

Charter for **Community Engagement**

Community Engagement Unit
Strategic and Executive Services



Queensland Government
Department of **Emergency Services**

The Charter

In June 2001, the Department of Emergency Services established a Community Engagement Unit in the Strategic and Executive Services Division.

The Charter informs Emergency Services management, staff and stakeholders about the role of the unit, its structure and objectives.

It supports and builds on the Community Engagement Unit's Terms of Reference endorsed by the Department's Executive Management Team.

The Charter:

- defines the principles of community engagement;
- outlines the reasons for the establishment of the unit;
- demonstrates the role and key priorities of the unit;
- highlights the value of the unit to all Department of Emergency Services divisions, key stakeholders and Queensland communities; and
- identifies the linkages to the Directions Statement of the Community Engagement Division, Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

For more information contact the Community Engagement Unit, GPO Box 1425, Brisbane 4001, (07) 3109 5012.

Foreword from the Minister

Growing social, economic and environmental diversity means governments need to move beyond traditional solutions.

This requires government policy makers to find innovative ways to address service delivery issues at a community level. Agencies like Emergency Services have to seek opportunities for community engagement that enhance policy decisions.

The Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet's Community Engagement Division, established in April 2001, aims to forge stronger links between the Government and the community.

It seeks to foster effective community contribution to the development of policies and programs, and offers opportunities to strengthen partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders.

The Department of Emergency Services' Community Engagement Unit will reflect the principles of the Premier and Cabinet's Division and offer new opportunities for partnerships across Government and throughout Queensland.

The unit will also strengthen partnerships across the Emergency Services portfolio and provide valuable support to the operational divisions of fire, ambulance and counter disaster and rescue services.

Examples of effective community engagement already applied by the Department include the 176 Local Ambulance Committees operating throughout Queensland, a unique approach compared to other ambulance services in Australia.

This Department's commitment to community engagement directly supports one of the Government's key priorities – *Community Engagement and a Better Quality of Life*.



Mike Reynolds, AM MP
Minister for Emergency Services
Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland

Foreword from the Director-General

For service delivery agencies of Government to plan and deliver responsive services to the community, they must listen to and engage their communities.

Community consultation and participation has become an essential part of government planning, policy development and service delivery. It improves the quality of decisions and is an important part of being responsive to community and stakeholder needs.

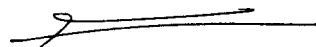
Local Ambulance Committees throughout Queensland and the Commissioner's LAC Reference Group represent a wonderful example of community engagement. The Department is also engaging communities through a number of other forums such as the Emergency Services Advisory Council, the SES Volunteer Executive Committee and the Rural Fire Council.

The Community Engagement Unit will develop community consultation strategies and advise on new models of service delivery for implementation by Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and Counter Disaster and Rescue Services. It will promote a more coordinated approach to community safety programs both across Emergency Services and with other State Government agencies and community-based organisations.

The unit will also play a vital role in coordinating Indigenous Australian service delivery strategies, and maximising the impact of community initiatives across the portfolio.

Progressively, the unit will impact on many areas across the portfolio and offers a valuable opportunity for the divisions to work together in establishing more effective partnerships with local communities.

I am committed to providing opportunities for operational staff to be seconded to the unit for a range of community engagement projects, providing valuable expertise and a sharing of experiences.



Michael Kinnane
Director-General

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What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting their well-being.

It is a powerful tool for encouraging cultural change that will improve quality of life for communities. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that serve as catalysts for changing policies and practices.

Community engagement incorporates consultation (information sharing) and active participation between the government and communities. It strengthens the capacity of communities to take action that produces positive and sustainable changes locally.

It promotes and facilitates community participation in the formation of policy and the delivery of services, and fosters collaboration across government and throughout the community in relation to issues affecting quality of life.

The Department of Emergency Services is represented in every community across Queensland, providing emergency and disaster management services. The agency already engages communities to varying degrees through the Emergency Services Advisory Council, Local Ambulance Committees throughout the State, the Rural Fire Council, Indigenous Australian Local Support Network Groups and an extensive volunteer network.

Greater community engagement will help Emergency Services to improve communication, promote a common understanding and strengthen community and stakeholder partnerships.

The community engagement process itself can take many forms (*See chapter on Principles and processes*). However, it should start in the planning stages of any initiative impacting on the community.

Effective community engagement cannot be entered into with a predetermined outcome.

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Why engage the community?

Better solutions will follow when communities are involved and governments are engaged.

Engaging communities requires government and agencies to be transparent and accountable in the way they do business. It also requires communities to know how government works and how to participate in ways that make a difference.

A Community Engagement Division was established in the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet in April 2001.

The division promotes five engagement principles:

1. Inclusiveness - Connecting with those who are hardest to reach.
2. Reaching Out - Changing the ways government and the community work together.
3. Mutual Respect - Listening, understanding and acting on experiences different from our own.
4. Integrity - Engagement as a means of promoting integrity in the democratic processes of government.
5. Affirming Diversity - Changing the processes of government to incorporate diverse values and interests.

For Emergency Services, effective community engagement and consultation practices will help identify potential issues, impacts, opportunities, options and solutions regarding service delivery.

Engaging the community will deliver policy and decision makers within Emergency Services the best information available and allow for the best possible outcomes for both the agency and the community.

Community engagement will provide a valuable link between the agency, the operational services and the community they serve by:

- enabling the community to be better informed;
- reducing the level of misconception or misinformation;
- ensuring commitment and greater ownership of the final decision by the community;
- encouraging the community to put forward ideas;
- enabling the agency to gain a better understanding of local needs; and
- helping to identify issues which may not otherwise have been considered.



The benefits

Open planning processes, community consultation and public participation can provide many tangible benefits. Those benefits are summarised in the diagram below:



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The value of those benefits has long been recognised by national and international organisations, major corporations, various government agencies and Local Government.

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Commonwealth Foundation are working internationally to find ways of building engagement between citizens and their governments.

The specific benefits of community engagement, its principles and objectives are highlighted in the Queensland Government Priorities: Community Engagement and a Better Quality of Life – *“All Queenslanders are encouraged to take part in the rich cultural, social and economic life of our State and to support the democratic processes that underpin our way of life. The Government is working to ensure equality of opportunity and equitable access to high standards of education, health, housing and family services and to achieve this through greater participation in choices made by Government”*.

Principles and processes

Community engagement involves the two-way exchange of information between the Department of Emergency Services and its operational divisions, and the community – before decisions are made.

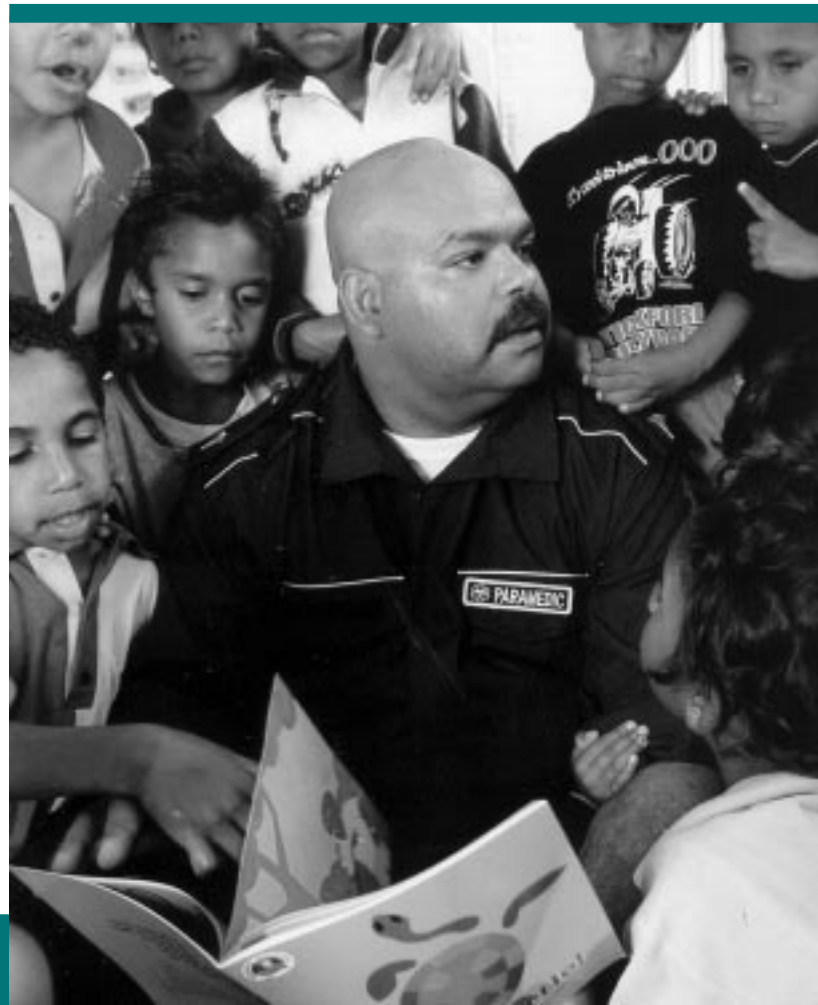
Engagement can only be achieved through an open and accountable community consultation process whereby individuals and groups can participate in decision making and influence the outcomes of a policy or decision.

There are many ways to approach community consultation, however, the processes adopted by the Community Engagement Unit can be grouped into the following four categories:

1. Information sharing – to inform the community of potential issues. This can be achieved via a number of channels:
 - a. advertisements, notifications or articles in the local newspaper or electronic media
 - b. flyers or mail-outs
 - c. brochures or newsletters
 - d. posters or displays in public places
 - e. information on websites.
2. Seeking response – to seek a community response regarding a specific issue. Response can be invited in oral or written form via mail, phone, interview, group or public gatherings. This can be achieved through variations on the following:
 - a. interactive displays
 - b. open days

- c. presentations with feedback sessions
- d. feedback forms or questionnaires
- e. surveys or interviews
- f. focus groups (usually consisting of existing community groups or partnerships called together for input on a specific issue)
- g. open public forums inviting response from the wider community.

3. Community input into planning – to ensure the concerns and visions of the community are considered in major decisions. On this level, the preferred means of consultation are:
 - a. stakeholder meetings
 - b. open seminars or workshops
 - c. advisory committee meetings or taskforces, usually with invited representatives
 - d. large public gatherings with open invitations.



4. Cooperative decision making and implementation – to find a way of working much more collaboratively with the community and stakeholders. On this level the Department and the community commit themselves to finding a solution to an issue. This demands more complex processes, including integrating small group meetings and taskforces with large public forums. Many of the approaches listed on the previous page will have to be incorporated to make this level work well.

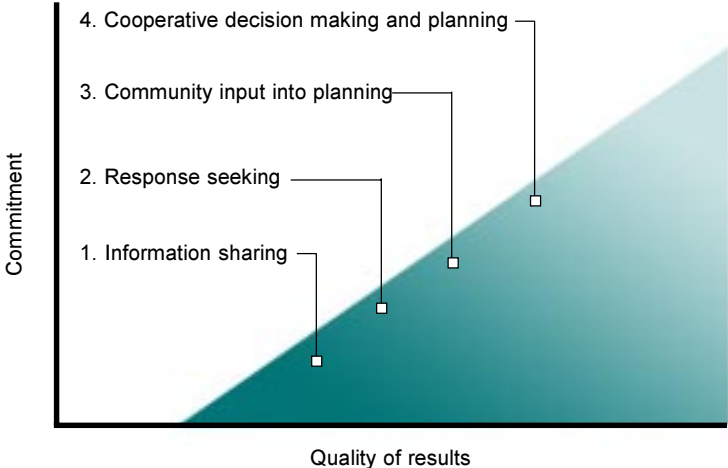
Each category of participation has its own particular validity. The choice needs to be made carefully according to the particular circumstances, issues and target group.

Usually levels one and two are required to kick off the engagement process and to facilitate the partnership between the Department and the community.

The level of engagement or commitment is directly related to the quality of the results required.

Levels of consultation

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The Community Engagement Unit

The Department of Emergency Services Community Engagement Unit will reflect community values, provide commitment to better organisational practice, and a forum for continued learning through evaluation and improvement.

Essentially, the unit will foster a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to identifying and meeting the needs of communities across Queensland in relation to emergency services and improved safety.

The unit will provide strategic advice on community engagement opportunities to the Director-General and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and Counter Disaster and Rescue Services.

Those community engagement opportunities will include:

- new, flexible models of service delivery, particularly for rural and remote communities, and Indigenous Australian and ethnic communities;
- community consultation strategies, policies and frameworks;
- a coordinated approach to the development and delivery of community safety initiatives; and
- coordination of proposals for external government projects, such as the Community Renewal Program.

The unit will seek to learn from both national and international experiences in community engagement and contribute to the body of knowledge in Queensland.

The unit's advisory role will be supported by targeted communication/consultation strategies and valuable networks established across State Government, Local Government, business, industry and key community organisations.

Consisting of a small core of permanent staff from across the Emergency Services portfolio, with secondments from all operational services for specific projects, the unit represents a valuable partnership opportunity – all the divisions working collaboratively for local communities.

The unit will work closely with the Department's divisions, operational services, the Emergency Services Advisory Council, the regions and stakeholders including the agency's community-based advisory committees.

Engaging communities will enhance decision making within Emergency Services, ensure tangible benefits for Queensland, recognise diversity and foster equity of access to services.

The unit will also work in partnership with other State Government agencies to enhance the practice of community engagement, as well as with Local Government, community organisations, and business and industry.

As well as providing strategic advice on community engagement/consultation issues, the unit will develop resources to assist operational staff in communicating with their local communities.

While the unit will assist with the development of policies and provide strategic advice on community engagement opportunities, service delivery and local community consultation will remain the role of operational services at a regional level.

Our approach to community engagement

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The Department of Emergency Services recognises consultation and participation is an essential part of planning, policy development and service delivery.

It is recommended that proposed service delivery initiatives incorporate an internal and external consultation strategy.

That strategy should address issues impacting on staff and volunteers, the other operational divisions and the agency as a whole, as well as external stakeholders and the community.

Community input is essential to enhance the decision-making process and produce innovative and flexible service delivery models.

The Emergency Services Advisory Council, Local Ambulance Committees, Rural Fire Council, Indigenous Australian Local

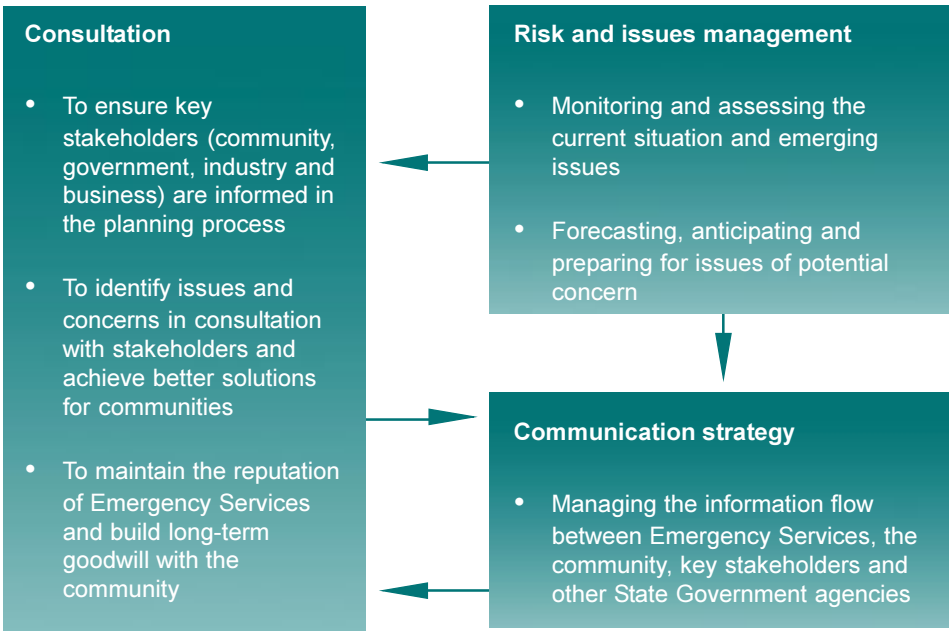
Support Network Groups, SES Volunter Executive Committee and our extensive network of volunteers all represent strong and effective links with local communities across Queensland. They can provide valuable information on community needs regarding emergency services.

The agency is also committed to effective consultation with other State Government agencies, Local Government, business and industry.

Effective internal and external consultation and community engagement by Emergency Services will produce:

- decisions reflecting community values;
- decisions demonstrating a commitment to better organisational practice; and
- decisions demonstrating a commitment to continued learning through evaluation and improvement.

Essential elements of our approach to community engagement



Meeting the challenge

The Community Engagement Unit will embrace good practices in community engagement/consultation frameworks both nationally and internationally to ensure innovative models are developed for Emergency Services.

The challenge for the unit will be to develop strategies and programs that:

- assist operational divisions to build the capacity of Queensland communities;
- develop the community engagement/consultation skills of Emergency Services staff, particularly regional operational staff;
- contribute to the Queensland Government Priorities;
- contribute to the Towards a Queensland Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnership 2001-2011 (Ten Year Partnership) and the Cape York Partnership Plan; and
- foster effective linkages across State Government, Local Government and within communities.

The unit will assist the operational divisions to develop and pilot new models of service delivery to meet the needs of communities.

The unit will develop protocols, guidelines, and resource kits, and deliver training to enable Emergency Services staff to effectively engage their local communities in relation to issues that impact on the provision of services.

The unit will showcase the community engagement initiatives and projects developed and delivered by Emergency Services.

The outcomes will be:

- an increased awareness of the contribution of Emergency Services to creating safer communities across Queensland;
- better and more efficient service delivery;
- more flexible service delivery models responsive to particular community needs; and
- improved community understanding of the decision making processes within the Department of Emergency Services, and therefore greater community confidence in the agency and its services.



Risk and issues management

Risk and issues management is a critical component of any community engagement process.

An effective risk and issues management strategy complements and enhances consultation and communication strategies.

It involves identifying and anticipating emerging issues during various stages of an initiative or project, with the aim of avoiding unnecessary conflict and achieving the best possible outcomes.

The benefits of an effective risk and issues management strategy are:

- greater awareness of risk exposure;
- more efficient use of resources;
- more effective contingency planning;
- enhanced decision making;
- better identification of opportunities;
- and
- a reduced incidence of undesirable outcomes.

Issues management necessitates being aware of what is happening both internally and externally and being proactive in addressing issues before they become matters of concern.

It is important to realise that issues are not always negative. Positive issues that arise during the course of community engagement/consultation can be proactively promoted. Alternatively, negative issues, if identified and addressed early, can be transformed into positives.

Ongoing communication between the Community Engagement Unit and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and Counter Disaster and Rescue Services will ensure any potential risks are identified and addressed early.



Measuring the achievements

Evaluation of community engagement/consultation strategies implemented for specific projects is essential. It needs to assess whether the objectives were achieved and whether the techniques adopted were effective.

The overriding result for Emergency Services should be a stronger relationship with the community and improved service delivery, particularly to rural and remote communities, through consultation and collaboration.

Evaluation of specific strategies will ensure they were designed and delivered well, and produced valued outcomes. Evaluation will be conducted in consultation with the operational divisions of Emergency Services.

Close links will also be maintained with the Emergency Services Advisory Council which reports to the Minister on the extent to which services meet the needs of communities.

The Department's community engagement performance indicators include:

- increased involvement by Queenslanders in the agency's decision-making processes;
- successful pilot and implementation of new, flexible models of service delivery by the operational services; and
- increased understanding of the benefits of community engagement throughout the agency.



