

December 2008

It's more than talk

A discussion paper about options for building knowledge, skills and values about effective community engagement within the public service

Building Better Government Engagement Reference Group

Your views are sought on how government agencies can improve citizens' and community organisations' involvement in decision making on issues that affect them.

The views in this report are those of the Reference Group and are not Government policy.

The reference group thanks Don Lenihan of the New Brunswick Public Engagement Initiative for agreeing to the use of the title *Its More Than Talk* for this discussion document.

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Additional material to support this report

There is also additional material available on the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector website (www.ocvs.govt.nz) that is referred to throughout this report, including the following:

- examples of New Zealand activities and resources related to community engagement
- case studies of organisational responses
- case studies of effective engagement processes
- progress in implementing the participatory processes recommendations in *He Waka Kotuia*, Community-Government Relationship Steering Group report 2002
- proposed standards for effective engagement by government agencies
- proposed characteristics of employees who engage effectively.

How can you give feedback?

This document considers options for enhancing the skills, knowledge and values of public servants in engaging with citizens and communities. The *Building Better Government Engagement* reference group invites you to give feedback on these questions:

- Do you think the engagement issues outlined in Section 2 are accurate?
- Do you agree with ideas for the way ahead in Section 4?
- Do you agree with the summary of possible actions suggested in Section 5 and if so which do you consider to be the top priorities?

Feedback should be given by **31 March 2009** and can be addressed to:

Building Better Government Engagement
C/o Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector
PO Box 1556
Wellington 6140.

Or ocvs@msd.govt.nz

Hard copies of this document can also be obtained from the above address.

Please include your name, organisation (if applicable) and contact details.

The reference group will also be holding some focus group meetings in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch in February 2009. If you want to participate, please contact ocvs@msd.govt.nz

What will be done with your feedback?

Feedback will be collated and reviewed by the OCVS and the reference group. Findings will be reported to the Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector with recommendations on the next steps.

Note: Your comments may be the subject of a request under the Official Information Act 1982, which may result in their publication. The withholding of particular comments submitted on the grounds of privacy, or for any other reason, will be determined in accordance with that Act. Accordingly, those giving feedback who feel there is any part of it that should be properly withheld under the Act should indicate this clearly.

Executive Summary

Complex social, economic and environmental issues facing society today cannot be tackled by government alone. To address these concerns, central government agencies need to form effective relationships with communities, through engagement with local government, the community and voluntary sector, businesses and citizens.

Increasingly, there is an emphasis in government on developing collaborative processes and partnerships. Joint action can cultivate creative solutions and muster wider financial, human and information resources to achieve shared goals. Community and voluntary organisations play an important role in achieving joint goals by providing a voice for local concerns and avenues for collective action.

Citizens have a right to participate in defining the problems and decisions that affect them, whether directly or via community and voluntary organisations. Creating a more participatory democracy, through effective government engagement with the community, has the potential to build trust in government, strengthen civic capacity, and create more sustainable policy decisions.

In recent years a number of working groups and forums have expressed concerns about government engagement practices. Community and voluntary organisations have called for government to develop more respectful community relationships, genuine and effective consultations, and collaborative and deliberative approaches to decision-making.

Established in 2008, the *Building Better Government Engagement* reference group provides advice to the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS) on ways to enhance central government engagement with citizens and communities. The reference group has concluded that, while there are good examples of central government engagement with communities, central government agencies are not yet sufficiently skilled at, or committed to, collaborating with citizens and communities.

Effective engagement occurs when government agencies understand the principles of effective engagement and have an organisational commitment to good practice. Important steps include:

- Building and maintaining active relationships with community stakeholders
- Ensuring a clear purpose for each engagement
- Choosing methods of engagement appropriate to the issue and target group
- Recognising the need for engagement skills when recruiting and developing staff
- Continuously assessing the quality of engagement.

The reference group now seeks input from other government agencies and community stakeholders on recommendations contained in this report on how the Government, and in particular the OCVS, might build more effective government engagement.

1 Setting the scene

1.1 The vision

This project aims to develop a plan of action and priorities for building skills, knowledge and values in the public service leading to effective engagement with citizens and communities. It seeks to identify steps towards a **vision** where:

Central government engages effectively with citizens and communities, recognising the interdependence of government and communities in achieving the best outcomes for society.

In recent years various working groups and forums have called for government to improve consultation processes and conduct more respectful and collaborative engagement. Government has responded through such initiatives as good practice websites and seminars, however, there is still much to be done. This project, *Building Better Government Engagement*, takes a fresh look at how to bring about the desired change.

The *Building Better Government Engagement* project's reference group was established to report to the OCVS on priorities for government action to strengthen engagement with citizens and community organisations. Details of the reference group membership, and the origins and approach of the project, can be found in the Appendix.

Addressing complex issues within a community often requires central government, local government, businesses and the community and voluntary sector to combine their skills. It is time for the public sector to embrace the art of engagement – not only with community and voluntary sector, but with citizens and communities in general.

Work in this area contributes to the commitment in the 2001 *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship* that:

“Government values the contribution of community, voluntary organisations to good policy making and delivery of effective services. Government agencies and the community sector will work together to develop and improve consultation processes through sharing good practice guidelines, workshops and training.”

The project also supports the State Services-led Development Goals for the State Sector. By building better relationships with external parties, government agencies can increase trust in government and become more accessible and responsive to the needs of citizens.

This document provides insights to current community-government engagement practices, and suggests options for taking this engagement further. It is intended to provoke discussion amongst government and community stakeholders.

1.2 What is community engagement?

Community engagement can be defined as:

A planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest or affiliation, to address issues affecting their wellbeing.¹

Central government agencies engage with:

¹ Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005). *Book 1 An Introduction to Engagement*, Victorian Government, Australia. Available at www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/wcmn203.nsf/Home+Page/8A461F99E54B17EBCA2570340016F3A9?open.

- other central government agencies and local government
- community, voluntary and iwi/Māori organisations
- businesses
- the general public/citizens.

This project primarily addresses central government engagement with community organisations and citizens. There are also many synergies with good practice in engaging with local government and businesses, although these are not the primary focus of this report.

1.3 Why engage?

The assumption underpinning this report is that citizens, communities and the organisations that they set up, have a right to contribute to defining the problems and decisions that affect them.

Citizens and community organisations are aware of issues that impact on their communities, such as economic downturn and violence, and contemporary concerns like climate change and peak oil. Localised initiatives (such as Inspiring Communities and Transition Towns)² indicate a desire by citizens to work together to directly influence and shape their communities.

The literature suggests both intrinsic and instrumental benefits to public participation in policy development (as outlined in Figure 1).³ United Kingdom research⁴ on the benefits of public participation in the governing and running of public services indicates that, at its best, community engagement can empower citizens; make a significant difference to the way services are designed and run, and secure widely valued policy outcomes.

In a representative democracy, many policy decisions are made by elected representatives. If the actions of government are to be effective and sustainable, broad public commitment to solutions is important. Government decisions will often be more acceptable to citizens if they are involved in the dialogue.

Figure 1: Benefits of Public Participation

Intrinsic benefits

- Raises the quality of democracy by broadening the sphere in which citizens can make or influence decisions
- Strengthens public trust in government
- Responds to calls for greater government transparency and accountability
- Builds civic capacity to respond to issues.

Instrumental benefits

- Improves the quality of policy by tapping into greater reservoirs of experience and creativity
- Strengthens the evidence base for policy making
- Reduces implementation costs.

Often it proves useful for a government agency to partner with a community organisation to plan an engagement process that taps the voices of citizens. Community and voluntary organisations provide avenues for communities of interest, place and identity to express their voices. They have specialist knowledge, and many represent marginalised groups that otherwise might not be heard. An important feature of a democracy is the ability of such bodies to advocate and influence government policy.

² See <http://www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz/index.html> and <http://www.transitiontowns.org.nz/>.

³ Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate (2008). *Based on Mind the Gap: Fostering Open and Inclusive Policy Making*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, France. Available at [www.oecd.org/olis/2008doc.nsf/LinkTo/NT00000CC6/\\$FILE/JT03241960.PDF](http://www.oecd.org/olis/2008doc.nsf/LinkTo/NT00000CC6/$FILE/JT03241960.PDF).

⁴ Active Citizenship Centre (2004). *The Benefits of Community Engagement: A Review of the Evidence*. UK Home Office, London. Available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/151525.pdf>.

Some government agencies, particularly local authorities, have statutory requirements to consult. However, engagement means more than just consultation – it can include information provision, partnerships, and support for community decision-making.

The Treaty of Waitangi places an additional responsibility on government to facilitate Māori participation in policy development and service delivery. Many government decisions affect Māori, sometimes in unpredicted or unintended ways. Engagement with Māori is, therefore, an area of specific importance.

“To thrive independently is the objective of most Māori organisations although the road for organisations to achieve tino rangatiratanga will be undertaken through their relationships and alliances with others.”

W.Knox⁵

1.4 Levels of engagement

Before embarking on a process of engagement it is important to consider the reason for seeking external participation, and the level of involvement that is desired - is the decision-making power ultimately with the government, the community, or is it shared?

Figure 2 illustrates different levels of community participation in decision-making. On the left side of the diagram, information provision can be a one-sided activity, with limited public involvement. At other times, government consults on the communities’ views, but retains the decision-making power. There are other instances still, when government agencies enter into collaborative processes with communities,⁶ and at the most devolved end of the spectrum, government takes a backseat role and supports community-based decision-making.

Figure 2: A Spectrum of Public Participation



Source: www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz

⁵ Knox, W. (2004). *Waitakere City Māori Community Research Report*, Waitakere City Council & Local Partnerships & Governance Group, Auckland. Quoted in McKenzie et al (2007) *Co-Production in A Māori Context* Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, 33 (Mar 2007). Available at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/spj33/33-co-production-in-a-maori-context-p32-46.html>

⁶ There is a range of terms that describe these more collaborative and empowering approaches, including *co-production* and *collaborative governance*.

The future challenge for government is to know when and how to work in the space of collaboration, partnering and support for community decision-making, to achieve joint decisions and community empowerment.

1.5 How to engage

The engagement tools used depend on the level of engagement. A common approach is to issue a consultation document. More innovative approaches include a range of dialogue and deliberation processes, such as citizens juries, national issues forums, sustained dialogue, appreciative inquiries, open space technology, and many more. It is important to choose the method that is most appropriate to the circumstances.⁷

Even running relatively simple public meetings requires particular skills, as do the emergent online approaches that offer new and exciting ways of involving citizens.

Some government agencies establish regular dialogue forums with representatives of key stakeholder groups. In situations where close ongoing engagement is occurring, some government agencies enter into written agreements with particular groups – such as memorandum of understanding and partnering arrangements.

Indigenous engagement models are evident in the *kawa* and *tikanga* followed on marae. Engagement with Māori requires appropriate understanding of, and respect for, appropriate cultural processes. Engagement with other population groups also requires consideration of the needs and values of those groups.

⁷ More information on engagement methods is available at www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz.

2 Issues in government engagement practices

The **core issue** being addressed by this project is that:

Central government agencies are not yet sufficiently committed to, and skilled at, collaborating with citizens and community organisations in order to jointly tackle societal problems.

This is not to deny that there are a number of successful engagement initiatives undertaken by government agencies. Rather, it suggests that, overall, further improvements need to be made. The problem partly relates to the complexity of relationships and the difficulty in “getting it right”. The issue manifests itself in tensions around:

- the perceived culture of government and level of organisational commitment to ensuring effective engagement
- pressures and constraints that impact on public servants when trying to undertake effective engagement practices
- knowledge gaps around different types of engagement processes and around what constitutes good practice
- limited training and other upskilling opportunities
- capacity and capability issues for community participants
- a lack of monitoring and evaluation around engagement processes.

These factors lead to frustrations for both communities and government agencies, reduced trust in government, and potentially less effective policy decisions. It points to a need to create environments that encourage good engagement, and to strengthen initiatives to build staff capability.

2.1 The culture of government

In recent years, various forums have raised issues about relationships between government and community and voluntary organisations. In particular, a recurring theme is that a change is needed in the culture and practices of government when relating to civil society. Some comments from community representatives are that:

- government agencies dictate the process too much, instead of working collaboratively
- greater respect needs to be shown for the expertise within communities
- public servants seem to fear that collaboration will mean a loss of control
- frequent staff turnover and agency restructuring impact on the ability of government agencies to maintain ongoing relationships
- excessive focus on community organisations’ service delivery functions and compliance requirements can mean that the value of community organisation advocacy and policy roles are overlooked or inhibited
- government is averse to trying new engagement approaches in case they draw critical media or political attention.

2.2 Organisational commitment

Community and voluntary organisations perceive an insufficient degree of organisational commitment within government agencies to implementing good practice in community engagement. While examples can be found of government agencies that have embedded a commitment to effective engagement in their corporate culture (see Section 3), and have followed this through with specific actions to build capability, it is not clear that this commitment is widespread. Issues to be addressed include:

- the absence, in many strategic planning documents, of the important role of strong relationships and engagement, and the link to achievement of outcomes
- internal behaviour within government agencies that does not always model respectful approaches to relationships
- engagement processes that are generally not monitored or evaluated
- policy development timeframes and budgets that do not always build in sufficient time and resources for adequate community participation
- recruitment and performance management systems that do not necessarily seek and reward engagement skills.

2.3 Tensions for government agencies

Tensions can arise for public servants in balancing good engagement practices with time and financial pressures. There can be concern about potential delays in decision-making if an engagement process is entered into, especially if there are difficulties in incorporating and reconciling diverse views. There may be concerns about how to reconcile differing expectations of political masters and community participants.

Concerns can arise about the financial and human resource costs of engagement strategies. In addition to practical costs such as staff salaries, advertising, venues, catering, travel, printing, and external facilitators, there may be costs around upskilling staff and reimbursing community participants.

However, the benefits listed in Section 1 suggest that it is important to persevere with engagement and make an effort to improve practices and share learnings with others.

“Given the problems arising from poorly designed and implemented policies, governments find strengthening their relations with citizens to be worth the investment. They also learn that not engaging them can create much higher costs, through policy failure in the short term as well as loss of trust, legitimacy and policy effectiveness in the long term.”

OECD⁸

⁸ Gramberge, M. (2001). *Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making*. OECD, France. Available at <http://213.253.134.43/oece/pdfs/browseit/4201141E.PDF>.

2.4 Engagement processes

Consultations are frequently an area of difficulty. Participants often feel that they have been given too little time to respond to documents produced by government agencies, and that insufficient coordination across government results in overlapping requests for community input. This leads to “consultation fatigue”. Participants may also feel that they have not been involved early enough in the policy development process (that is, starting at the problem definition stage). Furthermore, participants do not always get clear feedback on how their input has been used, so the consultation may not appear genuine. It can help if the limitations of any process are made clear from the outset.

In general, public servants lack knowledge of a range of dialogue and deliberation processes. New deliberative approaches offer participants the opportunity to gain insight into the issues and trade-offs involved, and provide opportunities to learn more about others’ views, potentially leading to greater social cohesion. Officials need to have an understanding of the techniques used in order to judge their appropriateness for any given issue. Government agencies are often reliant on external facilitators who can usefully offer perceived neutrality, but at a cost.

Increasingly government agencies seek to develop collaborative relationships and “partnerships”. There are useful examples emerging of genuine partnerships (see Section 3), but much is still to be learnt. Partnerships require government officials to relinquish a degree of control, and to make joint decisions with external parties. Partnering demands trust, commitment, respect, honesty and reciprocity. The term raises expectations of an equality of status (if not resources) that can be difficult to achieve in practice where one party is the State.

Collaborative governance structures, such as joint community-government committees, bring their own challenges, for instance around determining the appropriate representatives to speak with authority and mandate on behalf of their communities. Some community representatives also find themselves in demand for multiple committees, at times with overlapping agendas. In addition, issues can arise in ensuring all participants are well informed when dealing with complex or technical matters.

There is also increasing interest in community-based decision-making. Locally initiated projects give citizens a greater sense of influence and control in a world where highly complex social and environmental issues might otherwise seem overwhelming. The ways in which government agencies can interface with, and support, bottom-up processes may need increasing consideration.

2.5 Engagement skills

Government agencies need staff skilled in building active relationships and employing appropriate techniques across the inform-consult-partner-empower participation spectrum (see Figure 2: *A Spectrum of Public Participation*). However, there are a number of challenges facing agencies.

For one thing, not everyone is good at engaging. Support is particularly needed by staff with limited experience in working with communities in order for them to build external networks, develop confidence, and deal with the “messiness” of engagement.

Staff may have understandable concerns about facing up to potential criticism in a public venue. They may feel particularly unsure about interfacing with cultural groups different to their own. Engaging with Māori communities by non-Māori requires cultural sensitivity and at least a basic knowledge of cultural protocols. Engaging with specific population groups

(such as Pacific peoples, older people, youth, and people with disabilities) requires some familiarity with their particular needs and circumstances (for instance, the need for interpreters for non-English speakers).

Although not all staff have to be engagement experts, agencies need to have greater numbers of staff who are skilled in using the newer and more sophisticated engagement tools, including online and deliberative approaches.

Training is one way to build skills. However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) observes that few countries give consideration to the cost of training of public servants and citizens, although “training is paramount to good citizen engagement processes”.⁹ While this project has not undertaken a full survey of available support to build skill levels, the situation appears to be that:

- there are no New Zealand qualifications designed around community engagement, and very few with similar learning outcomes
- there are few opportunities for training in public engagement (see Figure 3 overleaf)
- while personal experience of working with communities builds skills, few government agencies have policies on employee volunteering, and exchanges or secondments with community and voluntary organisations are not common¹⁰
- engagement with stakeholders does not appear to be a critical part of most formal agency induction processes.

2.6 Community capacity and capability

While this report focuses primarily on central government capability in community engagement, it is important to acknowledge the implications for community organisations and citizens of involvement in government policy development processes.

Costs for community participants include the time given up from other activities and transport costs. Although many government agencies run regular sector forums, many do not meet travel costs or sitting fees.

Similarly to government staff, members of community organisations may have skill gaps that inhibit effective engagement. They may also have limited access to training in policy development processes.

2.7 Evidence and monitoring

A British report on the costs of participation notes that there is a “serious lack of data on the practical costs and benefits of participation” and suggests that if a robust evidence base is to be built, greater investment is needed in assessing participation processes.¹¹ This would appear to be true in New Zealand also.

There is a lack of concrete information on the extent to which government agencies are committed to, and achieving (or not), good practice in engagement. There is no benchmark against which to measure changes in community and government engagement. Moreover,

⁹ Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate (2007) *Initial Findings of OECD Questionnaire on ‘Open and Inclusive Policy Making*, OECD, France. Available at [http://www.oilis.oecd.org/oilis/2007doc.nsf/ENGDATCORPLOOK/NT000042F6/\\$FILE/JT03233066.PDF](http://www.oilis.oecd.org/oilis/2007doc.nsf/ENGDATCORPLOOK/NT000042F6/$FILE/JT03233066.PDF).

¹⁰ Community Internship programme run by the Department of Internal Affairs is a useful programme although with limited uptake.

¹¹ Involve Foundation (2006) *The True Costs of Participation*. Author, London. Available at www.involve.org.uk/mt/archives/blog_13/True%20Costs-Summary.pdf

government agencies do not formally report on their implementation of the *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship*.

Figure 3: The limited training available

- There are no courses specific to public sector engagement with communities. Available short courses tend to be on specific aspects of engagement such as negotiation, facilitation, consultation, and presentation skills. Also, there are various courses on working with Māori.
- The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) offers a useful certificate in public participation. It is delivered in New Zealand by one local trainer/facilitator, and by a visiting Australian consultant. The course is not widely known.
- New Zealand universities offer little in relation to dialogue, deliberation and public engagement. Victoria University of Wellington, where there is a substantial base of public servants, only offers a 300 level paper exploring social policy in relationship to collaborative governance and civil society, and the School of Government offers a one day course on Good Practice Consultation with Stakeholders.
- Culturally specific training courses are provided by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and Office for Ethnic Affairs.
- Few formal induction programmes include sessions on relationships/engagement. An exception is a Ministry of Economic Development module on Effective Stakeholder Engagement.
- Few government agencies tailor specific training in community engagement. Exceptions are:
 - Ministry of Social Development leadership training workshops on Building Partnerships
 - Department of Conservation Seed to Success relationship training, plus training in relationships with Māori
 - Ministry of Transport stakeholder engagement training.

3 Current engagement-related projects and practices

Although government engagement practices need improvement, there are examples of good practice to learn from. This section covers:

- a scan of current activities
- detail on some key projects and initiatives
- case studies of organisational practices in three government agencies
- case studies of effective engagement processes.

3.1 Scan of current activity

The OCVS has compiled a list of New Zealand activities and resources related to building effective community engagement by government agencies (see www.ocvs.govt.nz). Although not an exhaustive list, it does indicate a variety of activity related to:

- staff development (recruitment, induction, training, seminars, employee volunteering, secondments, engagement champions)
- awards
- guidelines, toolkits, and web-resources
- legislative requirements
- planning and accountability (statements of intent, local government planning)
- policy and research
- activities across the inform-consult-partner-empower spectrum (Figure 2, p9)
- protocols and agreements.

The reference group observes that useful written and web-based resources include:

- the OCVS site www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz
- the Department of Internal Affairs/ Waitakere City Council guidance on partnering agreements *Putting Pen to Paper*¹²
- State Services Commission guidelines for online participation¹³
- resources related to particular population groups or sub-sectors, for instance:
 - Local Government New Zealand resources on engagement with Māori¹⁴
 - Ministry of Justice and Te Puni Kōkiri's *Crown-Māori Relationship Instruments: Guidelines and Advice for Government and State Sector Agencies*¹⁵
 - Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs' *Pacific Consultation Guidelines*¹⁶
 - Office for Disability Issues' *Disability Perspective Toolkit*¹⁷
 - ChangeMakers Refugee Forum *Standards for Engagement: Guidelines for Central and Local Government and NGOs Working with Refugee Background Communities*¹⁸

¹² Available at <http://www.communityoutcomes.govt.nz/web/coutcomes.nsf/unid/CFIN-7FG7HT?openDocument>

¹³ www.ssc.govt.nz.

¹⁴ Available at <http://www.lgnz.co.nz/projects/SocialandCommunityIssues/CouncilMaoriEngagement/>.

¹⁵ Available at <http://www.justice.govt.nz/pubs/reports/2006/cmri/index.html>

¹⁶ Available <http://www.mpia.govt.nz/resources/pdfs/resources-pacificconsultationguidelines.pdf>

¹⁷ Available at <http://www.odi.govt.nz/disability-perspective/index.html>.

- o Department of Conservation's *Seed to Success: Guidelines for Community Conservation Partnerships*.¹⁹

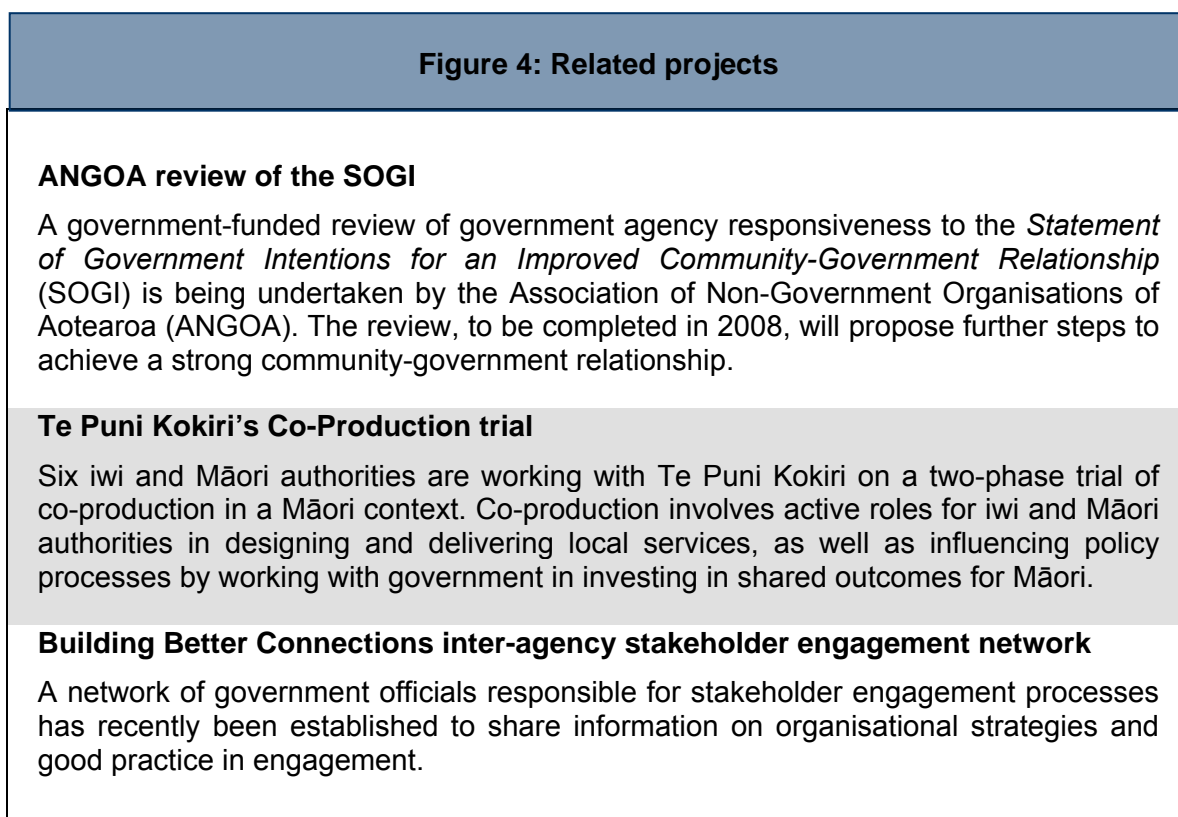
However, there is no generic hard-copy guidance on good practice in planning, implementing and evaluating community engagement.

Also, there are some initiatives to share good practice examples, particularly through the OCVS *Good Practice in Action* seminar series, and there is some limited training (see Figure 3). However, seminars, forums and training on good practice in engagement are not widely available.

One positive development is the increasing number of government agencies that are instigating regular forums with community and voluntary organisations (for instance, the Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency (NZAID), and Department of Conservation) and appointing stakeholder engagement staff to build and implement engagement strategies.

3.2 Strategies and projects

Below, in Figure 4, are examples of strategic projects that have particularly strong relevance to the *Building Better Government Engagement* project. In consulting on this document, the reference group is aware of the importance of building synergies with these projects to address the issues in this discussion document.



¹⁸ Available from info@crf.org.nz.

¹⁹ Available from <http://www.conservation.govt.nz/getting-involved/in-your-community/community-conservation-guidelines/community-conservation-partnerships/>.

The Online Participation project

The State Services Commission-led Online Participation project has developed guidance and resources on online participation and hosts regular face-to-face presentations in order to improve service and policy design and delivery. A 300 member community-of-practice, with national and international participants, is sharing ideas and information on diverse online engagement processes (<http://participation.e.govt.nz>).

Better Connected Services for Kiwis

Responding to an environment of increasingly complex issues and higher expectations about public services, the Institute of Policy Studies at Victoria University has prepared a discussion document which identifies success factors for more joined-up government, *Better Connected Services for Kiwis*. It includes acknowledgement of “an increased demand for participation” and the need to actively involve clients in “co-production”.²⁰

Kiwis Count 2007

This was the first all-of-government national survey to ask New Zealanders about their perceptions and experiences of public services as a whole. The State Services Commission will repeat the survey in 2009 with the potential for questions to be added about the effectiveness of government consultation processes.

DIA central-local government interface

The Department of Internal Affairs’ (DIA) interface facilitation team provides tools and information to support good practice in central government engagement with local government to determine and achieve community outcomes. (www.communityoutcomes.govt.nz).

3.3 Case studies of organisational practices within government

Examples of government agencies embedding good practice in engagement into their organisational practices can be found on the Good Practice Participate website (see links on www.ocvs.govt.nz):

- **NZAID** has a commitment to close collaboration with international development non-government organisations (NGOs) which is reflected in its strategic framework and formalised arrangements for engagement.
- The **Department of Conservation** commits to community engagement in its key strategic and business planning document, and has developed comprehensive training on community engagement, as part of broader guidelines for working with the community.
- **The Ministry of Economic Development** includes “strengthening relationships” as one of its key goals in its Organisational Development Strategy 2007-2012, and has various initiatives to raise staff awareness and skills.
- The **Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria, Australia**, has led government work to promote good practice in engagement in that State.

²⁰ Institute of Policy Studies (2008). *Better Connected Services for Kiwis*. Victoria University of Wellington. Available at <http://ips.ac.nz/events/completed-activities/joiningup/Connected%20Services%20ver%2010.pdf>

3.4 Case studies of effective engagement processes

There are also examples of good government engagement processes at different stages of the inform-consult-partner-empower spectrum (Figure 2). For a range of case studies, including the following recent additions, go to the link at www.ocvs.govt.nz.

Inform

- **Information seminars for marae governors** – seminars provided by a central-local government team to inform marae trustees and governors about the legal and compliance obligations affecting marae.

Consult

- **Parents Panel Discussion Group Project** – discussion groups set up by the Families Commission to gain an understanding of the perspectives of people raising children in diverse situations.
- **The Couch** – an online feedback panel informing the Families' Commission's advocacy work on behalf of families, and contributing to policy and research initiatives.
- **Tax incentives for giving and volunteering reference group** – a community reference group to guide Inland Revenue policy proposals, and the design and roll-out of a consultation strategy.

Collaborate/Partner

- **Pre-Birth Testing engagement** – a deliberative engagement process by the Bioethics Council which involved collaboration with the public to frame issues, and develop solutions, in relation to pre-birth testing.
- **The Workplace Wellbeing Project** – a collaboration by two social service umbrella organisations, a union, a philanthropic trust, and the Department of Labour to run workshops in order to gain input into sector specific resources, and to develop discussion about employment issues in the sector.
- **SKIP and the Warehouse Dads Project** – the Ministry of Social Development and the Warehouse working together to promote positive parenting messages.

Empower

- **Ora'anga Kopapa Matutu** – a Cook Island Maori community-led development health initiative in Tamaki, Auckland.

4 What we would like to see

Overseas research²¹ shows that successful engagement has two key components.

- Public agencies are willing, able, structured and managed, so as to engage citizens in as open and constructive a way as possible.
- Citizens are willing, able and supported to get involved.

This section highlights areas where government action can be taken to build good practice in engagement.

4.1 Government commitment

This report promotes the value of participatory democracy on the basis that effective government engagement with civil society will result in improved outcomes for society. The Government can support this through the messages it gives and mechanisms it sets in place.

Sending clear signals

It is important for the Government to continue providing signals about the importance of effective community engagement, for instance through statements in key speeches, and ongoing resourcing for good practice initiatives.

The reference group suggests that one way to reinforce Government's commitment would be to establish a joint Ministers' group to discuss ways to enhance community engagement and continue progress on the commitments in the *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship*.

Statements of Intent

The 2002, *He Waka Kotuia* report (see Appendix A) suggested that Ministers direct government agencies to include a commitment to good practice in participatory processes in Statements of Intent (SOIs). An SOI lays out a department's intentions, measures and standards, which are reported to the Parliament in departmental annual reports. The 2007 guidance document for the development of an SOI indicates that information should be included about:

"how the department intends to work with other organisations in order to help achieve the desired impacts, outcomes and/or objectives, including plans or activities to prioritise, manage or coordinate these shared interests".²²

The guidance document notes that "organisations" includes "key community, voluntary and tangata whenua organisations in a department's sphere of activity". The question remains of the extent to which this is occurring.

²¹ Rogers, B & E Robinson (2004). *The Benefits of Community Engagement: A Review of the Evidence*. UK Home Office, London. Available at www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/151525.pdf.

²² The Treasury & State Services Commission (2007). *Guidance and Requirements for Departments: Preparing the Statement of Intent*. Authors, Wellington. Available at <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/guidance/accountability/soi>.

Chief Executives' Letters of Expectations

He Waka Kotuia recommended that the Government shows its commitment to effective participatory processes by requiring chief executive performance agreements to include actions in response to the *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship*. Although chief executives' performance agreements no longer exist, most chief executives have Letters of Expectations from the central agencies (the State Services Commission, the Treasury, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet). While these letters are generally focused on the areas of greatest risk to a government agency, there could be inclusion of central agencies' interest in the extent to which the department has participatory processes in place.

Cabinet Office guidance

He Waka Kotuia recommended that Cabinet Office guidance to government agencies be amended to emphasise the need for active relationships and consultation with community organisations and iwi/Māori.

The *Cabinet Manual* refers to consultation with coalition partners and government departments when developing policy for consideration by Ministers. For fuller guidance on consultation, agencies are referred to the *CabGuide* which includes a section on "consultation with interest groups". In addition to acknowledging the need to follow any statutory requirements for consultation, this section states:

"It may be appropriate to consult outside interest groups when developing policy. This should be discussed with the Minister's office beforehand. In some circumstances, this consultation may be more appropriate after the policy has been considered by Cabinet."

There is also a requirement in the *CabGuide*'s standard format for Cabinet papers that "if outside interest groups have been consulted, provide details. If such consultation is intended after decisions are made, comment on that".

The reference group believes that these guidance tools could provide greater encouragement to agencies to involve community voices in policy development.

Mechanisms for monitoring progress

The ANGOA review of government responsiveness (see Section 3) will shed some light on government progress in responding to the *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship*. However, ongoing mechanisms to measure progress do not yet exist. The steering group recommends that the OCVS, State Services Commission, and Office of the Auditor-General work together to advise Ministers of ongoing mechanisms for monitoring progress by government agencies. This work should involve community stakeholders in determining the appropriate mechanisms.

Joined-up government

To reduce consultation fatigue for communities, there needs to be wider and more imaginative use of joint initiatives, such as roadshows where multiple agencies can consult on a range of issues. It would also be valuable to enhance central government agency involvement with local government's community-outcomes processes as a means of incorporating local community priorities into long-term planning.

The Institute of Policy Studies in *Better Connected Services for Kiwis*²³ describes learnings for government agencies in working more collaboratively with each other, including the value of:

- a clear focus on achieving collective outcomes, without rigidity about the means
- “a-ha” realisations that old ways will not work
- “public entrepreneurs” who invent new approaches
- “guardian angels” who support new thinking
- “fellow-travellers” focussed on common goals
- “co-production” with clients in creating solutions
- a “learning by doing” culture, including risk management and tolerance of failure.

Government agencies need to consider how to apply these learnings in order to achieve a more joined-up approach to engaging with communities.

“Working collaboratively is hard and it takes energy and commitment. It involves working on the edge and taking managed risks.”

Institute of Policy Studies (2008)²⁴

4.2 Organisational commitment

Given that most government agencies engage with communities, commitment to improving relationships and effective engagement needs to be embedded in the highest level of management, and identified at relevant levels in planning and accountability documents.

Standards for effective engagement

The reference group has developed standards for effective engagement to guide government agencies in developing and monitoring their engagement practices. These can be found at www.ocvs.govt.nz. The standards are outlined under five headings.

1. The agency defines the principles by which it engages (the reference group recommends the ten OECD Guiding Principles for Engaging Citizens).²⁵
2. The agency is clear why it is engaging.
3. The agency builds and maintains active relationships.
4. The agency chooses the appropriate way to engage (taking into account the inform-consult-partner-empower spectrum, see Figure 2).
5. The agency tests the quality of the engagement.

²³ Institute of Policy Studies (2008). *Better Connected Services for Kiwis*. Victoria University of Wellington. Available at <http://ips.ac.nz/events/completed-activities/joiningup/Connected%20Services%20ver%2010.pdf>.

²⁴ See previous footnote, at p9.

²⁵ Gramberge, M. (2001). *Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making*. OECD, France. Available at <http://213.253.134.43/oecd/pdfs/browseit/4201141E.PDF>.

Organisational development

Government agencies need to consider how their organisations can continually improve community engagement practice. The reference group suggests that where agencies exhibit the organisational characteristics outlined in Figure 5, there is likely to be positive progress towards good practice in community engagement.

Figure 5: Characteristics of effective organisations

- The agency believes that better community and government engagement contributes to achieving government outcomes.
- Commitment to effective engagement is identified as an organisational goal in the Statement of Intent, and reflected in strategies and plans.
- Key individuals in the agency initiate, champion and protect the commitment to effective engagement.
- The agency is committed to fostering long term relationships with external stakeholders.
- The agency is clear about how it wants its staff to communicate and behave.
- The engagement practices expected with external organisations are modelled in internal relationships and behaviour.
- There is a focus on empowering staff to take personal responsibility and to behave in a way that contributes to the agency's desired outcomes.

From commitment to action

Where the government agency has made a commitment to effective engagement this will be reflected in a range of actions, such as those in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Putting commitments into action

Organisations need to ensure that:

- community organisations are supported to engage through adequate resourcing and time
- succession planning helps maintain ongoing community relationships when staff change
- some staff are appointed with specific responsibility and accountability for engagement with the community, at a strategic and operational level
- there are a range of formal structures to engage with communities, e.g. advisory committees, forums
- informal engagement underpins formal processes, e.g. building active, informal relationships
- the agency provides an environment that enables internal and external problems to be heard in a constructive and responsive manner
- requirements around building relationships and effective engagement are appropriately acknowledged in individual performance agreements and reviews.
- staff are provided with training, mentoring, and resources to build their knowledge and experience of community engagement.

Employee characteristics

Appointing the 'right staff' is important. Figure 7 proposes characteristics of employees who engage effectively and build active relationships with the community. Greater detail for three job levels (entry-level, senior management level, engagement specialist) can be found at www.ocvs.govt.nz.

Figure 7: Characteristics of staff who engage effectively

Personal attributes

- Can “walk in another’s shoes” and act from a strong values base with respect, optimism, persistence and flexibility to build trust and active relationships.
- Has a high level of emotional intelligence.

Communication

- Creates respectful and constructive dialogue by communicating confidently and clearly with different audiences; can influence without being directive.

Maturity

- Has the self confidence and awareness to balance public sector boundaries and community needs and values, whilst maintaining confidentiality, integrity and a strategic perspective on the context and issues.

Maori responsiveness

- Understands the relevance of the Treaty of Waitangi, basic *tikanga* and *kaupapa Māori*, appropriate use of *Te Reo* and knows where to look for, and when to seek guidance on, engaging with Māori.

Awareness of different cultures and communities of interest

- Is aware of the need to consider diverse cultural needs and different community perspectives.
- Knows where to look for, and when to seek guidance on engaging with other cultures and communities of interest.

Additional role-specific characteristics

Specific characteristics according to the level of the role and its technical requirements could include the following.

- Project management (e.g. be able to manage delivery of a community engagement project to meet different expectations and changing circumstances).
- Leadership (e.g. be able to motivate, inspire and mentor others).
- Community development skills (e.g. be able to develop and implement an appropriate strategy for engagement).
- Technical skills (e.g. a policy analyst may need to understand, interpret and include engagement feedback in policy development).

4.3 Building government capability

Training and induction

To bolster skills and knowledge, there needs to be more widespread inclusion of community engagement information within induction programmes, including such areas as:

- the value and purpose of community and citizen engagement
- how to identify and build relationships with their key stakeholders
- the inform-consult-partner-empower spectrum (Figure 2)
- sources of internal and external expertise to go to for advice.

Further, there needs to be access to, and encouragement of, training in engagement skills such as:

- mapping relationships and developing relationship plans
- planning community engagement processes
- different methods of dialogue and deliberation
- online engagement tools
- evaluating community engagement processes
- active listening and rapport building
- conflict resolution
- facilitation and presentation skills.

However, training alone will not improve engagement skills, and mandatory training would be counter-productive. It needs to be part of a broader organisational development strategy.

The Government of Queensland through its Department of Communities has set up a managing **community engagement learning programme** for public servants, which describes how to plan, implement and evaluate community engagement, and manage risks. It also includes a section on community engagement skills and a useful skills profile for people engaging with the community.²⁶

Written and web resources

Internationally, a range of engagement guides and resources exist, for instance:

- the OECD has published handbooks on involving and evaluating public participation in policy-making, including ten guiding principles²⁷

²⁶ Department of Communities (2004) *Community engagement skills profile*. The State of Queensland, Australia. Available at <http://www.onlinelearning.qld.gov.au/materials/ce/online/ce/info/learning/guide/t8s1.htm>

²⁷ Gramberge, M. (2001). *Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making*. OECD, France. Available at <http://213.253.134.43/oecd/pdfs/browseit/4201141E.PDF>.

- the United Kingdom Government has a recently revised *Code of Practice on Consultation*,²⁸ which public agencies are invited to sign up to
- the Government of Western Australia has guides on planning and implementing consultations.²⁹ The Victorian Government has a series of workbooks on understanding, planning and undertaking engagement.³⁰ The Queensland Government has guides on methods and evaluation.³¹

Consideration should be given in New Zealand to the development of hard copy guidelines or codes of practice. The website www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz also needs to be more widely known and continually updated.

Other support for staff

There are many ways for organisations to build internal capability, such as through appointing stakeholder engagement advisers, and holding internal seminars to share good practice examples and learnings.

Staff secondments, employee volunteering, and support for private volunteering activities (such as flexibility around working hours) can develop staff understanding of community organisations, whilst also supporting communities.

The Department of Internal Affairs' has new a professional development initiative, where four staff will work for 3 months in 2009 in a voluntary agency to gain greater understanding of the community and voluntary sector.

Access to external expertise and networks is valuable. There is more that could be done to provide such external support, for example:

- the State Services Commission on-line engagement initiative, the Building Better Connections network, and the OCVS could join forces to develop a broad-based community of practice for community engagement
- OCVS Good Practice in Action seminars could be extended to centres outside Wellington
- additional central support for good engagement could be developed, such as a Helpline or mentoring service.
- scholarships could be initiated to support training in engagement methods.

4.4 Building community capacity

The capability and capacity of community organisations to have input into government policy and service development may require further, separate consideration. There may be opportunities for government agencies to support skill development in community agencies by including community stakeholders in internal policy and engagement training programmes.

²⁸ Available at www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf.

²⁹ Available at www.citizenscape.wa.gov.au.

³⁰ Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005). *Book 1 An Introduction to Engagement*, Victorian Government, Australia. Available at www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/wcmn203.nsf/Home+Page/8A461F99E54B17EBCA2570340016F3A9?open.

³¹ Available at www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au/index.html.

There is a role for government agencies to work alongside community-led projects. There appears to be a revitalised and growing interest in local community building. While this involves increasing local capacity for self-sufficiency, there are ways in which government can interface with such initiatives in an empowering way. Central government could develop an up-to-date analysis of the community development support available from government agencies and case studies of good practice in supporting community-led development.

5 Options for Discussion

The Building Better Government Engagement reference group is seeking your views by **31 March 2009** on ways to enhance government engagement with citizens and communities (see page 5). Your thoughts are sought on:

- whether the actions outlined below would be useful
- any missing actions
- the actions you consider to be the top priorities.

Note: The options below, which are offered for discussion, have not been endorsed by any agencies at this stage. Following the consultation process, any commitments to action will need to be agreed by the government agencies concerned and their respective Ministers.

5.1 Government commitment

Leadership from the centre of government is important. The reference group recommends the following.

Ministers:

- establish a joint Ministers' group to consider ways for government agencies to better implement commitments contained in the *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship*
- invest in tools, mechanisms and initiatives that build whole-of-government guidance on effective engagement.

The Central Agencies (State Services Commission, Treasury, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet) with support from the OCVS:

- amend the Cabinet Manual and CabGuide to place stronger value on consultation with community and voluntary organisations and iwi/Māori
- consider ways to recognise effective engagement by public servants such as awards
- offer scholarships to public servants wishing to specialise in participatory techniques
- work with representatives of government agencies and the community to develop mechanisms to regularly assess the effectiveness of government engagement
- include a focus on community and citizen engagement in government agency accountability documents.

5.2 Organisational commitments – from philosophy to practice and evaluation

Government agencies will need to be supported in making and implementing commitments. The reference group recommends that:

State Services Commission and the OCVS (to the extent possible within available resources):

- work with the government Human Resource Managers network to discuss the possible characteristics of public servants who engage effectively with the community, and the implications for recruitment, training, and performance management
- work with the *Building Better Connections* government agency network to develop a community of practice for government staff interested in advancing good practice in engagement
- develop an integrated training approach to support more effective community engagement (which includes the existing training designed by Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and Office for Ethnic Affairs), and encourage joint community-government policy and engagement training
- examine options for further encouraging secondments, short-term job swaps, and employee volunteering
- encourage government agencies to collaborate when planning and undertaking engagement processes within communities.

The OCVS (to the extent possible within available resources):

- enhance the OCVS Good Practice Participate website by adding interactive functions, additional links to overseas initiatives, and examples of emerging organisational development practices (for example, staff induction modules on engagement, stakeholder mapping exercises, approaches to evaluation)
- develop OCVS Good Practice in Action seminars on the participation spectrum, methods of dialogue and deliberation, approaches to evaluation, and examples of engagement principles being incorporated into organisational development and human resource practices
- extend OCVS Good Practice in Action seminars beyond Wellington to regional centres
- initiate a triennial Good Practice Participation Conference
- develop hard-copy guidelines for engagement, and engagement evaluation, to apply across portfolios, for use in developing policy
- investigate options for a Helpline or mentoring service to support government agencies with engagement processes.

Department of Internal Affairs and/or other relevant agencies:

- continue to promote inclusion of local community priorities into central government's long-term planning
- analyse, and provide case studies of, the government role in supporting successful bottom-up projects that have been initiated, led and owned by communities.

All government agencies:

- in strategic planning documents include commitments to good practice in participatory processes
- nominate champions to initiate, promote and protect the commitment to engage within their agencies
- offer clear guidance to staff on how to behave and operate when engaging with communities
- offer professional development support and induction in stakeholder engagement.

Appendix: Project Origins, the OCVS, the BBGE Reference Group, Methodology

The origins

In 2001, the *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship* was signed by the Prime Minister and Minister Responsible for the Community and Voluntary Sector. A future was foreseen whereby:

“the state performs its role as a facilitator of a strong civil society based on respectful relationships between government and community, voluntary and iwi/Māori organisations”.

In 2002, the Community-Government Relationship Steering Group report *He Waka Kotuia - Joining Together on a Shared Journey* included proposals aimed at changing the culture and practices of government at all levels. The proposals on improving “participatory processes” are of particular relevance to the *Building Better Government Engagement* project. An assessment of progress with these recommendations can be found at www.ocvs.govt.nz.

Since 2002, a range of activities within government has sought to strengthen relationships. Yet, in June 2007, community and voluntary sector representatives, government officials and 13 Ministers, again raised issues about government culture, relationships and participatory processes at a national forum. In response, the *Building Better Government Engagement* project was initiated.

The OCVS

The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (the OCVS) was established in 2003 to help government to move towards a more respectful community-government relationship. In response to *He Waka Kotuia*, the *Good Practice Participate* website³² and the OCVS *Good Practice in Action* seminar series³³ were launched to provide information and advice to encourage effective community-government engagement by public servants. The OCVS also provides policy advice on issues impacting on community organisations, and builds information on, and resources for, the community sector. The OCVS, located in Wellington, is administered by the Ministry of Social Development. It has a Director and eight staff.

The reference group

The *Building Better Government Engagement* reference group was established by the OCVS in March 2008. The role of the group is to report to the OCVS on priorities for government action to strengthen engagement with citizens and community organisations, taking into account issues identified through previous community-government dialogue processes and current government initiatives related to this area.

The members were drawn from government and non-government backgrounds, selected on the basis of their personal skills and knowledge in terms of relationship building, communications, dialogue and deliberation, government and political systems, civil society, and human resources and training.

³² Available at www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz.

³³ Information available at <http://www.ocvs.govt.nz/work-programme/building-good-practice/good-practice-in-action/index.html>.

The members are:

- Tina Reid - NZ Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations
- Tony Mayow - Community Waitakere
- Mary-Jane Rivers - Community-Led Development Trust
- Charlie Moore - Families Commission
- Roger Tweedy - Wellington City Council
- Sue Driver - ChangeMakers Refugee Forum
- Anne Shaw - Department of Internal Affairs
- Hata Wilson - Te Puni Kokiri
- Nikki Wright (to July 2008) - Department of Conservation
- Rosemary Hannah-Parr (to September 2008) and Laura Sommer (from October 2008) - State Services Commission

The Project Manager is Diana Suggate (OCVS), supported by Kathryn King (Department of Internal Affairs), Kathryn Paton (OCVS), and Judith le Harivel to July 2008 (OCVS contractor).

Methodology

Information was sought on the current level of skills, knowledge and values in the public service about effective engagement, emerging patterns of change, and what could be learnt from them. Information was gathered by:

- a scan of existing guidelines, resources, and training opportunities, and current activities by government agencies to build better government engagement
- interviews with a sample of central government agencies and training providers.

It was not possible in the timeframe of the project to carry out a detailed survey of all key activities relating to community and government engagement. A scan was carried out of activities known by word of mouth and of easily accessible information sources.

A sample of government agencies were interviewed³⁴ which were not necessarily representative, but rather were selected as they had practices and processes in place to support community and government engagement, or were required to consult or have a strategic central government role. Discussions focused on building an understanding of how the organisation facilitated community engagement through its organisational responses and suggestions for what training, knowledge and organisational skills would be most useful for public servants.

³⁴ Government agencies interviewed were: State Services Commission, NZAID, Capital & Coast District Health Board, Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Social Development, Inland Revenue, Department of Conservation. The Leadership Development Centre, Learning State, The Open Polytechnic and Training Line were also interviewed.