



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

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Submission to the Office of the Voluntary and Community Sector on *It's more than talk – Building Better Government Engagement*

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 50 nationally organised societies and national members. NCWNZ has 25 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and 150 other societies. The Council's function is to serve women, families and the community through research, study, discussion and action.

This feedback on the discussion paper has been prepared by the Public Issues Standing Committee from responses sent back by members, after circulating the information and questions in the monthly NCWNZ Circular.

Section 2: Regarding the accuracy of the engagement issues:

Most members agreed that central government is not good at consultation and made the following comments.

- Methods need to be improved. In particular, policy time frames are an issue, especially when consultation is called for over the Christmas break. This does not allow for organisations to consult with their members.
- Information is needed as to where the public can access the recruitment and performance management systems of the public service.
- The discussion groups on the 'It's more than talk' paper were confined to 30 people in a few centres, and were by invitation only. This does not reach the wider community.
- Communication needs to be improved from the beginning with input from grass/kumara roots level.
- Monitoring of consultation appears to be inadequate.
- Communication should encourage collaboration. It must be from real people in the community not just the heads of voluntary bodies in Wellington.
- More women need to be offered the opportunity to be involved in consultation such as at the recent Job Summit.
- ACC and OSH requirements are intrusive, costly and excessive and not necessarily appropriate. Community input is needed.
- The privacy law is limiting agencies exchanging information and consequently a good outcome of policies. For example Family Courts work with many agencies, and there is concern that there is not always a good outcome for the expenditure of all the agencies involved.
- One suggestion is to have a facilitator to collate community views, who would be accountable to the relevant minister.
- There are good examples of communities working together such as the NZ Budget Board, Citizens' Advice Bureau and St Mary's Home, Otahuhu (Anglican Trust for Women and Children).
- Some government departments are better than others at engaging. Housing NZ is given as an example as very good at engaging, especially with targeted areas of high social issues.
- There are some parts that are working well in most organisations but not enough.



Section 2: Regarding commitment from government agencies.

Concern was expressed that:

- Agencies cited as having good consultation are the Bioethics Council and DOC yet the Bioethics Council is being dismantled.
- Staff turnover can be an issue. Voluntary organisations can work hard to get their position understood and then the department restructures and they have to start again.
- The larger professional-type bodies that work closely with the government are consulted/listened to, but not necessarily the more local, voluntary organisations.
- Consultation should happen more frequently and with the appropriate community organisation, which includes voluntary organisations.
- Government bodies expect community organisations to do the work-but they are not forthcoming with funding or training.
- People take part in focus groups but often do not receive any feedback. Is it just an exercise in appearing to consult?
- E-mail could be used to facilitate a greater consultation range.
- Party manifestos have to be looked at after an election, as policies can often be rushed through without sufficient detailed consultation.

Section 2: Regarding staff training:

The following points were made:

- All volunteers handling government money require training, must be accountable and have good outcomes.
- All trained professional people should be trained to monitor for good outcomes.
- Members experienced dealing with people employed in central government who are unskilled in consultation. More training is required.
- Education is needed on community organisations for government officers, to ensure that they are aware of the different needs of communities.
- There needs to be better communication and coordination between government departments.
- Employing the right person with ability in communication should be the top consideration.
- Recognising the expertise of community organisations and people requires training.
- Anti-racism training and training in the effects of power and powerful positions would be helpful. People in powerful positions need to keep in touch with the real world.
- Tension is being created because the professionalism of voluntary groups may be seen as a threat to government employees.

Section 4: The way ahead

Members of NCWNZ agree with these ideas although one response group expressed some doubt about the value of a Joint Ministers' group because of the time taken for in-depth consultation among Ministries.

Section 5: Top priorities for action:

NCWNZ considers the following the top priorities

- A review of the guidelines for public consultation should be happening on a routine basis. This should be a top priority requirement.
- The Cabinet Manual and CabGuide must place stronger value on consultation with community and voluntary organisations and Iwi/Maori to give credence to the notion of consultation and open the way for accountability.
- Yes, develop New Zealand qualifications designed around community engagement and create more opportunities for training in public engagement.



- All government agencies, in their strategic planning documents, should include commitments to good practice in participatory process, nominate champions to initiate, promote and protect the commitment to engage within their agencies, offer clear guidance to staff on how to behave and operate when engaging with communities and, offer professional development support and induction in stakeholder engagement.

The National Council of Women of New Zealand applauds the attempt to improve the democratic process in New Zealand in ways that are practical, planned and cost effective. It is critical that this initiative is indeed 'more than talk'.

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National President

Joan Macdonald
Convener, Public Issues Standing Committee