

Wellington City Council (WCC) Draft Engagement Policy (DEP)

A submission from the WCC Accessibility Advisory Group (AAG)

30 August 2013

The AAG's main task is to advise WCC on accessibility issues and make recommendations for meeting the access needs of Wellingtonians.

This submission is a response to the WCC Draft Engagement Policy, specifically as it should relate to the needs of the impaired community.

These needs can be generally broken into the following groups, in descending order of reporting:

- Learning
- Cognitive
- Mobility
- Hearing and
- Visual impairments

Engagement policy tends to overlook learning and cognitive problems; rather it focuses on mobility, hearing and visual impairments - which is not a holistic approach to accessibility, or a step in the right direction to creating an engagement policy which will benefit all people regardless of ability.

The demographics of the Wellington population are changing and these need to be recognised by Council.

It is predicted the major increase in impairments will be in the 65+ age group.

- New Zealand's population (4.4 million in 2012) will increase to 5.4 million in 2036 and 6.0 million in 2061.
- Currently 20% of New Zealand's population identifies as having some form of impairment, this equates to some 880,000 people currently
- The NZ population aged 65+ was 600,000 in 2012 (14%) and is projected to increase to 1.2 million (23%) in 2036 and 1.5 million (26%) in 2061.
- In accordance with this spike of elderly the percentage of the population who will identify as having some form of impairment will also spike, it is estimated this figure may be as high as 30% of the population by 2036.

Applying the above figures and estimates to Wellington;

2012 Wellington Population = 395,600

20% of 395,600 = 79,120 persons who identify as having some form of impairment

2036 Wellington Population = 594,000

30% of 594,000 = 178,380 persons who identify as having some form of impairment

This indicates that the population of Wellington who identify as having some form of impairment will more than double over the next 20 years.

That increase will mean that more attention will need to be made to future engagement policies in the learning and cognitive area (dementia, Alzheimer's and neurological conditions) and other age related conditions.

A public engagement policy should include attention to accessible:

- Meetings – venue location, access and suitability of facilities
- Presentations – able to be easily understood and clearly presented and
- Information – web and print ready.

WCC information should be:

- Accessible (within reason) by all audiences
- Readily available
- Easy to locate
- Easy to read
- Easy to understand

This means that WCC needs to provide a variety of ways and means of communication and provide information in multiple formats to accommodate the diversity of its audiences.

We urge council to also consider the five points below and incorporate them into their Engagement Policy.

1. Quantitative tools will be needed to assess public opinions, attitudes, perceptions, judgments, feelings, ideas and reactions. These tools will test whether WCC is meeting the accessibility needs, noted above, of its audience.
2. WCC needs to stay current with technology developments in the communication area so its communications are accessible to all Wellingtonians. This technology may be specifically designed for an audience whose access to technology may be limited, or who prefer to receive information through more traditional means.

3. Accessible communication planning should be integrated into the annual business planning process and be evaluated as a standard part of the business operation and procedures.
4. Staff training needs to have an emphasis on accessible information and communication needs. Too often in the past the WCC has released documents for consultation which do not meet minimum standards of accessibility.
5. The WCC should maintain a publically accessible index (web and print) that allows access to all publications in an accessible format.