

Overview of Engagement Processes in the Development of Wellbeing Frameworks – Jacki Schirmer and Beth Slatyer

A view of participatory processes for developing and delivering on ACT Wellbeing indicators.

- Overview of engagement processes used internationally and nationally to develop wellbeing frameworks – Jacki
 - 5 international examples
 - survey on how people want to be engaged with
 - what ACT residents think of different processes
- Options and implications for the ACT – Beth

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am here on behalf of the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy, a grass roots alliance of individuals and organisations working to create a better democracy in the ACT.

SLIDE Our vision is *“a better democracy in the ACT, where citizens trust their elected representatives, hold them accountable, have greater engagement in decision making and defend what sustains the public interest”*

One strand of our work has been to advocate for and learn from new approaches to participatory decision making, particularly citizens juries and panels, which has exposed us to a wider range of issues about community engagement in Canberra. I am also on the ACTCOSS Governing Committee, and so bring perspectives from that sector too.

I have been asked to focus on options and implications for engagement from the community perspective.

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1. Why have community engagement?
2. What is a valid process from the Community’s perspective?
3. What is the community context in Canberra?

SLIDE – Aust Govt cartoon

I am going to focus on community engagement – both with individuals and in collective groupings, including through civil society peak bodies. This slide gives the picture.

I'll leave it to Jacki to talk about engagement in terms of broader expert input.

Why have community engagement on the wellbeing indicators?

1. To help ensure they are “meaningful, enduring, complete and coherent” (as per criteria in the NZ report)

- selecting indicators is partly about values, it is not just a technical exercise
- technical experts, in this case statisticians and others, need to listen to the community about values and meaning – and completeness and coherence
- But of course indicators also need to be conceptually and scientifically sound – just listening to the community is not enough. There needs to be a melded process

SLIDE 2. The second reason is because *“the purpose of public policy is to improve wellbeing, hence measuring the progress of wellbeing is of public interest”* (Deloitte)

- society as a whole benefits when everyone has the chance to reflect on current, future and transboundary wellbeing – and everyone has a valid view

3. The third and possibly most important reason is because we live in a democracy – and a functioning democracy needs an engaged citizenry which has the capacity to participate in making the decisions that affect it, to monitor and hold those it elects to account.

What is a valid process from the community's perspective?

1. Engagement has to be genuine, and seen to be genuine

- CAPaD has given quite a bit of thought to this.
- In 2015 we worked with ACTCOSS to develop a set of principles to test the validity of deliberative processes from the community's perspective. They are on this **SLIDE** TALK ABOUT EACH CRITERIA
- These principles are broadly relevant to this process too

2. The second point is that community engagement is just one part of a valid government decision making process – whether that is policy making, conducting a review or selecting indicators.

Community engagement is just a tool for generating community input. If the overall process for selecting indicators is not robust, engagement is just a veneer and the community is quick to detect that.

Governance and oversight of the process is part of that.

The overall process for selecting indicators has to be robust.

- NZ had a robust process – encompassing wide community engagement, technical workshops, peer review and appraisal

3. The community expect coherence and respect. They want to be able to trust engagement processes but on the whole do not – mostly from bitter experience.

- Two types of coherence matter. The first is coherence across government. The case in point for the wellbeing indicators is the parallel review of the Territory Plan – which is likely to ask citizens and civil society organisations many of the same questions.
- There is also scope for coherence with processes outside the ACT government. Many Community councils and residents are running community voice projects, SEE Change produced a “voice of the people” report. I will say more about these later – but suffice to say that coherence and respect go hand in hand.

4. “Listen to understand” and respect what has been said in the past – don’t ask the same questions again and again. But also don’t pretend people said things they did not. Respect the fact that capacity is limited and we need to build on what has been said and done before rather than start with blank sheets.

5. Finally – engagement needs to be funded in a way that respects the time and expertise being shared.

- Peak bodies and other representative groups should be resourced to participate at a level that recognises the intellectual capital they can share as result of their ongoing dialogue and engagement with their members.
- Individuals should be provided with financial support to participate in consultations.
- Community councils are our local mechanism for supporting local engagement, they can be partners - supported to build up participation.

Canberra context

SLIDE “to be successful, community engagement must encompass strategies and processes that are sensitive to the community context in which it occurs” my emphasis (Penn State Center for Economic and Community Development”

So what is the context – I will cover 3 key elements:

1. The city is growing and changing – bringing challenges to sustained wellbeing

- we are developing wellbeing indicators at a time when inequality is growing and communities are fragmenting. The drivers of change are national and global, but what we do at a city level matters, and matters a lot.
- Wellbeing in Canberra is coming off a high base. Canberra’s traditionally high level of performance on wellbeing is grounded in two things
 - the social determinants of wellbeing – higher education and health status, higher average income
 - but equally importantly, wellbeing and social sustainability were designed and built into the fabric of city.
 - There is interest in diversification, densification and better matching lifestyle and work patterns with the built form. But we have not had a robust and effective approach to understanding different aspirations, values and trade-offs.
 - The key point is that there is a lot of contested ground in what sort of city we want to be and what strategies we should use to get there. This is relevant context as we move to develop wellbeing indicators.

2. We already know a lot about what people want - lets not ask the same questions but ask new, different questions in new way to go deeper.

3. Engagement can and should be generative - not just “extractive” – we can use community development approaches to build capacity and agency.

- Being generative means leaving something behind – learning, capacity, connections – and building systems literacy, so people

better understand how their day to day experience is affected by laws and policies.

- That will be important if the indicators are to achieve their potential to improve decision making, improve government investment, enable public monitoring, empower civil society and community groups to make informed decisions, and help them advocate.
- Community development approaches create learning, respect and trust, and mobilise resources not otherwise visible or available.
- Community capacity is limited and resources stretched- and needs to be built and supported.
- ACT Public Service capacity is limited and resources are stretched.

SLIDE – Community capacity – lots of people are burnt out. Quote from a young single mother trying to engage. This is what failure looks like.

“A lot of us, and I mean A LOT, are just so exhausted.

The continual effort that we need to put into liaising with government to create/protect our basic community needs...It's inhumane.

The stress on individuals and community as a whole is incredible.

And seemingly getting us nowhere in the end.”

SLIDE Conclusion

What does this mean for the engagement process – key messages:

1. The overall process for selecting indicators has to be robust – it has to be more than just community engagement. There needs to be space for expertise, contestability, peer review and appraisal. Engagement is only one element of a good process.
2. Community engagement needs to be generative, not just extractive - and trusted. A community development approach assists this.
3. Context and Coherence matter – the community expect government to work across silos and to be cognizant of other related processes. Start with what has already been said, listen to understand. Align with related processes.

4. Governance and resourcing for the process.
 - Oversight, resourcing need to be well designed. But equally the resourcing needs to match the level of ambition.
 - Capacity building is needed for both the ACTPS and the community - fund engagement in ways that respect participants.
 - The governance structure needs to be right, particularly to ensure indigenous voice.