



Making Policy Together

Reflections from the NSW
Refugee Youth Policy Initiative



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Sydney Policy Lab
Report commissioned by
Multicultural New South Wales

Making policy together

Reflections from the NSW Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

“Most policy is written by grown-ups sitting in offices without consulting with the people on whom the policy impacts.”

Policy Professional, Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

“I think it’s an intimidating word, policy...But then, when you really get to the crux of it, it’s: here’s a problem, here’s a solution, can we make it happen?”

Youth Peer Researcher, Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

“If a minority group is affected by policies...it’s best if they are involved in making those rules and policies because they know what’s best for them. They know the culture, they know what they want, and they know how it can get there.”

Youth Peer Researcher, Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

“...if we live in a democracy, then the people who are making policy really should be representative and representing the voices of the population of the country that they’re governing over... And they come with...their own prejudices, biases, value systems. So, if you’ve got people in places making policy who don’t understand or represent people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, sexualities, genders, then it’s not necessarily a mean-spirited kind of policymaking, but it is not going to inherently represent a range of experiences. It’s not able to, because it doesn’t know about them.”

Policy Professional, Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

“Seeing that happening, seeing that basically democracy is taking place...the government is actually taking care of their people. I personally feel really happy, because I feel it is the first step in the right direction to engage in society.”

Youth Peer Researcher, Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

About the Sydney Policy Lab

The Sydney Policy Lab is a multidisciplinary research initiative at the University of Sydney and a nonpartisan space where people from all walks of life can meet and develop plans collectively for the future.

We exist to forge collaborative relationships between researchers, civil society, industry, politicians, and policymakers that are capable of creating new knowledge and driving change that would shape an Australia which is more equal, where power is in the hands of everyday people and where more people feel a secure sense of belonging in their own society.

The Lab develops original and far-reaching research projects which unite the grounded wisdom that comes from everyday experience and the perspectives gained from rigorous scholarship. We work in partnership with institutions who seek to put new ideas into practice.

Our unique way of working strengthens the ability of our researchers and partners to collaboratively generate new ideas, transform the ways they work and effect change.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Foreword

Public confidence in democratic policymaking has taken a knock in recent years.

In survey after survey, increasing numbers of Australians report feeling as if their politicians and public servants don't share their life experiences, don't have the same values and don't really listen to them.

There are deep dangers in this growing gulf. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed just how vital it is that there is widespread trust in public institutions. Without such trust, there is a real chance that key messages don't get through and that people don't follow crucial public health advice, undermining the wellbeing of everyone and threatening the economic recovery. Even before the pandemic, there was a strong sense that it is harder for politicians and public servants to make the kind of changes they need to make when their actions are viewed with scepticism and doubt.

At the Sydney Policy Lab, we have been looking for the last two years at the ways in which politicians and public servants may have to change if they are to put this right.

As we've done so, we have been hugely heartened to note that there are tremendous experiments ongoing across the democratic world right now trying to do just this. All of these experiments, we have discovered, have had one thing at their core: they are trying to redress the power imbalances that are at the heart of this growing public scepticism. They're trying, in other words, to ensure that the voices and experiences of people other than politicians and public servants are heard right at the centre of policymaking.

You can imagine our excitement here at the Lab, then, when we first discovered that just one such initiative has been happening right here in New South Wales.

Like the best of the international experiments, the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative was designed to enable young refugees directly to influence the development of the public policies that shape their lives.

In the report that follows, the Lab's researchers set out what has gone well with this initiative and what remains to be learned.

It is a crucial chance to step back and to see what we can all do to reinvigorate our democracy.

We hope you enjoy learning from it as much as we have.

Professor Marc Stears

Director of the Sydney Policy Lab



Executive Summary

Executive summary

After many years of declining trust in established institutions, there is a new global surge of investment in deliberative, participative and direct democracy. Calls for and efforts to include people from the broader community in public decision-making are emerging at all levels of governance, underpinned by the potential to develop innovative ways of finding consensus on and solutions to long-term and complex challenges.¹

Accordingly, the decade ahead may present new opportunities to reshape the relationship between people and their governments. This report found that public participation in policymaking, at its heart, can have most impact when it is underpinned by two fundamental factors: a willingness to innovate – to try something new – and a willingness to share power and responsibility with members of the public.

Resulting from a learning partnership between the Sydney Policy Lab at the University of Sydney and the New South Wales (NSW) Government agency Multicultural NSW, this report seeks to contribute to practice-based evidence and enrich understanding of what works and what does not work in efforts directly to include people in policymaking processes, particularly regarding initiatives that include people with lived experience of the policy matters under consideration. It outlines a rich set of insights from the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative, a unique NSW Government initiative led by Multicultural NSW and the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement, Professor Peter Shergold, that seeks to include young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the process of decision-making about settlement services policy in NSW.

These insights and key recommendations for propelling participatory policymaking forward for the next phase of the initiative and across NSW Government broadly are:

Enabling innovation in policymaking

Insight 1: Championing change

Institutional leaders and influential champions can play a key role in building momentum and conditions for innovative approaches to policymaking to thrive.

Recommendation: Public administrations need to sustain and foster commitment to public participation from all parts of leadership, from Ministers and agency heads, to executives and line managers, with dedicated coordination across whole-of-government and intra-agency structures a key to success. Demonstrations of commitment include adequate resourcing and timeframes, development of systems with strong feedback loops, investment in capacity building for public servants and public participants, and active support for public servants to take on innovative approaches to power-sharing and collaboration.

Insight 2: Reimagining outcomes

The value of participation in policymaking, and the new ways of working that it entails, can be difficult to capture in pre-determined outcomes on a limited timeframe. Balancing the need to demonstrate policy outcomes with the need to test new processes is key.

Recommendation: The public service needs to develop systems with feedback loops that facilitate clarity about the expectations, limits, roles and responsibilities of all participants. This involves supporting the evolution of outcomes that take processes into account, which may include the continuity and sustainability of engagement, the levels of trust and depth of local relationships that are attained, the availability of tailored opportunities for particular groups of public representatives to take part in deliberation, the development of existing community links, and the coordination of initiatives across different parts of government to avoid over-consultation.

Insight 3: Expanding policymaking time horizons

Engaging communities and including lived experience in policymaking requires a substantive and ongoing time commitment. For engagement to be meaningful, deep, and durable, relationships need to be fostered between and across governments, collaborating organisations and participating communities over a significant period of time.

Recommendation: Supported by political and public service leadership, participatory initiatives should have flexible timeframes and negotiated milestones, particularly given the contemporary need to mix online and in person engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meaningful public engagement needs to be started and planned early in the policy cycle, with special attention paid to the time available for participation in decision-making.

Insight 4: Removing the practical barriers to participation

Barriers to new forms of public participation such as educational prerequisites, time commitments and income loss limit the accessibility of participatory initiatives to those who live especially challenging lives. These barriers should be addressed collaboratively with participants across all stages of a participatory process.

Recommendation: The public service should tailor approaches to participation to ensure that a representative group of the participants whose views are being sought are enabled to get involved. This involves, as a starting point, developing a full understanding of implicit and practical barriers to participation in collaboration with members of the public who have lived experience relevant to the participatory process concerned. The public service should establish administrative systems and guidelines that support the involvement of community members such as through paid leave or reimbursement, provide additional support for participants with special needs such as physical disabilities and experience of social exclusion, and adapt to the capacities and expectations of participants, such as translation services, meetings outside working hours, and efforts to set aside bureaucratic terminology.

Sharing decision-making power

Insight 5: Empowering experience-based experts

Methodologies such as Participatory Action Research can be deployed in participatory processes to amplify the voices of experience-based experts – people who possess specialised knowledge based on first-hand experience of a social issue – and equip them to represent the communities with whom they share such experience.

Recommendation: The public service should empower public participants to come to the participatory process with knowledge of the issues concerned, time and techniques to build long-term relationships with each other and public servants, adequate power to set the agenda together with decision-makers, and skills and capacities for sharing lived experiences and engaging in dialogue.

Insight 6: Being conscious of everyday power dynamics

Bringing people with lived experience of policy issues into decision-making processes requires special consideration of the day-to-day power dynamics in interactions between those people and government or other institutions.

Recommendation: The public service should ensure public participants are given the resources they need to participate effectively and that public servants and leaders are accountable to participants about how their inputs are received and acted upon.

Insight 7: Forging collaborations beyond the public sector

The expertise required to run participatory processes well is wide-ranging and distinct from the technical forms of expertise usually required to make policy. Government must look beyond the public sector to build collaborative relationships with a range of people, institutions, organisations and communities.

Recommendation: Efforts should be made to build long-term, sustainable partnerships between public servants, non-governmental, community and academic partners to ensure that participatory expertise and resources are swiftly available and that initiatives can be effectively evaluated. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recommended that governments establish offices in charge of participatory and deliberative processes, funded by government and staffed by public servants in combination with university researchers or civil society representatives to develop independent understanding of when participation is appropriate and how it can lead to better policy and greater social impact.

Insight 8: Building the capacity of government and everyday people to make policy together

Long-term capacity building in the special skills required for participatory policymaking is an essential component of any public participation initiative. This is true for public servants, just as it is true for participants.

Recommendation: Governments should invest in building the capacity of public servants to understand and practise sound participatory methodologies, and to commission and evaluate participatory work. In ways distinct from traditional policymaking processes, public servants need negotiation and collaboration skills that enable public participation. Government should craft sustainable partnerships with organisations that are equipped to train public participants in personal development and leadership so that they know how to participate and deliberate well.

Public participation in policymaking holds the promise of new policy ideas, responsive and efficient policy delivery, a stronger sense of agency and belonging among participants and greater trust between citizens and government officials. With commitment to enabling innovation and sharing decision-making power, the public service can build a culture in which everyday people and public servants recognise each other as partners in achieving the public good.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACYP	Advocate for Children and Young People, NSW
CPI	Centre for Public Impact, A BCG Foundation
CGRR	Coordinator-General for Refugee Resettlement
GLA	Greater London Authority
IAP2	The International Association for Public Participation
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
STARTTS	NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
'The Initiative'	The Refugee Youth Policy Initiative, a project of Multicultural NSW and the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement, Professor Peter Shergold
'Youth Peer Researcher'	The title given to the 15 young people, aged between 18 and 24, who were selected through an open application process to participate in the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative.
'Policy Professional'	Staff from government agencies and non-government organisations who participated in the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative.



Introduction

Introduction

Around the world, governments, think tanks and community groups are seeking new ways to enable people from the broader community to make the collective decisions that shape their lives. Coming after many years of declining trust in established institutions, this new surge of investment in deliberative, participative and direct democracy renews hope that societies can develop innovative ways of reaching consensus and developing solutions to long-term and complex challenges.²

These calls for and efforts to include a broader range of people in public decision-making are emerging at all levels of governance, underpinned by the potential to generate policies and public services that are more effective and responsive to the evolving societal challenges we face.³ At the national level, governments from Portugal and Nigeria to Brazil and Ireland have spearheaded participatory processes to improve public agenda setting, budgeting and service delivery.⁴ Globally, regional and local government and non-government organisations are also experimenting with citizen engagement at a smaller scale, urged on by international institutions such as the United Nations Democracy Fund.⁵ It is clear that there is more than one way to bring people closer to public decision-making: interventions are being attempted at all points of the policy cycle, at different levels of governance and institutionalisation, and concerning a range of social, economic and cultural issues.

Here in Australia, the Federal Government has joined the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative overseen by a committee of government and civil society representatives that seeks to strengthen governance by promoting transparency, accountability and public engagement.⁶ The recent Thodey Review into the future of the Australian Public Service similarly called for a fundamental reset of the relationship between the public service and citizens that would put the interests of the Australian people at the heart of governance.⁷ This appeal coincides with the release of the *Australian Public Service Framework for Engagement and Participation (2019)*, a practical guide to enable public servants to share, consult, deliberate and collaborate with citizens, communities and businesses.

In the state of New South Wales, the Government has also committed to changing its relationship with people in the communities it serves. The Customer Experience Unit within the NSW Government Department of Customer Service has a mission to work “with NSW Government departments and agencies to ensure the customer is at the centre of policy and service design, funding, delivery and evaluation across the public sector.”⁸

If these initiatives take hold, the decade ahead may present new opportunities to reshape the relationship between government and people in Australia and beyond. Public participation could support the production of innovative policy ideas, achieve efficiencies by improving responsiveness, foster cooperation across diverse groups, build trust between people and government officials and strengthen feelings of agency and belonging among participants.⁹

Nonetheless, there are challenges ahead. A solid evidence base, drawn from real participatory initiatives, to substantiate the impact of public participation on governance outcomes has yet to be fully developed. We do not yet know which public participation strategies are the most effective in engaging the community and influencing policy outcomes. More partnerships between academic institutions and practitioners are needed to document and evaluate participatory policymaking processes in practice.¹⁰

A product of one such learning partnership, this report seeks to contribute to practice-based evidence and enrich understanding of what works and what does not work in efforts to include people in policymaking processes. In particular, this report focuses on initiatives that engage people in policymaking regarding issues related to their lived experience.

To this end, this report draws insights from a NSW Government initiative, led by Multicultural NSW, that seeks to put the real, lived experience of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at the heart of decision-making.

Entitled the 'Refugee Youth Policy Initiative' ('the Initiative'), this project selected a cohort of young people from refugee backgrounds and provided them with support to conduct research with their peers. The Initiative also sought to build the capacity of the NSW Government to design and deliver policies that are informed by lived experience. It involved policymakers and service providers who received support to learn how to listen to young people and engage with their ideas for policy action.

Parallel to the Initiative, Multicultural NSW embarked on a learning partnership with the Sydney Policy Lab at The University of Sydney to generate insights from its implementation. The Sydney Policy Lab convened a multidisciplinary research team to collect data from workshop observation and evaluation surveys, and to conduct 15 confidential interviews with participants in the Initiative. Analysis of these data resulted in the team developing eight key insights into the opportunities and challenges involved in integrating the lived experience of community members into policymaking in Australia. These insights are explored in this report.





1

**An overview of
the Refugee Youth
Policy Initiative**

1. An overview of the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

The Refugee Youth Policy Initiative ('the Initiative') was developed by the NSW Coordinator General of Refugee Resettlement, Professor Peter Shergold AC, and NSW Government agency Multicultural NSW in late 2018. An ongoing effort, the Initiative aims to enable young people, aged 12 to 25, from refugee backgrounds to understand and influence the policy process, and to build the capacity of the NSW Government to design and deliver policies that are informed by lived experience.

Multicultural NSW is the lead agency in the NSW Government responsible for implementing the policy and legislative framework to support multicultural principles. It has strong ties to community organisations and representatives and acts as a liaison and policy advisor to other state agencies. As part of its work, Multicultural NSW has long been involved in discussions about enhancing community engagement in policymaking. The position of NSW Coordinator-General for Refugee Resettlement (NSW CGRR) was created in 2015 to assist with NSW Government preparations for the arrival of refugees from Syria and Iraq announced by the Commonwealth Government and to coordinate across governments, government agencies and NGOs in the provision of refugee resettlement services in NSW.¹¹ Since then, the scope of the position has expanded to include refugee communities more broadly. Multicultural NSW works closely with the NSW CGRR on settlement policy. In late 2018, conversations between Multicultural NSW and Professor Shergold about ways to bring the lived experience of people from refugee backgrounds into policymaking developed into a project to trial an innovative new process with young people.

Multicultural NSW and the NSW CGRR created a Youth Sub-Group of the Joint Partnership Working Group on Refugee Resettlement – a group of advisors from civil society organisations and settlement service providers convened by the NSW CGRR – to inform the design of the project from a frontline perspective. A list of organisations that participated in the Youth Sub-group of the Joint Partnership Working Group on Refugee Resettlement can be found in **Appendix B**. Government agencies and partners from other sectors involved in refugee resettlement were also engaged to participate in and support the Initiative.

The two primary objectives of the Initiative were to build the capability of young people to influence decision-makers and to build the experience and capability of both the NSW Government and the broader service-delivery sector to design and deliver policies informed by lived experience. To date, the Initiative has implemented two phases – community engagement and capacity building – and a third phase, policy development, is still underway. The activities that have occurred in these stages are outlined below. The Initiative is ongoing, and Multicultural NSW expects to develop further stages of participation as discussed at the end of Section 1.

The engagement phase

In the first part of the Initiative, which took place from November 2018 to January 2019, the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) conducted 36 focus groups involving 176 young people, aged between 12 and 24, from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. The consultation was designed to gain understanding of the experience of settlement in NSW. Participants were asked to reflect on positive and negative experiences when they first arrived in Australia and identify things that might have improved their experience of the settlement process. Among the challenges identified in the ACYP's report were difficulties engaging with government agencies to obtain housing, employment and documentation, as well as limited availability of social opportunities provided by settlement service providers to engage with people outside migrant communities. Multicultural NSW used the ACYP's report to identify key areas for the Initiative to investigate further. The full report has been published by the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People.¹²

“Many of the issues raised by young refugees in the consultations were the same as those raised by all young people in NSW. These include difficulty gaining employment, wanting more life skills education like how to pay taxes, difficulties in obtaining a driver’s license, reluctance to seek mental health support and wanting more activities to do, especially at night. Young refugees, however, have the additional pressures and demands of arriving in a new country, adapting to a new culture, learning a new language, starting a new school, having to form new friendships and helping to support their families. The young people that took part in these consultations have suggested several avenues for services and communities to assist with these transitions and settlement journeys.”¹³

In the second part of the engagement phase, Multicultural NSW commissioned researchers at Western Sydney University to lead a Participatory Action Research project. This project was designed to form an evidence base of challenges and opportunities facing young people from refugee backgrounds settling in NSW. Participatory research comprises a range of methodological approaches and techniques that aim to hand power from the researcher to research participants, who are often community members or community-based organisations.¹⁴ Multicultural NSW and Western Sydney University worked together to identify 15 young people from refugee backgrounds. This group were employed by Western Sydney University and provided with training in participatory research methods. Over a period of three months, the 15 peer researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with 338 young people, the majority of whom were aged between 15 and 24, from 34 countries. The results of the research are presented in the report *Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards for the Premier*.¹⁵

“This research differed from the usual consultative processes by shifting power to refugee young people, offering sensitive guidance and trusting in their capacity to conduct ethical data collection and analysis.”¹⁶

“Because the peer researchers were engaged as university employees, their participation in the project also provided them with recognition as equal and valid voices, thus developing their agency and further opportunities for workplace learning – which also expanded their experience, capacity and sense of connectedness to Australia.”¹⁷



The capacity building phase

Following the participatory research phase, Multicultural NSW commissioned The University of Sydney's Sydney Policy Lab to build the capacity of policy workers from government and non-government agencies to work with the peer researchers on policy questions arising from the research.

The peer researchers attended a one-day workshop designed to build their capacity to exercise agency and leadership, demonstrate their strength and resilience and develop skills, networks and platforms to influence decision makers. One peer researcher articulated that the workshop helped them to answer the question: 'How can the challenges I face be tackled using policy as a solution?'

Representatives from government and non-government agencies attended a separate half-day workshop to develop skills and dispositions that would attune them to designing and delivering policies that are informed by lived experience.

"Because of this workshop I will change the way my organisation 'does' policy – less of 'here's a policy, what do you think?' and more of 'tell us what you need and we'll design a policy that works.'"

Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

"Because of this workshop I will change my thinking about program design and evaluation."

Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

"I learned that I need to listen and have meaningful engagement with young people."

Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

The policy development phase

The research and preparatory phase of the Initiative culminated in a one-day Policy Dialogue workshop run by Multicultural NSW and the NSW Department of Customer Service and hosted at the Sydney Policy Lab, which was designed as a forum to enable the peer researchers to collaborate with participants from government and non-government agencies to share knowledge, findings and expertise. Held a fortnight after the capacity building workshops, the Policy Dialogue was attended by the peer researchers and key government and non-government participants. The Dialogue was structured around discussion of key insights that had emerged from the research conducted by the peer researchers.

“You [a peer researcher speaking on behalf of the cohort] really felt like you were contributing to something greater and you could really see the impact, especially in the policy workshops. The research was really able to bring the two worlds together [policymaking and lived experience], and you become a very good voice for those people that you interviewed. So, you become a very integral part because you are essentially the bridge that connects the two worlds together.”

- Youth Peer Researcher, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“This is a good beginning and I hope this will be a start of seeing more participatory work with courageous and young people.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“I learned, observed and concluded that my organisation makes policy backwards – we write it, then user test it.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

As part of the Policy Dialogue, participants discussed a range of issues faced by young people from refugee backgrounds that had been identified by the peer researchers. Four policy concepts were adopted as the focus of ongoing follow-up activities led by Multicultural NSW. These are: Navigating and accessing existing services; Managing life transitions; Exploring identities and family and community relationships; and Preparing for the future and independence.

To date, follow-up work has led to a range of outcomes, including a flagship Multicultural Youth Linker program. The need to better assist young people to navigate the complex service system and to access opportunities and programs that already exist was a major theme across the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative. To meet this need, Multicultural NSW and the NSW Department of Customer Service worked together to co-design the Multicultural Youth Linker Pilot Program with young people from refugee backgrounds and community organisations. The program will be implemented in partnership with Service NSW and aims

to build the capacity of young people from refugee, refugee-like and migrant backgrounds to make informed decisions for themselves. Trialled for four months out of the Wetherill Park Service NSW Service Centre, the pilot will see the recruitment of two Multicultural Youth Linkers. Youth Linkers are young people from refugee backgrounds that will support other young people to connect with support services, advice and information, employment and education opportunities and local activities. Drawing on their own experiences, Multicultural Youth Linkers listen and provide advice about accessing existing services, finding opportunities for meaningful work, seeking out health care and education, navigating family, cultural and religious values and expectations, and building relationships in vibrant and inclusive communities. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Multicultural Youth Linkers will also connect young people to supports and information they need to cope with the pandemic. The initiative has been named a top NSW Government Customer Service priority, a decision endorsed by the NSW Government Secretaries Board.

Additionally, peer researchers have been invited to share experiences from the Initiative at a range of forums and events hosted by government, academic and non-government organisations. The methodology of the Initiative and content from the research have influenced the work of Settlement Services International, the NSW Government Office of Regional Youth, the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW and the NSW Department of Education among others.

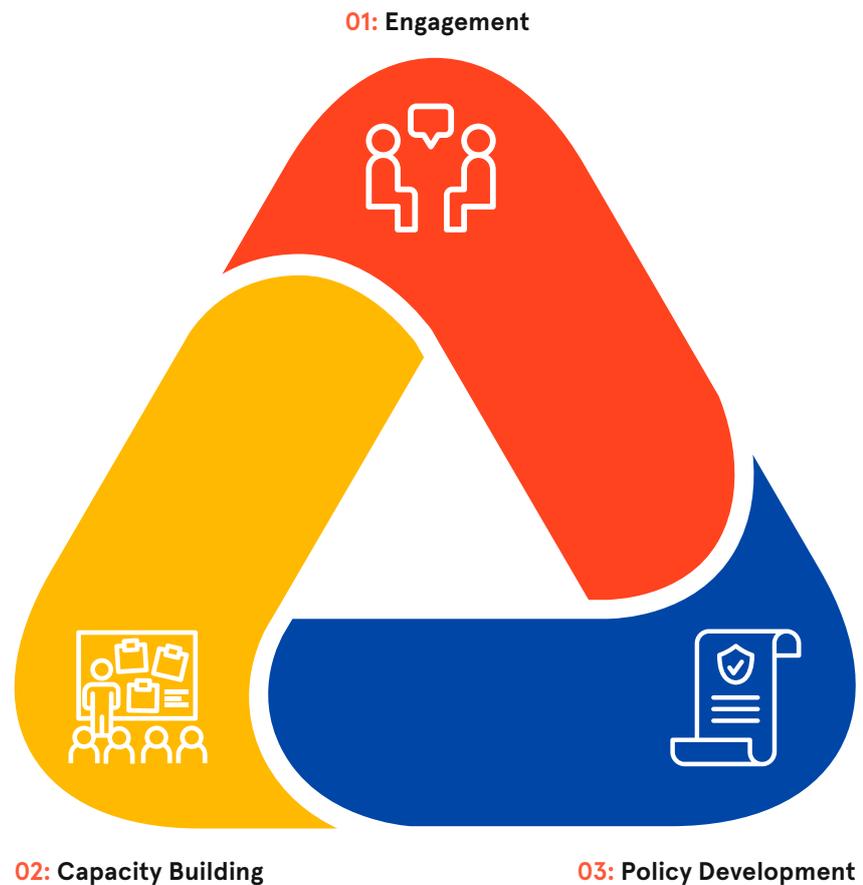


Figure 1: The Refugee Youth Policy Initiative



2

**Public participation
in decision-making:
What is it? What is it not?**

2. Public participation in decision-making: What is it? What is it not?

Prior to discussing insights from the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative, this section introduces the key theoretical typologies used in Australia and globally to support public participation in decision-making.

This section also discusses the ways in which these typologies have influenced real-world policymaking by presenting three vignettes about participatory initiatives run by public administrations. These vignettes highlight innovative ways to involve the community in public decisions and the role of public participation in building democratic trust and improving policy outcomes.

Public participation in theory

There are countless ways for everyday people to participate in and influence public decision-making. Participation through conventional avenues for political and civic engagement, such as voting, organisational affiliation and party membership, is on the wane, as trust in institutions erodes.¹⁸ At the same time, however, participation in less traditional political processes and institutions is on the rise globally, from mobilising mass protests and flash-mobs to organising campaigns and social movements, both online and in the streets.¹⁹ Far from heralding widespread civic disengagement, such trends demonstrate that people are demanding to be heard by their representatives, and in so doing, they are rapidly transforming modes of public participation available to them.

This paradigm shift in civic engagement away from traditional channels of participation poses an important challenge to public administrations.²⁰ Since the beginning of the participatory development era of the 1970s, governments have endeavoured to solve this challenge, among others, by developing new and innovative ways for the public to participate.²¹ Participation can take the form of public meetings, seminars and people's assemblies,²² open source or private digital platforms for online consultation, feedback, petition or public opinion mapping,²³ deliberative processes,²⁴ civic hackathons and policy challenges,²⁵ service or policy design workshops,²⁶ and participatory budgeting,²⁷ to name a few. The labels for these different forms of public participation are as varied as the forms themselves, including community engagement, devolution, localism, deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, co-design, empowerment, social capital, consultation, human-centred design and co-production. All these and more fall under the banner of public participation.

Public participation is broadly defined as the involvement of people and organisations in government policy processes and decision-making.²⁸

In the context of Australian governance, the most widely used definition of public participation is that promoted by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2): "any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and that uses public input to make better decisions."²⁹

Frameworks for public participation tend to represent the role and influence of the community in decision-making processes on a spectrum and distinguish three or more types of engagement. The most common types include:

- 1. Information:** Public participants are informed about a public decision, usually about the problem at hand and their rights, responsibilities and choices. Feedback is generally not invited, and information tends to flow one way. Information is shared in formats including newsletters, websites, publications or forums. Available and accessible information is a precondition for all forms of public participation.
- 2. Consultation:** Public participants are invited to share their opinions and feedback on a public matter and are sometimes kept informed about how their input influences decisions. Consultation often takes the form of meetings, focus groups, exposure drafts of legislation, surveys and public hearings where governments retain control over the entire process.
- 3. Collaboration:** Public participants are invited to share their opinions and feedback, with a commitment from the relevant public administration to take their recommendations into account and to keep them informed about how their input influences decisions. Committees, boards or other temporary or permanent institutions can be created to formalise mechanisms for shared decision making.
- 4. Partnership:** Public participants co-lead all stages of a decision-making process, from design to implementation and evaluation, and the relevant public administration has a high degree of accountability to the participants.
- 5. Empowerment:** Public participants lead the decision-making process, enabled and supported by the relevant public administration. Examples of empowerment include community-controlled schools and neighbourhoods.

A prominent example of a framework for public participation is the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, shown below (Figure 2). Each public participation goal included in the Spectrum is matched with a promise to the public in order to identify the level of accountability attached to each goal.³⁰ **Appendix A** examines in further detail several of the foundational or leading Australian and global frameworks for public participation which have informed this review, in addition to the IAP2 framework.

Figure 2: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation³¹

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IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

IAP2 notes that “differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.”³² The online platform launched to collect rapid feedback on the Scottish Government’s COVID-19 Framework for Decision-Making is a clear example of a participatory initiative well-suited to consultation, given the urgency and scale of the situation.³³ The orange arrow at the top of the IAP2 spectrum indicates the differing levels of impact that each method of public participation has on the final decision or outcome. It is important to note that only ‘empower’ places full decision-making responsibility in the hands of the public, while ‘involve’ and ‘collaborate’ denote different levels of shared decision-making between the public and the decision-maker.

There are a few important points to note about the process of public participation:

Participatory initiatives that are primarily consultative or informative do not give public participants the power to hold decision-makers accountable when they do not heed public input. Therefore, while public participation frameworks are instructive, they can obscure questions of power and its redistribution, which are at the heart of participatory endeavours.

Despite opening up public discourse, consultative exercises can sometimes entrench inequalities of voice and participation if there is no commitment to ongoing engagement and accountability. Accordingly, the connection between participatory processes and outcomes and institutional endorsement and implementation needs to be made clear from the outset of any participatory initiative. There are many examples of participatory initiatives that have received criticism for a lack of commitment to take public input forward. President Barack Obama’s ‘We the People’ online petition platform in the United States and the analogous ‘European Citizens Initiative’ launched by the European Commission – the executive branch of the European Union – purported to provide an avenue to public influence over policymaking but, it has been argued, in reality were more modest tools for promoting public debate.³⁴ An Australian example is the Rann Government’s 2006 consultation on South Australia’s Strategic Plan, which was framed as the beginning of a wider attempt to create dialogue with communities. Academics have assessed that the centralised and government-

driven process eventually implemented did not facilitate further dialogue and may have ultimately weakened the administration's perceived legitimacy.³⁵

As Sherry Arnstein, who developed the highly influential Ladder of Citizen Participation – see **Appendix A** – put it in 1969: “there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process.”³⁶ At its best, public participation fosters joint determination of outcomes, legitimising those outcomes in the process. In other words, “change happens when there is a shift in the dynamics of power.”³⁷ Meaningful public participation pursues and enables the involvement of those affected by a decision, communicates clearly the interests of all those engaged in the process, involves the public in the design of their participation, creates democratic mechanisms for taking public input forward, and commits to real accountability for doing so.

Public participation that takes questions of power seriously therefore demands of public servants, who are traditionally in command of processes and decision-making, the skills, resources and inclination to share some of their power with the public.

This is countercultural for many public administrations. To foster understanding of what it could look like to share power, researchers have suggested that public servants take the perspective of ‘community engaging government’, rather than ‘government engaging community’, flipping traditional power dynamics to position public servants as ‘operationalists’ and public participants as ‘strategists.’³⁸

Similar calls to transform traditional public sector values and ways of working have also come from leaders of public sector innovation within and close to government. Terry Moran argues that “public servants have to be better equipped and be given more authority to adapt to the needs of the communities they serve,”³⁹ and Professor Peter Shergold advocates for what he calls the “participation society,” with “twin pillars of trust and engagement”⁴⁰; both Moran and Shergold are Australian Public Service leaders. The enablement paradigm, coined by the Centre for Public Impact (CPI, a BCG Foundation), similarly represents a radical shift away from top-down authority, management and agency and towards humility about “what can be achieved when power is aggregated” and greater commitment to “what can be achieved through collaboration and cooperation.” CPI Chief Executive Adrian Brown explains:

“Rather than trying to control, rather than trying to manage, rather than envisaging the world as a giant machine to be optimised, an enablement mindset says that our job in government is to help create the conditions from which good outcomes are more likely to emerge.”⁴¹

Adam Lent and Jessica Studdert from the New Local Government Network in the UK argue that:

“There is an urgent need for a new model of public service delivery: the Community Paradigm. The fundamental principle underpinning this paradigm is to place the design and delivery of public services in the hands of the communities they serve. In this way, a new, egalitarian relationship can be built between public servants and citizens: one that enables the collaboration necessary to shift to prevention; one that requires communities to take more responsibility for their own well-being; and one that means citizens and communities can genuinely ‘take back control.’”⁴²

Finally, British social innovator Hilary Cottam puts it: “the question is not how can we fix these services, but rather, as I stand beside you, how can I support you to create change.”⁴³ Cottam argues for a shift from a “transactional” to a “relational” framework of governance:

“A relational framework allows for new things to grow, to be expressed and to be valued. Our current framework is transactional. It is about managing, handling, treating, and transferring. Transactions are useful. Sometimes we need to get from A to B or we need an operation to mend a broken bone. But a transactional approach cannot solve the biggest challenges we face. How to live well and grow, how to meet the challenges of climate change, immigration, ageing...challenges [that] cannot simply be managed. They are more complicated and solutions require our engagement, our hearts and our minds. Relational working requires capacities for empathy, for human warmth and practice: the tactics and tools to make change, often in difficult circumstances. It is not fuzzy... A relational way of working, thinking and designing is one that creates possibility for change, one that creates abundance – our capacity for relationships, like love, is infinite.”⁴⁴

Across such efforts to embed new structures, knowledge and practices in government, ‘design thinking’ – the approach to policymaking or service delivery from a design perspective – has become increasingly prevalent.

The idea that policymaking and services should be designed to meet specific needs, solve particular problems or achieve certain objectives efficiently has long been well-established, but attention to co-designing policy has grown substantially over the last decade.⁴⁵ Rather than a blanket term for non-conventional approaches to public participation, “‘co-design’ signifies the active involvement of a diverse range of participants in exploring, developing, and testing responses to shared challenges.”⁴⁶ Researcher and designer Emma Blomkamp defines co-design by breaking it down into its constituent parts:

“The ‘co’ is typically considered an abbreviation for ‘cooperative’ or ‘collaborative’ design, which draws on the Scandinavian tradition of participatory design...An appropriate definition of co-design as a methodology for policymaking would recognise it as a design-led process, involving creative and participatory principles and tools to engage different kinds of people and knowledge in public problem solving.”⁴⁷

Blomkamp goes on to specify:

“Co-design thus challenges conventional approaches to planning and policymaking, as it requires wide input into problem definition and the development of solutions, rather than merely offering the opportunity for citizen or stakeholder feedback once a policy or plan has been formulated by specialist professionals.⁴⁸ Moreover, it recognises that ‘the process is continuous and ever changing’, which has implications for policy designers whose job is ‘no longer to produce finished and unalterable solutions’ but to continuously co-create and negotiate solutions with people affected by policy issues⁴⁹ ...A distinguishing feature of co-design is the philosophy that underpins it, based on the radical roots of participatory design. As Sanoff explains, ‘This approach is based on the democratic concept whereby people affected by design decisions should be involved in the process of making the decisions.’⁵⁰ Applied to policy, this means enabling or empowering the people affected by a policy issue to actively contribute to developing a solution for it.”⁵¹

Compared with traditional participatory models, co-design not only changes the relationship between public servants and the public from dependency to reciprocity, but also has other advantages, including its adaptability, responsiveness to changing conditions and complexity, and broad suite of tools, practices and techniques for participation.⁵² Through co-design, policy and service prototypes can be created, tested, adapted and improved, all in collaboration with members of the public, and when practised on an ongoing basis, co-design can support cultural and institutional change in the public sector. Partly for this reason, policy labs and behavioural insight units have been set up in many countries to assist governments to embark on such initiatives.⁵³

A collaborative vision of policymaking presents challenges. By definition, sharing power with public participants reduces government control over a project and its outcomes. Even after successfully co-designing and implementing service and policy prototypes, public servants then need to cultivate working relationships across agency and departmental silos and persuade leaders to support and scale co-designed solutions.⁵⁴ Because co-design often occurs with a small number of participants from particular communities, moving from individual projects to high-level policy change or implementing at scale is not always suitable.⁵⁵

Further, the structure and culture of government neither facilitates nor rewards experimentation and adaptation, leading to and reinforcing calls for public sector transformation such as those outlined earlier in this section. Public servants interested in fostering meaningful public participation may be unsure of the level of institutional support and appetite for risk among their superiors, as well as how to navigate concerns such as legal or ethical standards of duty-of-care, achieving balanced representation, and accountability for using public resources in an unconventional way.⁵⁶

Supporting public servants to develop the skills and access the resources they need to create and steward opportunities for meaningful public participation is foundational to realising the potential of co-design and other participatory methodologies that seek to share power with the public. Supporting public participants to build the skills they need to ensure they are listened to is equally important for redefining the power dynamic between government and the public and for making sure participants are broadly representative of a community.



Public Participation and Lived Experience

The models for public participation discussed in the previous section can be applied to various types and levels of community engagement. The purpose of the Initiative was to improve the settlement experience in NSW by providing an avenue for the lived experience of young people from refugee backgrounds to be incorporated into policymaking. Working with community members with lived experience, potentially including past or present trauma, requires additional planning, specific expertise and may require translation services to be arranged. Organisational commitment to engaging lived experience can be concretely translated into priorities, systems and processes by:

Providing adequate time and resources: This may include dedicated staff time, budget for travel, events and research, paying people for their time to contribute, and bringing in additional external capability in research, facilitation, communications or engagement.

Codifying minimum practices: To ensure that the process of participation reflects and meets the cultural, social, economic and political needs of community members. Encouragement and resourcing should also be provided to enable teams to carry out these minimum practices.

Considering appropriateness and capabilities: Methods of engagement and listening should be appropriate to the purpose and also to the capability of those who are responsible for facilitating the engagement and of the community members involved.

Identifying obstacles and bridges: The organisation engaging with lived experience should consider whether its current systems enable or prevent engagement with lived experience. Identifying obstacles to acting on individual stories and clarifying the boundaries within which the organisation can act upon the results of engaging with communities helps to set expectations clearly for all parties at the outset.⁵⁷

Public participation in practice

As discussed, public participation takes many forms and encompasses a range of different kinds of relationships between public servants and everyday people. To illustrate the range of options for public participation, this report provides three vignettes of participatory initiatives. These vignettes have been chosen because they represent innovative efforts by public administrations genuinely to share decision-making power with public participants. These initiatives actively grappled with the difficulties of sharing power between governments and communities, and developed different answers to the question: “who has, or should have, power over public decision-making?”

Government, Civil Society and Philanthropic Partnership: Greater London Authority’s Citizenship and Integration Initiative

The Citizenship and Integration Initiative is a philanthropic, government and civil society collaboration in the United Kingdom that brings young leaders in civil society organisations into staff teams in London’s regional authority as secondees for periods of up to two years.

At its core, this initiative is about testing a new model of cross-sector partnership working between the Greater London Authority (GLA), civil society organisations and independent philanthropic funders. It aims to advance shared goals on social integration related to participation, equality and relationships.

Secondees work side by side with public servants on social integration projects, and the initiative has been shown to increase the effectiveness of government engagement with young people from diverse backgrounds. The initiative adds up to more than the sum of its parts: secondees are able to inform, influence and contribute to wider GLA activities and policymaking, to an extent that would not have been possible outside the secondment model; the quality of GLA activities is increased through the input of secondees and their networks; and partnering civil society organisations have wider audiences for their work.

One of the secondees interviewed for this report spoke about the experience as invaluable for any young person in the not-for-profit sector. Being embedded in government day-to-day enriched their understanding of how civil society leaders can better work together with and engage public servants.

The unique model for the initiative relies on a pooled fund including the Trust for London, Unbound Philanthropy, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Pears Foundation and the City Bridge Trust. The fund is independent of the Mayor of London and the GLA but complements the Mayor’s work on social integration with shared goals and objectives. The fund and the GLA commit resources to projects that go beyond what one partner would be able to achieve alone, drawing on the strengths and resources of all.⁵⁸

Permanent Deliberative Council: The Ostbelgian Model

Ostbelgian, the German-speaking region of Belgium, set up a permanent and institutionalised citizens' council in 2019 following an invitation by the Belgian government for a group of experts to assist in designing a model for public participation in policymaking.⁵⁹

It is an example of a representative deliberative process. In deliberative processes, Citizens' Assemblies, Juries or Panels convene groups of people from across society for one full day or longer to learn, deliberate and generate recommendations for decision-makers on complex policy problems.

The Ostbelgian Bürgerrat (Citizens' Council) sets the agenda for pressing policy issues of its choice to be addressed in up to three Citizens' Panels each year. Following the Citizens' Panels, the Panel and Council members together make recommendations for regional policy to the regional parliament.

The Bürgerrat has 24 members: six are politicians, from each political party; six are participants in previous citizens' panels; and twelve are randomly selected inhabitants of Ostbelgien. All Bürgerrat members are appointed for a period of 18 months, with one third of the cohort rotated out every six months – the politicians are rotated out first – and replaced by randomly selected citizens through a lottery.⁶⁰

The Citizens' Panels are composed of approximately 50 citizens, randomly selected, who work for three weekends over several months.

In contrast to many other deliberative models, the government and the relevant parliamentary committee commit to a minimum of two parliamentary debates about recommendations and to a public response. The Bürgerrat monitors the subsequent implementation of any recommendations.

The Ostbelgian model is unique among deliberative processes because it creates a direct voice for citizens to set the policy agenda and provides citizens with tools and an institutional structure for raising issues of shared concern and for holding their representatives accountable.⁶¹

There is no data from the Ostbelgian initiative yet, as it is still running through its first cycle. A similar initiative was recently established in the Belgian region of Brussels, inspired by the Ostbelgian model.⁶²

Joint First Nations Commissioning: Whānau Ora

The New Zealand Government established the Whānau Ora partnership to work with Maori, Pasifika (from the Pacific Islands), and Pakeha (settler) families in response to a 2015 New Zealand Productivity Report recommending increased opportunities for Maori governance and devolved commissioning and delivery of social services.

Whānau Ora is a culturally-based, whānau-centred nationwide approach to wellbeing focused on whānau (extended family groups) at the heart of decision-making.

The partnership set up three service commissioning agencies which see themselves as equal partners with whānau and have autonomy within a high-level framework based on Maori values, beliefs and principles. The agencies decide how they want to operate and which services to fund.

A core stream of funding is for local people to set up and operate services and businesses that contribute to the health and wellbeing of the local community, including safety from violence projects, locally-sourced produce cafés and work-based literacy programs.

Another stream of funding is for navigators employed by commissioning agencies to act as case managers and advocates, facilitating access to health, education, welfare and housing services for those that need them.

Whānau Ora has created a broad shift towards a more holistic and culturally-appropriate view of health and care, from top-down funding of services for individuals to wrapping services around whānau.⁶³



3

**Key insights from
the Refugee Youth
Policy Initiative**

3. Key insights from the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

As experimental efforts to engage everyday people in policymaking processes proliferate around the world, this report serves as an invitation to share collective lessons for doing this challenging but important work.

The Initiative provided a unique opportunity to examine the development of a participatory policymaking process. A research team appointed by the Sydney Policy Lab conducted an in-depth assessment of the project based on observations of workshops, surveys of workshop participants and interviews with people who were engaged both centrally and peripherally in its design, implementation and evaluation.

The assessment identified a series of eight key insights into the opportunities and challenges involved in integrating the lived experience of community members into policymaking in Australia. Taken together, the insights from the learning partnership suggest areas in which change is needed to propel participatory policymaking forward in NSW. The insights have been organised around two core changes required in business-as-usual: new practices for enabling innovation in policymaking and concrete strategies for sharing decision-making power.

These areas and insights are:

Enabling innovation in policymaking

Insight 1: Championing change

Institutional leaders and influential champions can play a key role in building momentum and conditions for innovative approaches to policymaking to thrive.

Insight 2: Reimagining outcomes

The value of participation in policymaking, and the new ways of working that it entails, can be difficult to capture in pre-determined outcomes on a limited timeframe. Balancing the need to demonstrate policy outcomes with the need to test new processes is key.

Insight 3: Expanding policymaking time horizons

Engaging communities and including lived experience in policymaking requires a substantive and ongoing time commitment. For engagement to be meaningful, deep, and durable, relationships need to be fostered between and across government, collaborating organisations and participating communities over a significant period of time.

Insight 4: Removing the practical barriers to participation

Barriers to new forms of public participation such as educational prerequisites, time commitments and income loss limit the accessibility of participatory initiatives to those who live especially challenging lives. These barriers should be addressed collaboratively with participants across all stages of a participatory process.

Sharing decision-making power

Insight 5: Empowering experience-based experts

Methodologies such as Participatory Action Research can be deployed in participatory processes to amplify the voices of experience-based experts – people who possess specialised knowledge based on first-hand experience of a social issue – and equip them to represent the communities with whom they share such experience.

Insight 6: Being conscious of everyday power dynamics

Bringing people with lived experience of policy issues into decision-making processes requires special consideration of the day-to-day power dynamics in interactions between those people and government or other institutions.

Insight 7: Forging collaborations beyond the public sector

The expertise required to run participatory processes well is wide-ranging and distinct from the technical forms of expertise usually required to make policy. Government must look beyond the public sector to build collaborative relationships with a range of people, institutions, organisations and communities.

Insight 8: Building the capacity of government and everyday people to make policy together

Long-term capacity building in the special skills required for participatory policymaking is an essential component of any public participation initiative. This is true for public servants, just as it is true for participants.

The remainder of this section outlines the insights in further detail, highlighting aspects of the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative to date that can usefully inform the design of the next steps in the Initiative and of future participatory policymaking efforts by governments.

Enabling innovation in policymaking

Governance structures have not evolved explicitly to enable citizen engagement in policymaking. Bureaucratic structures run on established and ordered procedures, rather than experimentation and openness. As a result, attempts to innovate – that is, to generate and test new solutions to public problems – can be impeded by existing structures for policy development.⁶⁴

The Refugee Youth Policy Initiative is an instructive example of an innovative approach to participatory policymaking conducted within traditional government structures. It provides insights into potential changes to bureaucratic structures that would allow policymaking to be more experimental, open and responsive. Four key insights were identified under this theme.

“There’s all these considerations that public servants have to take into account when they want to actually make something change.... government isn’t just one [place] where we all sit in the same office. It’s very complex and there’s many layers of people [and] constraints.”

– Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“[Policymakers have all] these perceptions [about participatory policymaking]: ‘We don’t really know how, it’ll take too long, a bit too hard to organise. It’s not how we’ve done it in the past, what will our bosses think, we’ve got time constraints, we’ve been asked for a policy document or something next week, there’s no way that we can do this...’ And public servants are also not used to being excited about things and there’s not a lot of incentive to think laterally, and to be brave, and to envisage.’ I think that when [a participatory process] is delivered to the policymakers, I see the obstacle as being the conservatism and potential atrophy within the broader government departments. If this initiative lands at a time when there are a number of other competing urgent priorities and the minister is saying, ‘I want you to do this, and I want it yesterday,’ people get swept off ... and caught up in other things... That’s just real politics.”

– Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

| Insight 1: Championing change

Public participation in policymaking is a departure from business as usual, and the commitment of institutional champions and individual heroes can be instrumental for initiating and sustaining participatory projects.

Participatory policymaking is a new approach to governance in NSW and so relies on the efforts of individual institutional champions. Government and community agency participants described many public engagement activities in Australia as hero-driven, dependent on the enthusiasm and initiative of individual public servants who carve out space to innovate. For example, the ability of Multicultural NSW and the NSW Coordinator General of Refugee Resettlement Peter Shergold to create and implement the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative within a single calendar year, without pre-allocated funding, was attributed to the strong and dedicated leadership within the organisation and the commitment of the Multicultural NSW staff involved in the project.

The pioneering efforts and commitment of Professor Shergold and Multicultural NSW created an environment in which staff managing the Initiative were able creatively to adapt, improve and expand the project. Multicultural NSW staff built innovative external partnerships and set out to undertake activities beyond the scope of traditional policymaking throughout the process. This was a process of ‘learning by doing’, rather than following a fixed plan. As Professor Shergold noted:

“The general directions have been set, but the particular form it’s taken and how far we have proceeded is really learning from each stage and then taking it forward.”

A key example of this flexibility was the way that Multicultural NSW staff responded to the findings of the Participatory Action Research project carried out in partnership with Western Sydney University.⁶⁵ Recognising the high calibre of the peer researchers and the quality of the research they were doing, the staff began discussions with the Sydney Policy Lab about ways to present research findings directly to policymakers in NSW Government and the next stage of the project was born without any previous roadmap.

In addition, ‘learning by doing’ enabled the Initiative to combine different types of public participation in different stages of the project: first, consultative methods whereby young people were given an opportunity to inform policy; second, participatory methods whereby young people were provided opportunities to co-design a research process and co-produce knowledge for policy; and third, engagement methods whereby young people were provided a forum to participate directly with policymakers and service providers. Many existing public participation typologies or frameworks presuppose a singular participation method for each instance of public engagement and the effectiveness or otherwise of the type of engagement chosen – for example, consultation, participation or collaboration in the IAP2 framework summarised in Section 2 of this report – tend to be measured separately.⁶⁶ The staged combination of approaches used in the Initiative provides an alternative model of public participation in governance.

While the patronage of Professor Shergold and leadership of Multicultural NSW allowed the Initiative to be designed to encourage experimentation, innovative public participation projects that occur under the auspices of institutional champions and through the commitment of individual heroes do, however, have to overcome obstacles which hinder their ability to craft long-term change. Our next insight refers to one such obstacle.

| Insight 2: Reimagining outcomes

The standard way that government measures impact and evaluates individual projects tends to reward those with defined outcomes. However, public participation initiatives, especially of this experimental kind, involve the development of new processes, rather than achieving immediate, concrete policy outcomes. Demands for achieving pre-determined outcomes in a limited timeframe can undermine the capacity for public officials genuinely to share decision-making power with participants and can act as a disincentive to creativity.

Government initiatives that pioneer new processes are not easily assessed within traditional measures of project success. This can make it difficult to capture the value of community participation in policymaking using existing systems.

In the first four stages of the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative, strong emphasis has been placed on building the capacity of the peer researchers, as well as the participants from government and service providers, to engage in participatory efforts. Future phases of work will focus on identifying specific avenues through which the findings of the Participatory Action Research project and Policy Dialogue might influence concrete policy outcomes. The one-day Policy Dialogue, which saw the peer researchers share their findings with policymakers and service providers, was intended to begin to establish specific, achievable policy goals, but a short event was able only to achieve limited outcomes in terms of policy development. Rather than resulting in the kinds of concrete policy outcomes encouraged by more mainstream approaches, the dialogue therefore demonstrated the potential of public engagement in policymaking, to be explored at greater length in the next steps of the Initiative, as outlined in Section 1.

“Certainly, it seemed that there was a lot of good intention, and a lot of goodwill and a willingness to really listen to young people and to see young people as equal partners. Whether that generosity and intention continues past this point remains to be seen, but certainly it seemed like people really had a genuine desire to do something a little bit different and that was a great process.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“I’m interested in what [the peer researchers] said and how we can ... meet the needs that they’re identifying, but I’m also really interested in the processes...[as a] process to be replicated for the future.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

However, a tension between the benefits of participatory processes and achieving concrete policy outcomes was a feature of the Initiative. Staff at Multicultural NSW were constantly aware that it was difficult to demonstrate the direct outcomes of capacity building and exposing policymakers to the lived experience of affected communities, meaning that they had simultaneously to test new processes and pursue outcomes that would fit into traditional measures of project success. In the wake of the Policy Dialogue, it was

challenging to balance the need to demonstrate immediate, concrete policy outcomes with the need to test and explore processes for building relationships and brokering decisions between the peer researchers and policymakers.

Participatory initiatives can come under pressure to measure outcomes and demonstrate success in ways that overlook the value of new processes and hamper the ability to engage in genuine dialogue with participants. The resulting tension needs to be resolved if government agencies are to pursue the incorporation of lived experience in policymaking on a larger scale.

| Insight 3: Expanding policymaking time horizons

Engaging communities and including lived experience in policymaking requires a significant and ongoing time commitment. For engagement to be meaningful, deep and durable relationships need to be fostered between and across government, collaborating organisations and participating communities over a significant period, challenging the often short-termism of government decision-making.

“The time needed for [listening to lived experience] is so crucial and important, that to then think you can quickly move on and then come to some sort of quick outcomes and solutions is probably...underestimating that need to acknowledge the contribution of the young people in the first instance.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“Translating insights from lived experience into policy takes a lot of thought, work and more time than one workshop – a good part of a longer process.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

The activities Multicultural NSW decided to include in the Initiative generally reflected the limited time they had to implement the project. For example, through its focus on a select group of 15 qualified and committed peer researchers, the Participatory Action Research model enabled the contribution of a large number of people while keeping the administrative burden associated with liaising with participants manageable. It also allowed Western Sydney University and Multicultural NSW staff to build relationships with the small group of peer researchers, and vice versa.

The capacity building stage of the Initiative involved one preparatory workshop for the peer researchers and one for public servants and service providers. The Policy Dialogue was held over one day. The limited time for the workshops and Policy Dialogue placed pressure on the organisations involved both to design and test a method of participation and to prioritise substantive policy areas in a very short period of time.

Time emerged as the key factor here. Meaningful relationships between public servants and public participants require sustained opportunities to dispel assumptions about what it means to be a policymaker or a migrant, work toward shared goals, get to know one another in a number of contexts and build trust. The Initiative has many such meaningful

relationships at its core, from the Joint Partnership Working Group that regularly brings together policymakers and service provision and other civil society organisations, to the appointment of peer researchers who continue to be engaged across multiple stages of the project.

Nevertheless, all the organisers of the Initiative agreed that at every stage there were many opportunities for deeper discussion and analysis that they would have liked to pursue if they had more time. One public servant who participated in the Initiative commented on the false efficiency that prevents government from investing in participation:

“You [public servants] think you’re going to save time at the start of your project by going straight to delivery, and then you’ll figure it out. But what you do is spend time and money trying to repair this thing or tailor this thing and totally adapt it...because you didn’t spend the time at the start. So you didn’t actually save yourself time or money by going straight to delivery.”

– Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

Defining what is achievable and what is not within the time constraints placed on any participatory policymaking process is an important first step, especially since time constraints are an ever-present part of working within government. Participatory initiatives should have flexible timeframes and negotiated milestones, particularly given the contemporary need to mix online and in person engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁷ Building in opportunities to rethink timelines and anticipating the establishment of ancillary processes can provide policymakers and public participants with additional time to deepen mutual understanding and continue to explore issues arising from the original process.

Insight 4: Removing the practical barriers to participation

In addition to the multiple implicit barriers to engagement with governance faced by young people from refugee backgrounds (see box entitled ‘Participation and Lived Experience’ in Section 2), there are practical barriers to new forms of public participation, such as qualifications, time commitments and income loss, that limit the accessibility of participatory initiatives to some parts of the community. The specific needs of people with lived experience of the policy issues under consideration, as well as the interests and circumstances underlying their desire and ability to engage in participatory processes, must be taken into account by government to minimise all burdens for participants.

Two issues emerged as particularly important in our review of the practicalities of the Initiative: compensation and representativeness.

The compensation of community members who engage in participatory processes is essential. Without it, it is often impossible for those who already live on low incomes or face other economic challenges fully to participate. Compensation is, however, often difficult to arrange, requiring new administrative systems, roles and practices to be created. In this instance, the Participatory Action Research model involved formal employment of the peer researchers by Western Sydney University, an acknowledgment of their unique expertise and the importance of participatory efforts to improve NSW settlement.

The research team at Western Sydney University advocated for the selected participants to be employed as research assistants under the relevant award and conditions established for that role, as it would assist them in their future careers and ensure they were appropriately compensated for their work. Peer researchers interviewed for this paper report that they were attracted to the Initiative because it appeared to offer an opportunity to progress their own careers, for example, as public servants, an interest that was not anticipated in designing the Initiative.



Multicultural NSW also endeavoured to allocate resources that would minimise barriers to participation, including assigning a Policy Officer to liaise with peer researchers and provide support compensating peer researchers for their time and effort. This included preparing for and taking part in policymaking and reimbursing them for associated expenses such as travel costs. After the Participatory Action Research was completed, however, Multicultural NSW faced a number of challenges in administering such payments. Multicultural NSW had not previously employed community members engaging public participation processes. In order to continue to compensate the peer researchers for their time, Multicultural NSW needed to create new administrative systems.

While this was mainly a technical issue, it is an example of the sorts of unanticipated practical difficulties that can emerge when new forms of public participation are attempted. A further example is that participants from outside Sydney encountered difficulties arranging their own transport to workshop venues, as they could not afford to use personal funds to pay for taxis and seek reimbursement later, which is the standard practice by NSW Government agencies. The constraints of government systems meant that these practical difficulties took time to resolve. This had an impact on participants who sacrifice other income and time to contribute.

For participatory processes to add their full value to public decision-making, they also need to be properly representative. Multicultural NSW and Western Sydney University paid close attention to the accessibility of the Participatory Action Research project to ensure that findings would represent the experiences of both males and females from a wide range of migrant and refugee backgrounds in NSW. There was a common understanding of the importance of selecting a diverse group of peer researchers, while ensuring familiarity with academic practices.

To select the 15 peer researchers for the Participatory Action Research project, Multicultural NSW and Western Sydney University advertised the research role through community networks and service providers. More than 70 applications from young people with refugee backgrounds were received in response. The selection of a number of candidates with academic experience and professional experience representing the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds in community and government spaces enabled the Initiative to proceed quickly and within the timeframe available. While the Initiative's selection panel ensured that participants were as representative as possible, Multicultural NSW's ability to find as broad a range of participants as it would have ideally liked, such as young people living with disabilities, young parents and young people with experience of the juvenile justice system, was limited by the project timeline. Selected peer researchers covered 10 countries of origin and had spent between two and 23 years in Australia.

The peer research model also ensured that the research findings would reflect diverse experiences of settlement in NSW. The 15 peer researchers were the core conduit for lived experience of settlement services, and these participants were trained and supported to conduct research that facilitated the participation of a broader group of young people. Each peer researcher interviewed around 40 other young people, either individually or in a group setting. Additionally, input from a further group of young people from refugee backgrounds was facilitated by the consultation conducted by the Advocate for Children and Young People. On the whole, the careful selection of participants and the research model ensured that breadth of lived experience was represented in the research findings.

Sharing decision-making power

Genuinely engaging people in policymaking changes dynamics of power over public decisions; “commitment to participation requires a real willingness on behalf of those who have power to share it.”⁶⁸ Beyond its practical and structural implications, then, public participation challenges and disrupts established approaches to policymaking and “dominant public sector cultures and values.”⁶⁹ Innovative participatory processes change the balance of control so that participants “become active partners in designing, shaping and resourcing services, rather than being passive recipients of pre-determined services.”⁷⁰ The diminished control and increased complexity that such processes entail require significant cultural change and capacity building to embed new knowledge, structures, and practices in government.

The Refugee Youth Policy Initiative represents an important experimental intervention into sharing power with the public because of its commitment to looking beyond public sector expertise to improve policymaking. The diverse collaborations forged throughout the Initiative – with young people with lived experience of settlement policies and with a range of external organisations, from universities to service providers – sought to contribute to the process of shifting power in governance. Four key insights were identified under this theme.

“It’s very easy for people who are in positions of power to assume that young people have the time, the energy and that they just want to participate because it’s a good thing to do. What they don’t understand is the cost to young people to be involved in this kind of initiative and I don’t just mean time or money. But I also mean whether or not the things that they say are taken seriously or whether they’re taken on board or whether they’re given hope...There’s the need for people in positions of power not to assume that people want to even participate in this kind of research. Why would they want to? What is the benefit today?”

- Youth Peer Researcher, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“It’s one thing to ask people’s opinion and work collaboratively. But it’s another thing to embed that voice within your policies...a lot of consultations, a lot of ways of working with [community participants] are about listening and learning, so the power doesn’t shift. So, ultimately, how would you improve it? It’s a really sticky one, because we can go on the surface and say, ‘Well, actually we need to listen more and we need to consult more, and we need to co-design more.’ But those are useless, unless there’s an actual shift in power. And that’s something that people don’t want to do. They’re very happy to talk about it. They’re very happy to represent people. But do they actually offer people jobs? Do they actually make the change? So, it really all boils down to a genuine way of all sharing that power and acknowledging people’s participation and expertise that you want to get your hands on. Whether you’re a researcher, whether a bureaucrat, you actually need them more than they need you.”

– Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*



| Insight 5: Empowering experience-based experts

The Participatory Action Research project and the methodology that underpinned it enabled and empowered the peer researchers to speak on behalf of communities of young people from refugee backgrounds, in addition to drawing on their individual personal experiences. The evidence base that the peer researchers gathered from 338 participants enhanced their ability to capture the attention of policymakers and encourage them to listen to their views and the experiences of the communities they represent.

“I think it’s really powerful to have the young people’s voices and for them to be able to speak with authority [based on their research] not just [based on] what they think.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“I thought it was a great forum to have policymakers and young people coming together. The sessions were facilitated by young people, so I was able to hear directly from them, even though sometimes some of the comments they made were a bit strong, but this is just how they felt. It was just amazing.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“...experts exist for a reason, and it’s important, I guess, for them to be able to play that role, but not at the expense of including the people that have the lived experience and for whom the policies might be made. To me it makes sense that you’ve got a genuine collaboration between the two because you are accessing perspectives that are complementary but quite different, so it could be potentially important.”

- Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

At the heart of all participatory policymaking experiments is the fundamental idea that different types of knowledge – from scientific expertise to the wisdom that resides in everyday experience – should be combined if we are to make decisions that are truly in the public interest. Scholars of decision-making now recognise that “experience-based expertise” – that is, specialised knowledge that a person possesses that is not recognised by any qualification but stems rather from “lived experience,” the first-hand experience of a social issue in their past or present day-to-day lives – has been established in classifications of expertise alongside technical expertise.⁷¹ Similarly, expertise is now widely understood not only as logical or analytical, but also as what is known as wisdom- or competence-based. Wisdom-based expertise is deeply laden with tacit knowledge and cannot be acquired through extended study. Rather, it can be attained by interactive immersion in a way of life: “it is only through common practice with others that the rules that cannot be written down can come to be understood.”⁷²

Making the philosophical case for engaging with the experience-based expertise of refugees specifically, the British philosopher Sarah Fine argues:

“It seems reasonable to suppose that refugees, other migrants, displaced people – from different parts of the world; with different languages, cultural practices, educational backgrounds, and religions; who have been compelled to leave their countries, towns, homes, families, familiar environments; who have, in many cases, experienced unimaginable human suffering – are in a prime position to offer evidence and guidance on the conditions necessary for living a decent human life... It may be that existing ideas about human rights and capabilities – including which rights and capabilities are to be prioritized and under which circumstances – ought to be modified to accommodate, for example, what refugees report about the special form of psychological suffering involved in a life in enforced limbo.”⁷³

The potential for generating new solutions to policy problems by combining experience-based and technical expertise underpinned the methodology of the Participatory Action Research component of the Initiative. Participatory Action Research is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to initiate action or create change by engaging community members in research design and in the collection of data related to their personal experiences.⁷⁴ There are many fruitful examples of building Participatory Action Research methodologies into policymaking processes in order to open up “possibilities for experiments and practices that redistribute expertise” and “disrupt consensual claims as to ‘what counts’ and what does not.”⁷⁵ As explained by Dr Karin Mackay in the final report of this stage of the initiative:

“Built on a youth advocacy framework, this research made peer researchers central to the research design... By facilitating young people to collaboratively design the research, speak with peers in their own communities, develop findings, and make meaning out of those findings, the project engaged with young people more deeply and widely than would occur in a typical consultation process.”⁷⁶

At the inception of the project, the peer researchers participated in a two-day workshop at Western Sydney University where they received training on community research methods and were supported to develop research topics and interview questions. The peer researchers then collected data using interviews, focus groups and written postcards. The Youth Sub-Group of the Joint Partnership Working Group assisted the peer researchers to connect with community organisations and networks in order to reach young people from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds. Peer researchers conducted approximately 40 interviews each and then participated in a data analysis meeting during where they identified policy issues arising from the data. The project report was then drafted by Dr Mackay and shared with the peer researchers for feedback and discussion.

This process gave experience-based experts – the peer researchers – the opportunity to develop an evidence base that could then be used by analytical experts – academic researchers, NSW public servants and service providers. Building on their experience-based expertise as young people from refugee backgrounds, the Participatory Action Research expanded and consolidated their experience through the process of interviewing other young people from similar backgrounds, giving the peer researchers authority to contribute to policy discussions from a far-reaching experience-based dataset. The peer researchers, as a result, had more authority to contribute to policy discussions than they would have when they were speaking uniquely to their personal experience.

Moreover, the rich findings that peer researchers could draw upon at the conclusion of the Participatory Action Research project attest to the importance of empowering people with lived experience to lead participatory processes. The peer researchers, who were all young people from refugee backgrounds, were in a position to identify with and relate to those they interviewed for the research based on their shared experiences. This gave them a distinct advantage, enabling them to discover far more than if government officials or others from non-migrant backgrounds had conducted the research.

“I already kind of had an idea about the power dynamics in the Australian society, as an egalitarian society, where everyone is equal to everyone... I had already been exposed to this, while some of the people I interviewed had already had only arrived to Australia two or three months ago...So they’re still really new in this country and they are still trying to adapt.

I think that [the research] was a good maybe first exposure to freedom of speech...I think my first exposure to freedom of speech was at school. There they told us, 'Yes, you can speak your mind. You don't have to be afraid of government for just speaking your mind.'"

- Youth Peer Researcher, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

Several peer researchers remarked on the experiences of interviewing other young people from refugee backgrounds with great positivity, reporting that interviewees grew comfortable sharing candid information, in part because of the common ground they could share. Some suggested, moreover, that the process of building relationships through interviews transformed interviewees' understandings of Australia as a place where they were permitted to speak freely, in contrast to the oppressive environments some people had experienced in their countries of origin. One peer researcher noted:

"And even when I was interviewing the people, and I was asking them - 'what do you think the government can do for you?' - they would look a little bit worried. Especially people who came as refugees from a totalitarian government. So, in the country where they used to live, they didn't get to give the government their opinion... When I actually explained that you would never get in trouble for this [in Australia], they would feel extremely happy, and they would actually start to talk."

- Youth Peer Researcher, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

| Insight 6: Being conscious of everyday power dynamics

Bringing people with lived experience of policy issues into decision-making processes requires special consideration of the day-to-day power dynamics in interactions between those people and government or other institutions. Trusting relationships can be built through co-design processes and maintained by openness to sharing information and a commitment to providing feedback.

Formal policymaking is usually adult-centric, dominated by official government or political agendas.⁷⁷ Research involving young people from refugee backgrounds has often been excluded from policymaking processes.⁷⁸ Initiatives such as this one therefore play an important corrective function in supporting young people to speak for themselves. Done poorly, however, listening exercises can leave people feeling marginalised or taken advantage of. This is especially true where participants are not provided with feedback on how their contribution was used.⁷⁹ The Initiative provided feedback to participants in various ways. The Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People provided a summary report to the young people interviewed in their consultations. Western Sydney University held an event to present the findings of the peer research. Multicultural NSW emailed the peer researchers with periodic updates during the Policy Development phase and continues to contact them when opportunities arise to be involved in government processes or events. For example, peer researchers were invited to provide input during the development of the Multicultural Youth Linker Pilot program (see Section 1).

The Participatory Action Research project also tried to take into consideration the implications for potentially vulnerable individuals of interacting with government. Some of the peer researchers and those that they interviewed, for example, had not yet obtained Australian citizenship. A peer researcher noted:

“On the one hand, everybody’s talking about making more participatory policy processes and involving people in speaking with government. But if you don’t have basic rights and security and can’t feel like you are a secure citizen, it’s a very different story.”

- Youth Peer Researcher, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

Western Sydney University went through the standard academic research ethics approval process before embarking on the Participatory Action Research. Although some guidelines regarding working with communities exist in the emerging field of participatory policymaking in Australian governance, this is an area where further work is needed. Based on their work with the University of NSW Centre for Refugee Research, Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei argue that the standard approach to research ethics does not provide sufficient protections to people from refugee backgrounds and communities.⁸⁰ Their discussion of “relational autonomy,” wherein the context of participation and relative power of vulnerable communities must be taken into account, is particularly relevant to projects that seek to engage young people from refugee backgrounds in policymaking processes.

Multicultural NSW sought to anticipate the implications for potentially vulnerable individuals of interacting with government. Public servants whose jobs did not directly require engaging with community members were given training in empathy and awareness in order to prepare them to listen to the lived experiences of the peer researchers. Similarly, the peer researchers were provided with training on accidental trauma counselling by the NSW

Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) before conducting primary interviews with their peers.

Mindful of the trauma associated with the peer researchers' own refugee experiences, Multicultural NSW encouraged peer researchers to contact STARTTS for on-call support throughout the peer research process. In the later stages of the project, the relative vulnerability of the peer researchers was not always accounted for. For example, representatives of the NSW Police Force were invited to attend the Policy Dialogue, which caused some concern among some of the peer researchers who had not been informed of this. One of the peer researchers purchased a suit for the Policy Dialogue because he wanted to make sure he was dressed appropriately to meet with government officials. He later reflected that he was surprised at how casually the government participants were dressed and could have saved his money.

Another way in which power dynamics could have been addressed in the Initiative is by ensuring that young people from refugee backgrounds were part of the team responsible for its implementation. Young people were represented on the Youth Sub-group created by Multicultural NSW to advise on the Initiative, though none of the paid staff from Multicultural NSW, Western Sydney University, the Sydney Policy Lab or the NSW Department of Customer Service were themselves from a refugee background or within the age group of the peer researchers.

The Greater London Authority created the Citizenship and Integration Initiative (see Section 2) to address the problem of representation in the design and delivery of government services. Many of the peer researchers describe their interest in the Initiative as connected to aspirations to access professional development opportunities with the public service. Beyond listening, the development of processes and hiring practices that provide opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to become policymakers is crucial for participatory processes. Their experience participating in the Initiative assisted two of the peer researchers to obtain employment with community organisations involved in the delivery of settlement services and another two were employed as research assistants in the university sector.



Insight 7: Forging collaborations beyond the public sector

The expertise required to run participatory processes well is wide-ranging and distinct from the technical forms of expertise usually required to make policy. In addition to – and in order to – share power with people with experience-based expertise, government must look beyond the public sector to build collaborative relationships with a broader range of people from a wide range of institutions, organisations and communities.

“I have increasingly pushed in all that I do to try to get it understood that the creation of public and social impact occurs best when it brings together cross-sectoral collaboration. So not just public servants doing it on behalf of government, but working with the business community, working particularly with frontline, not-for-profit community organisations to deliver public policy, and not just deliver under contract, which I think is very short-sighted, but to involve those other organisations in the co-design and the co-production of particular approaches.”

– Professor Peter Shergold

Multicultural NSW and the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement understood that to embark on a form of public participation that aspired to run deeper than informing or consulting people, it needed the support of organisational partners with expertise extending beyond that available within NSW Government. Multicultural NSW realised this because its mandate involves working closely with diverse communities to inform and advise the activities of the NSW Government. Such advisors and organisational partners covered specific areas of expertise including policy and research co-design methods; independent scholarly research; knowledge and experience working with young people; and techniques for learning from people whose expertise derives from their lived experience, as distinct from experts with analytical knowledge of a policy issue.

Accordingly, the Initiative harnessed resources and expertise from across a wide range of institutions, organisations and communities: it involved public sector agencies, non-government organisations, two universities, emergent community leaders and young people living in the community. In this sense, the Initiative was not simply engagement between government and community, but an attempt to engage in cross-sectoral relationship building and skill-sharing. As one government participant in the Initiative explained, the process involved “a hierarchical transgression of boundaries between bureaucracies...to have genuine conversations that transgress the boundaries and the barriers, to usual understandings...so the voice of young people can reach the people who can make the change.”

The Participatory Action Research phase emphasised training for the peer researchers to build their own skills across a range of research capabilities. This project required the skills and expertise of University-based researchers from Western Sydney University who had experience designing and conducting peer-led research with young people from refugee backgrounds. Western Sydney University was responsible for assembling the findings of the research conducted into a research report for Multicultural NSW, drawing on the lead researcher's scholarly research writing skills. The capacity building workshops prepared and supported diverse stakeholders to build relationships, share knowledge and generate new ideas in innovative ways. The workshops drew on the expertise of the Sydney Policy Lab and the NSW Department of Customer Service in co-design, facilitation, policy development and training diverse stakeholders to build relationships in new and innovative ways. Further details on capacity building work are included in the next insight.

Transgressing boundaries between sectors is not easy to do, and working across sectors requires partners to identify and discuss assumptions about processes and practices. Different organisations and stakeholders have different aims, objectives and modes of working. For example, the public sector's goal to expose policymakers to the insights and deliberations during the data analysis phase of the Participatory Action Research did not always align with University ethical research protocols, which require maintaining participants' confidentiality. Similarly, the Sydney Policy Lab and the NSW Department of Customer Service had sometimes different approaches to facilitation of the Capacity Building Workshops and Policy Dialogue; Sydney Policy Lab uses facilitation techniques derived from community organising that encourage participants to take responsibility for leading discussions and deciding priorities for action. The NSW Department of Customer Service works within the framework of government policymaking and balances its use of collaborative facilitation techniques against the constraints of policymaking processes managed by different NSW Government departments. In hindsight, these organisational partnerships would have benefited from greater efforts to articulate fundamental interests and goals shared by each side and attempts to identify and acknowledge differences in approaches.



Insight 8: Building the capacity of government and everyday people to make policy together

In addition to sustained and collaborative relationships with experts outside government, long-term capacity building in the special skills required for participatory policymaking is an essential component of any public participation initiative. This is true for public servants, just as it is true for participants.

“I thought [the capacity building workshop] was brilliant. I really liked the way that it was put together, the informality, the level of fun because...for young people that’s really important, but I think older people like it too.”

– Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

“I thought [the workshops] were good in the sense that they were there to educate, soften... to open up people that may have previously been relatively closed to working in a non-hierarchical way, to be open to listening to people with lived experience.”

– Policy Professional, *Refugee Youth Policy Initiative*

The Initiative was understood as an opportunity to build the capacity of young people as researchers and advocates as well as the capacity of NSW Government to engage everyday people in policymaking in new ways. The Capacity Building part of the project provided all prospective participants in the Policy Dialogue with an opportunity to reflect and develop advocacy, listening, and communications skills before meeting with other stakeholders. Separate workshops were held for the peer researchers, and for public servants and representatives of service provision organisations.

The peer researchers were provided with training on policy advocacy and communication and given support to frame policy insights arising from their report. One peer researcher reported that the workshop provided a clear “understanding in terms of the soft skills necessary for us [peer researchers] to be able to articulate ourselves to policymakers.” Capacity building was also a core element of the Participatory Action Research process, which sought to equip peer researchers with skills across a range of research capabilities.

The workshop for public servants and service providers was designed to enable participants to explore the role of lived experience in governance and consider various methods of listening to community members. It acknowledged that policy dialogue requires more than giving young people from refugee backgrounds a voice. It also requires policymakers and service providers to learn to listen effectively and appropriately, to engage with new forms of expertise and to practice building relationships that foster shared decision-making.

Unlike many approaches to public participation in policy processes, the Initiative firmly positioned policymakers as in need of capacity development, acknowledging that bringing people into public decision-making is complex and specialised work. Multicultural NSW invited representatives from government departments and agencies involved in refugee settlement in NSW to participate in the capacity building workshop and the Policy Dialogue.

Many branches of government responded by assigning junior officers or staff working on frontline service provision to participate. Multicultural NSW then actively lobbied for the participation of senior public servants in order to socialise the contributions that people with lived experience can make to policy design.

The experience of the Initiative highlights the reality that public engagement continues to be viewed within the NSW Government as a service delivery or customer service matter rather than as a fundamental part of governance.

Participatory processes involve in-depth training for public servants and sustained input from expert partners from outside government, and one is not a substitute for the other. As one government participant commented:

“These skills can’t be learnt from a document or a few workshops. It isn’t a check-box exercise.”

Multicultural NSW’s commitment to building collaborative partnerships outside the public sector as well as building capacity for policymakers and young people to work together set the Initiative up to influence the work of participants into the future. Participants from the NSW Department of Education and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice used their experience with the Initiative to influence the design of other projects.

Building capacity for genuine participation

As governments look to expand opportunities for public participation in decision-making, it is crucial adequately to resource skills and capacity building for public servants and public participants alike.

Genuine engagement by public servants demands that they possess high-level relevant skills that are not often part of their day-to-day competencies or training. For governments seeking to share some decision-making power with the public, systematic and widespread training for public servants to understand, develop, practice and evaluate participatory methods is crucial. Equally, investing in the skills of public participants helps overcome structural and societal barriers to their participation and make public participation more representative, ensuring that it is not only the loudest voices that are heard.⁸¹ This is particularly important when working with participants with lived experience of the matters that the decision-making process seeks to address.

Path-breaking work on building the capacity of people with lived experience to take up change-making and leadership roles is happening around the world, and there are a range of useful models for investing in sophisticated leadership and development training and support for participants with lived experience, many of which are led by civil society organisations. Here we suggest leading examples of capacity building initiatives for young public participants with lived experience from which to take inspiration.

We Belong – Young Migrants Standing Up

We Belong – Young Migrants Standing Up, formerly Let us Learn, is the first United Kingdom-wide campaigning organisation run by and for young migrants. Let us Learn was started by Chrisann Jarrett in 2014, then age 19, when she found herself effectively barred from a university education. As a young migrant raised in the United Kingdom, a change to regulations left her and many of her peers ineligible for student finance and subject to elevated international student fees. Let us Learn initially focused its energies on campaigning for equal access to education and now encompasses wider issues affecting young migrants.⁸²

The organisation has worked with 1,200 young migrants to provide information and practical and emotional support. Capacity building training is foundational to the We Belong's community and reach. Volunteer young migrants go through a rigorous six-month leadership training that is nationally accredited and based on a Harvard leadership program with support from community organising group Citizens UK.⁸³ Following the core training program, there is additional training available to young migrants on understanding the political landscape, parliamentary levers and how to engage decision-makers. All training programs are co-designed with the young migrants engaged in We Belong's work.

Founder Chrisann Jarrett, interviewed for this report, emphasised that training for people with lived experience must always begin with leadership skills. Training on how the political system works and ways to engage decision-makers is also critical, but secondary to empowering people with lived experience to develop their own leadership styles, build their resilience and tell their stories.

Coram Young Citizens

Young Citizens is the charity Coram's programme for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.⁸⁴ Young Citizens trainers co-design and run workshops for new young migrants to the United Kingdom, with a focus on personal development, the asylum process, the care system and wellbeing. Training is also provided for social workers who work with young migrants, with a focus on active listening and empathy. Young people who go through trainings go on to be involved in other Coram initiatives, some of which support authorities to systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers.⁸⁵

Amy Spiller, interviewed for this report, brings together learning from across Coram's co-production programmes, which include leadership training for young migrants. Training workshops are run jointly by Coram expert staff and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds trained in facilitation. Reflecting on Young Citizens' approach to training, Spiller explained that young trainers with lived experience are uniquely able to build connections with their peers, drawing from their own experience to share what they wish they had known when they arrived in the United Kingdom.

Berry Street

Berry Street is an Australian charity and community service organisation serving children, young people and families impacted by abuse, violence and neglect. Berry Street's approach to youth engagement is grounded in the belief that "experiences of disadvantage, while often painful and damaging, can be powerful periods of knowledge, skill and self-development."⁸⁶

Y-Change is Berry Street's social and systemic change platform for young people with lived experience of disadvantage. It provides training and employment for young people to adapt, build on and practice skills and expertise they have gained through lived experience.⁸⁷

The Lived Experience Movement

The Lived Experience Movement is a collaboration across philanthropy, academia and the social sector in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It supports 'lived experience leaders': those with first-hand experience of social issues who activate that knowledge to shape their social purpose work and directly benefit the communities with whom they share experiences. In its recent report on lived experience leadership, the project identified collaborations, progressive interventions and innovations that can be deployed to build the capacity both of leaders with lived experience and of those that they work alongside.⁸⁸



4

**Recommendations
for public administrations
in NSW and beyond**

4. Recommendations for public administrations in NSW and beyond

The eight insights outlined in this report lead to eight key recommendations to take forward in future phases of the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative and in initiatives for public participation in policymaking more broadly:

1. *Public administrations need to sustain and foster commitment to public participation from all parts of leadership*, from Ministers and agency heads, to executives and line managers, with dedicated coordination across whole-of-government and intra-agency structures a key to success. Demonstrations of commitment include adequate resourcing and timeframes, development of systems with strong feedback loops, investment in capacity building for public servants and public participants, and active support for public servants to take on innovative approaches to power-sharing and collaboration.
2. *The public service needs to develop systems with feedback loops that facilitate clarity about the expectations, limits, roles and responsibilities of all participants*. This involves supporting the evolution of outcomes that take processes into account, which may include the continuity and sustainability of engagement, the levels of trust and depth of local relationships that are attained, the availability of tailored opportunities for particular groups of public representatives to take part in deliberation, the development of existing community links, and the coordination of initiatives across different parts of government to avoid over-consultation.
3. *Supported by political and public service leadership, participatory initiatives should have flexible timeframes and negotiated milestones*, particularly given the contemporary need to mix online and in person engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meaningful public engagement needs to be started and planned early in the policy cycle, with special attention paid to the time available for participation in decision-making.
4. *The public service should tailor approaches to participation to ensure that a representative group of the participants whose views are being sought are enabled to get involved*. This involves, as a starting point, developing a full understanding of implicit and practical barriers to participation in collaboration with members of the public who have lived experience relevant to the participatory process concerned. The public service should establish administrative systems and guidelines that support

the involvement of community members such as through paid leave or reimbursement, provide additional support for participants with special needs such as physical disabilities and experience of social exclusion, and adapt to the capacities and expectations of participants, such as translation services, meetings outside working hours, and efforts to set aside bureaucratic terminology.

5. *The public service should empower public participants to come to the participatory process with knowledge of the issues concerned*, time and techniques to build long-term relationships with each other and public servants, adequate power to set the agenda together with decision-makers, and skills and capacities for sharing lived experiences and engaging in dialogue.
6. *The public service should ensure public participants are given the resources they need to participate effectively and that public servants and leaders are accountable to participants* about how their inputs are received and acted upon.
7. *Efforts should be made to build long-term, sustainable partnerships between public servants, non-governmental, community and academic partners to ensure that participatory expertise and resources are swiftly available and that initiatives can be effectively evaluated.* The OECD has recommended that governments establish offices in charge of participatory and deliberative processes, funded by government and staffed by public servants in combination with university researchers or civil society representatives to develop independent understanding of when participation is appropriate and how it can lead to better policy and greater social impact.
8. *Governments should invest in building the capacity of public servants to understand and practise sound participatory methodologies and to commission and evaluate participatory work.* In ways distinct from traditional policymaking processes, public servants need negotiation and collaboration skills that enable public participation. Government should craft sustainable partnerships with organisations that are equipped to train public participants in personal development and leadership so that they know how to participate and deliberate well.



Conclusion

Conclusion

As trust in established institutions declines, calls to include everyday people in public decision-making are growing here in Australia and across the globe. Experimental efforts to include people in decision-making are happening around the world at all points of the policy cycle, at different levels of governance and institutionalisation and concerning a range of social, economic and cultural issues. Landmark interventions such as the Thodey Review of the Australian Public Service, the formation of the NSW Department of Customer Service and the Human Centered Design team within the NSW Treasury domestically, and the Open Government Initiative and United Nations Democracy Fund internationally, recognise that broader public participation in decision-making has the potential to generate policies and public services that are more effective and responsive to the evolving societal challenges we face.

There remain, however, many different ways to bring members of the public into decision-making processes, to many different ends, and such processes can challenge conventional ways of working in the public service and other sectors. The lack of a wide-ranging evidence base drawn from real, participatory initiatives also means there is not yet broad consensus on what works and what does not in this space.

Accordingly, the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative, led by NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement, Professor Peter Shergold AC, and NSW Government agency Multicultural NSW, marks an important contribution to enriching understanding of when, why and how to bring everyday people into policymaking processes. As this report has demonstrated, experiments like this provide a vital testing ground for getting the process right.

The learning partnership between Multicultural NSW and the Sydney Policy Lab at the University of Sydney found that public participation in policymaking, at its heart, can have most impact when it is underpinned by two fundamental factors: first, a willingness to innovate – to try something new – and, second, a willingness to share power and responsibility with members of the public.

First, for innovation to be possible, the leadership of influential individuals and the commitment of staff in government departments is crucial. This is because deep and sustained public participation in policymaking is a departure from conventional ways of working in government, and, as a result, experimental initiatives follow a process of “learning by doing” to create prototypes for wider use. Influential individuals and committed public servants take on the tasks of designing new policymaking processes within existing structures, updating conventional ways of working to allow for improved processes and building and sharing the case for widespread adoption of participatory approaches. The leaders and staff team of the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative in NSW supported its growth into an ongoing policymaking experiment seeking to respond to the needs and ideas of public servants, service providers and young people each step of the way.

Second, these innovative processes need to be directed towards changing the balance of power over public decisions. The willingness of both government and people involved in participatory processes to be accountable to one another is fundamental to genuine and effective public participation in policymaking. The Refugee Youth Policy Initiative represents an important experiment towards the goal of sharing power with the public because of its commitment to looking beyond public sector expertise to improve policymaking. The Initiative endeavoured to listen to and prioritise the experience-based expertise of young people from refugee backgrounds at the core of its work, supported by collaborations with academia, service providers and community leaders.

Within these two areas, this report puts forward eight key insights for public servants at all levels of government in Australia, and in particular in NSW, to consider in circumstances where they seek to bring everyday people into policymaking. We hope very much that these suggestions embolden future initiatives and that we all continue to gain from the development of participatory policymaking initiatives across the world.

Public participation in policymaking holds the promise of new policy ideas, responsive and efficient policy delivery, a stronger sense of agency and belonging among participants, and greater trust between citizens and government officials. To realise this potential, further work on the conditions that enable innovation and make it possible to share decision-making power is needed. Practical and rich insights will emerge from partnerships between academic institutions and practitioners to walk alongside and study experimental initiatives, and this report invites scholars and practitioners around the world to share collective lessons for advancing this challenging and important work.



Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A. Overview of key public participation typologies

There has been extensive work undertaken on the need to expand public participation in governance and a number of frameworks have been developed to assist with the implementation of participatory processes. Such frameworks outline methods that can be used to engage the public in decision-making or policy processes. These frameworks also represent different ideological understandings of the purpose of community participation.

Global examples

Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

Developed as a critique of local government planning processes in the United States this typology classifies community engagement on a scale from 'non-participation' (or a one way flow of information from decision-makers to citizens) to 'citizen power' (in which citizens have decision-making power in some form). Sherry Arnstein used the Ladder to make the point that "[t]here is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process."⁸⁹

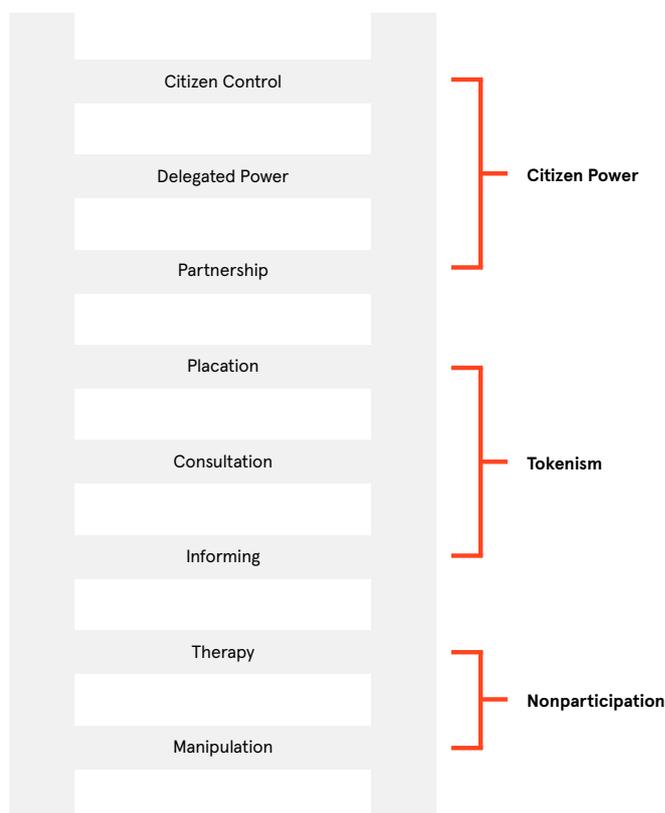


Figure 3: A Ladder of Citizen Participation,
Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Taylor & Francis Ltd.⁹⁰

IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation

The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (Figure 2) represents different choices that can be made regarding the role and influence of the community in planning and decision-making processes. Each “public participation goal” is matched with a “promise to the public” in order to identify the level of accountability attached to each goal.

IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Figure 4: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation⁷¹
 © International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org

For IAP2 each of these forms of public participation are equally valid such that even the act of informing the public involves a level of community impact on decision-making. In keeping with this view of participation, IAP2 posits that “differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.”⁷²

OECD Levels of Stakeholder Participation

The OECD has also developed a typology to represent existing relationships between citizens and governments.

Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make information and data available to other parties • Make targeted audience more knowledgeable and sensitive to specific issues • Encourage stakeholders to relate to the issue and take action
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather comments, perception, information and experience of stakeholders • No obligation to take stakeholders' view into consideration in final outcome
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to take part in the policy processes • May entail that participants have an influence over decision making • Can include elements of co-decision / co-production; balanced share of power among stakeholders involved

Figure 5: OECD Levels of Stakeholder Participation⁹³
© Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

There are two key differences between the IAP2's Spectrum and the OECD's typology. The first is that the OECD places the different forms of participation on a ladder from weakest to strongest level of participation as part of an agenda to encourage governments to work towards greater community influence on policymaking:

“Greater citizen participation in the policy cycle (CPPC) is at the core of an open government and has to be an integral element of countries' move towards openness across all branches of the state. Effective participation creates renewed attention to the mechanisms through which governments are going beyond the role of a simple provider of services towards a greater partnership with all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector, academia and independent state institutions.”⁹⁴

Notwithstanding this progressive approach to public participation taken by the OECD, the second difference is that the OECD's typology does not contain a parallel to the “empower” column in the IAP2 Spectrum. Whereas IAP2 anticipates the possibility of placing “final decision-making in the hands of the public,” the OECD's highest form of engagement is defined as “elements of co-decision/co-production; balanced share of power among stakeholders involved.”

Australian Government examples

In 2015, the Federal Government of Australia joined the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative overseen by a committee of government and civil society representatives that has secured concrete commitments from governments around the world that, among other things, aim to empower citizens in order to strengthen governance.⁹⁵ To date, Australia’s activities under this initiative have focused on measures to increase access to information, to enhance transparency and create greater public accountability at the Federal level. The 2018–2020 National Action Plan also includes a commitment to “enhance public engagement skills in the public service” which is being implemented by the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. As part of these efforts, the Government has published *The Australian Public Service Framework for Engagement and Participation* (2019). The Framework is influenced by IAP2, but is based on a set of definitions developed by the Ontario Provincial Government that focuses on ways to engage the public.

Share	When government needs to tell the public about a government initiative
Consult	When government needs to gather feedback from the public about a problem or solution
Deliberate	When government needs help from the public because a problem involves competing values, and requires trade-offs and compromise
Collaborate	When government needs help from the public to find and implement a solution

Figure 6: APS Framework for Engagement and Participation⁹⁶
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According to the Framework, “deliberate” involves asking people “to help identify and frame an issue and/or develop a strategy that the government commits to deliver.” The public are involved in developing recommendations which are then “provided to government for a final decision.”⁹⁷ Under “collaborate,” “people work with the government to define an issue, develop and deliver proposed solutions.” This involves “an agreement on government’s role versus the community’s role in implementing and delivering any recommended solutions” though “the final decision on how to proceed remains with government.”⁹⁸

NSW Government examples

Within the NSW Government, the Information and Privacy Commission developed the *NSW Charter for Public Participation* (2018) to support agencies in engaging the community in the development and delivery of policies and services. In contrast to the approach taken at a Federal level, the *Charter* was designed to provide a framework to guide the implementation of public participation strategies, and the *Charter* supports agencies to develop and implement their own policies on public participation. While it does not propose a specific typology, it acknowledges the use of IAP2 resources and provides examples based on the IAP2 Spectrum. For example, the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment released a *Community Participation Plan* in late 2019 which is framed using IAP2 ideas and language in that it commits to “facilitating discussion” to assist “decision makers to identify community concerns utilising local knowledge and expertise which empowers local communities in the planning process.”⁹⁹ Unlike the previous typologies which focus on actions that the government can take to engage the public, the *Plan* approaches implementation by focusing on four actions the public can take to participate: keep up to date; attend events; provide informal feedback; provide formal feedback.

Public participation in public service delivery is also being promoted by the NSW Department of Customer Service which has a unit that works with NSW Government departments and agencies “to ensure the customer is at the centre of policy and service design, funding, delivery and evaluation across the public sector.”¹⁰⁰ The Department of Customer Service has developed NSW Government ‘Customer Commitments’ and has been exploring ways to embed these commitments into how delivery of public services. These commitments, framed from the perspective of the customer, are as follows:

- **Easy to engage:** Make it easy to access what I need. Make it simple for me to understand.
- **Act with empathy:** Show you understand my situation. Treat me fairly and with respect. Provide service in my time of need.
- **Respect my time:** Tell me what I need to know beforehand. Minimise the need for me to repeat myself. Make what I need to do straightforward.
- **Explain what to expect:** Be clear about what steps are involved. Contact me when I need to know something. Let me know what the outcomes could be.
- **Resolve the situation:** Be accountable for your actions. Be clear in decision-making. Reach an outcome.
- **Engage the community:** Listen to the community to understand our needs. Ask how we want services delivered.¹⁰¹

Appendix B. Participants in the Multicultural NSW Refugee Youth Policy Initiative

Peer researchers:

Fifteen Peer Researchers were involved in the Engagement Phase of the Refugee Youth Policy Initiative, with 13 continuing their involvement through the Policy Development phase.

Organisational partners:

NSW Government Department of Customer Service
Sydney Policy Lab, University of Sydney
Western Sydney University

Youth Sub-Group of the NSW Joint Partnership Working Group on Refugee Resettlement:

Anglicare
Assyrian Resource Centre
Asylum Seekers Centre
Australian Red Cross
Community of South Sudanese and Other Marginalised Areas, Incorporated NSW
CORE Community Services
Fairfield City Council
Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International
Illawarra Multicultural Services
Legal Aid NSW
Multicultural Council Wagga Wagga
Multicultural NSW Advisory Board
Multicultural Youth Action Network, NSW
Multicultural Youth Action Network, NSW (Youth Ambassadors)
Navitas English
NSW Department of Education
NSW Department of Communities and Justice
NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (Regional NSW Group)
NSW Health South Western Sydney Local Health District
NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
Refugee Support Network
Settlement Services International
St Vincent de Paul Society
Sydney Multicultural Community Services Inc
Western Sydney University

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