

Meeting Guide

During meetings

During a meeting, you should:

- demonstrate that you understand and are sensitive to the different communication styles used – particularly the use of nonverbal communication
- demonstrate that you have understood community members' views by listening and then clarifying the outcomes of negotiations
- link purposes, information and events to local culture and events; this will ensure the material is contextually relevant and that cultural respect is demonstrated
- speak clearly and at a measured pace when addressing a meeting and loudly enough to ensure all participants can hear and understand what is being said
- provide the group with brief but appropriate information about yourself
- describe the agenda and timeframes for the engagement activity
- minimise the use of government jargon – if government terminology is necessary, explain the term or phrase and the concept surrounding it
- use your own style of speech; do not try to mimic Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander speech or words
- be inclusive of the participants at the meeting by inviting those interested to participate
- refer to the community members and community Elders as 'Mr' or 'Mrs' unless you have been advised otherwise, or you have already established relationships with them.
- avoid referring to Elders as 'Auntie' or 'Uncle' unless you have been invited to do so
- when speaking to Elders consider that English may be their second or third language and that you may find them difficult to understand and vice versa
- be conscious of your body language and style of dress, particularly when dealing with members of the opposite gender or if the meeting group is mixed genders.

Remember: promise only things that you know can be delivered and focus on tangible outcomes.

Asking and answering questions

Different community members will have varying degrees of understanding of the engagement process and related issues. This should not be overlooked when questions are asked.

When a question is asked more than once consider that it is because some audience members have not received adequate or appropriate information from you or another public official. Consider that you may have misinterpreted the question. Perhaps ask for clarification of the question.

Ensure that community members are provided with accurate information. If further information is required that you cannot provide at the time, offer to provide it later when it

has been sourced. Do not promise or guarantee the community anything that you do not have the authority to guarantee.

In conversation there should be a proactive attempt to demystify language and concepts. Some issues, such as economic issues, need to be described and careful use of language can be useful. As English literacy is a significant variant, knowledge of language is an important element in the early stages of interacting with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Tact and diplomacy are required to identify the best time to ask questions. Good timing ensures community members feel comfortable when answering questions. The time to ask questions should occur naturally regardless of whether the occasion is a formal meeting or a morning tea. If questions are asked with an expectation of a quick reply, answers may not be informative or reflect community views. Allow time for the viewpoint of others to be expressed and for answers to be well considered.

Being flexible

Being flexible with time and adaptable in relation to issues for discussion is important when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. You should not enter a community assuming that consultation or negotiation will occur quickly.

For example, significant events such as the death of a community member, cultural events or general meetings are important aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives and have an enormous effect on the activities and availability of people within the community. Given the customs and protocols of a significant event it is important to maintain flexibility and be prepared to cancel or postpone the meeting in case of a death, funeral or other major community event. In particular, the high mortality rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities mean that many people may be grieving and have associated obligations.

Consideration should also be given to the physical setting of the engagement. For example in some situations an informal setting may be more suitable than an office environment.

When engaging with communities be prepared to give attention to multiple topics as community concerns are often interrelated. On some occasions you may be asked to leave the room so that discussion may be held between community members. Be prepared for these discussions to take some time.

Source <http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/atsi-communities/visiting.html>