

# ***Public Participation in Government Decision-Making***

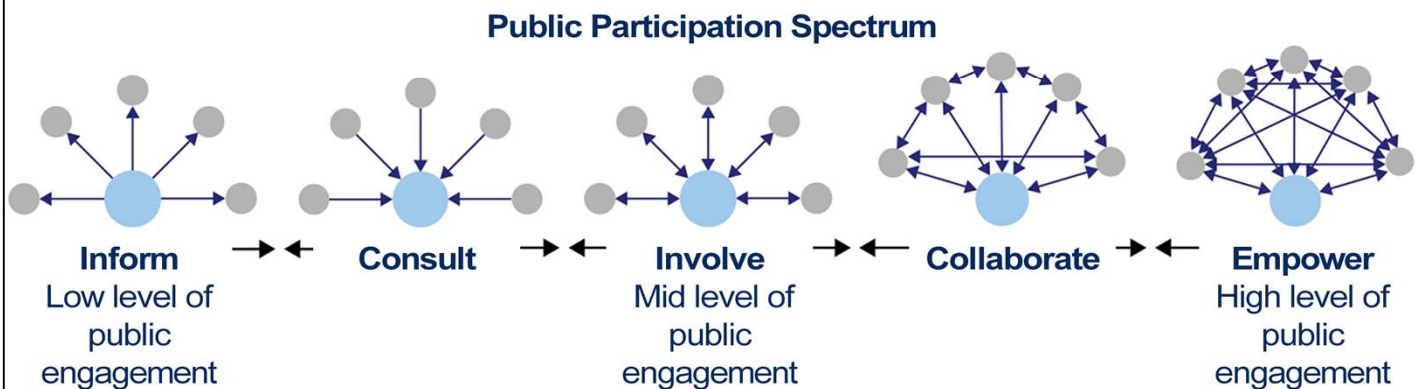
Tabled 10 May 2017

This presentation provides an overview of the Victorian Auditor-General's report *Public Participation in Government Decision-Making*.

## Overview

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**Public participation is the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process**



Source: VAGO, based the International Association for Public Participation's Public Participation Spectrum

Public participation is the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process. Increasingly, governments recognise the contribution the public can make in helping them to understand problems and risks, and to craft solutions that are more likely to work.

## Background

**30%** of performance audits identified inadequate or ineffective public participation



Affects sentiment about government transparency and accountability

In previous VAGO audits we have identified examples of agencies using inadequate or ineffective public participation methodologies to engage with the Victorian public. These examples have heightened the public's concerns about government transparency and accountability.

## What we looked at and how

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**Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC)**

**How effectively are they supporting public participation methods?**



**Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)**—Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (Port Phillip region)

**Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)**—Victoria's 10-year Mental Health Plan

**Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA)**—Caulfield to Dandenong level crossing removal project

**How effective were they in achieving their public participation objectives and adhering to better practice?**

In this audit we examined how effectively two central agencies—the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC)—and three portfolio agencies—the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA)—support better-practice public participation approaches across their areas of responsibility.

For each of the three portfolio agencies, we also examined the public participation activities for a specific program to see how effectively each program achieved its public participation objectives and adhered to policy, legislation and better-practice principles.

## What we found

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Well-managed public participation  
→ valuable contribution to  
decision-making



Victoria needs an overarching  
framework to drive activities and  
promote consistency of practice

When managed well, public participation activities in Victoria are demonstrably making a valuable contribution to government decision-making.

However, Victoria has no overarching public participation framework to drive activities and promote consistency of practice. Consequently the quality and extent of public participation to inform decision-making varies across the public sector.

## Public participation as a strategic priority

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Effective public participation  
requires strong leadership



DPC has shown commitment  
through two initiatives

**But**

DPC still needs to develop a framework or guidance

Effective public participation across the public sector requires strong leadership from DPC.

DPC has shown its commitment to public participation through two recent initiatives. However, DPC still needs to consolidate its leadership role by developing a framework or guidance for the Victorian public sector.

## Agencies' public participation activities

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All three agencies established public participation as a priority



DHHS and DELWP—no comprehensive public participation policy or framework

All three audited agencies have shown leadership by establishing public participation as a priority. Although all three agencies note the importance of public participation in high-level strategic documents, DHHS and DELWP have not yet developed a comprehensive public participation policy or framework.



## Public participation in practice



We examined one activity per agency



Most met objectives and were generally effective



DHHS and DELWP did not plan enough time



To improve:

- Develop evaluation plan early on
- Assess activities against key better practice

We examined one public participation activity for each of the three agencies. We found that overall most met their objectives and were generally effective. However, DHHS and DELWP did not plan enough time for their activities.

There are opportunities for all agencies to improve their approach to evaluating public participation activities such as developing a comprehensive evaluation plan early in the public participation process and assessing public participation activities against key better-practice features.



## Recommendations

### 2 recommendations for DPC

Collaborate with agencies to develop a whole-of-government framework and develop its own internal framework

### 2 recommendations for DHHS and DELWP

Develop a comprehensive public participation policy or framework and provide their staff with guidance

### 5 recommendations for DHHS, DELWP and LXRA

- Establish a single source of information for monitoring and reporting
- Evaluate and review the effectiveness of public participation training
- Have consistent messaging regarding the purpose of public participation
- Provide feedback to stakeholders on how their input has been used
- Plan realistic public participation activities to suit the time available

We made two recommendations for DPC—that it collaborate with agencies to develop a whole-of-government framework and develop its own internal framework.

We made two recommendations for DHHS and DELWP—that they develop a comprehensive public participation policy or framework and provide their staff with guidance.

Finally, we made five recommendations for DHHS, DELWP and LXRA—that they:

- Establish a single source of information for monitoring and reporting
- Evaluate and review the effectiveness of public participation training
- Have consistent messaging regarding the purpose of public participation
- Provide feedback to stakeholders on how their input has been used, and
- Plan realistic public participation activities to suit the time available

For further information, please view the full report on  
our website: [www.audit.vic.gov.au](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au)

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