

Fair Go Rates system

Engagement technical working group

Notes from meeting 7 (3rd meeting for 2017) 13 July 2017

Organisation	Name	Organisation	Name
Attendees			
Baw Baw Shire Council	Malcolm Lewis	Melbourne City Council	Georgie Meyer
Essential Services Commission	Angelina Garces	Mitchell Shire Council	Rosemary Scott
Essential Services Commission	Lisa Horsburgh	Monash City Council	Ross Goeman
Essential Services Commission	Freya McCormick	Municipal Association of Victoria	John Hennessey
Greater Geelong City Council	Erin McHugh	Victorian Local Governance Association	Bo Li Walter Koch
KJA	Kathy Jones	Wyndham City Council	Binda Gokhale
Apologies			
Development Victoria	Mark Ritch	Latrobe City Council	Edith Heiberg
Essential Services Commission	Andrew Chow	Local Government Victoria	Chris Phoon
Essential Services Commission	Michelle Bryne	Manningham City Council	Juanita Haisman
Hume City Council	Joel Farrell	Strathbogie Shire Council	David Woodhams
Knox City Council	Kim Rawlings	Yarriambiack Shire Council	Ray Campling

Purpose of the working group

In 2016 the Essential Services Commission established a local government engagement technical working group. The group is a forum for sharing ideas and expertise in community engagement with the aim of building capacity across the local government sector. The group is a conduit between the sector and the commission and helps the commission to tailor and refine its guidance on the engagement requirements for applications for a higher rate cap.

Purpose of this meeting

The purpose of this meeting was to hear from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) about the recent public participation audits, to discuss and refine the draft agenda for the Fair Go Rates system engagement forum, and to discuss the proposed sector survey.

Welcome and VAGO presentation

The group heard from VAGO about their recent audits *Public participation in government decision-making* and *Public participation and community engagement: Local government sector*.

VAGO shared some of their observations. At the state government level, observations included:

- a lack of engagement frameworks (including no Victorian Public Service-wide framework) and poor monitoring and evaluation
- agencies over promising and under delivering (e.g. on timeframes), creating significant stakeholder dissatisfaction
- that leadership/the authorising environment is crucial for good engagement by agencies.

At the local government level, observations included:

- councils commonly have engagement frameworks, but the quality and application varies
- there is a strong focus on quantitative evaluation of engagement (e.g. number of participants/responses), with little qualitative analysis
- more support for the sector is required (e.g. from Local Government Victoria).

The group discussed how evaluation of engagement is often done informally by councils but not documented. The group noted that there are simple ways to build evaluation processes in up-front. The group flagged this topic for further exploration (e.g. could be incorporated into the commission's reference material and case studies).

The group asked about evaluating the cost of engagement (i.e. value for money/cost effectiveness of engagement). VAGO noted that some examples of good engagement were low cost.

VAGO will be monitoring how the sectors (state and local government) implement the recommendations of the audits.

Recap of last meeting

The group reviewed the notes from the last meeting on 25 May 2017, and agreed to publish them on the commission website.

The group noted some further changes to the terms of reference. The changes were editorial except for the addition of text explaining that a formal review of the engagement technical working group will take place. The working group was established for two years, and at the end of 2017 the role of the group and the terms of reference will be reviewed.

The group agreed to publish the final terms of reference on the commission website as soon as possible.

Discussion of the engagement forum

The group reviewed the draft agenda for the engagement forum and made the following suggestions:

- the forum must be practical and focused on the Fair Go Rates system
- the target audience should include service planners
- the forum need to be explicitly pitched to non-engagement council staff and councillors
- explore how technology can be used (e.g. Slido) to capture thinking and report back
- send out a 'save the date' to councils and allow staff to start registering their interest.

Bo offered to make contact with Bendigo about dates and venues. The will commission also follow up with Bendigo. The group agreed to aim for a mid-October date for the forum, but to avoid clashing with other engagement or local government events.

Discussion of sector survey

The group briefly discussed the potential sector survey (on the commission's guidance material) and suggested:

- that we should ensure it doesn't overlap (in terms of content or time) with the recent Essential Services Commission reputation survey
- that we need to define the audience – e.g. officer level council staff, executive
- to determine the focus and questions first (i.e. what we want to ask) and then determine the methodology (e.g. online survey, phone survey).

The commission agreed to consider and incorporate this feedback and (if we decide to go ahead with the survey) to circulate a draft survey to the group for comment.

Actions

Action	Deadline	Responsibility
1 Publish terms of reference on the commission's website	July	Freya
2 Send items to go on the list of engagement events and resources to the commission (to Freya)	Ongoing	Working group
3 Distribute list of engagement events and resources	ASAP and periodically	Freya
4 Bo to contact Bendigo about the forum and the commission to write separately to the CEO	ASAP	Bo, commission staff
5 Rework agenda for Fair Go Rates system engagement forum	July	Freya
6 Working group to send through suggestions for speakers for the forum	ASAP	Working group
7 Have an out-of-session teleconference on the community engagement forum	August	Interested members of working group
8 Circulate draft questions for sector survey to the working group for review	TBC	Commission staff, working group
9 Invite Local Government Victoria to give an update on the local government act review at next meeting	ASAP	Commission staff

Meeting schedule

Meeting	Date	Key purpose
Meeting 8 (4 th for 2017)	14 September	Review Fair Go Rates system guidance material
Meeting 9 (5 th for 2017)	November (TBC)	Final meeting - wrap up and review