Profiling women: developing state training profiles in consultation with women: guidelines for consultation.

Butorac, Anne...[et al.]; WA Dept of Training.

Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority, 1996.

© Copyright Australian National Training Authority reproduced by permission.
Profiling women

Developing State Training Profiles in consultation with women
guidelines for consultation
Aspects

A comprehensive account of the central aspects of consultation is available in the more detailed study entitled Profiling Women: Developing State Training Profiles in Consultation with Women which is available from the Western Australian Department of Training.

Authors

Anne Butorac, Tricia Sharpe, Kath Lymon, and Annie Goldflam (through the Western Australian Centre for Research on Women)

Western Australian Department of Training Project Steering Committee

Under the auspices of the MCEETYA VEET Women's Taskforce

- Wendy Murray (Chair)
  Western Australian Department of Training
- Joan Susinetti (Executive Officer)
  Western Australian Department of Training
- Lea Corbett
  Office of the Status of Women, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Elvia Garwood
  Office of Training and Further Education, Victoria
- Sally Jeremy
  Australian National Training Authority
- Clair Higginson
  Women in Skills Formation Network
- Rachel Robertson
  Women in Skills Formation Network
- Nigel Haywood
  Western Australian Department of Training
- Claire Nutter
  Western Australian Department of Training
- Pauline Sedgwick
  NSW Department of Training and Education Coordination

Project Manager

Western Australian Department of Training

Views and Opinions

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and the project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of ANTA or the Western Australian Department of Training.

The Impact of Consultation

1. Ensure that when interpreting and representing what has been said into the language of the State Training Profile, the flavour or meaning is not lost in bureaucratic language.
2. Ensure that all those involved in consultation know how their input has impacted on the State Training Profile.
3. Provide to those involved in consultation an analysis of the State Training Profile which highlights the issues affecting women, resource distribution with respect to women and details of implementation and monitoring of the Profile.
4. Provide an analysis which directly documents the impact of consultation against the key indicators agreed upon during the development of the protocol, and explanations where the outcome is not that preferred by the group.
5. Include in the analysis information about who is responsible for the implementation of changes; and how it will be monitored.
6. Through consultation itself, generate renewal and improvement of processes for future consultation, including mechanisms for review and evaluation by both sides, and opportunities to change the process.
7. Ensure strategies are in place to maintain ongoing relationships and established networks of communication between those undertaking the consultation and those being consulted.
8. Ensure each cycle of consultation is informed by the most recent Profile analysis and that the impact of consultation in each case becomes the basis for the development of the new protocol. This ongoing cyclical process has been illustrated below.
DEVELOPING A CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

The Research

The study, Profiling Women, which informed this Practical Guide to consultation with women for State Training Profiles, used a range of strategies to find out what would constitute 'good practice' consultation with women in the preparation of the Profiles, and how the impact of such consultation might be measured in relation to the distribution of resources. Through questionnaires, interviews, groups and an extensive search through existing literature and 'off the shelf' protocols on consultation, the consultants developed a set of principles upon which all consultation should be founded.

Two 'world views' were identified. The first, based upon what the women said, suggested that women's groups are suffering from the consultation fatigue. Whilst willing and very able to participate, they require resources to participate effectively, and they need the consultation strategies to be arrived at in partnership rather than being imposed upon them, usually at short notice. Women require feedback from consultation. They want to know what impact their contribution has had. In this respect, their requirements reflected those of this research, which was to indicate how consultation could be shown to have an impact upon resource distribution within training.

The second world view was that of the agencies carrying out consultative activities. State Training Agencies demonstrated a broad range of consultative strategies at every level. However, consultation tended to be one-off, and constrained by a lack of resources, particularly time. Industry Training Councils also indicated that their consultation with women was very limited, and was generally concentrated within female dominated industries, and within the context of particular projects. Outcomes were rarely indicated other than through specific projects.

Despite substantial evidence of the consultative activities which have been carried out to ensure women's participation in the development of measures to meet their training needs, community women's groups indicated that they had little or no knowledge of such activities, and almost no exposure to the purpose of the State Training Profile, which is the basis upon which training in each State is being developed and delivered.

The Literature

The literature which was identified as useful was largely that developed within Government, although a small number of academic books and articles provided some food for thought. A full bibliography is attached to the research report, Profiling Women.

Process Consultation (1988) suggests that consultation helps managers to understand problems, using consultation as a means to influence internal organisational activity. Closer to the model which emerged from this study is that outlined by Barry Troya and Wendy Ball in their article, Partnership, Consultation and Influence: State Rhetoric in the Struggle for Racial Equality. This article recognises the ideological and political context as well as the organisational and individual context of consultation. It reflects research findings which indicate that comparatively swift and far reaching changes to the national training agenda (including ongoing restructuring and organisational changes within State Training Agencies) have occurred at the same time as changes to women's lives.

Women are substantially present in the paid workforce and are around half of those in further education and training. Consultation with women is therefore both more important, as recognised by ANTA, and more difficult to achieve.

Government policy documents in the women's area provided examples of four readily identifiable consultative strategies, namely:

- broad community consultation;
- the use of expert groups;
- central, high level advisory and consultative bodies; and
- individual interviews and focus groups.

These consultative strategies are reflected in numerous policy documents, and some detailed protocols have been developed, largely by Women's Advisory Councils or by the Community Services industry. (See research report bibliography.) There is also some good information about what constitutes good consultation with clients from non-English speaking backgrounds, produced by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

However, Lucia Parella sounds a note of caution in Participation in Government Structures: Progress or Co-option?, Australian Feminist Studies (18, 1993). Parella argues that there is incompatibility between grassroots political activism and the strategy of working through bureaucratic structures, which 'sets up some women' as experts who speak on behalf of other disadvantaged women (1993:67).
Principles of Good Practice for Consultation with Women

Three principles for good practice for consultation with women emerged. These principles apply at all levels of consultation, from national or central bodies, to community or training provider level. They are:

1. Consultation should be carried out within the context of an agreed protocol.

Agreement on the protocols to be used in consultation should be reached prior to any other activity taking place. Agreeing to the protocol is itself a consultative exercise, and although some excellent ‘off the shelf’ protocols are available, usually through Women’s Advisory Councils, using a ready-made protocol can only be effective if both parties have agreed that it is appropriate. Agreement might be reached through, for example, discussion with appropriate representatives of the target group such as the Women’s Advisory Council, or through an initial workshop with representatives of community groups.

2. Consultation methods should be designed and resourced to meet specified and agreed objectives in partnership with representatives of the target group.

The process of developing consultation methods requires input from those who belong to (or represent) the target groups, and who have knowledge and expertise in the best way to achieve the desired result. The range of consultative strategies is enormous, and getting the best possible results from the available resources will not be achieved without involvement in the planning of consultation by those who are to be consulted. This can be achieved through a workshop, a steering committee, or even a succession of telephone calls, depending upon the size of the population, elements such as distance, and the complexity of the objectives.

Women in the community must be resourced to participate, for example through travel costs. Community organisations have both consultative and information-disseminating tools which will add considerably to the effectiveness of consultation. They can contribute or share resources if they, in turn, are supported. They frequently have committee structures, broadsheets and notice boards, and using existing community networks and communication strategies is doubly important when consultation is designed to identify the needs and aspirations of specific groups, such as those from a non-English speaking background, or those living outside metropolitan areas. Actively seeking such involvement, and resourcing it, will expand the effective use of scarce resources for both the Department and the community organisation. Consultation is not cost neutral for either party, and an up-front agreement will benefit both, as well as contributing to a more effective and targeted exercise.

3. Consultation should be cyclical rather than one-off, and should always include agreed feedback mechanisms and evaluation and adjustment.

There is never enough time for proper consultation, and one-off consultation has a built-in failure mechanism. Women, particularly, find short timelines difficult to respond to when juggling work and family responsibilities. Those most likely to participate in consultation are the very women who are also contributing actively through their community involvement. Government departments which invite comment and give two weeks to closing date, or those which circulate details of dates of workshops without sufficient notice, even two or three weeks ahead, are unlikely to win friends in the community.

They are also unlikely to achieve the desired results. Such experiences have lead to cynicism and loss of confidence in the objectives of consultation and are seen as paying lip service rather than inviting real participation.

Consultation must be incorporated into every stage of planning and development, and should be clearly and publicly defined as cyclical and ongoing. When the process is agreed to by both parties, with clearly identified resources, consultation ceases to be an ‘add on’ or a chore. It is less likely to be a rushed, prickly and unsatisfactory encounter between a single, overstretched officer and an irritable, cynical and overworked group of women from the community who have turned up, despite all their experience, in the hope that, this time, it will be different.

Cyclical consultation allows for the development of working papers and can lead to particular consultative strategies within community organisations, which might circulate information, hold workshops, and develop an informed response. An agreement might be reached which targets a particular group or issue, and State Training Agencies working in partnership in this way might be better equipped to identify the needs of specific market segments or industries.

Cyclical consultation incorporates feedback and evaluation mechanisms, including some agreed measures of success and of change. Such agreement avoids the dangers of unrealistic expectations, and ensures that consultation, at whatever level it occurs, includes mutual understanding of objectives.
Measuring the Impact of Consultation

Tools for measuring success have been developed at all levels of government. Community organisations are usually familiar with performance indicators and performance measures. Where they have participated in funding applications, for example, they will be familiar with accountability requirements and the need to report on outcomes.

In relation to the impact of consultation, the study informing this framework, not surprisingly, did not find a simple solution and tool for measurement. It did, however, indicate that the impact of consultation, whilst not directly attributable, can be reflected at a number of levels, providing objectives have been clearly defined at the outset of the consultation exercise. For example, if the desired outcome is changes to participation of women in particular industries, or the provision of more child care places in colleges, it is measurable over time. What is not measurable is the direct consequence of a particular consultative strategy. It is critical to informed and ongoing consultative strategies that both parties have agreed objectives, and that what constitutes success for that strategy is also agreed.

Wider government policies, such as the importance of customer focus and the delivery of customer charters, provide avenues for consumer groups, including women, to have a broader input as citizens. Many women's groups are informed of such processes and involved in them. However, in the training arena, measuring change is accomplished at a national level, through outcome measures such as growth or decline in particular skills areas, the success of women VET graduates in getting jobs, and the comparative support given by employers to women and men undertaking training.

At the State level, outcomes also might be demonstrated by a gender analysis of participation and activity tables. Specific projects might also generate specific indicators for success, and such outcomes could be documented as part of the Profile, and in feedback to consultative partners. Industries and their Training Councils, providing they are resourced for consultative exercises, can indicate outcomes such as changing patterns of participation. All of these measures, whilst they may reflect priorities identified through consultation, are not directly attributable. Consultation is part of the process.

At the provider level, consultation also can be based upon a range of strategies, but should be designed and implemented according to the principles outlined above. Measurement of its impact might be incorporated into performance and resource agreements, and could include female participation in identified areas, or new strategies for reaching particular groups of women. Working towards priorities, and monitoring change, is part of normal business. Incorporating properly designed and delivered consultation at this level, and linking it to agreed measures of success, could go a long way to providing the underpinning at community level of the broader measures required within the State Training Profile.
Guidelines for Consultation with Women

The centre-piece of this guide to consultation is a PROTOCOL, or working agreement, developed as the first stage of the consultation process itself between those undertaking the consultation and those being consulted.

Consultation as a Strategy

Consultation must be seen as one strategy (amongst others) informing the women's training agenda in the State Training Profile. Information from the consultation process will supplement data gathered from a range of other strategies. At the same time, the consultation itself must be based upon existing knowledge about women's training needs and employment options.

Developing the Protocol

1. Consider how consultation with women will be consistent with, and incorporated into, the whole State Training Profile development process.

2. Consider consultation which may be occurring at various levels including College, individual providers, ITCs, State Training Agencies and consultation at the State or national peak body level.

3. Consider the range of women's groups to be consulted, ensuring the inclusion of groups representing women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, women with disabilities, and women from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

4. Establish initial meetings with key representatives of the above groups to establish a protocol for the consultation process.

5. Determine jointly with those groups to be consulted: aspects of the consultation cycle; the time-line appropriate to each group; and how the consultation will link to other aspects of data gathering.

6. Determine jointly: the objectives of the consultation process; key indicators against which to measure the outcomes of the consultation process; and the mechanisms for feedback to those being consulted.

7. Document and make available existing databases on women within the VET sector.

8. Consider resources necessary for effective consultation.

Undertaking the Consultation

Once the Protocol is agreed -

1. Make information available regarding the consultation to as many individuals as possible, paying particular attention to rural women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

2. Prepare all documents to readable style, and if necessary translate into the relevant first language of participants.

3. Ensure all participants understand from the outset that every aspect of the consultation, including discussion papers, reports, and individual views expressed, are open for discussion.

4. Develop adequate networking with women's organisations, Government departments and key community members in order to maximise the benefits of the consultations being undertaken.

5. Provide sufficient notice for women's groups and networks to inform and consult with their members, especially during holiday periods.

6. Where consultation is based on meetings, choose an optimal date and time for the meetings, choose a venue which is familiar and accessible, offer interpreters and child-care, and provide refreshments.

7. Disseminate agendas and/or focus questions to reach participants in sufficient time to allow them the opportunity to adequately consider the issues being addressed.

8. Find out as much as possible about the meeting participants before the meeting and facilitate the meeting to overcome potential barriers to the consultation process.

9. Be sensitive to the diverse needs of participants, with respect to cultural and political backgrounds, knowledge of the issues, literacy levels and communication styles.

10. Recognise and value all contributions and ensure all meeting participants can present their views.

11. Where it is impossible or inappropriate to consult in a face-to-face meeting format, consider other options such as written surveys, questionnaires, telephone interviews or interactive video forums.