



volunteering tasmania
do what you love

Stakeholder Engagement Policy

Purpose of Stakeholder Engagement

Why does Volunteering Tasmania need a policy for engaging with stakeholders?

A strong stakeholder engagement policy is essential for all of the work that Volunteering Tasmania (VT) does. Stakeholder engagement is a core aspect of VT's business, helping us work with our members, other relevant bodies and the broader community. This allows VT to identify and advocate on important issues for the volunteer sector.

Stakeholder Engagement is already well embedded into VT's work. As part of its everyday practice, VT engages with stakeholders in a range of ways including:

- Managers of Volunteers Network Meetings
- Conferences
- Participation in Stakeholder Initiatives
- Workshops
- Focus Groups
- Digital forums- VT website, newsletter, Facebook and Twitter
- Internal staff discussions
- Board meetings
- Media

Our regular discussions with stakeholders form the cornerstone of VT's *Strategic Plan*. Stakeholder Engagement connects the overarching strategic goals of VT to our operational plan and the risk registers that sit alongside both documents. Stakeholder Engagement is therefore important in supporting our key work areas of:

- Policy and Advocacy
- Research
- Volunteer Management
- Volunteer Engagement

Whilst VT already engages with its stakeholders, an appropriate policy framework to support our actions is essential. This will ensure that VT is acting appropriately on concerns and advice from our members, volunteers, volunteer involving organisations (VIOs), the not for profit sector and the broader community. Additionally, working to improve and add value to our engagement with

stakeholders will help ensure VT's relevance as the peak body for volunteering in Tasmania. Consultation and engagement underpin the strategic, policy and operational roles at VT.

Having a clear Stakeholder Engagement framework will provide VT with a policy structure to conduct its work in. This will allow VT needs to have a guide for working with individuals and groups, and for supporting the work that other organisations undertake. Having effective and appropriate mechanisms for engagement with stakeholders is also a critical component of VT's broader policy processes and will ensure that VT continues to meet best practice in this area.

Understanding Stakeholder Engagement

What are Stakeholders? What does Stakeholder Engagement Mean?

Stakeholders are individuals, organisations or groups who are impacted – both directly and indirectly- by the work that an organisation undertakes. Much of the literature on stakeholder engagement distinguishes between stakeholders and 'key stakeholders'. VT's Stakeholder Engagement policy does not emphasise a difference in strategy between these two groups, however it can be useful to understand these small, but important, differences.

'Key' stakeholders are generally referred to as those with significant influence on VT or who are most significantly impacted by the work that the organisation undertakes. Key stakeholders are those whose interest and influences are pivotal if the work VT undertakes is to be successful.¹

Stakeholders for VT are more broadly the individuals, organisations or groups who are impacted by the work that we do. VT's stakeholders can also be defined as groups, individuals or organisations who have an interest in the outcome of the work that we do.

VT's position is that stakeholders are both internal and external to the organisation. Stakeholders can be internal: VT employees and the VT Board. Consultation with these internal stakeholders is important. However, the key purpose of VT's Stakeholder Engagement policy is to consider how VT will engage with people outside the organisation: government, the community sector, business groups, education and training providers and VIOs.

Who are VT's Stakeholders?

VT has a broad range of clients who use our products and services. Our stakeholders are therefore similarly broad and varied. VT's stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- VT Members
- VT Employees

¹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Stakeholder Engagement Practitioner Handbook*. Commonwealth of Australia: ACT, 2008.

- VT Board and Social Policy Think Tank Members
- Current volunteers
- Potential volunteers
- Client organisations
- Volunteer involving organisations across government, business and non-government sectors
- Volunteering Australia
- Volunteer peak bodies across Australia
- Not for profit organisations
- Community sector
- Global volunteer research bodies
- Academics interested in volunteering, civil society and participation.

VT has a diverse stakeholder population that encompasses the wider Tasmanian and Australian community. Our stakeholders include anyone who may benefit from the opportunities volunteering offers; involve volunteers in their organisation; or are interested in developing best practice volunteer management. Stakeholders for VT can therefore vary significantly depending on the topic, issue or task.

Benefits of Stakeholder Engagement

What is the purpose of a Stakeholder Engagement Policy?

There are a number of benefits for VT in developing a clear Stakeholder Engagement policy. As the peak body for volunteering in Tasmania, it is important for VT to have an effective relationship with stakeholders and to engage in consistent and open communication.

Having a policy and process for engaging with VT's stakeholders have a number of broad benefits including:

- Cooperation with policy development and enhanced community confidence in operations of VT
- Creating more targeted services that suit VT stakeholders
- Improving access to emerging issues
- Legitimising decisions
- Mutual learning
- Higher levels of stakeholder 'ownership'
- Increasing organisational effectiveness
- Avoiding negative publicity or perceptions by undertaking positive communication and being proactive about communicating with stakeholders
- Two way communication to better understand both sides

- Bridging cultural gaps
- Developing a culture of innovation
- Improved conflict resolution by building trust
- Effective stakeholder engagement enables better planned and more informed policy, projects and better targeted service delivery.

There are also benefits for stakeholders including the opportunity to engage with the organisation and to provide advice as experts in the sector, particularly to contribute local knowledge. Good stakeholder engagement practices also give the opportunity to participate in decision making and have issues heard.

Benefits of Stakeholder Engagement

Benefits for VT

- Better quality decision making
- Improved risk management
- Ensuring services are delivered in collaboration and consultation with services- meeting needs of stakeholders
- Confidence of key stakeholders in VT processes
- Innovation

Benefits for Stakeholders

- Opportunities to contribute to policy and project development
- Greater understanding of business/organisational aims
- Open and honest lines of communication
- Access to decision making processes
- Contribute local and expert knowledge
- Encourage integrated and more comprehensive solutions to policy issues

Principles and Values

What are VT's Principles and Values? How do these inform our Stakeholder Engagement policy?

VT's principles for stakeholder engagement are drawn from best practice concepts. These principles are outlined against VT values.

- *Volunteerism – We value the place volunteering has in our community and we actively support it.*

We actively seek to understand volunteering in our community through honest, open dialogue and by gathering feedback. VT has a proactive approach that enables us to work effectively and efficiently as a peak body. VT maintains ongoing communication with our stakeholders to engage with them on relevant topics around volunteering.

- *Committed to People- We are committed to respect, equality and adding value to the experience of others.*

We are committed to achieve with our stakeholders a shared understanding on the many issues and opportunities in volunteering. We recognise and embrace the diversity in the community and seek to work in an inclusive way to create long –term sustainable and lasting improvements that benefit all.

- *Professionalism – We demonstrate our profession through our positive attitude, effective communication, integrity and commitment to improvement.*

We are committed to working professionally and collaboratively with all our stakeholders. We seek to establish strong partnerships with our stakeholders to develop a shared vision. In doing this we understand there are many competing needs and interests amongst our stakeholders and we strive to balance these interests in the actions and decisions we make in our organisation.

- *Leadership – We are the leaders in volunteerism in Tasmania and our position is based on experience, evidence and regular consultation.*

VT shows leadership in the field of volunteerism through the ongoing engagement with our stakeholders. Our work makes a significant and lasting difference, and we aim to continuously improve our practices. We are committed to being transparent and accountable in our work, fostering open dialogue that allows us to grow and improve as an organisation.

- *Community – We have a sense of belonging where we work towards common goals, valuing diversity and respecting difference for the development of volunteering.*

We recognise the diversity of stakeholders in our field and the varying capacity and resources they have to engage with VT. We are aware of the potential of our work to have varied impact. VT respects these challenges and recognises the need to maintain a multi-stakeholder focus that is fair and equitable. We strive to achieve the best outcomes by considering the range of perspectives amongst our stakeholders.

VT's Method of Stakeholder Engagement

How will VT engage with stakeholders?

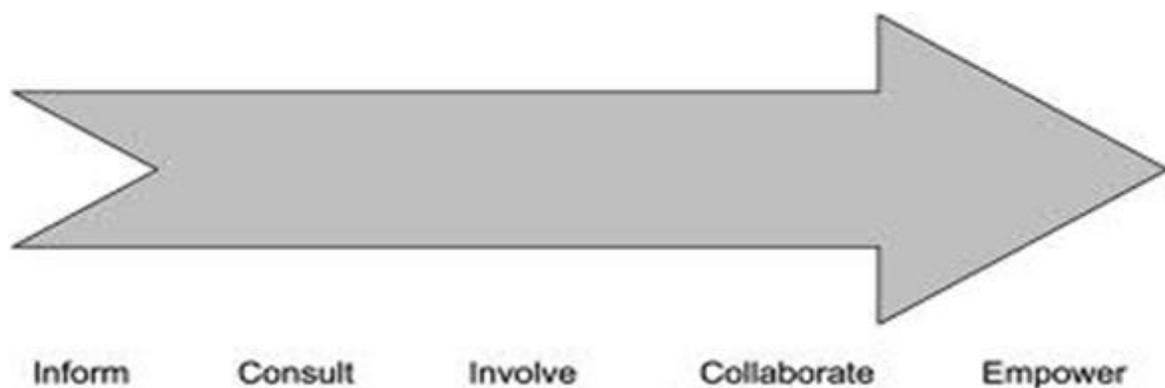
VT needs to consider the best approach and process for engaging with stakeholders. By having a clear policy for Stakeholder Engagement, VT will be clear about how, when and why it pursues relationships with stakeholders, rather than conducting engagement in an adhoc or random way.

VT's approach to stakeholder engagement is based on the model designed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). This is an internationally recognised framework and has been adopted by other organisations in government and non-government sectors alike. The model has been designed to assist organisations select the appropriate level of participation required for different stakeholder groups.

The IAP2 spectrum offers a range of approaches and tools for engagement depending on goals, resources and timeframes within the organisations. This spectrum, therefore matches the principles and values of VT. It allows for engagement to be different depending on the project and the needs and interests of the organisation. This model is useful as it allows VT to support stakeholders in different ways; it isn't a 'one size fits all' model and will aide VT in having a strong policy to underpin its engagement activities.

The IAP2 Model of Stakeholder Engagement

The IAP2 model perceives stakeholder engagement as a continuum; one that begins at the inform level, moving to collaboration and empowerment. ²



² This continuum of engagement is developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

Under the continuum of stakeholder engagement, the purpose of engagement is critical. This model highlights that need to decide on the purpose of the engagement and what the benefits should be. Having a clear purpose behind the engagement can avoid common problems such as: consultation 'fatigue', poor decision making and unrealistic expectations of consultation.

The type of stakeholder engagement chosen will depend on the issue or purpose of the engagement, timing and resources. Deciding on the process of the engagement commits to keeping it on track and managing the expectations of stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement, however, is not a linear process. It may be necessary on different projects to change the level of engagement over time to allow the right mix of stakeholders, or the right process for your stakeholders. What begins as an information campaign may later require additional consultation or more 'hands on' involvement with stakeholders.

What is the best method of Stakeholder Engagement?

The table (below) demonstrates different levels of stakeholder engagement, set out through the continuum of stakeholder engagement. This moves from 'inform' to 'empower'. It highlights the different purpose behind each level of engagement and the commitment of engagement VT will provide at that level. It also provides some examples and suggestions of engagement methods that VT can undertake at each level.

The continuum of stakeholder engagement provides a concise overview around the different methods and needs of stakeholder engagement. Not all activities require full consultation and feedback from stakeholders. Depending on the purpose of the engagement, information from VT to stakeholders may be the most appropriate form of communication. The continuum of engagement is used within VT's Stakeholder Engagement Policy to provide guidance for the way VT engages with stakeholders and to choose the most appropriate methods for engagements.

The *Tools and Resources* section of VT's Stakeholder Engagement Policy provides links to methods and ways that engagement can occur and can be useful, particularly in finding new ways to engage. It is important to note that there is no 'right' way to engage with stakeholders. There are benefits and limitations to all methods and methods may vary depending on the project or issue. Indeed, a number of different methods may be needed across the course of a project – particularly if it is complex or with diverse or numerous stakeholders to reach. The stakeholder engagement continuum provides an overview of the purpose behind each goal and method so that the most appropriate engagement process can be used.

The "Understanding Stakeholder Engagement" table on page 9 of VT's Stakeholder Engagement Policy provides a useful guide to each of the different levels of engagement; the purpose of engagement, VT's commitment to stakeholders and suggestions for engagement activities.

Understanding Stakeholder Engagement

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give stakeholders balanced and objective information • Help stakeholders understand a problem or issue • Present stakeholders with a solution to a problem or issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain feedback from stakeholders on policies, issues or decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work directly with the stakeholders throughout a whole process to ensure that their concerns are consistently understood and are actively considered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with stakeholders in all aspects of decision making • Work with stakeholders to develop alternatives and arrive at a preferred solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders will have the final say in the decision
VT's commitment to stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will keep you informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will keep you informed • We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns • We will give you feedback on if/how your feedback influenced policy or decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work with you directly to understand your concerns/needs • Your feedback will be directly reflected in the options developed • We will communicate how your feedback influenced the decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will take your direct advice and innovation in decision making • We will incorporate your advice, recommendations and decisions to the maximum extent possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will place final decision making in the hands of stakeholders • We will provide advice or information as needed but place decision making in your hands and accept your decision as final
Suggested methods for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter • Website • Briefing/Presentation • Exhibition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel or Roundtable • Meetings • Focus Groups • Surveys • Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated forums or discussions • Stakeholder forums • Networking • Digital consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory committee or group • Facilitated events • Collaborative events or projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen jury • Search conference • Joint venture • Local governance

Barriers to Effective Stakeholder Engagement

Within the Stakeholder Engagement policy, VT also recognises that there are always barriers (potential and actual) to effective engagement. Being aware of the potential barriers allows VT to ensure that the most appropriate and effective forms of engagement are chosen going forward.

Key barriers include:

- Missing opportunities to collaborate with other organisations to benefit from their knowledge and experiences
- Not being clear about the meaning and purpose behind an engagement activity
- Not having an open and transparent processes to engage
- Not having adequate opportunities for stakeholders to engage
- Not valuing the contribution made by stakeholders
- Communicating with the 'same groups'
- Offering advice that is not impartial

Developing a Process for Stakeholder Engagement

Consultation and engagement at VT needs to be meaningful with clear objectives of the engagement activity. Any consultation undertaken must be clear as to the purpose of the engagement and the outcomes from the process.

The (brief) template on page 11 provides some guidance for VT employees planning new engagement processes. Using the template, VT employees will be able to logically and methodically work through processes for Stakeholder Engagement. It will also assist VT decide on the purpose of the engagement, before a full stakeholder engagement plan is developed.

Template 1: *Planning Engagement Activities* sets out the key stages for planning stakeholder engagement – from identifying the stakeholders and the level of engagement appropriate, through to resources, timing and risk management. This template can be used when staff are first planning Stakeholder Engagement, developing a new engagement opportunity or significantly changing an existing method of engagement.

Template 1: Developing a Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Planning Engagement Activities

Who	1. Stakeholders	<i>Identify who the stakeholders are:</i>
How	2. Level of engagement	<i>What level of engagement is required? For example: inform, collaborate or empower?</i>
	3. Proposed method of engagement	<i>How are you going to engage with stakeholders? For example: Information session, newsletter, forum, citizen jury?³</i>
	4. Timing	<i>What are timing requirements?</i>
	5. Resources	<i>What resources are required?</i>
	6. Responsibility	<i>Who is responsible for the planning and outcome of the engagement?</i>
	7. Key message	<i>What are the key messages for stakeholders?</i>
Risk	8. Managing Risk	<i>What risks are associated with the engagement?</i>

³ The DHHS has a “Your Care, Your Say” toolkit which includes all current methods of stakeholder engagement and may be useful in developing new ideas for engagement. See http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/51177/Your_Care,Your_Say.pdf

Making Stakeholder Engagement Meaningful

How can I make sure my stakeholder engagement is worthwhile? How can I ensure stakeholders engage?

One of the key 'messages' from the literature reviewed around stakeholder engagement, is that unplanned and ill-informed consultation can be frustrating for stakeholders. Literature in this field points to key frustrations from stakeholders, including:

- Poor communication of and around an engagement opportunity;
- Little or no feedback on the engagement;
- No understanding of the purpose behind the engagement; and
- No understanding of what will be achieved (the outcomes) of the engagement.

To uphold VT's principles of maintaining a professional service as the peak body for volunteering in Tasmania, a well-planned consultation with stakeholders is essential. This includes identifying clear outcomes for the engagement and what they want to achieve through the process. There are a wide range of outcomes or achievements that can be gained from a stakeholder engagement, including:

- Knowledge of an issue, decision, product or service;
- Acceptance of key policy changes or decisions;
- Feedback on issues, products, services and decisions; and
- 'Buy in', discussion or engagement on key issues and topics.

By making sure the purpose of the engagement process is clear, stakeholders themselves will have:

- Clearer expectations of what the engagement activity involves;
- Clear understanding of what they are required to do when participating; and
- What the result of the stakeholder engagement will lead to.

The brief template (Template 2) on page 13 provides some guidance and examples around what could be achieved under a well-planned stakeholder engagement.

Template 2: Stakeholder Engagement Objectives

Objective of project, policy or service	Reason for stakeholder engagement	Outputs	Outcomes
Example	Example	Example	Example
<p><i>To provide information around new changes to legislation (Working with Vulnerable People checks)</i></p>	<p>To ensure stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Understand changes;</i> - <i>Have capacity to adapt volunteer management practices to meet legislative requirements;</i> - <i>Understand VT's services in providing support for volunteer management and volunteer involving organisations</i> 	<p><i>To provide a high quality, straightforward fact sheet for volunteer organisations that summarises key changes</i></p> <p><i>To discuss with managers of volunteers the problems they may face in meeting new legislative change</i></p> <p><i>To convey any concerns from the volunteer sector to government</i></p>	<p><i>Smooth transition to working with vulnerable people requirements</i></p> <p><i>Communicated concerns of the volunteer sector government</i></p>

Evaluating Stakeholder Engagement

How can I reflect on my stakeholder engagement? What lessons can be gained?

The literature on stakeholder engagement highlights the importance of ongoing evaluation and learning within engagement activities. There is a need to assess the effectiveness of how we engage and how we can learn from those experiences. This supports VT's values on leadership and its commitment to transparent and accountable processes and interaction with its stakeholders.

Template 3 – Stakeholder Engagement Evaluation (page 15) is designed to help VT evaluate stakeholder engagement activities; to reflect and revise engagement practices as necessary. This template allows VT employees to reflect on the planning process around the engagement; the engagement itself and the outcomes achieved. All of these steps will strengthen the way that VT engages with stakeholders into the future and improve VT's practices. Evaluation encompasses reflection on the stakeholder expectations, the commitments VT has made to stakeholders, the difference the engagement activity has made and the way feedback can be provided. All of these steps will strengthen engagement practices at VT.

Template 3 - Stakeholder Engagement Evaluation

	What do you want to know?	What evaluation methods will you use?	How will the evaluation be conducted?
Planning the Stakeholder Engagement	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What processes worked well?</i> • <i>What could have been improved?</i> • <i>Was there adequate time/resources when planning the engagement?</i> • <i>Were any stakeholders forgotten?</i> • <i>Were the key stakeholders targeted?</i> 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Interviews with stakeholders</i> • <i>Feedback sheets</i> • <i>Focus groups</i> • <i>Reflection/debrief amongst staff</i> • <i>Quantitative data</i> 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>VT staff follow up with key stakeholders to gain feedback on the engagement process</i> • <i>Feedback sheets given to stakeholders during the engagement to complete</i> • <i>Focus groups undertaken to gain feedback from stakeholders on the effectiveness of VT engagement</i> • <i>Reflection with staff and feedback on participation during the engagement</i> • <i>Data collected on stakeholders – number of participants; diversity of organisations</i>
Undertaking the Stakeholder Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What engagement methods worked well?</i> • <i>What could have been improved?</i> • <i>Were the numbers sufficient?</i> • <i>Were the stakeholders adequately engaged</i> 		
Benefits/Outcomes Achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What has changed in the policy, project or service?</i> • <i>How has the quality of the policy, project or service improved?</i> • <i>How has the relationship with stakeholders changed?</i> 		

Tools and Resources

Where can I go if I need some ideas for engaging with stakeholders?

There are a number of organisations and online toolkits that outline some of the different methods for engaging with stakeholders. It's worthwhile keeping up to date with this information or learning about the range of methods and options out there for engaging with stakeholders.

Some suggested resources include:

- The Community Engagement Network, "Book 3- The Engagement Toolkit", *Department of Sustainability and the Environment Victoria* at http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/105825/Book_3_-_The_Engagement_Toolkit.pdf (accessed 24 July 2014)
- Department of Health and Human Services, *Your Care, Your Say Toolkit*. http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/51177/Your_Care,Your_Say.pdf (accessed 5 June 2014)
- Education for Sustainability in Local Government: Handbook, "Tools and techniques for EfS and Stakeholder Engagement programs" at http://aries.mq.edu.au/pdf_handbook/7-ToolsTechniques.pdf (accessed 24 July 2014)
- International Association for Public Participation <http://www.iap2.org.au/> (accessed 5 June 2014)

References:

- The Allen Consulting Group, *Towards Participation 3.0: Stakeholder Engagement in the Public Sector*. 2011.
- DEDTA, *Engaging the Tasmanian Community Framework and Procedural Guidelines*. 2008.
- TasCOSS, *Consumer Engagement – Literature Review, Good Practice Approaches and Pilot Project in HACCC in Tasmania*. TasCOSS: Hobart, 2012.
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Stakeholder Engagement Practitioner Handbook*. Commonwealth of Australia: ACT, 2008.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Stakeholder Engagement Framework*. State Government of Victoria: Victoria, 2011.
- Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Tasmanian Government Framework for Community Engagement*. Tasmanian Government: Hobart, 2013.
- Department of Health and Human Services, *Your Care, Your Say Toolkit*.
http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/51177/Your_Care,Your_Say.pdf (accessed 5 June 2014)
- Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment, Parks and Wildlife Service, *Engaging the Tasmanian Community Framework and Procedural Guidelines*. Tasmanian Government: Hobart, 2008.
- International Association for Public Participation <http://www.iap2.org.au/> (accessed 5 June 2014)
- Involve, *People and Participation: How to Put Citizens at the Heart of Decision Making*. 2005.
- QLD Government, *Tools for Engagement*
- QLD Government, *Engaging Queenslanders: An Introduction to Community Engagement*
- Sinclair, M. L, "Developing a Model for Effective Stakeholder Engagement Management", *Curtin University of Technology*
- South Australian Department for Communities, *Community Engagement Directions Statement*. South Australian Government: Adelaide, 2009.
- TasCOSS, *Consumer Engagement Handbook for HACCC Services in Tasmania*. TasCOSS: Hobart, 2012.