BUILDING TRUST THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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QUEENSLAND (AUSTRALIA) EXPERIENCE IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
A PRO-ACTIVE PARTNER IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
Abstract

Established in 1896, the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc (LGAQ) is the peak body representing the 157 city, town and shire councils in the State of Queensland. A key function of the Association is building the capacity of councils to better serve the community.

This paper describes several successful initiatives undertaken over the past decade. It focuses on the pro-active partnership between the State Government and Local Governments based on a shared jurisdiction in meeting community needs. Underpinning and informing this collaborative relationship are LGAQ programs that promote civic engagement, enable the identification of community needs and build council capacity to respond in a positive manner.

These initiatives include:

1) A Protocol first created in 1997, and revised in 2003 and 2006, establishing the roles and responsibilities of the State and Local Governments focusing on improved community outcomes.

2) A Community Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey developed in 1997 and conducted biennially by the Association and councils assessing Local Government service importance and council performance facilitating improved community planning and performance measurement.

3) The award winning Local Area Multicultural Partnership (LAMP) program established in 1998 to strengthen community relations, access and equity for culturally and linguistically diverse groups at the local level.

4) The Youth Policy project commenced in 1998 is now focused on building the capacity of Local Government to acknowledge and engage young people as legitimate community members who possess the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

5) The Roads Alliance between the Main Roads Department and Queensland Local Government commenced in 2002 is now an internationally recognized inter-jurisdictional partnership for road planning, resource prioritization and roadworks delivery.

6) The Local Government Social Capital project undertaken in 2003 to assist councils strengthen their communities through the identification and promotion of council roles in building social capital.

7) The award winning Community Engagement project arising out of the community satisfaction survey in 2003 in response to a growing concern that Local Government’s engagement practices and techniques, including community consultation, required improvement.

These initiatives developed in conjunction with the State Government and with specialist input have positioned Local Government in Queensland at the forefront of civic engagement within Australia.

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Introduction

Since 1896 the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) has been representing and providing leadership to its member councils. This is done with the explicate intention of ‘strengthening the ability and performance of Queensland Local Government to better serve the community’.

This Mission Statement sums up the LGAQ’s purpose - to ensure Queensland Local Government operates within a ‘good governance’ framework in order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of services, programs and initiatives undertaken by the state’s 157 local government councils.

Irrespective of what aspect of work is undertaken by Local Government - road construction, water desalination, rubbish removal, environmental protection, lifelong learning projects with senior citizens or delivering immunization programs to babies, ultimately, it’s principal focus is local democracy and caring for people and their wellbeing.

Local Government undertakes these functions with the aim of making the State's towns and cities vibrant places to live, work and play. Maintaining and enhancing a quality lifestyle is Local Government’s core business. While the LGAQ’s objective of service to community has remained the same since its creation 110 years ago, the way it goes about its business to achieve these outcomes has altered dramatically. Local Government, like other spheres of government, has to reshape itself in order to respond to change and to help shape a sustainable future.

The Local Government mantra of the Roads, Rates and Rubbish, has expanded beyond its fore father’s wildest imaginations. While still core functions, the 3 Rs (rates, roads and rubbish) as a symbol of Australian Local Government’s ‘purpose’ is more representative of the past rather than the present or indeed the future. Today, Local Government has over 80 core functions and 400 career areas.

Local Government in Queensland employs nearly 37,000 people and spends $A5.5billion annually (2005/06). Across all Australian States and Territories these figures are respectively, 165,100 employees and annual expenditure of $A18.265 billion.
While the proportional de-emphasis on ‘services to property’ has affected some local governments more than others, there is unanimous agreement that this sphere of government is characterised above all else by diversity\(^1\).

The call for a multidisciplinary approach has come from two main areas. It has come from citizens seeking transparent accountable government at all levels which responds to local needs and aspirations. Local Government is more community-based than Australia’s State or Federal Governments and is often the obvious choice for such activity. In addition to Local Government voluntarily incorporating a range of new functions and responsibilities, State Governments in Australia have ‘devolved’ considerable responsibility to Local Government from what has previously been regarded as State jurisdiction. The challenge is to ensure that these changes occur within a strategic policy framework based on mutual interest and responsibility and that they can be sustained and meet triple bottom line capability\(^2\).

Councils are increasingly engaged in planning with the longer-term in mind. Councils are anticipating change - change in the way people live and work, change in the way they travel, change in demographic profiles and changes in cultural profile. Councils also want to influence the way things change and are increasingly examining the drivers of change. Councils are looking at what kind of future their communities are seeking - not just around the corner but in 30, 40 and 50 years time.

This role has required Local Government to look at its own future and role. This paper will explore how the LGAQ has reinvented itself in order to remain relevant and responsive in modern society and how it has applied civic engagement as the method by which to build trust in Local Government throughout the change process.

The paper will explore Local Government’s civic engagement responsibilities and examine some of the partnerships LGAQ has brokered and developed, particularly with the State Government. This approach strongly reflects LGAQ’s belief that all stakeholders are responsible for delivering on the complex issues facing communities and their future - and that one group or level of government cannot achieve success without the support and involvement of the people, and a commitment to working within collaborative decision making frameworks to ‘make it count’.

**Practicing what we preach**

It is important to the Association that it models the change it wants to see. The following figure demonstrates LGAQ’s commitment to engagement with its stakeholders as part of its annual policy and program development progress. Depending on the issue or decision to be made, LGAQ engages internal staff, member councils and other ‘communities of interest’ at an appropriate level on the engagement continuum to inform its strategic and operational planning.

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\(^2\) Triple bottom line refers to the economic, environment and social.
Community members are regularly consulted for their opinion on a range of Local Government services and functions. Regional organisations of councils and professional bodies are involved in the broader strategic policy setting. Special purpose Reference Groups participate in the development and implementation of LGAQ’s agenda. Once a year at the Association’s Annual Conference members are empowered through an opportunity to vote on policy and advocacy agendas. This process keeps the LGAQ accountable and its decision making processes transparent.

Protocol Establishing the Roles and Responsibilities of the State Government and Local Government in the system of Local Government

The Protocol Establishing the Roles and Responsibilities of the State Government and Local Government in the system of Local Government represents a cooperative arrangement between the State Government and Local Government in Queensland (represented by the LGAQ)\(^1\). Unlike other Australian states, the LGAQ is the sole peak body representing Councils in Queensland. It is this unique position that brings universality of voice and opinion. LGAQ is not dictated by party and geographical politics that have divided Local Government elsewhere and can therefore speak with a clear and authoritative voice.

\(^1\) Protocol Establishing the Roles and Responsibilities of the State Government and Local Government in the system of Local Government\(^2\)2006.
Currently in its third iteration (1997, 2003, 2006) the Protocol provides a framework for negotiation between the two spheres of government in order to ‘enhance the wellbeing of communities’. It does this initially by acknowledging very clearly that the two spheres of government have a shared jurisdiction and that each will effectively serve the people of Queensland if they operate in a spirit of mutual respect with an emphasis on partnership and cooperation. The Protocol also recognises the individual roles and strengths of each partner. Local Government plays a critical role in community governance as a democratic, accountable and efficient forum for local decision making. It also acknowledges the State Government’s responsibility for establishing and providing coordination of state wide issues of strategic significance.

From a purely legal perspective Local Government is a creature of the State Government. However, the relationship shared and actively promoted is one of partnership. Each shares the same constituents, shares the same land area as Local Government in Queensland covers the entire State, and shares many roles and responsibilities through legislative and financial interaction. The Protocol demonstrates a maturing of this relationship beyond the traditional construct and reflects mutual respect and recognition.

It documents a formal set of principles that frame the engagement and interagency collaboration between the two spheres of government. It identifies shared understandings and expectations aimed at providing better outcomes through integrated and collaborative action.

So how does this work in reality? The implementation component of the Protocol documents the process that both spheres of Government adopt to promote a successful outcome. The State Government’s Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation (DLGPS&R) has carriage of embedding the Protocol across all government agencies.

Notwithstanding the good intentions and best practice principles of partnership and collaboration embodied in the Protocol, its success is measured by the commitment of the parties to its implementation.

Regrettably, the relationship between the Queensland Government and Local Government in the State was severely damaged on 17 April 2007 when the State unilaterally abandoned the jointly conducted voluntary reform program entitled Size, Shape and Sustainability (SSS). This program, developed over two years in collaboration with the State and undertaken by Local Government with extensive community engagement, has been replaced by a State appointed seven member Commission which will undertake a statewide review of council boundaries over three months leading to the forced amalgamation of councils from March 2008.

The SSS program was instigated in 2005 by Local Government in Queensland in recognition of the need to review its structures as well as its organizational and operational arrangements. With the focus on long term sustainability, the SSS program was voluntarily investigating change options involving amalgamations and boundary changes as well as collaborative resource sharing arrangements including establishing joint enterprises and service agreements. With 157 councils spread across the vast and diverse area of Queensland this approach was designed to identify changes appropriate to not only densely settled metropolitan and coastal areas but also remote sparsely populated rural and outback areas.
By its action the State not only repudiated the principles contained in the Protocol but also adopted a reform model and timetable which effectively denies the community any real opportunity to be engaged in a process of fundamental change of local government areas. The wishes and aspirations of local communities will not be heard in a process that will determine the structures of their local government bodies to operate for the next century.

This action is in complete contradiction to the objectives of the 7th Global Forum as it explores the reinventing of government by building trust through civic engagement. It also demonstrates the fragility of commitments to engagement and collaboration when jurisdictions are able to exercise their political power to achieve their ends.

**The Community Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey**

In 1997 LGAQ commissioned a project to develop a survey instrument and process to allow Queensland Local Government to monitor and track performance against the value system implicit to their customers.

Since 1997, the survey instrument developed at that time, has been used biennially by LGAQ to provide an overall benchmark by Council category (developed metropolitan, fringe metropolitan, provincial and rural) on the aggregate performance of Councils against a number of themes and topics. In addition, the surveys provide a time series on trends in aggregate performance of the Local Government sector in Queensland.

The survey methodology looks at both the importance of a function or service to the community and the perception of how well a Council is performing each specific function or service.

The premise of this approach is that there is not much merit in achieving excellence for an activity that has little value to the community. Nor is mediocre performance desirable in those functions which are judged as crucial by the community.

In developing the survey methodology, the market researchers employed by LGAQ held consultations with a cross-section of community representatives across Queensland. These consultations were aimed at gaining an insight of the range of services, activities and functions which were seen by the community as the essence of local governance.

This resulted in five broad themes being identified. Within each theme, a number of topics, services or activities were identified against which to measure both importance and performance. The themes and number of topics are:

- Basic Services and Infrastructure (12 topics)
- Community Lifestyle Services (12 topics)
- Managing the Shire/City (7 topics)
- Customer Service/Communication (6 topics)
- Qualities of Council (5 topics)
The following figure shows the trend in performance by theme over the five surveys undertaken to date. The 2005 scores showed a generally sound level of performance, and an improvement from the lower scores recorded in 2003 across all themes.

The surveys are used to highlight specific topics or functions where performance is below average. These become targets for performance improvement and are used by LGAQ to develop strategies and initiatives for capacity building.

The following figure shows the 15 performance improvement targets highlighted by the 2005 survey. The topic “Quality of the Elected Council” recorded the largest gap between importance and performance in the 2005 survey. This has been a focus of a number of LGAQ initiatives in recent years.
The Community Engagement project, discussed later in this paper, was a response to a community perspective, identified through surveys, that Local Government’s engagement practices and techniques including community consultation required improvement. The following figure reveals that the gap between importance and performance narrowed significantly in 2005 following implementation of this initiative in 2003.
The survey methodology has also been used by a significant number of larger Councils in the State to track their own performance relative to the category benchmarks developed from the whole-of-state survey. The results then feed into individual Council Corporate and Operational Plans where initiatives are required to enhance performance.

The survey also provides the opportunity to include questions on emerging themes and topics. For example, in 2005 a number of questions focused on customer access to the internet and willingness to use this for information, business transactions and payment of accounts. This information has been used to further develop the e-business approach of Councils in the State.

The survey has also allowed LGAQ to track the performance of Local Government as a service provider relative to other Federal or State Government owned service providers. The question was first asked in a 1995 community attitude survey but has also been included in the Benchmark Surveys since 1999. As the following figure shows, the percentage of respondents regarding Councils as being just as good or better than these other service providers has steadily increased from 71% in 1995 to 86% in 2005.

![Figure 4: Council Performance as a Service Provider](chart)
Local Governments around the world are facing the challenges and opportunities provided by increasingly culturally diverse communities. Current figures show that around 18% of the State’s population was born outside of Australia. However, Queensland is becoming increasingly diverse through migration streams which include family reunion, skilled and humanitarian. In more recent years this diversity is spreading across regions that historically were not host centres mainly due to increasing skilled worker intakes.

In 1999 the Queensland State Government, in partnership with LGAQ, initiated the Local Area Multicultural Partnership (LAMP) program to assist Councils to make the most of the benefits of this increasing cultural diversity, to address barriers to full participation of migrants and refugees and to pre-empt possible divisions between communities. Now, with 16 Councils as partners, LAMP is a nationally recognised program focusing on economic, social and cultural outcomes for Queensland’s communities all of which are culturally diverse. From its base in Local Government, LAMP works across the whole community to develop greater cohesion and appreciation of the benefits of diversity.
Key aspects of the program include:

State and Local Government partnerships

Each partnering Council develops its own community relations plan that is based upon its distinct demographics, strengths and identified needs within that community. A full-time LAMP officer is employed within each Council. Over time, task-oriented partnerships have emerged between the three spheres of government and the community to address issues around employment, housing, health, policing, education, disaster management, corrections, domestic violence and racism. These partnerships have important local outcomes but also contribute to the development of a state-wide knowledge-base largely through the strategic role of LGAQ.

Transferability across 16 urban and regional centers

Whether Councils are large or small, this model has been able to produce workable results. It has also flexibly responded to the widely contrasting community demographics in each local government area.

Demonstrated local ownership yet state-wide implementation

Models developed in improved customer service delivery, policy development and planning arrangements are promoted through LGAQ's linkages to all Councils in Queensland and to other States and New Zealand. For example, the Queensland Department of Corrections, noting an increase in one particular ethnic group within its largest prison, requested the local Council to co-develop a program to better support their rehabilitation during incarceration. The request was based on the acknowledged work already done by the Council in other areas. This model is being used as a base for work in prisons across the State.

Community driven programs and contextually sensitive responses

Through LAMP Councils have engaged with culturally diverse communities in new and dynamic ways which have provided opportunities for these communities to initiate and drive projects that meet both their aspirations and their needs. For example, Brisbane City Council developed a booklet Islam in Brisbane in collaboration with the city’s Muslim community. The booklet aims to help Muslims feel welcome in the city and assists the wider community to better understand the Muslim community.

The LAMP program is a key strategy of the Queensland Government under its multicultural policy implemented in partnership with Local Government.

The Program won the Local Governments in Cultural Diversity national award for excellence at the UNESCO 2005 Transformations Conference, Canberra, Australia.
Youth Development and Local Government

People under the age of 25 constitute approximately one quarter of Queensland’s population. They are a diverse group that makes a significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural capital of the community.

Queensland Local Government recognises providing services and programs for young people is part of Council’s core business because:

- Young people are future voters and current citizens;
- Young people use public transport and community facilities;
- Young people use roads to ride bikes, to learn to drive and to travel to school;
- Young people have a role in caring for the environment; and
- Young people will inherit the consequences of the decisions that are made today.

In recognition of this important role the Queensland Government Department of Communities has worked in partnership with LGAQ to deliver the Youth Development Project. This project
aims to build the capacity of Queensland Local Government to acknowledge and engage young people as community members who have the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The aims of the project are to support and develop the skill and capacity of Councils to:

- Provide young people with positive experiences and opportunities within their community;
- Foster connections and networks;
- Advocate for effective and ethical youth policy and youth strategies;
- Develop Local Government engagement process and practice alongside young people; and
- Work developmentally to ensure connections to key organisational plans and policy.

Local Government is the closest form of government to the community. From a young person’s perspective it is the most recognisable and accessible. Local Government’s commitment to civic engagement with community members is sometimes challenged when attempting to involve young people as they are often defined as a ‘hard to reach’ group. To build trust with this highly mobile, sometimes skeptical demographic, Local Government needs to rethink and reinvent its traditional methods.

At the 2006 National Awards for Local Government, three Queensland councils were recognised for their excellence, innovation and engagement of young people. Two projects are summarized as follows.

**Sarina Shire Council**

The Sarina Shire Council’s ‘Picture This Program’ was awarded winner of the National Award for Innovation at the 2006 National Awards for Local Government for a council with a ratepayer base under 15,000.

The ‘Picture This Program’ engaged young people from small remote areas of the shire socially disadvantaged due to a lack of transport and recreational facilities. The project involved young people undertaking pictorial ‘audits’ of their community. These photographic representations were presented to Council so that they could ‘view’ the world through the eyes of a young person. Young people had identified barriers to their social inclusion and worked with Council to seek solutions.

The shire council is so pleased with the results that this process has become part of core business in engaging young people in the shire.

**Brisbane City Council**

On a bigger scale, Brisbane City Council’s *Inkubator* is an initiative that targets young people under 26 years of age who are interested in self employment initiatives or starting their own enterprise. *Inkubator* is located in Brisbane City’s award winning community hub for young people - ‘Visible Ink’. The *Inkubator* has been an outstanding success. Over 10 enterprises have been started through this program, many developing a sustainable venture or project.
The initiative links young people to adult mentors, other youth entrepreneurs, emerging businesses, funding opportunities and subsidised rental. This combination helps an individual or an enterprise to develop a business plan and work strategically toward that plan within a supportive, flexible and creative environment.

Not only do these initiatives help to improve community wellbeing but also they actively engage young people in a process that builds important life skills. The engagement process with young people promotes a strengths-based approach built on dialogue and cooperation.

**Roads Alliance: partnering for infrastructure**

The Roads Alliance provides an excellent example of a partnership between the State and Local Government in the planning and provision of infrastructure.

The Roads Alliance is a commitment by Queensland Department of Main Roads and Local Government to achieve better value from all available road dollars through improved planning, increased capability, better resource sharing, joint purchasing, and more efficient project delivery. It is a shared initiative between Main Roads and Local Government to achieve smarter management and delivery of Queensland’s road network.

In Queensland, both the State Government and local governments have responsibility for the construction and maintenance of the road network. Historically, these networks have been treated separately based on ‘ownership’.

The Roads Alliance challenges this traditional thinking by focusing on road function and not ownership. Therefore, the development of the agreement required significant leadership by both the State Department of Main Roads and the LGAQ.

The fundamental premise at the core of the Alliance is that the community is not concerned about who ‘owns’ the road, but expects that roads of a similar function will be built and maintained to a similar standard across a region. Therefore, groups of local governments and the State Government should work together to deliver the best outcome for the entire region.

It empowers regional communities to set and deliver regional road outcomes. In the Roads Alliance partnership investment strategies and best practice road management processes guide decision-making on an agreed road network regardless of ownership.

Since its inception in 2002, the Roads Alliance has achieved its primary aim of establishing a collaborative approach to road network management and planning and the coordination of road projects. Both the State and local governments now jointly develop regional works programs to manage a network of approximately 32,000 kilometers of public roads, known as the local roads of regional significance (LRRS).

Eighteen regional road groups (RRGs) with representatives from local governments and Main Roads have developed regional works programs for the LRRS and will monitor their success with the view to improving the process over time. These works programs are reviewed annually to show 5 year road network priorities and demonstrate better funding allocations at a regional level.
This Alliance has re-defined how two spheres of government can do business with each other.

The Roads Alliance has celebrated some key achievements. In particular the completion of the 5 year regional works programs. This represented a very significant change for many local governments who previously only adopted one year works programs. Now there are 5-year programs that:

- Incorporate an agreed network of regionally significant roads;
- Address road safety across government boundaries;
- Give priority to projects which contribute to the economic and social development of Queensland’s regions;
- Embrace 20 year investment strategies which take into account future demands on the road infrastructure; and
- Provide a clear direction for road investment in Queensland’s regions.

The benefits to the community have been multiple:

- Better regional road network sooner;
- Improved access to social services within the region including schools and hospitals;
- A safer regional road network; and
- Improved regional economic development opportunities through reduced travel time and costs including tourism and freight movements.

For the two principal road owners benefits have also been derived locally from road management and investment decisions being made regionally which include:

- Best use of available resources;
- Economies of scale in various areas including plant and equipment;
- Improved Local Government road management, investment and construction capability;
- Access to better road management technology;
- Ability to produce a justifiable case for road funding;
- Continuing state government employment guarantees;
- Improved consistency in planning and investment; and
- Greater use of Local Government expertise.

In 2005 the Roads Alliance was recognized for its innovative and successful approach to inter-jurisdictional collaboration by receiving the International Road Federation’s (IRF) Global Road Achievement Award for Program Management.
Social Capital Action Research Project

In 2001 the LGAQ brought to Australia renowned Harvard academic and social commentator, Professor Robert Putnam to deliver the keynote address at the LGAQ’s Annual Conference. His visit generated vigorous discussion among Local Government and the wider community at a symposium in Brisbane on 11 September attended by over 800 paying participants. Putnam is well known for his commentaries on civic engagement and social connectedness or what he refers to as ‘social capital’. His remarks during this Australian visit sowed the seeds for a collaborative social capital project between the Community Service & Research Centre (CSRC) at the University of Queensland and the LGAQ.

In his book, Bowling Alone (2000), Putnam documents a decline in social capital by referring to quantitative data that measures civic engagement and social connectedness across a range of activities. This decrease in the social capital stockpile, he says, has resulted in a measurable decrease in everyday quality of life.

Putnam says that social capital greases the wheel that allows communities to advance smoothly. When this is not in place there is a consequence - the result is a tangible cost to individual and collective health, wealth and wellbeing. The public sector is central to the functioning and welfare of any society and Local Government is no exception. The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) Declaration on the Role of Local Government states -

“Local Governments are elected:

• To represent their local communities;
• To be a responsible and accountable sphere of democratic governance;
• To be a focus for community identity and civic spirit;
• To provided appropriate services to meet community needs in an efficient and effective manner; and
• To facilitate and coordinate local efforts and resources in pursuit of community goals”.

While there are many commentators on the topic of social capital, and this work continues to grow, there are few documented examples of practice at an international or national level that relate to Local Government.

To help fill the gap in this research the LGAQ Executive (Board) approved a Social Capital Action Research Project in early 2003. The University of Queensland (UQ) Community Service & Research Centre (CSRC) was appointed to partner with LGAQ due to its sound record in applied or action research. It was important to the Association that this work had practical, tangible outcomes for Councils and their communities.

The purpose of the project was to:
1. Identify and document the roles, and potential roles, of Queensland local governments in building social capital;

2. Provide a clear direction for Queensland local governments to take up or continue undertaking the work of building social capital; and

3. Through undertaking the tasks above, continuing to strategically inform Queensland Local Government Corporate Planning Processes.

In addition the LGAQ wanted to build leadership and encourage confidence in government at a local level by supporting Councils to identify how best to engage their local citizens and incorporate community goals into sustainable decisions via planning processes.

The researchers called for expressions of interest and signed partnership agreements with five local governments representing diverse geographic locations, demographics and social composition. To obtain the required information the researchers conducted focus groups, interviews and developed a survey tool. Site visits were repeated several times to build upon the relationship being developed with each community.

A social map was developed of these local government areas including an examination of community values and aspirations. Because of the need to apply the research training and support workshops were conducted to provide feedback on the research findings. This helped staff and councillors better understand the principles and process of Social Capital. By providing Councils with these ‘real world’ skills ideas were developed on how to transfer the learnings into everyday Council operations.

The major outcome of the work, a Report titled ‘What Makes Communities Tick?’ identified a need for more rigour to be applied to working with Local Government in the following areas:

1. **Fostering Leadership**
2. **Communication and Engagement**
3. **Sharing Learning**
4. **Measurement and Evaluation**
5. **Collaborative Partnerships.**

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**LGAQ Community Engagement Framework**

After the release of the Social Capital Action Research Project (SCARP) Report, LGAQ staff commenced another research project into what constituted good practice with regard to Civic Engagement. The SCARP Report sharpened LGAQ’s focus on the significance of community engagement as a pillar of good governance. The report’s findings supported the Community Satisfaction Survey results and consequently the need for Local Government to change and deliver on its commitment to participatory democracy.

It was realised that a cultural shift was required in the way Local Government perceived and approached community engagement. Local Government has a long history of the “public meeting” with little positive results and its approach to community engagement needed to change. The work that was about to commence had a strong philosophical base. At its core was the belief that the community is a resource, largely untapped, of ideas, solutions and potential - not a problem to be managed.

This decision resulted in another successful partnership. Along with a number of activist Councils the LGAQ collaborated with two key partners - the Queensland Government Department of Communities and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). These groups assisted in the development of a policy position and a comprehensive practice framework that would position Queensland Local Government for the future challenges of dealing with increasingly complex problems and diverse stakeholder groups.

A clear position was required that articulated what Local Government stood for. What followed was 12 months of discussion, a Discussion Paper, a Position Paper, a state wide consultation process and ultimately, a policy position was voted upon.

At the 2004 LGAQ Annual Conference in Mackay, Queensland, decision makers from the 157 Councils voted overwhelmingly to accept the following policy position.

**2.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**2.3.1**
Local Government recognises that community engagement is vital to the democratic process and contributes to building balanced healthy communities.

**2.3.2**
Local Government understands community engagement contains the core elements of information, consultation and active participation.

**2.3.3**
Local Government will apply the core elements of community engagement, where appropriate, to facilitate meaningful community involvement in the decision-making process.

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\[\text{Adopted September 2004. LGAQ Annual Conference. Mackay, Queensland.}\]
The democratic principles enshrined within this policy position provided the foundation for developing a set of tools that would build capability and confidence. The IAP2 core values underpinned the process while the IAP2 code of ethics supported LGAQ’s work as a practitioner.

It was learnt that community engagement draws upon many disciplines including social justice, risk management, education, conflict resolution, public relations. Also, there are numerous levels to engagement in applying the IAP2 Spectrum (see attached), and that for every level a promise or commitment is made. The IAP2 Spectrum was extremely valuable in that it provided a common language and ‘demystified’ the terms consultation, involvement and collaboration. For the first time, there was authority in the use of these terms and an understanding of the responsibility involved with each and the promise that was attached to it. Also, it was understood how important it was to develop a method for evaluating the process.

The value of planning for community engagement was learnt which involved a shift from developing project plans that incorporated community engagement as a line item to developing complementary community engagement plans. There was a perception that this meant asking an already over stretched workplace to do more and that the process implied elected members giving up their role and handing it back to the people. Neither was true. While there is a case for developing a complex engagement plan to support a complex project, there is equally a case for not undertaking ‘consultation’ where it is not warranted and indeed, for “piggy backing” on existing processes to achieve sound outcomes.

Elected members were given very clear messages that this was not about reducing their influence but about equipping them with maximum information and support to build the potential for positive outcomes and sustainable decisions.

Sustainable decisions are:

- technically feasible;
- economically viable;
- environmentally compatible; and
- publicly acceptable.

Another important aspect of the Framework was training. This commenced with a one day introduction to Community Engagement course specifically designed for Queensland Local Government. LGAQ actively recruited Councils to send a cross section of their organisations (Chief Executive Officers, elected members and staff) to the sessions. Over 400 people have participated in 19 locations across the state. The courses became so popular that they were opened up to State Government colleagues, particularly in remote areas, and key community partners.

Modeling this approach was essential to the success of the courses. Consequently, a methodology based on collaboration was adopted. The courses were led by an LGAQ officer and a private consultant and State Government regional officers were also invited to co-
facilitate where appropriate. In addition, ‘community engagement champions’ were recruited.

These champions were identified by their peers as ‘people who appreciated the value of Community Engagement’. LGAQ approached their respective councils and requested their involvement in the delivery of the courses on the following grounds.

  - The participating Councils will be promoted as partners and as good practice agents in this area both on the training brochure and on the LGAQ website;
  - The training will provide an opportunity for participating Councils to share their knowledge and expertise with neighbouring Councils and strengthen regional relationships; and
  - The training course will provide a low cost and challenging professional development opportunity for the participating staff keeping their skills up to date.

All four Councils that were approached agreed. From the one day training sessions there was a critical mass on which to offer the five day IAP2 certificate training program. To date, some 50 people have attended the certificate program and have thus contributed significantly to the bank of knowledge across Queensland Local Government.

Community engagement is now understood as being decision orientated and goal driven. Also, a well developed engagement plan can facilitate a deeper understanding of the issues and encourages a richer, more meaningful conversation that is more open to the emergence of possible solutions.

The LGAQ has been very encouraged by the success to date. Not only has the community response to the Community Attitude Surveys improved but also several Councils have now won independently assessed national and state awards for their good practice.

Summary

This paper demonstrates the pro-active role played by Local Government in Queensland in the process of civic engagement and the leadership role played by the Local Government Association of Queensland over the past 10 years.

The paper also demonstrates at a practical level the significant role of community engagement in the development of place and people at the local level. It also demonstrates that delivering on the principles of community engagement require a long term commitment if trust in government is to develop and be sustained.

The Local Government Association of Queensland is in its 111th year of representing and providing leadership for its members - the city, town and shire councils of Queensland. Its success and longevity as a voluntary membership body is a measure of the trusting relationship with its members and its delivery on its mission of ‘strengthening the ability and performance of Queensland Local Government to better serve the community’.

The paper also demonstrates the ease with which trust in government can be destroyed through the ill conceived use of political power for short term political gain. Notwithstanding
this breach of trust the Local Government Association of Queensland will continue to engage the State Government to ensure that the interests of Local Government and the communities they serve are not the victim of a reform agenda devoid of any real commitment to civic engagement. This engagement will not be based on trust but on the need to protect and promote the interests of local communities.

Governments all over the world are facing more complex issues and increasingly ‘wicked problems’. These issues are inescapable at the local level - drought, desalination, natural resource management, rural decline, water management, population control and sustainable growth. No one group or level of government has a mandate on the solution to these challenges. All stakeholders must work together in order to encourage the very best thinking and to promote the best decisions and therefore the best outcomes.

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## Appendix A

### IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

*Developed by the International Association for Public Participation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
<td>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</td>
<td>We will implement what you decide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example Techniques to Consider:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example Techniques to Consider:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example Techniques to Consider:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example Techniques to Consider:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example Techniques to Consider:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fact sheets</td>
<td>• Public comment</td>
<td>• Workshops</td>
<td>• Citizen Advisory Committees</td>
<td>• Citizen juries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Web sites</td>
<td>• Focus groups</td>
<td>• Deliberate polling</td>
<td>• Consensus-building</td>
<td>• Ballots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open houses</td>
<td>• Surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Participatory decision-making</td>
<td>• Delegated decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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