



Water sensitive urban design

Community engagement in water sensitive urban design

Summary

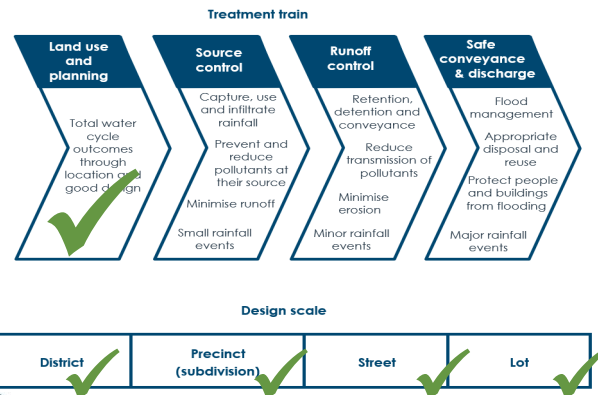
Engagement is 'a personal state of connection with an issue'.

Community engagement is increasingly undertaken as it improves project outcomes, builds trust in organisations or reform processes, and supports transition to water sensitive cities.

Effective engagement can help communities learn and change behaviours; obtain input from people about what they want; and help build an involved and connected community.

Engagement programs should be designed specifically for the target audience, reflecting their level of knowledge, values and behaviours. Programs should incorporate a variety of engagement platforms to optimise connections within diverse communities.

Longer term engagement is often more effective than short-term programs, as trusted relationships are built and maintained.



Why is community engagement important in WSUD?

Engagement can inform, educate, and raise awareness about water management issues. Water-related knowledge is significantly and positively associated with:

- support for alternative water sources;
- support for raingardens;
- use of everyday water-saving strategies;
- uptake of water-saving devices; and
- pollution-reduction behaviours.

It is therefore a critical component of transitioning to a water sensitive city.

What can community engagement achieve?

- Behaviour change programs focussed on water conservation have been generally successful in Australia, although their effectiveness is dependent on social and environmental context.
- Education campaigns can be successful at improving attitudes to more sustainable water practices, but their long-term effectiveness is not well documented.
- Support for new policies can be achieved through effective communication techniques that combine good information and suitable message framing. More complex issues are likely to require face-to-face or social mobilisation initiatives rather than advertising alone.

- Intensive consultation has the power to generate new ideas, although it is important not to 'over-promise' and to be transparent about how the feedback may (or may not) influence project outcomes.
- Community engagement and participation in water-related projects can:
 - improve outcomes of redevelopment and built form retrofitting;
 - support local government financial planning;
 - integrate scientific information and community preferences into water resource planning; and
 - build long term relationships and trust.
- The effectiveness of engagement initiatives may depend more on how the initiative is implemented, rather than the choice of method used.

Methods of community engagement

- Methods to obtain information about community opinion include surveys, polls, online discussions, focus groups, workshops and public meetings.
- Recruiting community champions is an effective method to connect with local communities and support achievement of long-term outcomes, even after the engagement process ceases.
- Social media and on-line content are becoming increasingly important and effective, allowing messages to be targeted to suit a diversity of audiences.

Key tips

- **Know your community:** Be clear about the audience you are targeting and understand relevant current issues, constraints, knowledge and behaviours. Engagement is more effective when targeted to existing knowledge levels in the community.
- **Use a variety of engagement techniques:** Communities are made up of diverse groups that vary in their ability to engage and participate, so provide different outreach pathways to maximise reach.
- **Frame the issue carefully:** Messages need to be tailored to effectively engage different audiences, because messages intended for "everyone" are unlikely to appeal to everyone.
 - Messages that appeal to closely held values usually have more traction.
 - Using a sustainability message frame can increase support for water sensitive cities among the 'disengaged'.
 - Information presented using community-friendly terminology can lead to higher levels of engagement (trust) with the message, and members of the community are more likely to share the information.
 - Appealing images with local content and containing people are generally perceived as being personally relevant. Images that elicit disgust (like stormwater drains and degraded waterways) should be avoided.
- Although the cost of participatory engagement processes can be substantial, the benefits from such processes can also be significant.



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Higher water-related knowledge is associated with water sensitive attitudes and behaviours



GREATER SUPPORT FOR RAINGARDENS



HIGHER UPTAKE OF WATER SAVING DEVICES



GREATER SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVE WATER SOURCES



GREATER USE OF EVERYDAY WATER-SAVING STRATEGIES

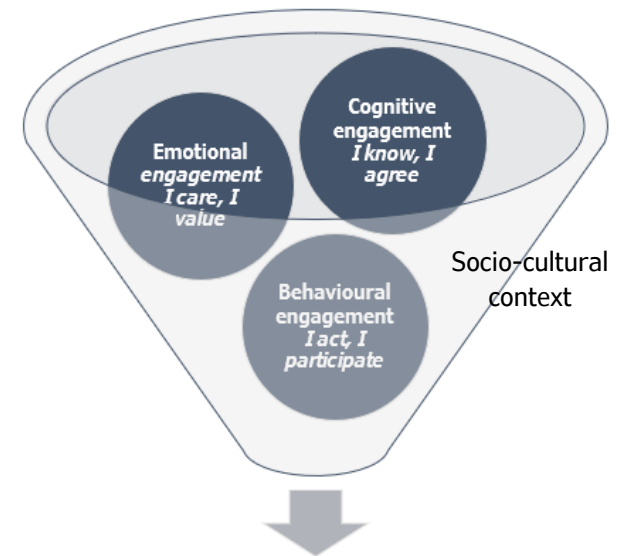


GREATER ENGAGEMENT IN POLLUTION REDUCTION BEHAVIOURS

Principles for engaging communities in Water Sensitive City transitions

1. Engage community through local place
2. Grow a network of community champions
3. Ensure there is safe space for community ideas and contributions
4. Allow time for iteration, reflection and refinement
5. Engage diverse representatives
6. Create opportunities for social learning
7. Develop a shared narrative that people can connect with
8. Establish a clear and compelling long-term vision
9. Use imagery to bring ideas to life
10. Establish pathways for tangible and meaningful action

Framework for assessing engagement in water-related issues



Water sensitive citizens

Although this framework suggests that knowledge is critical for behaviour change, the benefits of engaging on an emotional level to gain momentum are also recognised.

References and suggested reading

Church, E., Rogers, B.C., Gunn, A., Lindsay, J., Fielding, K., Dean, A., and Hammer, K., (2018). Principles for Engaging Citizens in Water Sensitive City Transitions, Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities, Melbourne, Australia.

Dean A, Fielding K, Newton F & Ross, H. (2015) Community knowledge about water: Who has better water-related knowledge and is this important? Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities, Melbourne, Australia. (link)

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International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) website: <https://www.iap2.org.au/Home>

Schultz, T., Dean, A., Newton, F., Ross, H., and Fielding, K. (2017). Getting the message right: the use of frames, community-friendly terminology and visuals, Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities, Melbourne, Australia. (link)

