



**Towards
Inclusive
Practice**

Including Everyone.

A Guide to Planning Inclusive Consultations



A project by:



Inclusion Australia

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About this guide

This guide was developed as part of Inclusion Australia's Towards Inclusive Practice project. The project provides advice to government and other organisations about how to be more inclusive of people with an intellectual disability.



Teams of Inclusion Advisors around Australia shared their experiences as people with an intellectual disability about what makes them feel included when working with government or using services.

For this topic, people shared ideas about how governments can prepare for, and run a good consultation. Together we made this guide on inclusive consultation.

This Guide will help you think about, design and run consultations which are more inclusive of people with an intellectual disability. It also has information about:

- Making questions accessible
- The right consultation format for your project
- Working in partnership with disability organisations
- Recruitment and support of participants for your consultation
- the importance of time
- making your consultation accessible

The information in this guide is advice only. It is not an instruction manual. Use the information and accompanying tips to increase accessibility in your own practice.

Introduction

“One of the problems is that people think a good consultation is easier to do than it actually is, they only see part of the journey.” – Inclusion Advisor, Tasmania

Consultations play an important role in government planning, decision making and service delivery. Whether large scale national consultations, or more targeted consultations on specific policy issues, they allow government and government departments to hear the voices and opinions of people who are impacted by and rely on their plans, decisions, and services.

Consultations are also an important way for governments to hear from people directly and understand the experiences of people with an intellectual disability. They can also be a space for people to share ideas and offer solutions based on their experience.

People with an intellectual disability face some specific barriers to participation in consultations and as a result are often excluded from consultation processes.

Common reasons for this include:

- Not being aware of the consultation occurring
- information about the consultation is not clear and easy to read
- questions are not appropriate, accessible or framed in a way that makes sense
- consultations being held in inaccessible locations
- not being given enough time to respond



Many people with an intellectual disability also rely on connections with disability organisations, family, friends and supporters to learn about and engage with surveys, public forums or other things on offer. Without making these connections as part of the planning for consultations, people with an intellectual disability risk being shut out.

Why do inclusive consultations matter?

“Organisations and government agencies often make decisions without consulting people with an intellectual disability even though they are the people who will be most affected by the decisions.” - Inclusion Advisor, WA

The disability community has a common response to those in authority who make decisions; ‘nothing about us without us.’

Consultations can be a powerful way for people with disabilities to share their experiences directly with decision makers to influence change.

People with an intellectual disability have the same rights as everyone else to have their voices heard in government decision making that affects them. When done properly, consultation can be a place for people’s experiences and ideas to contribute to better informed policy development and outcomes.



Following many decades of advocacy by the disability community, government is increasingly consulting with people with an intellectual disability on issues that affect them. However, many consultations are not accessible. Often, we see surveys, consultation papers, roundtables, workshops, advisory groups, targeted consultations, and public forums done in ways which are inaccessible for people with an intellectual disability.

Inclusion Advisors told us that many consultations that are designed to be *accessible* for people with an intellectual disability are often not *inclusive*.

This guide considers how to design, plan, communicate and deliver consultations that are both accessible and inclusive for people with an intellectual disability.

Who do you need to talk to

For any engagement the first questions should always be “who do you want to talk to and why?” If you cannot answer this, you are not ready to consult!

Have a Clear Purpose When consulting with people with an intellectual disability, it is very important to be very clear about the purpose of your consultation. We often see that the purpose of a consultation is too broad (trying to cover too many things at once), too vague (not clear what is being asked) or makes assumptions about what people know.

Example: an researcher assumes all people with an intellectual disability are accessing the NDIS and does not check with the people they want to talk to. This leads to people with an intellectual disability being consulted on topics they do not have direct experience with.

Be clear on what you need: Have a clear idea of what you want to know and narrow down your topic. Some topics that you might think are quite specific are actually very broad. For example, rather than seeking feedback about public transport, be specific about what areas of public transport you want to know about.

Who can give you the information you need

There are over 460,000 people with an intellectual disability in Australia. We are a diverse community, from children to older people, all with different skills and experiences. People with an intellectual disability come from different cultures, including First Nations and people from overseas. People communicate in different ways; and live in different places. Some people have families and lots of support, other people are more disconnected. People are all sexualities and genders. Some people have more than one disability; some people have hidden disabilities. Some people with an intellectual disability do not identify with having an intellectual disability at all.

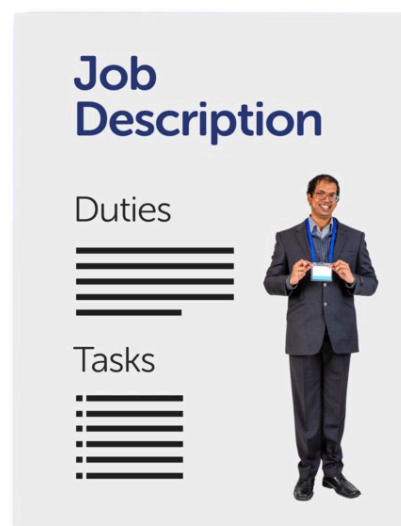
When planning your consultation with people with an intellectual disability, do not make assumptions about what people know. What examples of lived experience do you need?

Think carefully about what you are trying to find out and who is best placed to tell you.



If you are consulting with people about a specific service or support, you need to find people who have used that service or support and have feedback to give about their experiences. For example, if you want to know about people's experiences of using Centrelink offices, you should recruit people with an intellectual disability who have visited a Centrelink office recently.

Make any lived experience requirements clear when you are recruiting or reaching out to other organisations to help you recruit.



"They often went too broad and probably did not have their target group right as many of the questions did not apply to me." - Inclusion Advisor, ACT

Working with Disability Representative Organisations

Disability Representative Organisations can play an important role in the planning, design and delivery of consultations with people with an intellectual disability.

Also known as DROs, Disability Representative Organisations represent and work directly with people with disability and others to advocate for change. DROs have deep knowledge of policy, systems and processes that people with disabilities and their families may not and can help discuss your consultation goals to help achieve the outcome you need. DROs also have direct relationships with people with disabilities, so are well placed to give advice on accessible consultations.

Inclusion Australia is the DRO for people with an intellectual disability and their families meaning we have deep experience supporting people with an intellectual disability to speak up in consultation and other engagement. Our team includes people with an intellectual disability, working alongside non-disabled team members as equals and sharing experience every day.

Inclusion Australia also works with other DROs to make sure we draw on their specialist expertise. For example, we work with First Peoples' Disability Network (FPDN) and National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) to support people with an intellectual disability from Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities respectively.

For a full list of national DROs visit: www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/consultation-and-advocacy/national-disability-peak-bodies



Designing your consultation questions

“If you're going to consult with people with an intellectual disability, you can't have 19 questions for a one hour consultation.” - Advocate, VIC

To get good information you need to ask good questions. Inclusion Advisors said that for people with an intellectual disability, good questions are clear, accessible, aimed at the people you are consulting with, and only talk about one thing at a time.

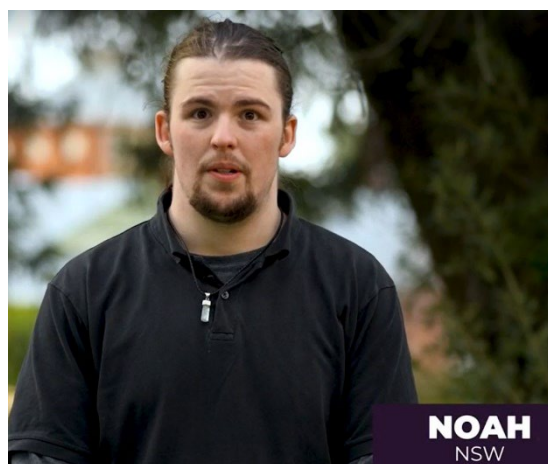
- Use clear, simple everyday words that everyone knows.
- If you need to use technical words, be clear what they mean.
- Ask short, specific questions (no more than 15 words).
- Think about how long it will take to answer questions. Have fewer questions but allow more time to answer them. This will allow conversation to flow.
- Prepare alternative ways to ask the same questions in case they don't make sense or you need to provide more explanation.



- Don't ask two questions in one. Split questions up if they are too long. For example:
 - "Have you ever been to Geelong and if so, what did you do there and what was your favourite thing you did?"
 - "Have you ever been to Geelong?" "What did you do in Geelong?" "What was the best thing you did in Geelong?"
- Write your questions so it is clear they are targeted toward people with an intellectual disability ("You") not their families, support workers, or others.
- Avoid words like "ideal" or "best". People may not always know what the "best" or "ideal" outcome is, but they will know how to make things better. Ask them what would make things better.
- If you are talking about an experience that people may have more than once, like a NDIS planning meeting, be specific about which time. If it is something that took place over a long time, be aware they might tell you the most recent thing or the thing that impacted them most.
- When complete, write your questions in Easy Read format with pictures.

"It is good to have questions prior the meetings, so we have support to understand the questions and come up with some responses." - Inclusion Advisor, SA

*"Just because you could [ask the questions] does not mean you should."
- Inclusion Advisor, Tasmania*



Types of engagement

When you have a clear sense of what you want to ask, it is time to think about **how** you can ask questions. There are lots of different ways to engage with people with a disability. Which one you use will depend on the topic and the people you are working with.

Interviews



Questionnaires



Online chats



Small groups



Workshops



Online workshops



Writing submissions or reports



Storytelling and art



Online surveys



Each of these different types of engagement can work for people with an intellectual disability depending on the nature of the consultation.

You might want to offer multiple options so that people have a choice about how to participate. This will differ from person to person.

“They were very friendly. I often did not understand what they wanted from me. They tried their best to support me and include me. Maybe 1:1 would have been better for me than a group.” - Inclusion Advisor, ACT

When
people
listen

- Power is when people listen.

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Thinking about safety

We all have a right to be and feel safe. It is particularly important to think about the safety of people with an intellectual disability when planning consultations.

Many Inclusion Advisors told us that the Towards Inclusive Practice project was their first opportunity to speak up, share their stories and be listened to. For some this was a powerful experience. For others it was more challenging. Sharing your story can be both physically and emotionally draining. This is sometimes called ‘emotional labour’.

Inclusive consultation recognises this and builds in comfort breaks, downtime, and other circuit breakers to help people feel OK.

Subject matter can also be triggering for some people. As part of the Disability Royal Commission, people were often sharing their own experiences of abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation. Great care was taken to ensure people had a range of options about how and where to tell their story.

This included 1:1 private sessions with trained professionals. People could choose to have support from a friend, family member or supporter and were also given access to expert counsellors and other professionals before and afterwards.

Whilst this subject matter was highly likely to prove difficult, do not make assumptions that your subject matter has no risk of raising trauma for participants. Be clear about what supports you will provide, including who people can talk to, and make sure people are clear that they are not obliged to answer questions that make them feel uncomfortable.



Recruiting participants

Working with an expert disability organisation is the best way to help identify groups of people with an intellectual disability to participate in a consultation and advise on designing a consultation that is inclusive of people with an intellectual disability.

Although many people with an intellectual disability use the internet, they are less likely to hear about consultation opportunities at random. A blanket or generic email is not an effective recruitment process. Many people do not have access to email, rely on others to explain emails to them, or prefer other methods of communication.



In many cases, people who meet the target group will need to be identified and contacted individually. Many people with an intellectual disability rely on trusted organisations to find out information and hear of consultation opportunities. DROs and other organisations also have established networks of people who have indicated their interest in finding out about opportunities or have specialist knowledge and/or interest.

When working with DROs, be ready to provide clear information on the outcomes you are seeking and have resources in accessible formats. Information on when the consultation is, how it will be run, if they will be paid, and what is expected of participants will help an organisation prepare to identify the participants.

DROs can explain information for each person to consider if they wish to participate. They can help people to understand how the consultation will work and the format. With all the information they can give informed consent to be part of the consultation. Giving people a choice of how they can participate will help with making their decision.

Another important aspect of recruitment is representation.

If you are undertaking a national consultation, you want to be sure that all your respondents are not from the same place. Similarly, ensuring you have a wide range of people including experience, age, race, gender, sexuality, communication preference, accommodation types and others will also help you ensure your consultation more accurately reflects the diversity of people with an intellectual disability. DROs are well placed to ensure this representation occurs.

The role of families and supporters

Families and other supporters have a significant role in the lives of many people with an intellectual disability. Many people rely on family to help navigate complex systems. Because of this families are often asked to provide feedback and suggest improvements in systems for people with an intellectual disability.

However, it is important to remember that people with an intellectual disability and their families, friends or support people are two different audiences for consultations.

When undertaking consultations involving people with an intellectual disability and family members, remember:

- **Consultation sessions should specifically be for one group and not both at once** – people with an intellectual disability may defer to non-disabled people in the room, or non-disabled people may dominate conversation.
- **Do not prioritise families and supporters - consult directly with people with an intellectual disability.** – it is not sufficient to consult with other people with disability types and then families of people with an intellectual disability and then say people with an intellectual disability were consulted.



- **Families have a lot to contribute** - families must be consulted because they have unique perspectives on issues such as system navigation. They can be aware of significant issues that their family member with an intellectual disability is less aware of.
- **Supporters have a role to stand beside** – some people need supporters in the room for consultation sessions to support them to participate. This is important for accessibility and inclusivity. However, it is important that supporters do not take over or dominate conversations.
- **Be very clear who said what** - methodology reporting of any consultation must explicitly say how people with an intellectual disability were consulted - including how many. People with an intellectual disability and family member responses should be listed separately and not combined.

“Sometimes the questions are a bit hard, and I don’t know how to answer them. This is why I need support to prepare. My support person explains the question in another way.” - Inclusion Advisor, TAS

Build in Time

“We need to have more time to process the questions – 90 mins can be quick.”
- Inclusion Advisor, Victoria

“People need to actually learn about something before they can comment on it.”
- Inclusion Advisor, Tasmania

Time is a critical factor in inclusive consultation. Too short a time frame will put people under pressure and you will not get the best out of everyone.

For a deeper understanding about how to build time into your consultation process and why it matters, read the Towards Inclusive Practice resource, ‘Make Time, Take Time’.



Keep thinking about accessibility

Even taking all the advice into this guide into account, your planning must continue to think about accessibility. As you move from the planning to the doing part of consultation, read our guides on running accessible and inclusive meetings. It includes tips on making sure meetings are both physically accessible and support the full involvement of people with an intellectual disability.

Our accompanying guide on planning and running accessible online meetings will also help you for online engagement.