LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES | Toolkit

Communicating with your community

This fact sheet provides information about about communicating with older Tasmanians in the community.

Contents

Older Tasmanians want communication

Many older Tasmanians feel that they are valued less by government, businesses and community as they age, even on issues that directly affect them. Communities can only be improved by asking community members about what they enjoy or find challenging, so these can be directly addressed.

Community engagement benefits

- Older Tasmanian and community participants, who:
  - Can participate in their community
  - Are empowered to voice their concerns and opinions
  - Feel heard, valued, respected, and part of their community
  - Are able to make a positive impact on their community
  - Can address issues that directly affect them

- Council, which can:
  - Correctly identify and address community issues, rather than guessing or assuming what these are
  - Appreciate community's perspective
  - Implement change with community support
  - Demonstrate its appreciation and value of community members

- Broader community members, by:
  - Identifying and addressing community-wide issues and concerns
  - Acknowledging successful programs and projects
  - Allowing community members to meet and form social connections

> "When they're [government] having meetings to plan things for the older people, they don't have the older people there to ask them what they want. Why? They're trying so hard to do the right thing but they end up doing the wrong thing, because they don't ask us."
>
> —*Older Tasmanian, Sorell*

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Tips for communicating with older people

Considering ageism[1,2]

Ageist stereotypes are widespread and often considered 'normal' in our community. Many of us unconsciously demonstrate ageist attitudes, even against our own age. Stereotypes of older people may present themselves in how we talk or present information to or about them, and the types of questions and responses encouraged during consultation.

It's useful for us to challenge our own and our communities' ageist stereotypes before consulting with older people. What stereotypes could influence you? What behaviours or attitudes do you expect from younger or older people? How might these expectations impact how you view individuals? Is it really age that makes someone angry, timid, talkative, grumpy, forgetful, unproductive or a slow driver, or is that just how some people are and have always been? Older people are just as diverse in their interests, personalities, behaviours and attitudes as young and middle-aged people.

Project Implicit is a Harvard Study that includes a test to find out if you may have unconcious bias against younger or older people. You can register for free and the results may surprise you: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html.

Most older people:

- Do not feel 'old'.

- Live in the community, not in residential care. Less than 5% of Tasmanians aged over 65 lived in residential aged care in June 2019[3].

- Want to be consulted about issues that affect them.

- Do not have dementia, sickness or significant physical and mental disability. Only 17.8% of Tasmanians aged over 65 years lived with a profound or severe limitation in 2016.

- Are individuals with different backgrounds, beliefs and life experiences.

- Have a wealth of practical and theoretical knowledge.

1 *Don't Call me Granny — A guide for Communication Professionals*, Department of Health and Human Services 1999

2 *Better Together: a practical guide to effective engagement with older people*, Government of South Australia. Retrieved from: http://bettertogether.sa.gov.au/prepare

3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. GEN Aged Care Data Snapshot — 2019. Canberra: AIHW

Avoid using ageist language and attitudes when engaging with older people:

- Talk to people in terms of what they are doing or how they identify themselves — it may be useful to talk to members of your community about how they prefer to be identified before engaging with a large number of people.

- Do not assume that you know what older people are concerned about.

- Avoid judgements about what is appropriate for older people, what their capabilities are, or what interests them.

- Talk to older people in a manner that you would talk to a person of any other age. Unless someone asks, do not raise your voice or slow your speech.

- Do not use terms such as 'oldie', 'elderly', 'pensioner' (some people over 65 years still work or have non-pension income), 'Grandmother' or 'Grandfather' (unless in context, not all older people are grandparents) or 'the aged'.

- Avoid using terms of familiarity like dearie, lovey, darl/darling, sweetie, honey etc. These names are often seen as patronising unless you know the person well.

Expect to learn something new about your community when engaging with older people.

Methods of communication

Though online communication is the easiest and cheapest way to communicate with the community, you risk missing a large and important group of people who are not, do not want to be, or have limited ability to go online. This impacts people of any age, not just those who are older who have not grown up with technology. In fact, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index shows that in Tasmania in 2019[4]:

- People on low income were the least digitally included overall.

- People with lower levels of education had the lowest scores in Digital Access.

- People on low income had the lowest scores in Digital Affordability.

- People aged over 65 had the lowest scores in Digital Ability.

- Tasmania was the least digital included of all Australian States (NT and ACT age data not available).

> People who are not digitally engaged tend to experience greater disadvantage than their online counterparts.

It is critical that Councils and organisations communicate with their community both online and offline to allow everyone, particularly the most vulnerable, to have their voices heard.

4 Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Wilson, C. K., Rennie, E., Ewing, S., & MacDonald, T (2019) *Measuring Australia's digital divide: The Australian digital inclusion index 2019*, RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, for Telstra. https://doi.org/10.25916/5d6478f373869

Ways to communicate with people who are not online include:

- Local newspapers and newsletters
- Local radio
- Letter/flyer/postcard drops
- Through community groups
- Through community services
- Through advocacy and support organisations

Information and flyers can also be posted in places that older people often visit, including:

- Neighbourhood Houses
- Libraries
- Doctor surgeries
- Pharmacies
- Shopping centres
- Community centres
- Government centres (Centrelink, Service Tasmania)

Where do older Tasmanians find information?

Newspaper **68%**	TV **68%**	Doctors **64%**	Family & friends **61%**
Radio **55%**	Pharmacies **47%**	Yellow Pages **46%**	Websites **40%**

Increasingly, websites are used to provide information. This is far from ideal for people aged 75 or more.

Improving your communications with older Tasmanians (COTA Tasmania, 2014)

	Websites	Doctors/pharmacies
50–59 years	19%	16%
50–74 years	12%	23%
75–84 years	6%	27%
85+ years	4%	27%

Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people[5,6]

Building genuine relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through respectful consultation is crucial to develop appropriate, targeted and responsive support and services. It is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are included from the beginning of consultation and that the reason for being consulted is clear and transparent.

Older people are an integral part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as they possess knowledge and wisdom that is transferred through generations. Councils should work closely with Elders and leaders in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to plan consultation and engagement. Elders and leaders will provide advice and direction about the most appropriate way to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which may take time and regular contact.

There are a range of cultural considerations to be made when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Though the following provide some insight as to what these may be, specific considerations should be discussed directly with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Respectful ways of communicating may include specific body language, seating position and use of certain words.

5 *Working with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, Benevolent Society. Retrieved from: https://www.benevolent.org.au/~/media/5D30EB251FC3BACCF1B73DF61E07A9A8.ashx

6 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural protocols*, Oxfam Australia. Retrieved from: https://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/respect-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-protocols-oxfam-australia.pdf

Culture is of central importance to how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people understand their identities and live their lives. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse and protocols to respectfully and effectively engage them vary across communities.

During consultation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people should have the right to:

- Own and control their cultural and intellectual property;

- Ensure that any means of protecting their cultural and intellectual property is based on the principle of self-determination;

- Be recognised as the primary guardians and interpreters of their cultures and regulate how stories and information is presented;

- Authorise or refuse the use of their cultural and intellectual property according to customary law (note: although customary law does not exist in Tasmania, there are cultural protocols that need to be followed);

- Maintain the secrecy of their knowledge and other cultural practices;

- Be given full and proper attribution for sharing their heritage

- Control the recording of cultural customs and expressions, the particular language which may be intrinsic to cultural identity, knowledge, skill and teaching of culture;

- Own and control their cultural heritage, and their rights and interests in how they are portrayed (in images, text etc.) must at all times be respected and protected.

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Working with people from culturally diverse backgrounds[7]

Engaging culturally diverse communities requires councils to work with community leaders and organisations to learn about the culture, their practices and the best way to consult with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. This may be in the language you use, how you promote and report your engagement, or how you interact with community members.

Community leaders and organisations can guide you as to how you engage with culturally diverse communities. This may be through translation of resources and engagement materials or by having an interpreter present at groups meetings or events. These methods may be expensive and time consuming, so ensure you consider them in your budget.

It is important that staff are culturally aware of the group they are engaging with, either by discussing cultural practices with community leaders or training in cultural awareness, to avoid misunderstandings.

Some culturally sensitive practices to be aware of include:

*   Be respectful of religious and cultural beliefs and practices;
*   Ask people how they would like to be addressed and for correct pronunciation – referring to people by their first name may be disrespectful;
*   Women supervising men;
*   Younger people supervising older people;
*   Touching another person;
*   Holding a person's gaze when they are speaking;
*   Coughing or blowing one's nose;
*   Dress codes;
*   Time of day ie. Prayer times;
*   Appropriate drinks and refreshments;
*   Different ways of greeting people;
*   Participants replying 'yes' when unsure, confused or not wanting to say 'no'.

7 Working with people from culturally diverse backgrounds, Victoria's Volunteering Portal. Retrieved from: http://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/manage-your-volunteers/encouraging-diversity/working-with-people-from-culturally-diverse-backgrounds

Resources

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural protocols, Oxfam: https://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/respect-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-protocols-oxfam-australia.pdf

Don't call me Granny: a guide for Communication Professionals, Department of Health and Human Services (1999)

Finding Out: Supporting older people to access the right information, COTA Tasmania: www.cotatas.org.au/action-advocacy/finding-out-report

Working with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Benevolent Society: https://www.benevolent.org.au/~/media/5D30EB251FC3BACCF1B73DF61E07A9A8.ashx

Working with people from culturally diverse backgrounds, Victoria's Volunteering portal: www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/manage-your-volunteers/encouraging-diversity/working-with-people-from-culturally-diverse-backgrounds