

# Community Leadership Consultation Resource

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Why write a Community Leadership Consultation Resource in the context of Municipal Public Health Planning?.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>How did the resource development process take place?.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>What was learned from the processes used?.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>How can this resource be read?.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<b>2. LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>What is community leadership?.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>What attributes and skills do community leaders require?.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>3. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND CONSULTATION .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>How do community leaders consult?.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>What is best practice in consultation by community leaders?.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>What do community leaders need to know in order to effectively consult with their community? .....</i>	<i>19</i>
<b>4. LESSONS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>What are the key lessons for community leaders?.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>What are the key lessons for community leadership and health planning?.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<b>5. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>24</b>

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## WHY WRITE A COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP CONSULTATION RESOURCE IN THE CONTEXT OF MUNICIPAL PUBLIC HEALTH PLANNING?

In an innovative project funded by the Department of Human Services, Success Works was contracted to combine Brimbank City Council's Municipal Public Health planning in 2002-2003 with the development of a community leadership consultation resource. Through this resource development, the involvement of community leaders in consultation as part of municipal public health planning was explored. Of broader significance, however, are the findings on what it means to be a community leader in today's society. While this research focused particularly on Brimbank, it is hoped that this resource will provide ideas to other local government bodies and community leaders throughout Victoria and Australia.

## HOW DID THE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS TAKE PLACE?

The following diagram illustrates how the two parallel processes noted above took place:

**Diagram 1: Processes Used**



These components involved:

- A Steering Committee of identified key stakeholders was established to guide the Plan and Resource Development.
- A Social Health and Wellbeing Forum of Brimbank wide representatives was held in July 2002 to discuss national, state and local trends, to establish priorities for the Plan, and discuss consultation good practice.
- A review of available data was conducted.
- A key issues paper with identified priorities was presented to the Steering Committee for their comment.
- Community leaders were identified from within each Brimbank ward.
- A review on involving community leaders in consultation was conducted.
- Community leaders identified at a ward level attended workshops to establish priorities and to discuss community leadership issues and consultation techniques. Further consultation was undertaken through an action research journal writing process.
- Participants from the Social Health and Wellbeing Forum and the Community Leadership Workshops were invited to establish strategies for the identified priorities and critique the process to date, in March 2003.
- The Municipal Public Health Plan and the Community Leadership Consultation Resource were developed.

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## WHAT WAS LEARNED FROM THE PROCESSES USED?

An important element of the research was the ability to learn from the processes used. In order to facilitate this learning, participants were asked to comment as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Evaluation of the Project**

<b>Process Component</b>	<b>What went well?</b>	<b>What could have been improved?</b>	<b>What alternative best practice process should have been used?</b>	<b>Success Works Commentary<sup>1</sup></b>
Steering Committee Establishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to participate in a focused group</li> <li>• Opportunity to input to process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings over a shorter period to maintain focus</li> <li>• Council planning for meetings with papers, agenda, etc. and communication outside of meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More communication</li> </ul>	Major issues impacting on the effectiveness of the Steering Committee included role definition and communication. Best practice suggests that a Working Party could have been established by Brimbank City Council from interested parties to undertake initial planning and gathering of briefing documentation. In addition, a role statement and communication strategy would have increased project clarity.

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<sup>1</sup> Best practice as presented is based on *Community Planning Handbook* (2000) and Success Works experience of local government consultation. This technique also mirrors the work done by Lyn Carson (2000) for Planning NSW which included a four step process of visioning with a wide group of community members (in her case randomly selected); "operationalising" by knowledgeable individuals; testing of the plan by the wider community; and evaluation/feedback (quoted in Robinson's "The qualities of effective public participation processes" [2002]).

Process Component	What went well?	What could have been improved?	What alternative best practice process should have been used?	Success Works Commentary <sup>1</sup>
Social Health and Wellbeing Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good organisation and communication</li> <li>• Discussion of many issues</li> <li>• Good representation</li> <li>• Productive with achievement of positive outcomes</li> <li>• Opportunity to share with other community members about issues at work</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Open discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity on two strands of the project</li> <li>• More time to “thrash out issues”</li> <li>• No new information</li> <li>• Reduced time frame</li> <li>• Continuity and follow up post-event</li> <li>• Tended to be side lined by one issue items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear commitment from Council</li> <li>• Regular bulletin post-event</li> <li>• More accountability and follow up post-event</li> </ul>	<p>The main issue was the loss of momentum and commitment to the process by consultees. Best practice would indicate that this type of forum is best held at the conclusion of a consultation exercise rather than at its commencement as it raises expectations for action. However, if a shorter timeframe was used, an alternative approach could have included a Future Search Conference or other visioning process looking at the past, present and future vision and actions, including 60-70 individuals from different interest groups. Regardless of the process used, this conference/forum needed to be followed up by targetted focus groups and a feedback conference to report on the future search conference and focus groups, decide on next steps, and form a Steering Committee of community partners to guide the plan development (appointed at the future search conference). Working groups would then need to be formed for each agreed priority area to develop detailed strategies. This would be followed by an open house or interactive exhibition to allow for wider community participation with feedback incorporated by the Steering Committee and approval sought for consultation on the draft plan by Council.</p>
Key Issues Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on Forum, demographic and health research provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations for more information not followed up</li> <li>• Lost momentum due to time lapses</li> </ul>		<p>An important development was the lack of leadership in taking the Key Issues Paper forward through targetted consultation and ownership of the content. This lack of ownership led to an alternative process of local community leadership consultation and ensured a diminished partnership approach.</p>

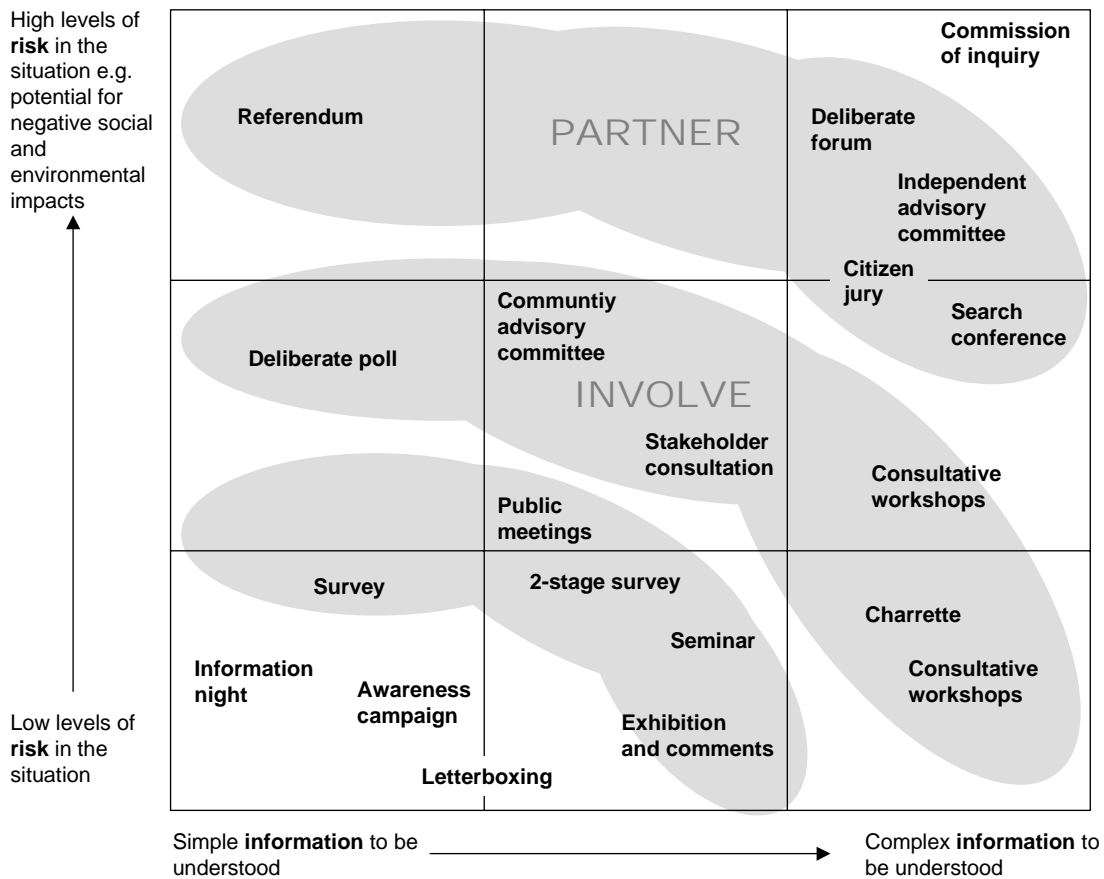
Process Component	What went well?	What could have been improved?	What alternative best practice process should have been used?	Success Works Commentary <sup>1</sup>
Community Leaders Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing together different perspectives</li> <li>• Major outcomes</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Process used to identify representatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer identification of various strands of the project</li> <li>• Confusion on role of planning district and Community Plan consultation</li> <li>• More action</li> <li>• Planning and communication</li> <li>• Not sure who of suggested representatives ended up participating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More information before attending the workshop</li> <li>• More meetings to outline key issues</li> <li>• Training provision so leaders can understand the political system</li> <li>• Identification of breadth and depth of representation</li> </ul>	<p>Success Works was undertaking a mapping profile for Brimbank City Council as part of a FaCS Stronger Families and Communities process. This had led to the identification of community leaders in Ardeer, Sunshine, Deer Park and St Albans. It was decided to enhance this mapping process by including community leaders from other areas. Nominations of local leaders were sought from neighbourhood houses, agencies, CALD groups, and Council staff. Best practice would indicate that this information should be readily known with Council officers such as a community liaison officer having a pre-existing relationship with local Community leaders.</p>

Process Component	What went well?	What could have been improved?	What alternative best practice process should have been used?	Success Works Commentary <sup>1</sup>
Community Leadership Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller group allowed for increased participation</li> <li>• Interesting journal exercise</li> <li>• Good discussions</li> <li>• Good process and well facilitated session</li> <li>• Communication and leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger group with increased attendance</li> <li>• Clarity on actions taken and Implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written instructions for the journal</li> <li>• More transparent and accountable</li> </ul>	<p>A letter was sent to community leaders letting them know they had been identified as such and inviting them to a workshop to discuss both the priorities for the MPHP but also community leadership issues. In order to enrich the experience, a journal was provided to attendees to record their processes of consultation with the community subsequently to the workshop as well as their reflections of the process. While the number of attendees was small and the number who returned the journal was even smaller, a range of community leaders attended including school, faith community, CALD and Indigenous community, neighbourhood house, historical society, formal political leaders and informal leaders involved in many networks. Individuals who could not attend were followed up with a telephone interview.</p> <p>Best practice indicates that although this proved to be a useful consultation exercise, its value for participants would have been increased if it had been a participatory consultation with a longer timeframe to allow for community/constituent feedback and engagement.</p>

Process Component	What went well?	What could have been improved?	What alternative best practice process should have been used?	Success Works Commentary <sup>1</sup>
Municipal Public Health Plan and Community Leadership Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good organisation and materials</li> <li>• Structured presentation</li> <li>• Good discussion</li> <li>• Opportunity to share with other community members about issues at work</li> <li>• Engagement and clear agreement</li> <li>• Opportunity to confirm groupings and MPHP priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed subsections under the major priorities</li> <li>• More time</li> <li>• Prior background information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to comment with own group outside the forum</li> <li>• Background information, particularly for those with limited prior engagement</li> <li>• Expectations from members prior to the meeting</li> <li>• Requesting global objectives cold makes for a difficult task with a small sample from which to draw</li> </ul>	<p>Following from the workshop, both local community leaders and Brimbank-wide community leaders were invited to attend a forum to agree on the priorities for the plan with a short follow-up workshop with local community leaders to identify their consultation process with their community. Given the diversity of involvement and the gap in time for some consultees, the process would have been improved through release of an updated issues paper to attendees. A dinner and Mayor's speech was also planned in order to illustrate to community leaders their importance to the Council and to Brimbank. Attendance was limited. Best practice, as noted in the Social Health and Wellbeing Forum commentary would have been the holding of a feedback conference within three months of the forum with smaller groups forming to develop strategies.</p>

Success Works concludes that regardless of the process used, the failure to effectively engage the Steering Committee and retain key stakeholder interest are key lessons. This flows in part from the need to establish the degree of partnership and participation sought from community leaders. Les Robinson provides a useful matrix on public participation to guide decisions on technique.

**Diagram 2: The Public Participation Matrix (© Les Robinson 2002)**



However, it is worth noting that regardless of the initial intentions and determined approaches, events often shift these plans with best practice indicating the need for flexibility. In this case, the shift in Council personnel, Steering Committee engagement, impact of the Community Plan consultation, and consultation needs of this resource all led to the adoption of alternative processes. Fundamentally, regardless of the processes chosen, commitment to feedback is key.

## HOW CAN THIS RESOURCE BE READ?

This document includes literature from Australia and overseas plus details of the consultation results in Brimbank. These research findings are interspersed with suggested tools for community leaders or those working with community leaders. This section outlined the methodology used and action learning from the Municipal Public Health Planning process. Section Two provides literature on community leadership and Brimbank's community leaders' views on community leadership. Section Three discusses consultation and community leadership and provides useful tools for community leaders in undertaking consultation. Section Four outlines key lessons which Brimbank's community leaders wish to share as part of this resource as well as a discussion on the links between health planning and community leadership.

## 2. LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

### WHAT IS COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP?

A discussion on community leadership must begin with a definition of community and of leadership. As those working with communities know, the word community can mean very different things. Maser in *Vision and Leadership in Sustainable Development* (1999) notes that the word community comes from the Latin word *munus*, meaning gift, and *cum*, meaning together – literally “to give among one another” (27). Typically, however, the term community can be defined to be either a community of place (i.e. one based on a locality) or a community of interest. Currently, the use of the term community is being used in conjunction with an attribute, such as healthy community, cohesive community, sustainable community, etc. In this way, there are indicators or measures which can be applied to see if the community measures up to its attribute. Community can also be viewed as a system with its component parts interconnected and exhibiting specific characteristics (Thompson & Kinne, 1990). Another currently popular use of the word community is community building in Victoria. Fundamentally, this concept relates to the desire by government to increase the capacity of the community. While this may mean increasing the strengths of community, rather than weaknesses, there is still a connotation of community change, either imposed or owned.

As with the concept of community, the concept of leadership has a vast history of usage. At its most basic and traditionally understood level, leadership has to do with authority, i.e. with a leader and a follower (Stone, 1995). Leaders are the stuff of myths, battles, and heroic deeds and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of corporate takeovers (see for example Hustedde & Woodward, 1996 who differentiate between the heroic and post-heroic leader). However, different authors have broken down the concept of leadership to include different types of leaders – for example, structural leaders who work to accomplish established goals, human resources leaders who serve human needs, political leaders who establish and work with coalitions and symbolic leaders who focus on meaning (Bolman & Deal). An important concept in the 1990s was that of “servant leader” extended within the community leadership context by Hustedde & Woodward (1996) through the National Association for Community Leadership to mean community trustees who hold the community in trust. The National Extension Task Force on Community Leadership in the United States defined community leadership as follows:

*“Community leadership is that which involves influence, power, and input into public decision-making over one or more spheres of activity. The spheres of activity may include an organization, an area of interest, an institution, a town, county or region. Leadership capacity extends beyond the skills necessary to maintain a social service and/or activities organization. The leadership skills necessarily include those necessary for public decision making, policy development, program implementation and organizational maintenance”* (Langone, 1992: 1).

According to Michigan State University’s LeadNet (a network of educators devoted to leadership development), community leadership is collaborative, facilitative, servant led and shared.

In an audit of community leadership programs in NSW conducted by Anderson et al. (2002) community leadership is defined as “a specific form of the general concept of leadership...frequently based in place and so is local, although it can also represent a community of common interest, purpose or practice” (8).

In the United Kingdom, the term community leadership has been used by local authorities to emphasise their enabling role within the community (see for example, Local Government Association’s (LGA’s) 2001 document *Community Leadership: what is it?*). Therefore, an important element of the democratic reform agenda in the United Kingdom has been community leadership, particularly focusing on the role of political leaders, i.e. councillors in local government. The eight characteristics of effective community leadership as noted by the LGA include:

- Involving and learning from local communities
- Building vision and direction
- Making partnerships work
- Making things happen
- Standing up for communities
- Empowering local communities
- Being accountable to communities
- Using community resources effectively (3-4).

In order to better facilitate leadership training, the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA) has developed a Leadership Academy where topics covered include personal, political and community cohesion and leadership. One of the important areas of note in the research from the United Kingdom is the distinction between position and behaviour (Leach & Wilson, 2000). In 1975, Edinger identified the difference between a positional leader or one who leads as a result of an office or position, and a behavioural leader who shapes actions and may not have a formal position. In a paper by the University of the West of England, a three-fold typology of leadership styles was outlined as designed and focused i.e. built on institutional structures, implicit and fragmented i.e. based on multi-organisational partnerships where there is a multiplicity of potential leaders, and emergent and formative i.e. pragmatic and focused as a result of a situation. This distinction is important within the realm of governance which entails the loss of leadership and power of local government through the formations of partnerships and networks at a local level (Stoker, 1996). Another area of community leadership involves capacity building to increase the number of community leaders. This has been a route taken by many women’s leadership initiatives and also by development workers. Another stream of literature on community leaders is cultural leadership. As noted by Austin at the Salzburg Seminar on International Leadership, “Cultural leaders can be the leaders that lift the gates

In Brimbank, Success Works found four types of community leaders who were identified by their community as local leaders. These included political leaders (those who had been elected into a role of leadership), formal leaders (those who served as chairs or organisers of groups as well as those who held positions of authority within an organisation with links to the community), informal leaders (those whom many within the community identified as a leader, given their vocal stance on issues and attendance at various networks and groups), and CALD leaders who often fulfilled the function of acting as facilitator between their community and its needs/concerns and mainstream society, and organisation’s role/use to the community. While the concept of community leadership is less gendered than traditional leadership (see for example, Weeks, 2001), we found more men than women identified as leaders.

between culturally diverse groups while sustaining their group identity. More important, these leaders are able to translate the various cultural signs and symbols that must be dealt with" (P9) into the mainstream culture.

In Success Works' research for this resource, we asked identified community leaders to tell us what the concept meant to them. This is what they told us:

- Being prepared to listen
- Having an interest and awareness of community need/issues
- Possessing a vision
- Possessing leadership qualities
- Having a knowledge of the system and being able to use it by turning knowledge into action pursuing ongoing relationships development
- Setting in place processes to create change ("continuous improvement model')
- Being able to help other people (such as elderly/disabled).
- Being down to earth - supportive
- Having the responsibility to give and take authoritative advice and participate in decision making
- Being able to gain the respect of others (worth while)
- Possessing skills such as sensitivity and resource identification
- Meeting people
- Learning on the way
- Having a sense of pride
- Volunteering
- Having a positive influence
- Making a difference and affecting lives in positive ways
- Presenting the community in a positive way
- Raising cultural awareness
- Encouraging reconciliation and helping Indigenous people to achieve better services
- Having the responsibility to contribute to future directions
- Getting involved in political and community groups seeking to make the community a better community
- Willingness to be vocal and active in the pursuit of sporting, social and medical facilities for the community.

#### WHAT ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS DO COMMUNITY LEADERS REQUIRE?

As can be seen from the definitions of community leadership, the attributes and skills of community leaders are a defining element. According to the NSW study noted previously, attributes include: social entrepreneurship; knowledge of people and resources; problem solving capability; responsiveness; ability to share community's vision; goals and values and use its resources for a common good; commitment, and the ability to listen and hold the community's trust (Anderson et al., 2002).

The skills and attributes identified by community leaders in Brimbank are very similar and also link back to their comments noted earlier. These included:

- Having a vision, being able to communicate the vision and holding on to the vision
- Possessing a moral element (living by example), maturity, analytical skills, courage, humility, stealth and persuasion skills
- Having system, people, processes understanding, networking, resource tapping, negotiation, organisational and communication skills
- Being flexible, able to listen, task focused, determined, friendly and approachable
- Having wisdom, patience and a sense of humour
- Being unafraid to learn
- Being disciplined but also passionate about goals
- Having influence
- Allowing time for introspection.

The National Association of Community Leadership defined attributes within the community trusteeship paradigm to include, that community leaders should:

- Have self-knowledge.
- Care about their communities
- Be community stewards
- Serve “the common good”
- Listen to diversity and appreciate diversity
- Develop the ability to look for connections and be systems thinkers
- Be able to define and articulate concerns, dreams and visions
- Use their abilities including reflection with others on successes and lessons
- “Lead with passion” (quoted in Hustedde & Woodward, 1996, 3).

While there has been tremendous interest in the skills and attributes required by community leaders, an article in *Concepts and Connections: A Newsletter for Leadership Educators* noted that there is not a complete theory on how to develop a leader with some scholars articulating that leadership development may be a form of individual adult development (Prince, 2001). In fact, Rodgers-Healey, Centre for Leadership for Women, identifies two “building blocks” of leadership. These are:

- Developing the self through self-identity, strategic thinking, self-confidence to communicate a vision, mobilising others, skills of facilitation and team work
- Practising leadership (2002, 2-3).

### **Tool 1: Are you a community leader?**

The following simple questionnaire has been developed by the Community Tool Box. If you answer yes to these, you are likely to be a community leader.

- Do you want to improve your community?
- Do you have something to contribute?
- Do you not wait around for someone else to get the job done but do it yourself or with others?

Many people are community leaders and there is ‘room’ for many more.

### **Tool 2: You can learn to be a community leader.**

The following steps, outlined by the Community Tool Box, can help you become a more effective community leader.

- Dream big to create your personal vision
- Listen to people
- Decide that you are the person to take responsibility for your community
- Set goals
- Think about the individuals in the group
- Think about the group as a whole
- Propose programs and policies
- Get the work done
- Recruit and teach others to become leaders

### 3. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND CONSULTATION

#### HOW DO COMMUNITY LEADERS CONSULT?

Just as there are many different types of community leaders, there are many different consultation techniques. One of the purposes of this research was to discover the ways in which community leaders consult with their community. This is an area which has received little study. Success Works' found that in Brimbank, community leaders communicate with their communities as a form of consultation. This includes using letters, emails, phones, fax, letter drops, newsletters, sermons, posters, flyers, notices, etc. Often these forms of communication serve to both keep the community informed but also either to invite them to public meetings or to other consultation opportunities such as school meetings. In addition, these forms of communication also serve as forms of consultation through the addition of cut out sheets, etc. Another technique used is surveys to the community. However, the most common form of consultation involved either facilitation of discussions at existing group meetings or speaking at public meetings. Knowledge of local issues was facilitated by "keeping an ear to the ground" with one community leader reporting that he listens to his community's concerns while walking the dog.

#### WHAT IS BEST PRACTICE IN CONSULTATION BY COMMUNITY LEADERS?

In a concept paper by the University of Wisconsin-Madison entitled "On Leadership", effective community leadership is tied to the following actions:

- Seeking of the views of at least three major sectors of the community when dealing with issues of community importance
- Ensuring that each of these perspectives is fully represented
- Conducting a continuous scan of local resources and assets and utilising these to address community issues
- Ensuring external support but within the parameters of community prioritisation.

#### Case Study A - Community Centre

In this case study, one of the Brimbank community leaders identified worked at a neighbourhood house. In deciding how to consult with the community, the leader first needed to identify the community as it was not clear which community was represented, i.e. users of the neighbourhood house, the Committee of Management, or the community more broadly. In this way, a language class was chosen as the neighbourhood house holds an ESL class on a regular basis. With the tutor, the leader devised a two-hour session with fourteen students to illicit ideas for the Municipal Public Health Plan priorities. A key learning from this experience was the need to convince the students that their views mattered which included spending time discussing the consultative process within the current political climate and the links with the CALD students' experience of consultation in other countries. Of broader ramifications for best practice are two important learnings:

- A community leader may represent more than one 'community' and therefore may need to first identify which community to consult.
- Consultees regardless of their country of origin need to know that there is value in what they are contributing. This means both a process explaining how contributions will be used and then of feeding back results and actions to the community.

These actions have parallels with the “situated leadership model” developed by Falk from the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia. According to Falk, the following are required:

- Building of relationships across different sectors to establish common visions and goals
- Understanding the qualities of “historicity, externality, reciprocity, trust, and shared norms/values” of interactions
- Identifying community resources
- Bringing people and groups together
- Organising opportunities for interactions across the community (i.e. “futures agenda, planning opportunities, events etc.) to achieve goals
- Ensuring networking
- Celebrating and documenting successes and key learning.

Best practice of consulting within the community as identified by Brimbank community leaders included:

- Generating community interest by finding the passion of the community. This can be done through surveying the community on a key issue of local importance and then holding a public meeting to discuss the findings rather than just holding a public meeting.
- Using existing community resources as part of the consultation. This can be done through having community members administer a survey. Using community resources means having to first uncover what these are. In addition, the actual administration/facilitation may be best undertaken by the community whereas the community leader may best contribute through planning and resourcing of the consultation.
- Having community leadership give visible commitment to the process and outcomes. It is vital that community leaders honour their processes of consultation.
- Having a feedback loop which is visible to the community.

Overall, community leaders in Brimbank identified that there needed to be a sophisticated understanding of which technique to use for which audience and situation. Regardless of the technique, however, best practice should be derived from appropriate feedback mechanisms.

### Case Study B – School Principal

Community links with schools are of increasing importance with many community leaders identified from within schools. In this Brimbank case study, the school principal met with his existing group of principals at their weekly meeting and asked them to observe and report community priorities over the week. They met at their next weekly meeting and held a half-hour discussion on their findings.

Key lessons included:

- Given time, it may have been better to use a wider/larger group
- There needed to be a school community consultation component
- Principals see this as an interesting option

### Case Study C – (Community Group Organiser)

In this Brimbank case study, the group organiser called a meeting of existing group to discuss priorities. This led to the prioritising of issues not only for the MPHP but for the group’s priorities for the year.

Key lessons included:

- A process (externally imposed) was used which served previous need for group priority setting
- The process allowed for the setting of common goals and aims with new members and old members contributing
- It was a good way to connect new people because the group developed joint/owned priorities.

## WHAT DO COMMUNITY LEADERS NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO EFFECTIVELY CONSULT WITH THEIR COMMUNITY?

Given the types of consultation community leaders predominantly undertake, the following tools are provided:

- Active Listening
- Visioning
- Facilitation.

### Active Listening

As reported in the Community Tool Box, the basic skills of active listening include verbal and non-verbal communication; questioning, reflecting and summarising others' points; expressing one's own views; and resolving confrontations.

Tips for active listening include using:

- Eye contact if culturally appropriate
- Non-verbal clues to show interest
- "I" sentences rather than "You" sentences
- "Aha", "I see", "Hm" etc. to encourage sharing
- Personal antidotes to show empathy if appropriate
- Validating sentences
- Quiet
- Questions rather than criticisms
- Reflection of what has been said (Community Tool Box: Part E, Chapter 14, Section 8).

### Visioning

As noted earlier, being able to develop a vision, articulate the vision and remain committed to that vision in the face of opposition is an important attribute of a community leader. Tool 4 outlines a simple exercise for developing a vision with a group of people.

### Tool 3: Active Listening

While there are many resources on active listening which can assist in developing these skills, a very simple exercise (adapted from Rifkin & Pridmore, 2001, 36) involves finding two friends or colleagues and asking one to take on the role of speaker and one of observer. Have the speaker talk for up to two minutes on a subject of her/his choice while you listen without taking notes. The observer watches both the speaker and listener, paying attention to the non-verbal communication. At the conclusion of the two minutes, reflect back to the speaker what you have heard. Check with the speaker that you have reflected back properly and check with the observer for comments on the non-verbal communication. Questions to consider include:

- What helped me to listen?
- What hindered my listening?
- What hindered my remembering?
- What did I learn about myself as a listener?
- How did the speaker know I was listening?

### Tool 4: Visioning

A typical visioning exercise employed by Success Works includes asking a group of individuals to imagine that in five years' time the community is functioning brilliantly. Ask the individuals to spend five minutes quietly contemplating what this positive future will be like. Then ask them to write down up to five words which express their vision. To conclude the exercise, have each individual share these words and write them all up on one piece of paper, noting the similarities. It is important to keep the words positive, so if someone starts to state a negative, i.e. "in five years' time we won't have dirty streets", ask him/her to reframe this as a positive, i.e. "in five years' time we'll have clean and well maintained streets". For some groups, the use of words is inappropriate so drawings may be used instead.

Usually a visioning exercise is concluded with developing goals or actions to achieve the desired/joint vision.

### Facilitation

Another important skill of a community leader is facilitation. There are three important differences between facilitation and chairing a meeting. First, the facilitator is there to guide a process of gaining group views not interjecting his/her own opinions. Second, the process used is as important as the information gained so the facilitator needs to plan the approach carefully. Finally, a facilitator plays a neutral role without taking sides. Good facilitation includes: having clarity on meeting goals/objectives; keeping the group working on the process; involving everyone; and being transparent about decision-making (Community Tool Box: Part E, Chapter 16, Section 2).

In order to conduct a group meeting, facilitators need to be aware of the location and environment. Often groups are most productive in a place which is comfortable and familiar with a room size that matches the group size. Another factor to consider is the arrangements inside the room. Small group discussion best occurs around small tables; podiums and lecture style seating best suits the provision of information in a formal setting; and chairs in one circle or around a table encourages total group discussion and familiarity. In addition, the facilitator needs to either bring his/her own equipment such as butchers paper and pens, or ensure that the room used provides these items. It can be helpful to keep a kit well stocked with both permanent pens and whiteboard pens, butchers paper, blue-tack for walls, Post-It notes for individual activities, pens, and coloured pens for drawing and creative work. Finally, food is an important element of many cultures' gatherings and the provision of food and beverages of a high standard can show respect.

#### Tool 5: Facilitating a Session

The following process can be followed:

- Be aware of when to start. This does not always match the advertised start time.
- Start with a welcome and introductions. While it can be useful to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves, be aware that you may need to limit the introductions of participants given the number of attendees and the allotted time. Often it can be useful to link introductions with expectations of the meeting.
- Agree a process/agenda and ground rules with the group. This helps people stay focused.
- Allow for maximum participation. As there are many people who like to dominate meetings, alternative exercises can be employed to ensure that everyone gets a chance to contribute. The most common exercise are small group discussions. However, be flexible in the approach as preplanned exercises do not always fit the group dynamic. When in doubt, it can be useful to ask the group. In addition, group work can often include conflict. This is best resolved through agreement on the agenda/process and ground rules, determining people's expectations, and group discussion. Confrontation and calling a break are last resort measures.
- Ensure closure of each element of the agenda/process by reflecting back what has been heard and/or decided.
- Conclude with next steps gaining participant commitment if necessary.

## 4. LESSONS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

### WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS?

Overall, the Brimbank community leaders had this to share with other community leaders and those working with community leaders.

1. Unless a community leader takes the initiative, nothing will happen.
2. The differences between formal and informal leaders and their capacity for involvement needs to be understood.
3. A leader needs to have proactive plans and not be reactive.
4. There should be more opportunities to mentor new leaders. This can be done through sharing wisdom and techniques.
5. A vital first step for a "would be" community leader is involvement on committees, groups, and networks.
6. Above all else, leaders need to be able to listen to their community's issues and concerns.
7. Community leaders need local government to provide them with an open and transparent feedback loop so that their communities can see how the feedback provided via the community leader has been used.
8. Local government also needs to provide community leaders with information on Council decisions, changes, directions and key contacts. This could best be done through allocated community liaison officers.
9. Leaders need to be prepared to be surprised and be flexible so they can respond in the right way.

### WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND HEALTH PLANNING?

This resource has been written for two purposes: one, using Brimbank as a case study, to highlight local learning; and two, to draw conclusions regarding consultation with community leaders. As this resource illustrates, there are two levels of consultation: consultation with community leaders and consultation by community leaders with their constituents. While Sections 2 and 3 were predominantly focused on the latter level of consultation, Sections 1 and 4 highlight consultation with community leaders within a health planning context.

The main lesson to be drawn from Brimbank is that planning, whether for health, education, etc. should start from the premise that "appropriate planning starts with people" (Rifkin & Pridmore, 2001). Participatory planning, or in this case planning in partnership with community leaders, needs to go beyond consultation to collaboration. Using Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, this means allowing for community partnerships as community wellbeing rests with a multiplicity of community stakeholders. According to Rifkin & Pridmore (2001), guidelines for participatory planning include:

- Focusing both the content of the information required for planning (i.e. both numbers and data as well as people's experiences) and on the process used to get the information which should involve local people. It is also important to determine at the onset who will own the information as one can have a participatory process with great content that then disappears into the halls of bureaucracy.

- Allowing for a systemic approach with clear planning steps as well as flexibility in changing these steps along the way to match the participatory planning needs.
- Developing attitudes, behaviours and skill sets supporting of partnership working. These include: respect, active listening, a positive approach, open communication, feedback, facilitation of community sharing, and lateral thinking to resource the process (25-26). Interestingly, these were also identified as important aspects of a community leader illustrating the natural synergy between community leaders and participatory planning.

Finally, while this resource has focused on best practice for community leaders, there is best practice which can be followed by local government in working with community leaders.

1. Be aware of the differences which exist within the category of "community leadership". Our research found that this includes political leaders, formal leaders, informal leaders, and CALD leaders. Not only do individual styles of leadership vary, but, also, different categories of leaders have different relationships with their constituents which impacts on their consultation techniques and input.
2. Understand that in some cases, community leaders have more than one group of constituents. Be clear from which group information is desired.
3. Allow appropriate time for constituent involvement.
4. Show respect and commitment to the process and be clear on whether the process is informative, consultative, or participative. When desiring commitment, action, and community ownership, participative approaches are best. Our research found that if the process is participative, employing appropriate communication between meetings and forums is necessary in order to ensure commitment.
5. Know that even if a participative process is used, there still needs to be commitment to participative decision making. An interesting case study is the Metropolitan Strategy outlined by Karen Allen in the *Journal of Better Communication in Government* (September, 2001).
6. Understand that feedback is vital regardless of the approach taken. Community leaders need to indicate to their constituents how their input has been used and what decisions have resulted. As many community leaders need to motivate their constituents to provide information, a dearth of feedback makes this task more difficult with each subsequent consultation.
7. Be cognizant that the process does not end for the community once information has been gathered.
8. Be aware that community leaders have at least three relationships which must be maintained. Our research suggests that this includes their relationship with government, their relationships with each other, and their relationship with their constituents. Our research suggests that their relationship with local government would be strengthened by ensuring a single point of contact within government.
9. Assist community leaders through developing a municipal consultation strategy; providing assistance and resources for consultation as requested (including sample surveys, guides on qualitative and quantitative research, and best practice examples

and websites<sup>2</sup>); and updated demographic data and reports. In addition, provide training for community leaders to understand and work within the political environment and let community leaders know shifts and changes in local government. Our research found that the political environment has a large impact on the ability of community leaders to contribute. As new and emerging communities may have particular needs (see for example a study conducted for the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland in 2002 entitled "Listening to Emerging Voices: Addressing Collective Needs"), leadership training may be appropriate in dialogue with these communities.

Finally, our research illustrates the importance of community leadership involvement in participatory planning processes.

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<sup>2</sup> There are many such guides being promoted in Victoria. This resource does not seek to replicate these.

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