

Assessment against OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes



The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) is a key international standard-setting organisation. The OCED has collected a wealth of evidence about how deliberative processes work across different countries and has created a set of guidelines that we used for our Stage 3 deliberations with our Community Panel. In this section we describe how we implemented each principle.¹

Table A.I: Assessment of our pricing proposal customer and community engagement against IPART’s examples of principles for good practice

Principle	What we did
<p>Purpose</p> <p>The objective should be outlined as a clear task and is linked to a defined public problem. It is phrased neutrally as a question in plain language.</p>	<p>Our problem statement ‘How do we balance providing reliable, high-quality services, with protecting the environment, creating a positive legacy for future generations, and keeping prices affordable?’</p> <p>The problem statement went through a cognitive testing process with our Community Engagement Advisory Panel (CEAP) and external plain English review.</p>
<p>Accountability</p> <p>There should be influence on public decisions. The commissioning public authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on participants’ recommendations in a timely manner.</p> <p>It should monitor the implementation of all accepted recommendations with regular public progress reporting.</p>	<p>For stage 3 we committed to the level of ‘collaborate’ on the IAP2 Spectrum and incorporate their recommendations ‘to the maximum extent possible’.</p> <p>We held a ‘Close the Loop’ session with deliberative forum participants in September 2024. At this session, how recommendations are incorporated into our pricing proposal was articulated to participants.</p> <p>We will establish an ongoing community committee of customers that will meet at least annually to monitor performance and hold us to account. This will include marking a report card that will be publicly available on our performance against targets.</p>

¹ : The full document is available at: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/good-practice-principles-for-deliberative-processes-for-public-decision-making.pdf>

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<p>Transparency</p> <p>The deliberative process should be announced publicly before it begins. The process design and all materials – including agendas, briefing documents, evidence submissions, audio and video recordings of those presenting evidence, the participants; report, their recommendations (the wording of which participants should have a final say over), and the random selection methodology – should be available to the public in a timely manner.</p> <p>The funding source should be disclosed. The commissioning public authority’s response to the recommendations and the evaluation after the process should be publicised and have a public communication strategy.</p>	<p>All deliberative forum materials, including panel recommendations are available on our website.</p> <p>A media release describing the deliberative forum recruitment random selection process was distributed as well as being available on our website.</p> <p>A document articulating how recommendations have been incorporated into our pricing proposal is available on our website.</p> <p>A communication strategy has been developed for IPART’s public exhibition process which will include links on our website to all deliberative forum materials, including our response to recommendations.</p>
<p>Inclusiveness</p> <p>Inclusion should be achieved by considering how to involve underrepresented groups. Participation should also be encouraged and supported through remuneration, expenses, and/or providing or paying for childcare and eldercare.</p>	<p>Participants were financially compensated for their time (\$170 per full day session attended) and considerable efforts were undertaken to involve underrepresented groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An invitation was distributed to the local TAFE Aboriginal Engagement Liaison officer for distribution to students and First Nations People (FNP) • The invitation included a link to a registration form that contained questions regarding any additional support required to enable participation (e.g. assistance with transport, interpreters, childcare) • A participant who did not own appropriate technology to participate in the online sessions was provided with a Hunter Water iPad • Seating was available at all times for those challenged by the need to stand and all venues were accessible for those with mobility challenges.

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<p>Representativeness</p> <p>The participants should be a microcosm of the general public. This is achieved through random sampling from which a representative selection is made, based on stratification of demographics (to ensure the group broadly matches the demographic profile of the community against census or other similar data), and sometimes by attitudinal criteria (Depending on the context). Everyone should have an equal opportunity to be selected as participants. In some instances, it may be desirable to over-sample certain demographics during the random sampling stage of recruitment to help achieve representativeness.</p>	<p>A robust recruitment process was undertaken with the registration survey, demographic matching and final selection of the panel, undertaken by a third-party specialist recruitment firm. The random selection process to arrive at the final deliberative forum community panel was as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12,000 randomly selected customers from billing database stratified by LGA to proportionally match Census were sent a hard copy invitation by post • Tenants were included in the sample and inferred when the billing address did not match the residential address • An additional sample of 5,000 customers from our ebilling database were sent an electronic invitation • The invitation (both hard and electronic copies) included a link to a registration survey to match primary and secondary demographic characteristics • A second random selection process was undertaken from people who expressed interest in participating. <p>We found it challenging to recruit, young people, First Nations People and business customers. We will focus on improving representativeness in these areas going forward.</p>
<p>Information</p> <p>Participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise.</p> <p>They should have the opportunity to hear from and question speakers that present to them, including experts and advocates chosen by the citizens themselves.</p>	<p>The panel was provided with an Engagement Report that described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was in and out of scope for deliberation (decisions already made) • The topics for deliberation • The outcomes of previous stages of engagement for the pricing proposal as well as other relevant community engagement insights. <p>In addition to hearing from and questioning Hunter Water subject matter experts (SMEs), the panel were asked to nominate any other speakers they wished to hear from to fill any information gaps they may have had. These speakers were provided across three days of sessions.</p>

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<p>Group deliberation</p> <p>Participants should be able to find common ground to underpin their collective recommendations to the public authority.</p> <p>This entails careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every participant having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats that alternate between small group and plenary discussions and activities, and skilled facilitation.</p>	<p>The sessions were run as a mix of face to face and online sessions to mitigate the potential of the formation of voting blocks, reduce confirmation bias and to change power/group dynamics.</p> <p>The panel arrived at their final recommendations through an iterative three stage process that included small group work, voting and reporting back to the panel as a whole.</p> <p>The final ‘consensus day’ culminated in final recommendations that include the accumulated costs for the forum’s preferences, overall price/bill impact and service levels. The panel undertook a voting process that required a supermajority of at least 80% of participants reaching consensus on the final recommendations.</p>
<p>Time</p> <p>Deliberation requires adequate time for participants to learn, weigh the evidence, and develop informed recommendations, due to the complexity of most policy problems. To achieve informed citizen recommendations, participants should meet for at least four full days in person, unless a shorter time frame can be justified. It is recommended to allow time for individual learning and reflection in between meetings.</p>	<p>The deliberative forum consisted of a three-hour orientation session followed by a full day ‘learning’ session, which introduced the process, provided an overview of the topics that were deliberated on and described the results of previous stages of engagement.</p> <p>This was followed by three full days of deliberation on the topic areas and a consensus day. It was made clear to participants on the first full day of deliberation the quantum of the ‘baseline’ bill impact. Participants understood that any recommendations they made for additional investments would be on top of this baseline bill increase.</p>
<p>Integrity</p> <p>The process should be run by an arms’ length coordinating team different from the commissioning public authority. The final call regarding process decisions should be with the arm’s length co-ordinators rather than the commissioning authorities.</p> <p>Depending on the context, there should be oversight by an advisory or monitoring board with representatives of different viewpoints.</p>	<p>The forum was independently facilitated by our engagement partner Insync.</p> <p>Each day of deliberation commenced with a closed session between Insync and the participants (no observers or Hunter Water staff), so that participants could raise any concerns or discuss any issues without being influenced by Hunter Water.</p> <p>Hunter Water staff had no input on the days other than information provision and answering any questions participants had.</p> <p>Our CEAP panel of experts, as well as a representative of the Justice and Equity Centre (JEC), formerly known as the Public Interest Advisory Centre (PIAC), attended each session in an observational capacity to provide oversight and feedback.</p>

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<p>Privacy</p> <p>There should be respect for participants' privacy to protect them from undesired media attention and harassment, as well as to preserve participants' independence, ensuring they are not bribed or lobbied by interest groups or activists. Small group discussions should be private. The identity of participants may be publicised when the process has ended, at the participants' consent. All personal data of participants should be treated in compliance with international good practices, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).</p>	<p>The identity of the participants have not and will not be shared with any other organisation or group (other than for the purposes of recruitment and engagement organisation, for example inviting them to attend the close the loop session).</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p>There should be an anonymous evaluation by the participants to assess the process based on objective criteria (e.g. on quality and diversity of information provided, amount of time devoted to learning, independence of facilitation). An internal evaluation by the coordination team should be conducted against good practice principles in this report to assess what has been achieved and to improve future practice. An independent evaluation is recommended for some deliberative processes, particularly those that last a significant time. The deliberative process should also be evaluated on final outcomes and impact of implemented recommendations.</p>	<p>A survey has been provided to participants at the start and at the conclusion of the process to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ measure how transparent the engagement was ○ the quality of the information provided and speakers ○ any shift in sentiment about the deliberative process and Hunter Water more generally ○ the results of this survey are included in the final engagement report from the forum and is available on our website.