

Service provider consumer engagement guideline

Best practice principles and elements of consumer engagement

The AER¹ considers that five core principles reflect the aims underpinning the National Energy Laws. The corresponding elements describe good practice and reflect at a practical level the objective of each principle.

Best practice principles

1. Accessible and inclusive
2. Transparent
3. Communication
4. Collaborative
5. Integrity

The best practice principles and supporting elements are not an exhaustive list. Businesses should not view this list as a 'minimum compliance' list. Businesses should use these principles to drive the development of their consumer engagement processes.

1. Accessible and inclusive

Recognise, understand and involve consumers early and throughout the process.

Elements

- Identify relevant consumer groups, recognising they can change over time.
- Facilitate and promote consumer engagement.
- Acknowledge and accept the differing views of all consumers and ensure that all voices are heard.
- Prepare consultation plans and tailor engagement strategies to meet the various needs of differing consumer groups.
- Avoid jargon and technical language.
- Be willing to build knowledge and capacity of consumer groups.

2. Transparent

There are clear and agreed information and feedback processes.

Elements

- Clearly identify and explain the role of consumers in the engagement process.
- Clearly set out the processes and opportunities for two-way feedback and interaction.

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Please note that this is a preliminary document and the guideline is still under development. The guideline and explanatory statement will require AER Board approval. Therefore, all preliminary work and draft documents may be subject to change.

- Reinforce and manage expectations about expected outcomes and influence input will have on decisions throughout the process.
- Report openly the input from all consumer groups.
- Credible reporting. That is, report on the positive and negative experiences and outcomes.
- Data sharing where possible to allow consumers to draw own conclusions.
- Any research undertaken should be independent or made sufficiently open to scrutiny. For example, publish terms of reference.

3. Communication

Open and effective engagement involves two-way communication.

Elements

- Provide clear, accurate and relevant information and feedback.
- Seek consumer views early and regularly throughout the engagement processes.
- Establish clear and realistic timeframes for consumer input.
- Maintain engagement throughout the life of the project.
- Ensure staff are well informed so they can answer questions during the process.

4. Collaborative

Work to seek mutually beneficial outcomes.

Elements

- Recognise that adequate time and resources are necessary for all consumers to effectively engage.
- Share expertise.
- Work in cooperation. This may include consumer input in selecting engagement techniques.
- Give consumers choice where it is reasonable or sensible to do so. (Both in how they engage and outcomes available).

5. Integrity

Conduct engagement in a manner that fosters mutual respect and trust.

Elements

- Conduct engagement early and throughout the process.
- Clearly define the scope of engagement with clear expectations about the purpose of the engagement.
- Report on progress regularly, factually and promptly.
- Encourage consumer feedback on the process itself as well as the subject of the engagement.

- Evaluate and review consumer engagement processes.

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