



Western Sydney  
community forum

# Response to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's Draft Community Participation Plan

December 2018





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The Hon. Anthony Roberts MP  
NSW Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing and  
Special Minister of State  
NSW Department of Planning & Environment

Dear Minister Roberts,

Please find attached Western Sydney Community Forum's submission for the  
Department of Planning & Environment's Community Participation Plan.

Western Sydney Community Forum has reviewed the draft plan and developed seven  
recommendations for your consideration. These recommendations are intended to  
provide communities and the agencies that support with an inclusive environment to  
support the future growth and developments of their local areas.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make this submission. We look forward to  
continuing to work with the Department of Planning & Environment to support new and  
existing communities.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Charlton Wun on  
9687 9669 or [charlton.wun@wscf.org.au](mailto:charlton.wun@wscf.org.au)

Yours sincerely,



**Billie Sankovic**  
Chief Executive

## Introduction

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On October 2018, the NSW Department of Planning & Environment (the Department) released their draft Community Participation Plan. The draft Community Participation Plan sets out to be the driving principles behind engaging communities in the planning process, in addition to providing space for community participation within the planning processes.

## Western Sydney Community Forum

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Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) have led and shaped social policy and service delivery across Greater Western Sydney for over 30 years. As a regional peak, we champion solutions that sustain community resilience, health and wellbeing, and work with community organisations, join with business and partner with government across all levels and services.

As a regional peak for Greater Western Sydney, WSCF is the regional social development council representing and supporting communities and community groups and agencies in the region. This represents a population of 2.4 million people and a community services industry that annually invests 2.7 billion into the Western Sydney economy, according to the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission.

This submission provides seven recommendations for the Department to consider which support their work with the community to create great places where people have access to equitable infrastructure, services and opportunities.

Through research and consultation with our wide member base, WSCF has developed a number of recommendations and comments that could add value to the draft Community Participation Plan. WSCF has an active and broad member & subscriber base (2,500) that includes a mix of agencies who connect with and provide services to people across Greater Western Sydney. Members range from small community-based agencies to large charitable groups.

## **Recommendations**

1. Connect and collaborate with local community service providers as well as wider peak organisations to facilitate community involvement
2. Incorporate community empowerment as a core principle for community participation in the planning system, so that community members are equipped to respond to plans and processes effectively and efficiently
3. Increase avenues and methods for community participation in locally significant developments
4. Encourage collaboration across state agencies and corporations, as well as local governments, and existing organisations for greater efficiency in communication
5. Incorporate culturally appropriate practice when working with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities
6. Establish a list of projects and circumstances, which are deemed either government priorities or administrative requirements, that justify the circumvention of the community participation process
7. Provide the opportunity for local councils and peak agencies an opportunity to respond or comment on changes and amendments to State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs)

## **Working with local providers**

WSCF strongly recommends the Department utilise NSW's strong community services sector as an avenue for community engagement and participation. Local services and community organisations are a central part of existing communities, with many of these organisations providing integrated service support for over 30 years (WSCF 2015). This integrated service support system refers to a spectrum of engagement and support for communities, ranging from intensive one on one intervention to inclusive whole of community strengthening projects. Community service organisations also play a critical role in addressing the needs of their community in a collaborative role through a representative processes.

Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre, along with a number of partners, have developed the Blacktown Northwest Think Tank to identify strategies towards developing and resourcing local social infrastructure for the rapidly developing precinct. Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre has been operating in the local area since the 1978 and has developed robust relationships within the local community. These relationships enable Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre to effectively to represent local needs from across the spectrum.

## **Community Empowerment**

Firstly, the Department should be commended for recognising the connection between community involvement and the creation of place. In addition, WSCF would like to recommend that principles of community empowerment be incorporated at the centre of the Department's community participation practices. Community empowerment refers to the practice of providing local communities increased capacity towards controlling their own lives (World Health Organisation 2009) leading to an increase in community pride and the creation of great places. Communities must be empowered to contribute to planning processes, especially on projects which have cultural significance or major developments which affect the daily lived experiences of existing communities.

An examples of this is Team Colyton, an initiative developed in the older suburb of Colyton in Penrith local government area which was developed with local residents and community organisations as a part of community renewal efforts led by council (Penrith City Council 2015). Community organisations successfully empowered residents through outcomes-based projects driven by local residents, which has led to the revitalisation of Colyton as a result of increased agency and knowledge of the local residents.

## **Collaboration**

The Greater Sydney Commission Metropolis of Three Cities Plan proposes strategies to create a planning process driven by place specific groups. WSCF recommends a focus on collaboration to address complex issues across local and state government portfolios/ departments as well as local public and private stakeholders and community groups. As developments in any region have inevitable overlaps and impacts on other departments and stakeholders, it is vital for the Community Participation Plan to also leverage and inform other key stakeholders in the region.

For example, through the redevelopment of the Parramatta North Heritage Core led by Urban Growth, have developed a number of strong relationships with local community groups and organisations through actively meeting with members with particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups with strong cultural connections with the site.

## **Support for Cultural groups**

In the draft Community Participation Plan the Department recognises the need for a blend engagement types to communicate with different communities. WSCF would strongly recommend the Department's community engagement team be trained in and utilise culturally competent and aware practice in order to effectively engage with ATSI and CALD Communities. Culturally competent practice can lead to developing transparent relationships and the creation of a more receptive cohort as well as the formulation of better ideas and outcomes.

Currently Multicultural NSW and SBS have co-developed a Cultural Competency Program which provides a flexible platform towards enabling workplaces and employees to be operate with cultural awareness (Cultural Competence Program 2018). A number of government departments have adopted this approach including the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet as well as the NSW Fair Work Ombudsman.

## Government Priorities

*“...there may be some occasions where a government priority or administrative requirement demands immediate action on proposals that prevents the implementation of our usual community participation process.”*

p.14 Exhibition Draft- Community Participation Plan

WSCF believes clarification on the above statement regarding the nature of specific types of public exhibitions is crucial to ensuring equitable community participation. If certain projects are able to circumvent the community participation processes, this has clear implications for engagement processes and implies that community participation is an optional process. Criteria for a project to be recognised as a government priority or an administrative requirement must be articulated. In its current format without criteria it is difficult to identify the Department’s commitment towards communicative planning or in the very least a commitment towards working with community to create great places.

## Councils and Peak agencies

As a final point WSCF would like to again reinforce the need for the Department to work together with local councils and peak agencies across the service spectrum. This is in particular reference to the “discretionary based” exhibition time frames for SEPPs, with delivery made through this process having a major impact on communities, families and individuals. Local councils and peak organisations can provide expert insight into these impacts. As a main stakeholder of delivery, local councils will have a particular interest in SEPPs.

## References

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**Cultural Competency Program. 2018, Cultural Competency Program, viewed on 29 November 2018, <<https://cultural-competence.com.au/home>>**

**Penrith City Council. 2015, Care about Colyton? Join the Team, viewed on 28 November 2018, <<https://www.penrithcity.nsw.gov.au/News/Care-about-Colyton--Join-the-team/>>**

**World Health Organisation. 2009, Track 1: Community Empowerment, 7th Global Conference on Health Promotion, Nairobi**

**WSCF. 2015, Nepean Blue Mountains District Community Sector Roundtable Report of Findings.**



