



# Rural and isolated communities

A GUIDE TO ENGAGEMENT



## RURAL AND ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

# A guide to engagement

Many rural and isolated communities around Australia are experiencing significant social and economic changes, and Tasmania is no exception to this. Tasmania has the most decentralised population in Australia, meaning that effective engagement strategies with rural and isolated communities are essential.

There are many opportunities for positive engagement and benefits in engaging with rural and isolated communities. For example, smaller populations can mean stronger connections between people. You may find there are already well established community networks, the potential for community champions, a strong sense of community and sense of community ownership of local issues.

### Challenges for engaging with rural and isolated areas


While there are many positives to living in rural and isolated areas, many of these communities do not have the same access to further education, employment or services and amenities that urban areas do. In addition to this, declining populations in rural and isolated areas has resulted in decreased service delivery in these areas.<sup>1</sup>


Engaging with any community is challenging (see Section 4 of a [Tasmanian Government Framework for Community Engagement \(the Framework\)](#)). However, key factors to consider when engaging with rural and isolated communities include:

- *Communication:* If there is not enough publicity, communication or promotion, your engagement attempts will suffer. To help communicate effectively, you may need to seek advice from officers and communications personnel in other Tasmanian Government agencies, as well as inviting key representatives in the community to encourage local residents to participate.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Regional Development Australia cited in Tasmania, Regional Plan 2012-13)*

- 
- *Confidentiality and anonymity:* In small communities many people are connected to, or at least know of, each other. Therefore, if the purpose or topic of engagement is sensitive, some individuals may be reluctant to participate. This type of engagement requires respect, discretion and confidentiality. Ideally, it should be scheduled according to individual or group preferences.
  - *Dominant voices:* As in most communities, some community members consistently influence community affairs. As a result there may be a degree of deference to their authority and status. It is important to engage in ways that allow you to hear the concerns and perspectives of all those who wish to be heard, irrespective of their standing in the local community. There is however, value in touching base with community leaders, as they are often 'over the fence' communicators and generators of new ideas and information.
  - *Fear/resistance:* The gradual decline and removal of government services in rural and isolated areas means that community members may be reluctant to engage, or may do so with residual anger about previous government decisions that have impacted on their community. Ideally, the design of engagement activities would be focused on rebuilding and cultivating trust and honesty, or at the very least, an environment of mutual respect.
  - *Lack of trust:* Some Tasmanian communities may feel that previous government decisions have had a negative impact on them. This may mean that attempts by government to engage may be met with distrust. For this reason, it is particularly important to be very clear with the scope, purpose and reason for the engagement.
  - *Lack of services:* The lack of services available in a community can lead to feelings of disconnectedness and anger, which may cultivate feelings of resentment and alienation between residents and non-local service providers - and the government. It is important to be aware of whether a service or services have recently been removed from the community. If it comes up, acknowledge this loss. Explain what is available to the community. If you are not sure what is available, make sure that you follow up and report back.
  - *Transport:* Without transport, the key enabler required for community engagement, real community engagement is not possible. This is especially true for people with disability, people who are financially disadvantaged and older people. Travelling long distances to participate in engagement opportunities has opportunity costs in terms of time and money. Public transport may not be available or operate on a daily basis. Transport options should be included as part of your engagement plan.
  - *Time:* People in rural communities may not have the ability to leave their properties due to high workloads. Many people are not available during



standard office hours or for particular times of the year, for example, miners work long shifts and farmers have ongoing demands upon them. Ensure that the times chosen for engagement suit the diversity of the local community.

- *Forestry*: The restructure of Tasmania's forestry industry has caused discord in many rural and isolated communities and there is often tension regarding the issue of industry and development versus environmental protection.
- *Inadequate resourcing*: Without proper resourcing for engagement, many people are completely left out of the process.


*"It is labour intensive consulting with regionally remote communities with low levels of literacy. You need to travel to see them but the travel and time is often not factored into the framework of funding. It is important to build a relationship with these communities, otherwise they will not take you in. Intensive legwork is required on the ground, but this is not recognised with funding resources, as measurable outcomes are based on quantity not quality or qualitative outcomes".*

*Community worker, St Helens*

### Addressing challenges

To address some of these difficulties you may also find it useful to:

- conduct a series of smaller meetings in small towns or districts to make it a more attractive option for residents, rather than having one meeting in a regional centre;
- ensure you have the right communication skills to engage effectively ie know your audience and be prepared to listen (listening is vital if distrust, anger and cynicism are to be overcome);
- provide transport options to support participation or take the engagement to the people;
- talk to people in the community (such as the local school principal, business owners, police, sporting clubs and organisations such as the Country Women's Association (CWA) or Rotary) over the phone and ask them who else should or could be contacted;
- visit the community prior to planning your engagement in order to get a sense of place and who to involve (if resources permit); and/or
- use local media (including school and community newsletters, newspapers, radio and notice boards) to communicate the details of your project.



While video conferencing offers a solution to overcoming geographical distance, do not underestimate the importance of face-to-face engagement. Technology and statistics do not replace the reality and emotional experience of being in a community. However, you can use social media and other on-line mechanisms to engage community members who are struggling to access transport or who prefer not to leave their community.

Also, and importantly, regional and isolated communities must know their concerns are heard. Nothing will build credibility, and reduce scepticism toward the Government and State Service, more than having the resources and ability to act on what you hear and learn from the community.

## ENGAGING IN RURAL AND ISOLATED COMMUNITIES


Within one local government area there may be several communities, all with different issues, population demographics, views and concerns. Local government can be a gateway into rural and isolated communities. For instance, local government websites can be a good source of information to find out what is happening across the broader local government area. Also, community development officers are often well-placed to know what is going on in the community.

However, it is important to realise that not all communities have a strong relationship with their council. Therefore, you will need to make sure that you make contact with other organisations and individuals within that community, such as:

- local public servants (ie staff at Centrelink, Service Tasmania Shops, LINC's, police, etc);
- the local school principal;
- the local chamber of commerce and industry;
- a community house or health centre;
- a local organisation such as the RSL and/or service clubs (eg Rotary and Lions).

### Understand the community

For some rural and isolated communities you will need to plan your engagement around local and seasonal activities, for example, during harvest, shearing or mine shut down events. Also, seek out and take advantage of scheduled events and opportunities such as AgFest, agricultural shows or Rural Health Week to learn more about local issues and experiences,



or as a platform for engagement. See further information on [understanding the community](#) in the Framework.

**Inclusive engagement:**

It is important to consider individuals and groups at risk of exclusion within rural and isolated communities, as their interests may not be represented by engaging with the community as a whole (eg transient workers or those new to the community).

In some smaller communities there may not be key central points that can coordinate or mobilise the community to the point where it has a voice, or even spread the message through a community. To address some of these issues, see the engagement guide on [Engaging with People Who are Hard to Reach](#).

It is especially important to go to rural and isolated communities to engage, rather than expecting people (who may already feel isolated or are tied to their properties/livelihoods) to travel extensively to meet you. More information about [inclusive engagement](#) is available in the Framework.

**TASMANIAN POLICIES, LEGISLATION AND PROGRAMS**

Economic Development Plan

[http://www.development.tas.gov.au/economic/economic\\_development\\_plan](http://www.development.tas.gov.au/economic/economic_development_plan)

A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania 2009

<http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/siu/strategy/strategy>

## WHERE DO I START?

Below is a list of some key stakeholders you might like to contact when planning your engagement or event:

Organisation	Contact Details
<b>Youth Development Officers (or equivalent) in local councils across Tasmania</b>	<p>Many local governments have youth advisory groups that can provide a useful avenue to access and engage young people.</p> <p>A list of local Councils is available through the Local Government Association of Tasmania.</p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.lgat.tas.gov.au">www.lgat.tas.gov.au</a></p>
<b>Australian Local Government Women's Association Inc (Tasmania)</b>	<p>The Australian Local Government Women's Association supports women in local government so they, in turn, can support their communities and each other.</p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.algwatas.asn.au">www.algwatas.asn.au</a></p>
<b>Community Transport Services Tasmania (CTST)</b>	<p>CTST is funded by the Home and Community Care Program (HACC) to provide social and non-emergency medical transport to the frail aged and younger disabled, enabling independence and quality of life.</p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.ctst.org.au">www.ctst.org.au</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@ctst.org.au">info@ctst.org.au</a> Phone: (03) 6231 6974</p>
<b>Council on the Ageing (Tasmania) (COTA Tas)</b>	<p>COTA is a leading advocate and source of trusted information, giving older Tasmanians a voice.</p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.cotatas.org.au">www.cotatas.org.au</a> Email: <a href="mailto:admin@cotatas.org.au">admin@cotatas.org.au</a> Phone: (03) 6231 3265</p>
<b>Country Women's Association in Tasmania (CWA)</b>	<p>The CWA is a non-sectarian, non-party-political, non-profit lobby group and voluntary organisation working in the interests of women and children in both urban and rural areas.</p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.cwaintas.org.au">www.cwaintas.org.au</a> Email: <a href="mailto:cwaintas@netspace.net.au">cwaintas@netspace.net.au</a> Phone: (03) 6231 3706</p>

Organisation	Contact Details
<b>Cradle Coast Authority</b>	<p><i>The Cradle Coast Authority is a joint authority created by the nine councils of North West Tasmania to facilitate the sustainable development of the region, resolve regional issues and coordinate regional-scale activity.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.cradlecoast.com">www.cradlecoast.com</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:admin@cradlecoast.com">admin@cradlecoast.com</a>            Phone: (03) 6431 6285</p>
<b>Lifeline</b>	<p><i>Lifeline in Tasmania helps individuals and communities through programs and services.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.lifeline.org.au">www.lifeline.org.au</a></p>
<b>Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT)</b>	<p><i>LGAT is the voice of local government to other governments, interested stakeholders and the wider community. LGAT works to protect the interests and rights of councils, to promote the efficient operation of local government and to foster strategic and beneficial relationships.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.lgat.tas.gov.au">www.lgat.tas.gov.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:admin@lgat.tas.gov.au">admin@lgat.tas.gov.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6233 5966</p>
<b>Northern Tasmanian Development (NTD)</b>	<p><i>NTD advances the interests and development of Northern Tasmania by facilitating and co-ordinating worthy economic and community initiatives.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.northern Tasmania.org.au">www.northern Tasmania.org.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:admin@northern Tasmania.org.au">admin@northern Tasmania.org.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6380 6800</p>
<b>Regional Development Australia (RDA) - Tasmania</b>	<p><i>RDA is an Australian Government initiative established to encourage partnership between all levels of government to enhance the growth and development of Australia's regional communities.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.rdatasmania.org.au">www.rdatasmania.org.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:rdatasmania@rdatasmania.org.au">rdatasmania@rdatasmania.org.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6334 9822</p>



Organisation	Contact Details
<b>Rural Alive and Well Tasmania</b>	<p><i>A not-for-profit organisation delivering suicide prevention and community wellbeing services to the Central Highlands, Glamorgan Spring Bay and Southern Midlands Municipalities in Tasmania.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.rawtas.com.au">www.rawtas.com.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:admin@rawtas.com.au">admin@rawtas.com.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6259 3014</p>
<b>Rural Financial Counselling Service</b>	<p><i>The Rural Financial Counselling Service offers independent assistance free-of-charge to primary producers, fishers and small rural business people in rural areas who are experiencing the pressures of financial hardship and could use some help and support.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.rfcstasmania.com.au">www.rfcstasmania.com.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:hobart@rfcstasmania.com.au">hobart@rfcstasmania.com.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6272 5992 or 1 300 883 276</p>
<b>Rural Youth Tasmania</b>	<p><i>Rural Youth is a member organisation made up of young people - male and female - from all walks of life who are between the ages of 15 and 30 years. Not all members live or work on farms – in many instances the only thing members have in common is that they are young people interested in developing themselves and others.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.ruralyouth.com.au">www.ruralyouth.com.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:admin@ruralyouth.com.au">admin@ruralyouth.com.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6331 6154</p>
<b>Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority</b>	<p><i>The Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority is a regional organisation of Councils. It was created by the twelve southern councils to facilitate cooperative working partnerships and improve the ability of councils to take joint action to address regional development issues and progress sustainable economic, environmental and social outcomes for southern Tasmania, its local communities and the State.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.stca.tas.gov.au">www.stca.tas.gov.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:bwest@stca.tas.gov.au">bwest@stca.tas.gov.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6270 2242</p>

Organisation	Contact Details
<b>Tasmanian Association of Community Houses (TACH)</b>	<p><i>Tasmanian Association of Community Houses (TACH) is the peak body for the 34 Community Houses and Neighbourhood Centres around Tasmania.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.tach.asn.au">www.tach.asn.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:tach@tach.asn.au">tach@tach.asn.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6228 6515</p>
<b>Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TasCOSS)</b>	<p><i>TasCOSS is the peak body for the Tasmanian community services sector, "working for a fair, just and inclusive Tasmania".</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.tascoss.org.au">www.tascoss.org.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:admin@tascoss.org.au">admin@tascoss.org.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6231 0755</p>
<b>Tasmanian Farmers &amp; Graziers Association (TFGA)</b>	<p><i>The TFGA is Tasmania's state farmer organisation, representing over 5 000 members who live and work on farm businesses situated across Tasmania.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.tfga.com.au">www.tfga.com.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:reception@tfga.com.au">reception@tfga.com.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6332 1800 or 1800 154 111 (in Tasmania)</p>
<b>Tasmanian Men's Shed Association (TMSA)</b>	<p><i>TMSA provides assistance locally through support, information and auspicng. It exists only through the efforts of volunteers from various sheds around Tasmania.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.tasmensshed.org">www.tasmensshed.org</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:tasma@mensshed.net">tasma@mensshed.net</a>            Phone: (03) 6223 6900</p>
<b>Tasmanian Regional Arts (TRA)</b>	<p><i>TRA builds vibrant communities through arts and cultural development.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.tasregionalarts.org.au">www.tasregionalarts.org.au</a>            Email: <a href="mailto:info@tasregionalarts.org.au">info@tasregionalarts.org.au</a>            Phone: (03) 6426 2344</p>
<b>Tasmanian Women in Agriculture (TWiA)</b>	<p><i>TWiA are mothers, wives, partners in farms and fishing, and managers of agribusinesses.</i></p> <p>Web: <a href="http://www.twia.org.au">www.twia.org.au</a></p>



Organisation	Contact Details
--------------	-----------------

<b>Women Working in Rural and Regional Industries in Tasmania</b>	<p><i>The Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Wildlife and Environment (DPIPWE) has established this database to provide opportunities for individuals, industry and business to network with rural women around Tasmania, share knowledge, skills and practices and to keep up with developments and trends in their business operations.</i></p> <p><a href="http://library.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/public/RuralWomen/index.html">http://library.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/public/RuralWomen/index.html</a></p>
---	--