

DELIBERATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Learnings and advice from decision makers, project managers and experts

Reflections on 11 deliberation journeys and ideas on 'what's next' for engagement in the sector

On 18 November 2021, MosaicLab facilitated an online event that showcased 11 high-influence engagement processes and explored possible futures for deliberative practice in the local government sector.

Mayors, councillors, project managers, facilitators, researchers and industry representatives came together to share their experiences and reflections and discuss ideas for the future.

Key speakers and contributors at the forum were:

- ◆ **Cr Kate Hely**, Mayor, *City of Stonnington*
- ◆ **Cr Despi O'Connor**, Mayor, *Mornington Peninsula Shire*
- ◆ **Cr Kim O'Keefe**, Mayor, *Greater Shepparton City Council*
- ◆ **Iain Walker**, Executive Director, *the newDemocracy Foundation*
- ◆ **Professor Janette Hartz-Karp**, *Curtin University*
- ◆ **Dr. Lyn Carson**, Research Director, *the newDemocracy Foundation*
- ◆ **Fadak Alfayadh**, Acting Director Policy and Strategy, *Local Government Victoria*

This free resource highlights some of the ideas, advice and learnings the speakers and participants shared.

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We chose to empower. We gave them the pen and we didn't change a thing. And it was brilliant.

DESPI O'CONNOR, MAYOR, MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE

THE VALUE & IMPACT OF A DELIBERATIVE PROCESS

Building trust & creating advocates



(Participants are saying) 'I'm actually being heard' and 'I trust local government' - the process has created tremendous advocates.

The trust building process was more important than the output.

General feedback is that this process is very valuable. The statistics about increased trust support this.

Inclusion of diverse voices



We had a really great, engaged and diverse mix on our panel, especially people we wouldn't typically hear from, which was a huge achievement.

Deliberative engagement connects our community because a group of randomly selected people can see their similarities and embrace their differences through this process.

Creating better decisions



Gives councillors deep connection to a representative group not just the regular 'louder' voices.

Really interested to see that Councils that did "empower" then have highest commitment from their Mayors after the process.

Great to hear that decision-makers are champions for the deliberative engagement processes and the Community Panels.

Participant effort and investment



Level of investment by community members.

Panel stayed on through the whole process.

Planning for the future



Love that the vision is alive and we have an ongoing point of connection with communities.

Terrific process, panel involved in all legislative requirements.





LESSONS TO TAKE FORWARD

What should councils keep in mind when planning and delivering a deliberative process?



We need to keep these people on as continuing advocates. And give them ways to stay involved.

It's important to keep what has been invested in the process alive, not relegated to a completed process, not exchanged for a finished document.

We think we 'know' what the community needs and interests are both from a council and officer perspective. It's important to continually check and challenge the process we use to reach our decisions.

Bring the panel back to talk to councillors and officers about the process so that they are aware of the power of deliberative engagement.

Need to work with youth more to understand future needs.

Go earlier next time - start process before rather than after the Council Elections

The new act brings a lot of change - fail fast to get to the best outcomes (taking risks is ok)

Need for cultural change within Council itself to embrace active listening to the community.

Push through the inertia.

Apply lessons learnt to future projects.

People are reasonable-don't be afraid to share the good, the bad and the ugly.

Do not lose momentum! We have taken a further step in the journey toward deliberative engagement.

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The citizens, the people who councils work for, like it, trust it, believe in it. They think their decisions will have input and they trust that it is genuine. In democracy, trust is everything.

IAIN WALKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE NEWDEMOCRACY FOUNDATION

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I would like there to be a culture of engagement. That the community feels that they have space and place and opportunity to engage with council. That they want to do so and see it as a key part of what it means to be a citizen of the area where they live in.

CR KATE HELY, MAYOR, CITY OF STONNINGTON

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Looking forward, councils are really maturing in this deliberative engagement space. There's so much room for innovation and to include deliberative practices in other things that we are doing.

MICHELLE DEVANNY, PROGRAM LEADER, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT, KINGSTON CITY COUNCIL

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Invest in deliberative engagement because the outcomes will greatly exceed what you expect... the respect you show your community - their ability to be involved in decision-making, will pay you back.

MATT BURKE, MANAGER STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE, CITY OF STONNINGTON





WHERE TO NEXT FOR DELIBERATIVE PRACTICE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

Standing panels and deliberation done differently



Ongoing use of deliberative engagement and the potential for having ongoing standing panels.

Standing panels and other ways of hybrid recruitment.

Embedding deliberative practice in decision making



More deliberative engagement! Let's solve our wicked problems.

More deliberative engagement with confidence.

Better, more complex engagement that is purposeful and influential.

Changing the way we engage with our community to be more meaningful and diverse.

Thinking beyond borders and boundaries



Combine forces to use our combined representatives to share feedback to Victorian and Federal Government about what the community wants.

I like the concept of a state-wide deliberative citizens' panel - it would be a very large panel that could be used for state gov issues but stratified for localised issues. Maybe Municipal Association of Victoria could assist with this process.

Sector sharing, networking and learning



Communication across the sector on the benefits of using deliberative engagement (standing panels) not just when legislatively required.

Networking with other councils on these issues, sharing information.

Recruiting more effectively



Analysis of various elements. E.g. Different methods of recruitment and ROI on these methods, the engagement/exposure of councillors in the process, and the impact of panels at different levels of influence.

Research and development



Standing panels and other ways of hybrid recruitment.

That there is a centralised way to recruit.



What's not to like about this work? It is going to work for both citizens and elective representatives. Besides anything else, it's fantastic fun. I have never seen a council that regretted it. They are always somehow changed or improved by the process.

They can't go wrong. It's a no-brainer.

DR. LYN CARSON, RESEARCH DIRECTOR, THE NEWDEMOCRACY FOUNDATION



There is going to be more integration of panels and deliberative processes as part of everyday decision making. I would hope that, five years from now, there is standing panels all over the State.

NICOLE HUNTER, MANAGING DIRECTOR, MOSAICLAB

