

Australian Local Government Association – 2023 National General Assembly

Motion Details

Title:

Accessibility and inclusivity of Australian Government department consultation

Motion:

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to investigate and implement technological options for Australian Government Departments to receive feedback and submissions to proposals, plans and programs in alternate formats including audio recording or transcription recording.

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to investigate these alternate options to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of engagement and consultation conducted by Australian Government Departments, for the benefit of culturally and linguistically diverse community members, and people living with disability, who may experience limitations and difficulties with writing or making submissions.

National Objective:

(Why is this a national issue and why should this be debated at the NGA? Max 200 words)

Community engagement, also known as ‘public participation’, is about involving people in decision-making and it should be at the very core of democratic processes across all levels of government.

The Australian Government must embed, through its departments and practices, the commitment to engage with our communities on the issues that matter in a transparent, open, and accountable way.

The outdated requirement that exists across many Australian Government departments for submissions to be in writing only can disadvantage a number of groups of people such as people with vision impairment, with an intellectual disability, or with language barriers. Offering different channels for providing feedback should be considered, including options for providing verbal submissions.

The Australian Government should take all reasonable actions possible to dismantle the barriers preventing individuals from participating fully in our communities, placing an important focus on creating more inclusive communities and opportunities.

Summary of Key Arguments:

(Background information and supporting arguments – Max 500 words)

Effective government engagement and consultation is key to working openly and meaningfully with the communities that we serve. The Australian Government and its agencies must ensure they are utilising tools and channels that facilitate genuine participation with all members of the community to lead to the development and delivery of better policy, programs and services.

The prevailing reliance of Australian Government departments for submissions to be in writing only can disadvantage a number of groups of people such as those living with disability or with language barriers.

Australian Local Government Association – 2023 National General Assembly

This is called in to focus by the data of the 2021 Census (<https://www.abs.gov.au>).

According to the 2021 Census, there were 1.46 million people (5.8% of the Australian Population) who reported a core activity need for assistance. That is, they needed assistance with at least one of the core activities of self-care, communication, and mobility.

Additionally, in 2021, 5.8 million people (22.8%) reported using a language other than English at home. This was an increase from 4.9 million people (21.6%) in 2016.

For those respondents who used another language at home, the Census asked how well they spoke English. A response of 'not well', or 'not at all' indicate a low proficiency in spoken English. In 2021, 3.4% of the population spoke English not well or not at all.

This data demonstrates that there are members of our communities at risk of being unable to effectively participate in the engagement and consultation process through the prevailing practices. The Australian Government must champion improving access for all members of the community to effectively understand and engage with its diverse range of programs and services, helping us all to understand and meet the needs of our diverse communities.