being able to play a broader role in acting as the face of Government social policy at the local and regional level’.216

Finally, ... perhaps the most valuable, yet under-utilised, outcome of this program is the existing and potential organisational knowledge that is being acquired and developed by the Place Based Service practitioners themselves. This practice knowledge covers a broad spectrum of issues relevant to Centrelink as an organisation, and beyond this to the collected social policy agencies of government in their efforts to develop ‘joined-up’ policy and service delivery. ...

Over and above the intra-organisational needs of Centrelink, the Place Based Services program provides a model for a ‘policy intelligence network’ which could be of vital importance to the development and review of ‘joined-up’ policy by all of the social policy agencies of government. Initiative staff are exposed daily to situations where policies of different agencies and different levels of government intersect and where the collective impact effectively contributes to the disadvantage or exclusion of the customer.

While this is the ‘grass-roots’ application of service integration, many of the issues identified can only be effectively dealt with at the level of policy integration. For best effect these two levels must be brought together and the intelligence and experience of the direct service providers must be made available in the policy development arena. ... Centrelink and the social policy agencies of government should develop an appropriate mechanism for feedback concerning the impact of intersecting policies on the most disadvantaged customers from their own frontline staff. An extension of the principles adopted in the Place Bases Services program to other

215. Ibid., pp. 83–84.
216. Ibid.
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places, and in some cases, across the Centrelink network, would be a central element of such a development.  

Proposed changes to the Australian government’s human services framework seem wholly consistent with the spirit of citizens’ participation, cross-organisational collaboration and services and policy integration imperatives demonstrated by the Place Based Initiatives.

Indigenous engagement: at the heart of ‘Closing the Gap’

Effective engagement with Indigenous people in the development of policies and services has been an ongoing challenge for governments at all levels. A COAG reform process has given new impetus to improving remote service delivery and human services policy under the national Closing the Gap strategy. The strategy commits all Australian governments ‘to work towards a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ... in areas such as health, housing, education and employment. It aims to help Indigenous children get a good start in life and provide Indigenous people with the same choices and opportunities as other Australians living in comparable locations’.

In July 2009 under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement all governments committed to the following service delivery principles for Indigenous Australians:

- **Priority principle**: Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local needs.
- **Indigenous engagement principle**: Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services.
- **Sustainability principle**: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets.
- **Access principle**: Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.
- **Integration principle**: There should be collaboration between and within government at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services.
- **Accountability principle**: Programs and services should have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.

217. Ibid., pp. 88–89.
Engaging Today, Building Tomorrow: A framework for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (the Framework)—produced by the Australian Government under its ‘Closing the Gap’ initiative—is a ‘suite of documents designed to improve how APS agencies engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians on the policies, programs and services that affect their lives’. It provides several examples of the practical application of the Indigenous engagement principle.

- The Stolen Generations Working Partnership

To commemorate National Sorry Day (26 May 2010) the Australian Government launched the Partnership as a mechanism for collaboration with Stolen Generation members on the development of a comprehensive national policy response to support members of the Stolen generation and to help heal their grief and trauma. The effectiveness of the process was discernible in the feedback from Indigenous participants, which revealed that the process had observed the core requirements of quality engagement and collaboration—early engagement, continuous feedback and dialogue, respectful negotiation, mutual responsibility, and co-creation of documents.

The big difference was that the idea of the Working Partnership was brought to us before it went ahead and our involvement discussed. We were able to add our thoughts and recommendations to an early draft and we met and talked it through some more. It came back to us for further comment, and we got to see the input from all parties before it was finalised. So we had a chance to create it together from the beginning.’

The consultations inspired us to think of what could be possible if we continue to work together in cooperative partnership with government instead of providing feedback and then losing sight of the process in the policy formation and implementation stages and finding the end result looks nothing like the original feedback provided.

- Mornington Island Local Implementation Plan

Mornington Island is a priority site under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery, and has been declared ‘an acknowledged best practice example of well managed, meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders’. According to the implementation report, the process was an ‘organic’ one which ‘evolved as the community increasingly engaged in conversations about the Local Implementation Plan’.

Existing ideas, initial conversations and government priorities were captured in a document called ‘Community Talk’. There was an early focus on talking ‘to the right people in the right

221. FaHCSIA, ‘At a glance guide’, Engaging today: Building tomorrow – a framework for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Australians, 2011


224. Ibid., p. 33.

225. Ibid., p. 32.
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way’, and conversations were held over several months following accepted cultural practices, and all issues raised were duly documented. These formed the basis of further discussion in men’s and women’s ‘Yarning Circles’. 226

All the government agencies involved were brought together to deliberate about ‘the best ways they could assist with addressing the community-identified needs’, and the result was then ‘taken back to the community, to identify community contributions and success measures so that the plan could be finalised’. 227

• First Peoples’ Water Engagement Council

After nearly two years of extensive consultation and Indigenous participation and leadership, the First Peoples’ Water Engagement Council now provides ‘direct, high-level input’ into national water planning and management issues. 228

To build an alliance of stakeholders and forge consensus around a model for the new Council, principles of self-governance were strictly observed ‘so that each of the stakeholder groups could decide collectively on how and when to move through the necessary phases in establishing the new Council’. 229

An initial steering group, selected by key Indigenous figures in water issues, planned a major National Indigenous Freshwater Forum, which in turn proposed and named the Council, and devised both a membership appointment process and draft terms of reference.

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout this process, and the adoption of a governance model which allowed stakeholders to determine their own next steps, were vital to achieving such positive outcomes. 230

Collaborative approaches to complex environmental problems in Victoria

In 2001, the Victorian Government devised a statutory mechanism to facilitate ‘community-based processes of decision-making and action’ in dealing with local environmental issues commonly arising as the cumulative impact of multiple sources of pollution. 231 This mechanism—which provides for the establishment of a Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan (NEIP)—establishes a formal process to bestow Environment Protection Authority (EPA) legitimacy upon locally developed responses to environmental issues. It ‘abandons command and control in favour of collaboration and community-based decision-making’. 232

226. Ibid.
227. Ibid., p. 33.
228. Ibid., p. 36.
229. Ibid., p. 35
230. Ibid., p. 36.
232. Ibid., p. 126.
Under the legislation, a NEIP can be initiated by individuals, households, social organisations, businesses, ‘green’ groups, professional associations and financial institutions. Each NEIP must be sponsored by one of a list of prescribed protection agencies that have official duties or responsibilities under the Act. There is a series of steps that the community-based initiator(s) and their partners must go through to ensure the robustness, and broad community endorsement, of their proposal. The sponsor is required to act on behalf of the group to bring the proposal to VEPA for endorsement, and ultimately approval as a plan with legal status that is published in the Government Gazette.

An evaluation of three pilot NEIP projects (published in 2007) judged that ‘it is clear ... NEIP is flexible and potentially capable of engaging with a diverse range of complex environmental challenges’ and ‘well-suited to policy solutions’. However, several challenges were thrown up by the pilots, including that:

- project participants were not broadly representative of the community
- the action plans, in order to comply with the NEIP legal framework, took between two and three years to develop, which acted as a deterrent to people’s participation; and
- mobilising resources and funding for implementing planned initiatives in a timely and efficient way was the ‘most problematic’ issue.

A subsequent evaluation of NEIP, published in 2010, revisited some of these issues. It found that citizens’ participation, for example, depended significantly upon the size of the community involved, the personal stake of individuals in the issue being addressed, and the perceived urgency of the matter. The demands made on the time and skills of participants were also found to be something of a barrier, and migrants’ involvement was circumscribed by limited English-language skills. However, the evaluator judged that ‘all programs included representation from a wide variety of affected individuals ... organisations ... and interests in numbers that appear significantly more “participatory” than traditional centralised regulation (which primarily relied on bureaucratic experts)’.

Key implications of the study focused on the capacities of potential participants, and the capacities of the public service agencies as facilitators of participation. For participants, time, effort and resources must be applied to reducing participatory barriers and imparting the ‘necessary foundational capacities’ for people to come to the table. For the public agencies, limited direction from senior managers, or vague procedural guidance, about engaging with citizens and communities ‘saw officials fail to scrupulously foster participation’.

In 2007, the EPA published its *Engagement Improvement Strategy* which specifies its aims as follows:

234. Ibid., p. 148.
236. Ibid., p. 387.
237. Ibid., p. 389.
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- Embed community engagement as core business
- Establish a shared culture and common approach to engagement
- Clarify the behaviours we need to demonstrate in all aspects of our work
- Identify and prioritise our requirements for ensuring EPA has the capabilities and systems required to effectively engage
- Ensure we learn from each others’ community engagement experiences
- Ensure an integrated approach to engagement that allows the best use and application of our resources. 238

The Victorian EPA also specified as its top strategic priority for senior staff that they ‘outline their own development plan to build their community engagement skills’.239 The articulation of these goals and aspirations suggests strongly that citizen engagement was identified as the key ingredient to the agency’s success in meeting its statutory and service obligations to the people and Government of Victoria.

A strategic educational initiative in Tamworth, New South Wales

In 2007, the NSW Education Department won a national award for ‘robust public participation process’ in its strategic planning for education services in the Tamworth region.240 The planning exercise was prompted by demographic and regional economic shifts, local skills shortages and enrolment imbalances and resource inequities across educational facilities.

To plan for engagement, a governance structure was established with wide community representation, including teachers, students and parents and a range of other stakeholders. An independent facilitator was engaged to manage the entire process, which was designed to ensure inclusiveness and deliberation. The process was a sophisticated one, involving:

- interactive sessions with samples of students from kindergarten to Year 12
- parent and teacher discussions, and focus groups at all schools
- community workshops combining ‘station rounds’ and ‘world cafe’ techniques
- deliberative forums using a ‘citizens jury’ approach
- specific Indigenous consultations involving meetings, youth groups and workshops
- interactive briefings with interest groups
- regular newsletters to continuously update information, and
- regular meetings with Departmental officials.

All elements of the process were communicated extensively, including through local newspapers, radio and television, and the representativeness of the range of participants was expanded through additional random selection processes. Independent evaluations of the deliberative forums assessed

239. Ibid.
the effectiveness of communication, participants’ understanding of issues and purposes, the adequacy of timeframes, and enabled critical reflection on the engagement process as a whole.  

As a result of the process, 58 recommendations were made to the Department. While there was widespread support for some goals and strategies, on others there remained a diversity of views. The engagement process had been exhaustive and well-facilitated, leaving little doubt that the citizens of the Tamworth region had been given a genuine opportunity to influence the educational future of the area. The practical effect of their participation in such an intensive process will emerge as the Tamworth 2020 vision unfolds over time.

Disability services in WA and Queensland: Local Area Coordination

Local Area Coordination (LAC) emerged in Western Australia in 1988 ‘partly as a response to concerns about quality, costs and outcomes of traditional services’ as well as a response to ‘a range of new ideas about how individuals, families and communities can make a difference’.  

The LAC framework observes a range of key democratic and autonomy-enhancing principles, including:

- people with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as all citizens to participate in and contribute to the life of the community
- people with disabilities and their families are in the best position to determine their needs, their goals, and to plan for the future
- people with disabilities and their families have natural (legitimate) authority and are best placed to be their most powerful and enduring leaders, decision-makers and advocates
- the lives of people with disabilities and their families are enhanced when they can determine their preferred supports and services and control the required resources to the extent that they desire.

LAC is essentially an exercise in enabling people with disabilities to co-design and co-produce the services and supports they need while also enabling them to contribute and share their own knowledge, skills and assets through their local LAC-inspired networks. Local Area Coordinators build and maintain effective working relationships with individuals, families and communities, provide accurate and timely information, assist with goal-setting and clarifying people’s strengths and needs, facilitate practical solutions and support, promote self-advocacy and contributes independent advocacy when required, and build inclusive communities through partnerships and collaboration.

The entire endeavour militates against the disempowering condition of people feeling under-valued, not listened to, lacking control and having to ‘fit in with the agenda of experts’.

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241. Ibid.
If traditional services tend towards pigeon-holing people according to the needs they identify and the available service options before them, many co-produced services start somewhere else – more like: what sort of life does this person want? What does this person feel is a good life for them? They definitely don’t start with the question: what services does this person need? 244

LAC is now operating across many Australian states, Scotland, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand, and a valuable body of research on its effectiveness has emerged. In the UK, analysis has shown that costs per person accessing the LAC approach are ‘35 per cent lower than the average support package’ and that LAC has ‘a 58 per cent higher take up of people in receipt of disability support than other services’. 245

The findings of a detailed evaluation report on LAC for Disability Services Queensland were similarly positive. The evaluation found that ‘in comparison with other DSQ programs, LAC offers highly cost effective support’ and is ‘a very low cost program ... which potentially offers supports to people with disabilities and families across most of the state’s area, to those who have never received disability services’. 246 It has given Queensland ‘the most coverage in terms of disability services ever in its history’. 247

The LAC methodology has demonstrated personal, community and economic benefits. Its emphasis on ‘bottom up’, citizen-centric approaches has proven not only successful but sustainable.

There has been a very strong commitment to supervision and support in this program and this must be seen as a cornerstone of the success of the program. LAC has invested considerable time and money into the supervision and support of LACs and LAC practice. This has been an important safeguard in enabling the program to meet its objectives not just at the outset but to keep meeting those objectives. (Emphasis in original.)

There are two significant implications for the work of LAC in this signpost. First, sustaining practitioners in difficult contexts is a serious challenge for all health and human services in rural and remote areas. Second, the translation of service ideals to the lived experiences of people with disabilities and families has proven to be a complex and difficult task. ...

It is our view that LAC has demonstrated a model for ongoing support and supervision which can begin to address both these challenges. (Emphasis in original.) 248

The assessors’ overall view was unequivocal: ‘we would state categorically that ... LAC ... has had a positive effect ... both short term and long term. We believe that the LAC program will be seen as the bench mark for best practice’. 249

244. Boyle, op. cit.
245. Ibid., p. 21.
247. Ibid., p. 78.
248. Ibid., p. 83.
249. Ibid., p. 79.
The UK’s Expert Patients Programme: a new approach to managing chronic disease

In the 21st century, advanced nations are struggling to deal with the impacts of increased longevity among their citizens. The predominant pattern of ill-health is not one of acute illness but rather chronic disease or long-term illness. Diabetes, arthritis, cancer, dementia, heart disease and stroke are just some of the conditions that are being endured and managed by individuals over longer and longer periods. Many health professionals involved in the care of these individuals are acknowledging that their patients understand their condition better than the clinicians do.

This knowledge and experience held by the patient has for too long been an untapped resource. It is something that could greatly benefit the quality of patients’ care and ultimately their quality of life, but which has been largely ignored in the past.\(^{250}\)

The expert patient scheme first emerged as an idea in a 1999 UK Government White Paper, and was formalised in *The NHS Plan* published in 2000. It drew its inspiration from over twenty years of work in user-led self-management programmes developed at the Stanford University School of Medicine under the leadership of Professor Kate Lorig.\(^{251}\)

The expert patient scheme is premised on the need ‘to empower patients’ and ‘the fact that patients and professionals each have their own area of knowledge and expertise and need to work together’.\(^{252}\) Patients tend to possess significant tacit knowledge, and it is important ‘to be able to identify and articulate tacit knowledge and then be able to use it appropriately’.\(^{253}\) By combining the knowledge, experience and life skills of the patient with the technical medical expertise of the practitioner, the most appropriate services and support can be devised, and treatment of the condition optimised.

Moreover, the ‘expert patient’ can be trained to assist and support others who are coming to terms with chronic illness:

The mainstay of the Expert Patients Programme is a six-week self care skills training course which is an adaptation of the Chronic Disease Self-management Programme developed in the USA. The course is delivered [in primary care settings] by people who have personal experience of living with a long-term condition.\(^{254}\)


251. Details of Professor Lorig available at http://patienteducation.stanford.edu/lorig.html

252. UK Department of Health, op. cit., p. 11.


Apart from any direct benefit conveyed to a patient seeking advice about their condition, the EPP builds social networks, which have a demonstrably positive effect on people’s health and wellbeing. A comprehensive evaluation of the pilot versions of the six week self-care training course was undertaken, both to explore how it was implemented and to assess its clinical and cost effectiveness. It included case studies in eight locations around England.

Notwithstanding various logistical and participatory barriers associated with a new and unfamiliar programme, the results indicated that ‘the provision of a lay led self care support programme to a heterogeneous group of patients with long-term conditions results in significant increases in self-efficacy, and is likely to be cost effective’. At a ‘purely pragmatic (and economic) level partnerships between patients and clinicians can also help make better use of health professionals’ time’. Given that, in the public healthcare arena, it is not easy to separate the ethics of care from the economics of care, such considerations matter.

A cost-effectiveness analysis, measured in terms of Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs), concluded that ‘the EPP is likely to generate QALY benefits with little or no additional cost, and that the EPP intervention is likely to be cost effective when compared with treatment as usual at threshold values of cost-effectiveness’. The results were declared to be ‘largely in favour of implementation of EPP’.

The results also showed ‘that there was a significant improvement in satisfaction with quality of life for those in the intervention arm of the trial’.

In a move to encourage similar approaches to patient-doctor collaboration, the Australian Government’s 2010–11 Budget provided $449.2 million over four years to improve the quality and coordination of services provided to people with diabetes. Under the scheme, a general practice would receive pooled payments to be used to work with patients to develop a personalised care plan, among other things. The doctors would be paid, in part, on the basis of their performance in keeping their patients healthy and out of hospital. The Minister for Health, Nicola Roxon, was subsequently reported as ‘preparing to tweak key aspects of her national health reforms after a backlash from doctors’. The minister later announced ‘the early commencement of a [3-4 year] pilot of the Coordinated Care for Diabetes reform’ to evaluate the reform’s design, clinical outcomes and patient well-being and quality of life.

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257. Ibid., p. 18.
258. Hardy, op. cit., p. 6.
Other examples of successful citizen engagement initiatives

Consulting with Canadians

The Canadian Government operates a website www.consultingcanadians.gc.ca that provides a structured, single-point of access to on-line and off-line consultations. Consultations listed on the site are updated regularly by participating government departments and agencies. The site provides:

- a list of current consultations under way across participating government departments and agencies
- a selection of consultations that have been completed, including links to background information and reports
- an at-a-glance view of when consultations are scheduled to take place, with a search function that can be used to find a consultation listed by title, subject, or department or agency.

Europa: gateway to the European Union

The European Union portal http://europa.eu/index_en.htm provides for online public consultations and petitions. Any citizen, acting individually or jointly with others, may at any time exercise his right of petition to the European Parliament under Article 194 of the EC Treaty. The petition—submitted by post or via an online form designed for that purpose—may present an individual request, a complaint or observation concerning the application of EU law or an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt a position on a specific matter. A Committee on Petitions meets monthly to examine petitions received and decide what type of action should be taken.

Depending on the circumstances, the Committee on Petitions may:

- ask the European Commission to conduct a preliminary investigation and provide information regarding compliance with relevant Community legislation or contact SOLVIT
- refer the petition to other European Parliament committees for information or further action (a committee might, for example, take account of a petition in its legislative activities)
- in some exceptional cases prepare and submit a full report to Parliament to be voted upon in plenary
- conduct a fact-finding visit to the country or region concerned and issue a Committee report containing its observations and recommendations or
- take any other action considered appropriate to try to resolve an issue or deliver a suitable response to the petitioner.263

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As well, a web portal called *Your Voice in Europe* provides a regularly updated list of all public consultations across all policy areas.264 Each consultation typically provides relevant background papers, media releases and speeches, an online questionnaires and an invitation for written submissions.

264. European Commission, ‘Your voice in Europe’ website, viewed 2 March 2011,  
Appendix 2: Core Values for Public Participation

International Association for Public Participation

Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation

• Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

• Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.

• Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.

• Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

• Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.

• Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

• Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Source: International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), Core Values, IAP2 website, viewed 6 January 2011, http://www.iap2.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=4
Appendix 3: Key themes in public participation

The following themes concerning governments’ approaches to public participation are drawn from the Canadian Institute of Governance (IOG).

- Citizen engagement takes different forms according to the nature of the issue at hand, and the expectations of both public servants and citizens involved must be clearly understood and managed. There must be commitment to the cause of involving citizens from ministers, senior executives and line managers, with adequate resources ear-marked, and public servants suitably trained in consultation and facilitation.

- The methodology of engagement observes the following principles:
  - shared agenda-setting
  - relaxed time-frame for deliberation
  - emphasis on value-sharing
  - inclusiveness, courtesy and respect.

- Voluntary and non-government organisations are valuable agents for informing participants and facilitating dialogue between government and citizens.

- The application of information technologies to citizen engagement requires careful attention to the sociology / demography of internet use and how information is prioritised and dialogue facilitated in online environments.

- Citizens must be enabled to come to the engagement process with some knowledge of the matters under deliberation, a willingness to learn, and possessing the civic skills and personal capabilities that facilitate respectful dialogue.

Appendix 4: OECD guidelines for online citizen engagement

Guiding principles for successful online consultation

- **Start planning early**: Start planning an online consultation early on. Define what information should be provided to the target group, and in what format. Decide how long the online consultation should be run, who will be responsible for it and how the input received will feed into existing timetables for decision-making.

- **Demonstrate commitment**: Ensure leadership and visible commitment to the online consultation at the highest level and communicate this clearly from the outset. Explain the purpose of the consultation (e.g. scoping new policy issues, developing draft legislation, evaluating policy implementation), where the results will be published and how they will be used.

- **Guarantee personal data protection**: Guarantees for the protection of personal data must be provided for participants in online consultations. The implications for personal data protection will vary with the form of data collection chosen (e.g. anonymous submissions, online registration or password access for restricted groups).

- **Tailor your approach to fit your target group**: Identify the participants whose opinions are being sought (e.g. general public, experts, youth) and adapt the online consultation to their capacities and expectations (e.g. language, terminology). Provide additional support to enable participants with special needs (e.g. physical disabilities, social exclusion) to participate.

- **Integrate online consultation with traditional methods**: Consider the use of traditional methods in association with online consultations (e.g. public roundtables plus dedicated websites). An approach based on multiple channels is likely to be more successful in reaching and engaging citizens than relying upon a single medium.

*Source: OECD, Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of online citizen engagement*

Appendix 5: OECD Guiding principles for open and inclusive policymaking

In 2009, the OECD updated and republished the following Guiding Principles for Open and Inclusive Policy Making:

- Commitment from politicians and senior managers to open and inclusive policymaking.
- Citizens’ rights to information and participation firmly grounded in law, with independent oversight mechanisms to enforce these rights.
- Clarity about the roles, responsibilities, limits and expectations of all participants.
- Early engagement in the policy process and adequate time available for participation.
- Inclusiveness to ensure a wide variety of people are engaged, and through multiple channels.
- Adequate financial, technical and human resources made available, and public officials with the skills and organisational culture that supports both traditional and online engagement.
- Co-ordination across levels of government to ensure coherence of effort and leverage the knowledge networks and communities of practice within and beyond government.
- Government accountability to participants about how their inputs are received and acted upon.
- Proper evaluation of the performance of government in effecting public participation.
- Active support by government for building the problem-solving capacity of, and encouraging citizens’ participation in, civil society organisations.

Citizens’ engagement in policymaking and the design of public services

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