

STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Guidelines for Central and Local Government, and NGOs Working with Refugee Background Communities

MARCH 2008



Communities want to
be active participants
in policy development
and service delivery.

Introduction



An important change has come about in recent years in the way refugee background communities wish to work with government and other organisations. Communities no longer want to be treated as the passive subjects and receivers of policy development and services. In Wellington, refugee background communities are becoming more involved in the development and delivery of the policies and services that affect them.

To assist this new relationship we have written some guidelines to help government agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) and communities to work well together. We have called these guidelines *Standards for Engagement*. These Standards are intended as a practical guide that can be used in our relationships to help our work together, our discussions and our actions. They are intended for use by both central and local government agencies working with refugee background communities, as well as by NGOs.

In any collaboration, it is important to understand and acknowledge the differences in the resources, networks and knowledge that refugee background communities, NGOs and government agencies have access to. These differences affect each group's ability to work well together.

In general, government agencies have greater access to resources than NGOs and communities, and communities have less access again than NGOs.

One of the purposes of the *Standards for Engagement* is to draw attention to the potential "power" relationships that exist when we work together, to recognise that imbalance and, if possible, to address it in an appropriate way.

STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

THE STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT ARE DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS:

- Principles and Common Understandings
- Standards
- Indicators of Success.

This is a living document that many have contributed to. As we continue to work together, we expect these Standards to change and reflect our ongoing experience of working together.

The *Standards for Engagement* will be monitored and evaluated by the *Wellington Regional Refugee Health and Wellbeing Action Plan* Working Group. Feel free to redistribute this document in either hard copy or electronically, but if you do we request that you cite ChangeMakers as the author.

Thank you for your commitment. We know from our experience that such commitment results in much better results for everyone.

ChangeMakers Refugee Forum – 17 March 2008

Principles and Common Understandings

THE STANDARDS¹ ARE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

- Human rights are the basis for policy development and services.
- Our focus is on strengths, not weaknesses. People from refugee backgrounds bring with them knowledge and many skills that can be used.
- A shared voice is a stronger voice.
- Trust and reciprocity are the basis of our relationships.
- Our goal/purpose for working together is clear and mutually agreed to.
- Our communication is open, honest and easy to understand.
- Our engagement is inclusive and fair to all parties involved. People with refugee backgrounds are involved in all stages of our work together – defining the issue, planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Information is accurate and timely.

¹These have been drawn from principles that ChangeMakers Refugee Forum has been working from, as well as principles proposed by Community Economic Development Action Research (CEDAR) in 2003.

Stages

OUR WORK TOGETHER INVOLVES THREE STAGES:

1. PRE-ENGAGEMENT:

This is when we build our relationships, we ensure that all those who should be involved are involved, and we agree together on what we will work on.

2. ENGAGEMENT:

This stage is the practical expression of our relationship. The planning and the “doing” through discussions, reflection and action.

3. POST-ENGAGEMENT:

At this stage we collect feedback and evaluate our work together.



Standards

1. MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION:

People are engaged in a process or project in a meaningful way (explained in the indicators). Communities (leaders, elders, key people and members), agencies and organisations are involved, and any barriers that may prevent communities from participating fully are identified then removed or minimised.

2. PARTNERSHIPS:

Potential partners are identified and encouraged to be involved – i.e. all the people who may have an interest in engagement with communities.

3. PLANNING TOGETHER:

Needs/issues and available resources are identified and all parties agree upon the purpose, scope, timescale and actions.

4. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING:

- a. Communication about any action related to working together is clear and transparent. Information sharing between the parties is carried out in a fair and timely way.
- b. Language used is accessible to speakers of English as a second language and/or appropriate interpreting services are used as needed.
- c. An effort is made to reach out to all sectors of the refugee background communities, and information is made easily available to those without access to it.

STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT



5. PROCESSES:

The ways of working together are agreed by everyone involved.

6. SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE:

Barriers to engagement are identified and help is provided to overcome them.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND UTILISATION OF SKILLS:

The skills, knowledge and expertise of all participants are recognised, identified and used to benefit the project or “engagement”.

8. FEEDBACK:

There is a good flow of information and regular updates between all the participants.

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

There is regular monitoring and evaluation of the engagement to make sure these *Standards for Engagement* and their agreed purposes are satisfactorily met.

Indicators of Success

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

INDICATORS FOR THE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION STANDARD

- a. All groups interested in the issue/s are identified and represented. They are expected to play an active role throughout the engagement process.
- b. An interested group is any party that:
 - can usefully contribute to the engagement
 - has the ability to be actively involved and agrees to carry out their commitments
 - has the knowledge, skills, and experience to contribute to the engagement
 - possesses the authority to act on behalf of those they represent
 - maintains ongoing dialogues and discussions with those they represent
- c. All agencies and groups can show how they identified and promoted the participation of those interested in being part of the process.

PARTNERSHIPS

INDICATORS FOR THE PARTNERSHIPS STANDARD

- a. Potential partners who may be interested in engagement are identified and included.
- b. Similar programmes are researched and taken into account to avoid duplication of work.
- c. Relationships with other individuals and organisations are fostered.

STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

PLANNING TOGETHER

INDICATORS FOR THE PLANNING TOGETHER STANDARD

- a. Purposes of engagement are clearly identified, and agreed to by all parties. Everyone is involved in identifying or naming the issue and options for action.
- b. When prior consultation has already identified a certain need that remains relatively constant, and exists in research and literature, resources are not wasted on unnecessary consultation.
- c. Intended results that are specific, measurable, and realistic are drawn up together and agreed to.
- d. Existing and potential resources are identified with participants in the engagement, and proposed actions around use of resources realistically assessed.
- e. Planning is open and inclusive of all parties.
- f. Participants are involved in identifying information necessary for evaluation.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

INDICATORS FOR THE COMMUNICATION AND SHARING INFORMATION STANDARD

- a. Communication is clear, free from technical language as much as possible, and in a format easily understood by communities. Language used suits the audience, and is accessible to speakers of English as a second language.
- b. There is sharing of relevant information. Within the limits of confidentiality, information is transparent and openly available to all parties involved.
- c. If bound by confidentiality, participants identify and explain openly why access to such information is restricted.
- d. Style and accessibility of communication is monitored and evaluated according to *Standard 9, Monitoring and Evaluation*.



PROCESSES

INDICATORS FOR THE PROCESSES STANDARD

- a. All methods used are understood and agreed to by all participants.
- b. All methods used are appropriate for the purpose of working together and enable diverse views to be expressed and taken into account.
- c. Working with communities is made accessible (i.e. through interpreters and limited use of technical language).
- d. Processes and methods are evaluated and changed according to feedback.

SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

INDICATORS FOR THE SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE STANDARD

- a. Work together is properly resourced. Adequate technical and financial support for participation is identified and provided, especially for work that is voluntary.
- b. Those who want to consult or organise events should identify other initiatives which are already involving participants and possible participants.

STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND UTILISATION OF SKILLS

INDICATORS FOR THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND UTILISATION OF SKILLS STANDARD

- a. Skills that exist within refugee background communities are taken into account and utilised during the engagement process.
- b. The accumulated skills and knowledge of the refugee background communities are supported and encouraged.

FEEDBACK

INDICATORS FOR THE FEEDBACK STANDARD

- a. Participants will provide regular feedback to their communities to explain why certain actions have been taken, the outcome, and to provide information about upcoming activities.
- b. Feedback is given in an agreed format, within an agreed timeframe to both refugee background communities and service providers.
- c. Feedback to communities is made publicly accessible (i.e. through direct communication with community groups, and information posted or placed at community centres and language schools), and in language understandable by speakers of English as a second language, or translated into an appropriate language, in accordance with *Standard 4, Communication and Information Sharing*.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

INDICATORS FOR THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION STANDARD

- a. The Working Group of the *Wellington Regional Refugee Health and Well-being Action Plan* is responsible for monitoring and evaluating engagement processes through the *Standards for Engagement*.
- b. The engagement is evaluated based on the intended results outlined in *Standard 3, Planning Together*.
- c. Practices, skills development and progress are measured by evaluation.
- d. Results of any evaluation are shared publicly, celebrated, and evidence of good practice is shared with other partners.

STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

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