100 ideas to help engage Hard To Reach people
Inclusive engagement is about recognising the unique circumstances of hard to reach groups and that traditional methods of engagement such as public meetings and workshops don’t always work.

It is about thinking beyond the usual methods of engagement and encouraging all members of the community to voice their opinions, ideas and concerns. Inclusive public engagement is about addressing the barriers to participation.
Introduction

There are groups in every community that are more difficult to engage than others. Reaching out to these people presents a number of challenges beyond those we wrestle with every day as community engagement practitioners.

Working with our clients, friends and colleagues we have developed this book which documents 100 of our ideas for engaging with hard to reach groups: the Bereaved, Children, People with a Disability, Older People, Homeless, Indigenous, Newly Arrived, Older Migrants and Young People.

We have chosen these groups not because they are more important than any other but simply because they are where the majority of our experience lies. The book includes tips regarding engagement tools, techniques and content, as well as ideas to raise awareness and attract participants.

In the essence of robust engagement, we would love to hear your feedback. If you have any thoughts, observations and/or other ideas - please get in touch:

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Now, get out there and engage with the WHOLE community....not just the usual suspects.

The Capire Consulting Group Team

A note on using this book

Hard to reach can also be referred to as the hard to hear. Hard to reach are those people who may face barriers to participation. Not all individuals in these groups may be hard to reach.

In identifying these groups, we have not assumed that all the issues are the same for each group or that all the approaches to engagement can be replicated every time.

We understand that everyone is different and that every group is made up of individuals with unique circumstances. Engagement methods need to be adapted accordingly. Likewise, every project, idea or issue is unique and the tools and techniques need to be adapted to suit each project.

NB. This guide follows in the footsteps of the 100 Ideas to Help Engage Your Community Online prepared by our close associates at Bang the Table.
Fact

The 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census estimated that 24.6% of the Australian population were born overseas.
Every community and every project is different, but there are some overarching principles that need to be considered before you design your engagement strategy.

1. Do your research to understand who may be hard to reach.

2. Identify organisations that work with hard to reach groups through a local community directory. Most local government areas should have a community directory identifying organisations and community groups.

3. One size does not fit all. Target your methods according to each group, the geographical location, the issue or topic being discussed and the purpose or desired outcome of the project.

4. Use ambassadors to recruit participants. Ambassadors can be interested community members who have networks within their groups.

5. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities should not be identified as a standalone ‘hard to reach’ group. It is important to be aware of the needs of CALD groups in any engagement exercises. This includes an awareness of language and communication needs as well as cultural differences associated with engagement.

6. Make sure people are aware of the topic they are being engaged about and how they may benefit from participating. Set realistic expectations and make sure you are clear on what is negotiable and what is not.

7. Involve community members in meaningful engagement. There is no point undertaking an engagement exercise for the sake of it.

8. Provide feedback and acknowledge contributions made. Recognise that people’s time is valuable. Their commitment to the process should be respected.

9. Engagement activities require the building of trust and confidence in people and the process. Make sure your approach is warm and friendly and follow up with people if necessary.

10. Before you prepare an engagement strategy, ask representatives of the hard to reach groups how they would like to participate.
NEWLY ARRIVED PEOPLE

1. Provide incentive payments or vouchers for newly arrived people to attend engagement events as some people may find it difficult covering costs such as transport or childcare. Offering food and public transport tickets are also good ways to recognise their contribution.

2. Make sure your venue has appropriate multilingual signage – or bring your own.

3. Language can be a barrier to participation. Interpreters may be necessary to ensure that complex issues are fully understood and information may need to be distributed in key community languages.

4. Understand that there is diversity between and within newly arrived groups and that targeted engagement may be necessary. For example, certain cultural or ethnic groups may not mix. Be aware of this, do your research and speak to people who work in the sector.

5. Some people may not be comfortable in a mixed gender forum. It may be appropriate to run women or men only engagement activities.

6. Be aware of special days or events that may clash with your event, such as cultural days, celebrations or religious festivals.

7. Use existing networks and groups as a way to connect with newly arrived people. Organisations include Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition and Spectrum.

8. Allowing participants to take photos can be a great way to break down language barriers and encourage community members to actively participate in and interpret their neighbourhood.

9. Promote your engagement event or activity in ethnic media including multilingual community radio and community newspapers.

10. Understand that people may be experiencing trauma or difficulties in the settlement process. These experiences are different for everyone, but be aware of this and adapt your methods accordingly. Know when to seek help or professional support.
We often hear: “Don’t ask me, I won’t be around in 10 or 20 years”. Make older people aware that their input and ideas are valued and recognise that their contribution is just as important as everyone else.

Older people can be busy and can be members of a range of groups or clubs. Existing networks such as the lawn bowls clubs, University of the 3rd Age (U3A) and senior or elderly citizens clubs can be great way to tap into a captive audience.

Send older people a letter inviting them to participate.

Consider undertaking an engagement exercise in partnership with local older citizens clubs or organisations, but make sure not to ask too much of people, resources can be limited.

Provide refreshments at your event, meeting or discussion. Sharing a chat over tea or coffee and food can be a great way to engage older people and create a relaxed environment.

Some older people may have great stories and experiences, take the time to listen. One-on-one engagement may be the best way to make sure you have the time to hear these stories.

Choose an appropriate venue including one that is located in a familiar, safe setting and that is close to public transport. Make sure the venue has good access and is comfortable.

Consider the time of day of your event. Evening events may not be appropriate, as some older people may not feel comfortable or safe going out at night.

Recognise that similar engagement may have happened in the past. There is no point starting from scratch if there have been numerous conversations about the same issue over the years. Recognise this and explain why this engagement is different and how the outcomes will be used.

Limit the use of jargon or ‘buzz' words.
In 2003, the ABS estimated that 3.9 million people or 20% of the Australian population were living with a disability.
Be considerate of the fact that people with disabilities may need more time to voice their opinions, may prefer to provide feedback in written format or may need questions or the discussion topic forwarded ahead of time to prepare their contribution. Written material may need to be in large font for people who have a vision impairment.

Auslan interpreters or hearing loops may be required for meetings if deaf people are attending. If an Auslan interpreter is present, speak clearly and a little slower than you would usually to give them time to translate.

Attendant carers may be required for people with higher needs.

The venue should be located near public transport and have suitable access for wheelchair buses or maxi-taxis to stop nearby. Check the venue’s accessibility for the little things: Can the toilet door be opened independently? Are there enough accessible car parking spaces and wheelchair spaces at the venue? Is the lift working and is it okay for large scooters?

Very early events such as breakfasts may not be suitable for people with disabilities where it takes additional time to get ready and to get transport to an event. Equally evening events may not allow enough time before and after events for people to negotiate peak hour traffic, transport and taxis.

Travel to your participants. It is easier for two able-bodied people to travel than 10 people with disabilities all requiring different travel needs.

If you are not sure of people’s communication or mobility requirements, it is better to ask, than assume.

Be aware that temperature may be an issue as many people with disabilities have temperature sensitivities.

Consider that people may have different eating requirements and catering should be carefully selected. Drinking straws should also be provided for people who may have limited mobility.

Social media and online forums can help increase accessibility for people with a disability. The internet can help break down barriers for people who might otherwise find it difficult to travel to and participate in traditional engagement activities.
Fact

The ABS’s *Counting the Homeless* report reveals that 104,676 Australians were homeless on Census night in 2006.
Support services can be a good place to start your engagement. Melbourne City Mission, the Big Issue or HomeGround Services are some of the organisations that work with homeless people in Melbourne.

Consider undertaking vox pops or surveys at outreach services or community centres. It is much better to go to people, rather than wait for them to attend a meeting or forum.

Before starting your engagement, do your research. People who are homeless may have complex emotional and health issues which could impede the level of participation in an engagement activity.

Ask local support services for incentive ideas to participate in more structured engagement such as a focus group. For some people an incentive such as a $50 voucher can make a huge difference.

Display information in community centres or outreach centres. The display can be staffed at appropriate times to engage homeless and to have a discussion in a comfortable, familiar and neutral environment.

Use the engagement exercise as a capacity building opportunity by increasing the confidence of participants. Using community members who are homeless to undertake the engagement may be a good way to actively encourage involvement in the project.

Go for a walk and allow people to talk about their surroundings. This can provide a different perspective on the community and local environment.

Consider one-on-one conversations and take your time. Always ask how people would like their story to be displayed or written. Let people talk about what they want and allow people to tell their stories.

Have a chat over food and a tea or coffee. This can help normalise the conversation and make everyone relaxed.

Recognise that professional help may be required if the issue is serious. Listen to concerns, issues or problems, but if you don’t have the appropriate skills, make sure you refer them to someone who can help.
Do your research before commencing the engagement exercise to allow you to understand history, relations, previous projects and appropriate group(s).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be very diverse depending on history and heritage. Respect that there are differences and take your time to understand these. Within communities there can also be numerous voices.

Take the time to establish strong connections and build rapport. It may be beneficial to liaise with someone who has existing connections with the community.

Be flexible in your approach as things may come up that impact on an arrangement. For example, family and community matters may take precedence over a prior commitment.

Connection to country or sea is a significant part of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture.

Choose a comfortable and familiar setting, perhaps in a space or place where people meet regularly.

Social interactions and behaviour can differ between communities. Introductory protocols may be required which can take time. Also understand that people may take time to offer their knowledge. Be aware that the sharing of knowledge and culture is sacred and that permission may need to be sought from communities first. Wait to be invited before joining a group of people and do not approach groups discussing men’s or women’s business.

Seek permission before taking photos, recording conversations and publishing someone’s story or photo. Always ask how people would like their story to be displayed or written.

Be aware that if you are discussing issues that may be sensitive or may only affect women or men, it is best to speak to people individually or with men or women separately. For example, if you are discussing women’s health issues, women are more likely to open up if men are not present.

Consider age appropriateness. Depending on the topic being discussed, it may be appropriate to speak to different age groups within the community.
Indigenous Australians are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, who according to the 2006 ABS Census, were 2.7% of Australia’s population. The Indigenous population is also a young population, with around 70% aged 25 and under.
1. Provide opportunities for people to talk about the past, their loss and how they are feeling. Often, it’s not until they have shared their story and memories that the bereaved are able to look to the future.

2. Take time to talk and listen, don’t rush. The bereavement process is different for different people, and it may not be obvious how people are coping or feeling.

3. Expect to invest a lot more time into the listening process over a much longer period.

4. Use creative techniques for the bereaved to share their memories. For example, murals, scrapbooks and digital stories.

5. Consider that people may not be ready to commit to too much, too quickly. Let people commit to what they can.

6. Use techniques such as listening posts or ‘drop in’ sessions where people can decide how much they are willing to contribute at that time.

7. Be particularly careful with the language you use, for example, “how are you?” might be better phrased as “how are you today?”

8. Use reflection and ask open-ended questions (what, how, describe, tell me...) that will draw out more detail about the things people are describing.

9. Use images as a tool to facilitate conversation. A person in mourning may not have the capacity to engage in lengthy conversations. Images are a way for people to express what they like, dislike and hope for the future. Images are especially effective if the engagement has a focus on developing a shared vision.

10. As practitioners, engaging those who have suffered a loss can be emotionally draining. Debrief with a friend or colleague.
Fact

In the 2006 ABS Census, 3.2 million people or 16.2% reported they spoke a language other than English at home. Italian was the most common non English language (10.1%), followed by Greek (8%), Cantonese (7.8%), Arabic (7.7%), Mandarin (7.0%) and Vietnamese (6.2%).
Older migrants may be more comfortable in their own setting, including the local club or community centre. Consider visiting an existing group or network such as an elderly citizen’s migrant group.

Provide a translator, preferably someone that is independent and can understand the issues.

Practice working with translators prior to engagement activities. The pace it takes to translate English varies for different languages. You may be surprised how long it takes to say “shared community vision” in Mandarin.

Interview identified community leaders to understand the breadth and depth of community perspectives prior to undertaking consultation with a larger group. This will provide the practitioner with time to research any culturally specific issues to ensure information and communication needs are met.

Provide opportunities to engage older migrants with family and friends around. This allows them to feel comfortable and they can ask family members to explain something if they don’t understand.

In some cultures it may be inappropriate for participants to raise issues or to disagree or object in a group.

If appropriate, ask older migrants to complete a questionnaire or survey. Translating from a written document can be much more precise than a verbal, ‘real time’ translation.

Where possible, meet with one cultural group at a time. Using multiple translators is very complex and time consuming.

Make the engagement activity social by providing food and refreshments. Some older migrants may be isolated and community engagement is an opportunity to socialise and connect with other community members.

Build the capacity of older migrants to engage and talk about issues in their communities and lives. This may take time and over numerous visits or events.
Children

Always ask parents or care takers for permission before consulting with children.

Think about attracting the parents, then talking to the children. An option is using role models as a way of attracting involvement from both parents and children.

Be creative and allow for creativity. Colour, pictures, images and stickers are just some of the tools children may feel comfortable with.

Bring in a ‘play’ element if possible. Lego will instantly attract children. It is familiar and fun and can be used for a range of discussions.

Distribute posters to local schools with options about a topic or issue and ask children to vote on preferences. Posters can be designed to target different age groups through the graphics, diagrams and language used.

Primary schools and school networks are fantastic resources to tap into. Some schools may even be willing to include your project in their curriculum.

Story telling can be used as a way to explain complex ideas. It’s also a fun way to get children involved. Drama or role playing is also a creative way for children to express their ideas and act out possible scenarios.

Children love colouring-in competitions. They’re creative, children love to show off their skills and when there’s a prize involved it’s all the more fun.

Allowing flexibility and creativity for both parents and children to be involved encourages no-one to be excluded and for children to feel safe and confident in any situation.

Walking tours or treasure hunts in your local area or park may be a great way to get children talking about their neighbourhood. It can also help you to understand how children perceive and interpret their environment.
Fact

The 2006 ABS Census reported that one in five Australian’s were aged 12 to 24 years old. The majority of young people live in cities and one in five speak a language other than English at home.
1. Spend the time to build confidence. Most young people are not used to participating in a public forum, but given the training, support and the opportunity, they often rise to the challenge with surprising results.

2. Make sure the promotional material is eye-catching and appealing to young people. Look at other promotional material targeting young people for ideas.

3. Don’t dumb down the information. Young people have a lot to contribute and can understand complex issues if given the chance.

4. There are many existing school networks or youth groups out there. Student Representative Councils for example are elected bodies who are there to represent their fellow students.

5. Commitment needs to be short-term and finite. Long-term commitments or timeframes aren’t attractive to young people.

6. Young people like to create. This may include traditional creative activities like music, dance, radio, theatre or art.

7. Young people like to know they are being listened to. Recognise their contribution by providing food and offering rewards, certificates, incentive payments or vouchers. Also be explicit about the benefits of participating and how their input will be used.

8. Consider opportunities such as mentoring that promote sharing of ideas and that can have more long-term impacts.

9. Online forums and social networks can be a quick and easy way to connect with and engage young people. For example, many young people are connected via instant messaging services, Facebook, MySpace and SMS.

10. If you are organising a focus group with young people it is usually best to separate males and females and to have no more than a few years age difference amongst participants.
Fact

According to the ABS, during 2004-05, 123,424 people immigrated to Australia. Of them, 17,736 were from Africa, 54,804 from Asia, 21,131 from Oceania, 18,220 from the United Kingdom, 1,506 from South America, and 2,369 from Eastern Europe.
Capire Consulting Group is a specialist social sustainability consultancy.

Capire's difference is our independence. Our freshness and our an extensive network of associates ensures our clients have a better understanding of their communities or stakeholders - reducing risk, building better projects and increasing their contribution to society.

Our core advisory services are designed to better understand communities and stakeholders through research, engagement, planning and advice. Co-founders and Directors, Chris Robinson and Amy Hubbard bring together over 25 years of professional experience in strategic planning, urban design, community and stakeholder engagement, community development and corporate sustainability. The Directors' experience has spanned Australia and international arenas including Europe and the UK, the USA, Asia and the Pacific. Chris and Amy are supported by a highly qualified team of consultants with skills spanning social planning and research, communications and engagement.

More information can be found on our website: www.capire.com.au

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