

Transcript: Online Seminar - Accessible engagement with people with disability

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Good morning, and thank you for taking the time to join us today for the second of our online seminars on accessible communication and engagement. My name is Mel Butcher and I'm Director of Impact and Engagement at the Social Deck. To begin today's webinar, I'd like to extend my Acknowledgement of Country for the lands on which we and all of our participants are present to meet on today. Where I'm, in Queensland, this is the land of the Kabi Kabi or Gubbi Gubbi people. I pay my respects to Elders, past and present, and to emerging leaders. I also welcome and acknowledge First Nations people who are joining us for today's webinar. Just a little bit of housekeeping before we get started, we're using Microsoft Teams to broadcast this webinar today, as you'll be aware. There will be some features you may not be familiar with if you're used to accessing broadcasts via Zoom or other channels. But to make sure that we can reach government staff, Teams is selected as the most likely platform people are to be able to access.

So, you'll have the best experience today if you keep your Teams in gallery view. I know that large gallery view may not work on some browsers. There will be four people on camera. There'll be myself, our speakers, and Auslan interpreters. If you require an Auslan interpreter, you can right-click on the interpreter's screen and select Pin to make sure their video remains in your view. If you need or want to see live captioning during today's webinar, we've put the live captioning link into the Teams chat and it would have been also included with your second reminder email. If you lose connection at any stage, we suggest that you close the feed and reopen the link. If you have technical difficulties such as trouble hearing us, you can post in the chat and someone will try to help. Otherwise, if you can't access the chat and need help to troubleshoot, you can also phone us on 0491 617 118. And I'll just repeat that. That's, 0491 617 118. OK. During today, I'll be setting the context, but we have two key and really expert speakers who I'm really excited to have with me today. Dr Graeme Innes, who many of you will know as the former Australian Disability Discrimination Commissioner. And we have Dr Scott Avery, who is descended from the Worimi people and has extensive experience in engaging with First Nations people with disability and will be speaking specifically about this later in today's session. I'd also like to introduce our two Auslan interpreters who are with us today, Imran and Taison. You will see them appear throughout the session. You'll notice that they are linked in remotely from their own location. All online engagements and presentations can include Auslan. There are 30,000 deaf Auslan users with total hearing loss in Australia. And this is one step to start off with that you can take to make sure that your engagements are more accessible. I just want to let you know how the questions will work today. We'll have some time for questions towards the end of the session. So, I encourage you to jot down any thoughts and then post the questions in chat as we go through the sessions.

You can use the chat function in Teams. We understand that some government departments systems may prevent you from posting in the chat. And if this occurs, you can also text us a question at the following number, and that is, 0491 617 118. And we'll also put that number in the chat. As we have so many people in attendance today, we won't get to all of these

questions for our panel. The Social Deck team will pick out some common ones and things that might not be covered in other parts of the session. For those that attended the first seminar on accessible communication, you'll also note that we'll endeavor to follow up after the session to provide additional information and some links to resources. So again, I want to thank you all for joining us today. We're delivering today's webinar in partnership with the Australian Government Department of Social Services. The department has been doing a substantial amount of work in building knowledge and expertise in good practice successful engagement.

Today is an opportunity for us and for our speakers to share some of this good practice with you. We're really excited to have almost 600 people registered to join us today for this online seminar on accessible engagement. Citizen engagement is something important to governments at all levels. And today's seminar aims to give you, number one, an understanding of the importance of engaging with people with disability. And number two, some practical tips about how to make sure your consultation or engagement program includes and is accessible to all people with disability. So now, I'd like to introduce, very excited to introduce, Dr Graeme Innes AM as our first speaker. Just to let you know about Graeme, I'm sure many of you will know Graeme already, that Graeme is a lawyer, author and company director. He's also a conference presenter and facilitator, a fantastic facilitator. Many of you will know Graeme also as a human rights practitioner, which he has been for more than 30 years, was a commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission for nine years, responsible for issues relating to not just disability but race and human rights. He also led the merger of four blindness agencies to form Vision Australia. Graeme was awarded an AM for his work on the development of the Disability Discrimination Act. He was a finalist for Australian of the Year, and on the international stage, he was a member of the Australian delegation that participated in negotiating the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Graeme is gonna be speaking about why making sure your engagement is inclusive of people with disability matters. And later, Graeme will also give us the seven rules of engagement, to looking forward to. And now, I'll hand over to Graeme.

GRAEME INNES:

Well, thanks very much, Mel. It's great to have the opportunity to talk with all of you at the seminar. And as you can probably see, I'm presenting from our family car. Our house is being painted today. So, it was my only option. And I've just realized that I'm such a law-abiding citizen that, even though the car's not moving, I've still got my seatbelt on. So, I'll take that off. We've all caught a bus at some time in our lives, and they carry about 50 people. And on such a bus, with diversity represented as it is in the Australian population, 10 or 11 of the people on that busload of 50 would be people with disabilities. Now, why isn't that obvious to you when you get on the bus? Well, there's a few reasons. First, many disabilities are hidden disabilities. You can't see hearing impairment, or autism or cognitive disability, or acquired brain injury, or epilepsy, just to name a few. People with physical or mobility disability are people who, such as myself, use guide dogs or service dogs are the standouts.

But, you know, our proportion in the disability population is quite low. Second reason, we are not on the figurative bus, even if you can't see us. There are a number of reasons for this. In the busload of politicians, we're almost not there at all. Jordan Steele-John is a rare example. In the busload of senior public servants, it's the same. Cain Beckett as prime

minister and Cabinet and Ben Gauntlett as Disability Discrimination Commissioner, again, are rare exceptions to this rule. You don't see us on the television bus. Screen Australia studies confirm that our statistics, in terms of appearances on television are very low. Our sports are now a little bit more in focus. Kurt Fearnley and Dylan Alcott would be two that I'd think of. And can I just note Dylan's win at Wimbledon just last week. We appear more in comedy. Stella Yang, Hannah Gadsby and Adam Hills are three that I could think of. And we appear a little bit more in current affairs and news commentary. Rick Morton, Samantha O'Connor, and perhaps, myself.

But again, it's still rare for people with disabilities to be seen in these roles. You know, this was the story of women 20 or 30 years ago. It's the story of people who are culturally or linguistically diverse to some extent now. And it's definitely the story of people with disabilities now. But we're still out there in the community getting on with their lives. And surprisingly, to many in the community, we want to contribute to the community. But we can only be included in the community if the community lets us be included. It's not our choice, it's your choice. Now, one of the ways that we want to be included in the community is to be consulted. We wanna be consulted about the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the scheme available for a small proportion of us. We wanna be consulted about our changing Medicare benefits. We wanna be consulted about where national infrastructure projects will be built. We wanna be consulted about our treatment as asylum seekers and refugees. We wanna be consulted about our acceptance as immigrants to Australia and about how we've been treated during COVID, and why we are not receiving vaccinations as quickly as we should be, just to name a few areas in which the Commonwealth government consults. And people with disability are just as interested in being consulted as everyone else. I'm sure that you want to be part of the solution rather than the problem. And if I'm right, then you need to know how to include us in consultations, hence this seminar. So, back to you, Mel. And I look forward to speaking to you all a little bit later in the seminar.

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Thanks so much, Graeme. And those are some really important points that you've made there. And to sort of, you know, build on those, Graeme has spoken about representation in the community of people with disability. I wanna share a few stats with you about this. There are 4.4 million people in Australia with disability. That's about one in five Australians. So, if we don't make sure we're inclusive when we design engagement activity, so it's accessible to people with disability, we can't hope to fully achieve the outcome of our policies for a really large proportion of the Australian public. Within this, there are many different types of disability, of course, and circumstances that impact people's ability to engage and participate in the community. 3.6 million people live with some form of hearing loss. There are around 660,000 people with intellectual disability. Around 360,000 people are blind or have low vision. There are estimated around 355,000 autistic people who are all individually impacted by autism.

Thousands of people have psychosocial disabilities, which may affect how they want to engage, and people may have multiple disabilities. At the Social Deck, we managed engagement programs for government across a wide range of issues. And we've seen firsthand the value that can come from making sure your engagement is accessible, even if your policy or program isn't about disability policy. We've also seen, as I'm sure you have, the unintended consequences when policies or services are designed without consultation

with people with disability, who again, potentially make up one-fifth of consumers. As we've discussed in our first webinar, people with disability have the right to contribute to policy and to be consulted on the same basis as other people in the community. This is reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, of which Australia is a signatory. The Disability Royal Commission has highlighted areas where the involvement of people with disabilities needs to be better to make sure policies and the delivery of services is informed by people they affect.

The way policies and services are delivered can have a big impact on the lives of people with disability. You might have heard the term "Nothing about us without us." It means no policy should be decided without the full and direct participation of people or representative groups affected by that policy. When it comes to making sure people with disabilities are involved, this would apply to most, almost all public policy design. A key focus of today's session is on making sure you're also thinking about the different types of disabilities that exist when designing your engagement program. There are specific strategies you need to take to reach some groups. For example, people with intellectual disability, or people who have complex communication needs, or people who are non-verbal. Reaching people with different types of disabilities is really important, even when your focus is on delivering mainstream services in the community. So, with this why in mind, we'll move to session two of today's seminar, and this covers the how.

Before I hand over to Graeme and Scott to discuss some considerations and tips for your engagement processes, I wanted to touch on one question we had during the accessible communication seminar that we held previously. And this is related to co-design. So, a very practical way you can work towards this is to co-design with people with disability. We know how design, in general, is something governments and other organisations are working to do more and more. It's also a very important process for people with disabilities to be involved in. During consultations to inform the new National Disability Strategy, co-designing programs and policies with the full involvement of people with disability was one of the most common things people said there needs to be more of. When it comes to co-designing with people with disability, the practice of co-design is the same as with anyone in the community. You just need to make sure that your co-design activities have a clear intent and are accessible.

It's also very important that co-designing with people with disability is led by people with disability. The activities you undertake to co-design will also need to be different to meet the needs of different audience groups of people with disability. For example, the way you might involve people with physical disability in a co-design environment would be very different to the way that you might involve people with intellectual disability. In addition, co-designing a service or product requires you to involve people who might be impacted in different ways. It's really important that First Nations people with disability or those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, for example, are engaged in specific activities. Therefore, it's really important to tailor the activities and ways that you're seeking input. Co-designing with the disability community needs partners who understand and are trusted by people from different groups, regions, communities and disability type.

You can investigate the procurement and funding options available to you to partner with organisations who work with people with disability already in co-design. And where this

might not be an option for you, it's OK to require that any agency that you engage to run consultations with people with disability has people with lived experience and partners involved in leading the process. We suggest that it's more effective to co-design with people with disabilities in smaller groups, so you can offer targeted discussion and safe spaces. Using partner organisations to help establish the strategy for co-designing with these different groups can also be really useful. And really importantly, the process needs time. People will need time to understand the information about the policy, service or product that you are proposing. They also need time to reflect on ideas and to go away and discuss options or issues with other people, such as advocates, carers, support people to make sure there are no adverse impacts or unintended consequences.

You will need time to prepare and provide materials that are accessible and can be understood as part of the process. For example, you'll likely need to have easy read materials, some stories and examples, and tools such as posters or conversation cards. We often use cards that have a large illustration or image on them and one question to help people provide input when they're at an event and when they don't always necessarily feel that they've been heard in other ways. Where needed, one of our team might fill out a card for someone as they're talking to them one on one. This can also help people to better understand the question and also focus on one thing at a time. So now, I'm going to head back to Graeme Innes who has some really important considerations or rules to share with you about designing your engagement so it's more inclusive of people with disability. Graeme's topics... Oh, sorry. I'll hand over to Graeme now. Sorry. Graeme, I'll let you take it away.

GRAEME INNES:

Thanks, Mel. And good to be talking to you again. Sorry, I'm just gonna mute something that I had unmuted while I was listening to Mel. So, experts can be grumpy, as you can see from my first slide. And planning your meeting with an architect or a doctor or a lawyer can be a tricky thing to do. You need to think about why you're consulting the expert and what it is that you're looking for from them, and you need to view them and relate to them as an expert in their field of activity. Because if you don't, then the meeting is just not going to go well. And so rule number 1 is that expertise matters, particularly expertise in terms of lived experience of disability. And so, that should count in your consultation. When you're talking to people with disabilities, particularly about issues which relate to us or how we live our lives, you are talking to the experts in that field. And that is not a concept that is readily available or experience that's readily available for people with disabilities in the community.

Disabilities are different. This relates to my next rule. And so, it's a D here, for Dopey, and disabilities are different. Let me tell you a couple of stories that illustrate that. Eddie was a man with a disability, he used a wheelchair and he only had use of one arm. And he used to love the poker machines and he was a regular attendee at the casino, doesn't matter which casino or where it is. And the word went out, following the passage of the Disability Discrimination Act, that public facilities, including casinos, would have to make themselves accessible. And the manager of the casinos thought, "Excellent. We've got Eddie. He's here every day. We'll talk to him." And so, what do you think was designed? A casino which was absolutely accessible for people with one arm who use wheelchairs, but it wasn't accessible for anyone else. You know, Professor Ron McCallum, who happens to be a friend of mine, is also, as am I, totally blind. He's an academic, he's an adviser and an expert in industrial

relations law, whereas I'm a human rights lawyer and tend to work more as a company director and advocate.

Ron McCallum uses a white cane to travel around. I use a guide dog. He uses different technology to me. Still, whenever we're seen by people, even people who know us, we are confused. People come up to me and say, "Hello, Professor McCallum. How are you? Nice to see you." And I know because I've talked to him about it. People come up to him and say, "Hello, Dr Innes. How are you? It's nice to be in touch." Disabilities are different and people with disabilities, even the same disability, are different people and we operate in different ways. Let's go to rule three. We've chosen bashful for this because you don't need to be bashful about this. If you're running a meeting, think about the way that you are distributing handouts. If you hand me a piece of paper at the beginning of a meeting and say, "Here's the agenda," or, "Here's the document we're going to discuss," you've effectively excluded me from a significant part of that meeting, in the same way as if you hold the meeting in a building where the only access is via steps you've excluded a person with a wheelchair. And if you say at the beginning of a large group meeting, if you tap the microphone and say, "Can everyone hear me?" And it is amazing how often that question is asked, of course, the people with a hearing impairment can't hear you. And so, you've excluded them and they can't answer your question. That's why you need to use things such as Auslan interpreters and captioning, which Mel has mentioned at the beginning of this seminar to include such people. That's why if you're going to hand out a document at the beginning of a meeting, circulate it beforehand in electronic format or have it prepared in braille, as well as in print if you know that people who can't use print will be attending the meeting. In other words, consult respectfully. Think about your audience, and that's rule number three. Let's go to rule number four, with Sneezzy. In COVID times, a sneeze has an impact and it has far more of an impact. Things that don't have an impact on you have an impact on people with disabilities.

Getting up in the morning is one thing which for a person with mobility disability, has far more impact. You and I might get up and make a cup of coffee and start our day. But if you need assistance with getting up, showering, toileting, dressing, eating, then your day starts... well, your day starts at the same time, but your public face isn't available nearly as quickly. A lack of taxis has an impact on people with disabilities, particularly people with mobility disabilities. And I'm talking, of course, about accessible taxis. So, if you think that people will be able to get to a venue by a particular time, then step back, put yourself in the shoes of the people that you want to attend, and think about rule number 4, think about disability and its impact when you're planning and conducting your consultation. For rule number 5, we've called in the Doc. You want the doc, not the person working in the office. So, if you are talking to someone from Vision Australia, you're not actually talking to a person with a disability necessarily, although you might be talking to a staff member with a disability. But you're talking to the service provider, the organisation that provides services to people with disabilities. If you want to actually talk to people with that group of disabilities, then you need to talk to Blind Citizens Australia, which is the advocacy group of people who are blind or vision impaired. And that is the only group who can speak for us, speak for people who are blind or have vision impairment. Vision Australia, irrespective of the great services that they provide, can't speak on our behalf because they're providing services to us. So, rule number five, talk to people with disabilities or our organisations. Now, the disability sector is a different group to consult, and you may well need to consult that sector. That's the

disability service sector. But realise that that's who you're consulting, not people with disabilities. We've got Happy here for the next rule. It's best for you if the people that you are consulting are happy, and that's why Happy has come along with this slide.

People with disabilities are consulted a lot. We really are. We get asked many, many questions, which is great. We argue in some cases that we're over consulted. I don't think we are. But some people in the disability field put that view. So, we've got consultation fatigue. We've got Zoom fatigue. So, think about what a consultation is. It's a transaction. You're conducting one side of a transaction. You're meeting with people who you possibly won't meet again or you may be using a transaction, the transaction of consultation, to develop a relationship. But it's still a transaction. So, as the person with a disability, what do I get from the consultation? Do I get paid or recompensed in any way? Are there notes provided of the consultation? How are the outcomes reported? In other words, from my perspective, what is the purpose of the transaction, apart from me having the opportunity to give you some advice? And of course, we all like a bit of gratuitous advice. I love to give a bit of gratuitous advice.

So, that is part of the transaction, but it's not all of the transaction. And for rule number seven, we've brought along Sleepy because this is the last rule. But I don't want you to go to sleep. So, I want to read you a quote from Sarah Novik, and this is an advocate for people who are deaf. And she is a deaf woman herself. And she says, "I like being deaf. I like the silence as well as the rich language and culture that deafness affords me." But, you know, the view in the general community is very different to that. Headlines across the world are, contrastingly negative about deafness. If you think about these three headlines, Nevada's Proposed Gun Safety Laws, Pleas from Ontario's Elderly, and Weather Safety Warnings in Queensland, and all of those three headlines all finished with, all fall on deaf ears. So, when we talk about thinking about something that falls on deaf ears, then that is language which is negative about people with disabilities. Now, you wouldn't use sexist or racist language during a consultation or hopefully, anywhere else.

And using ableist language in that way, during consultations, is just as disrespectful and just as much reinforces the disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities as does sexist and racist language. So, there are numerous guides on the Internet in this area about ableist language. But rule number seven is language matters. And, you know, because rule number 7 is that language matters, that's why I refer to all the people who've appeared in our slides today as people of short stature rather than the more commonly used name, because language does matter and that more commonly used name has a very negative connotation. Thanks very much for the chance to speak with you this morning. I look forward to hearing from Scott and then to taking part in answering some of your questions.

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Thank you very much, Graeme. I would now like to introduce Dr Scott Avery who will speak more specifically for the next 10 minutes or so about the important considerations for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. Just before I hand over to Scott, just a little bit of background to Scott. Scott is profoundly deaf and descendent from the Worimi people. He's an indigenous disability researcher and advocate on health and social inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. He's undertaken extensive community-based research whilst with the First Peoples Disability Network and is currently a senior lecturer at Western Sydney University.

Scott had an extensive career in public policy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, health, disability, justice and education. He's a passionate and active advocate for social justice. Now, I'll hand over to you Scott.

DR SCOTT AVERY:

(SPEAKS INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE), which is hello and welcome in my native language of Gathang. I would just like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of where we all are today. I'm here on Dharawal Country which is in the south of Sydney. So, I'm not going very far at the moment, but here on wonderful Dharawal Country. And I just wanna acknowledge where you all are, but also to the Social Deck, Mel and the Social Deck team for the invitation and extend my great respect to Dr Innes, to such a wonderful advocate. And we just stand on his very, very broad shoulders in terms of his advocacy. In the introduction, I did make a point of it and I make much of a point of it now. In being Aboriginal, there's a certain pride that is conveyed with that, being a person from the Worimi nation, I can speak about it. I have art in the back here. But often, what is overlooked about mine is I'm actually profoundly deaf. So, I have a cochlear implant. And I was just taken by what Graeme Innes was talking about towards the end where he was talking about the use of language.

And often, when I'm actually required to participate, being both Aboriginal and a deaf person, is that the language is around that I suffer hearing loss, or that language, I don't suffer anything. I'm actually quite proud to be deaf. It's actually my natural state. It's where I would be. I have a piece of technology, like you all have mobile phones, but that does not change who I'm. And I often say the best thing about having a cochlear implant is I can take it off and resort to this beautiful, wonderful silence. I'm actually quite jealous of... You know, I feel a bit sorry for you that you can't come to this place. So, I like to speak quite proudly that I'm a deaf person and make a point of saying that. But what I wanted to talk more about today was my experiences. I am currently at Western Sydney University, but I did spend a lot of time doing my policy. I actually did my PhD embedded in the First Peoples Disability Network. So, that's an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disabled People's Organisation. Now, we use that language, Disabled People's Organisation, in a deliberate way because that is an organisation that is governed in its entirety by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. So, it's not the service sector, it's not people who provide services to us. It's not carers, people with disability. And we think that organisation is unique in the world, in that it is one of the organisations that is both an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. So, Aboriginal people and people with disability. And so our board of directors is comprised of that. I just wanna talk about what my experiences are. And what, in my talk, I want to talk about the engagement, is essentially I want to talk about how there's physical aspects to accessibility, which is making sure we can get in the building if we like, there are Auslan interpreters in that. But the access part that I want to talk about is our ability to express our voice. And I want to start with explaining the nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability and how these things come together.

So, the nature of access, if you're Aboriginal and disabled, you have two parts, but they actually come together and compound. So, you have the disability access things, which is understanding not just the physical access barriers, but the sense of how people with disability can express their voice. In addition to that, you haven't mentioned that relates to Aboriginal people. And so, what we would call is intersectional. So, Aboriginal and disability

coming together. And these barriers to access can compound. What I mean, I'll give an example of that and how that. So, part of my PhD research I did, in my PhD, I just went out and talked to as many Aboriginal people with disability as I could. And my research question was... 'What is your story? So, tell me your story.' 'Cause no one had actually asked them that before. They'd ask everyone around them, the service sector, carers, but they never actually asked Aboriginal people with disability. So, that's the nature of my research and what I did and there's one example that gives an illustration of how access barriers compound.

So, there was a Aboriginal man with an intellectual disability, and he lives in western Sydney, so not too far from where I live and work, and he said that when he goes shopping, he often gets harassed by security guards and it's what's happening, it's the presentation of his cognitive disability, coupled with negative public prejudices about Aboriginal people and drinking. Those two things come together, he goes, I can't go shopping, 'cause people presume that I'm drunk and intoxicated. I can't get a bus, so I'm isolated, socially isolated from life, because these two things coming together compound. So, that's an example to give a short synopsis of what we're talking about, we talk about that intersectionality and I did, when again picked up Graeme's mention of Dylan Alcott and I saw a photo of Ash Barty, an indigenous woman, an Aboriginal woman with Dylan Alcott and I said, "Well, there's an Aboriginal person and a person with disability in the one frame" and I thought that's wonderful, but what intersectionality is, is those two things embodying in one person and it's not about separate parts of their identity, they just happen to be an Aboriginal with disability, it's the barriers or marginalization compounds.

So, that's the nature of the problem and the experiences of people with disability. Now, I wanna move to how policy attempts to address that and what are the implications are, when we try to talk about this level of complexity. Is government policy and how it is designed doesn't see intersectional, it takes one part of the problem, one part of the dimension, if you like and so, it's indigenous or disability, so you might have issues around closing the gap, which is sitting over here and then you have the National Disability Strategy, we're sitting over there and there's very tenuous connections, if at all. So, one policy example, what happens is if I take something like social housing, is when I did my travels through the remote Northern Territory, there was a lot of houses that were built under the remote access housing scheme for Aboriginal people with disability, but people with disability were not involved in that process. So, they just built standard prefabricated houses, which were not disability accessible.

So, the people who lived in that, who had disabilities, they were saying, they had to get carried over the ledge, because it was all confined to let's address social housing for Aboriginal people and had not accommodated the disability access part of it. So, what we find is when we try and talk about this and we have these intersectional complex problem, but governments are designed in a way and structured in a way, they actually deal with it as a complicated problem. So, if we do step by step by step then we'll get an answer, but it's not taking into account is these two areas come together. So, we would need to understand more the complexity and Graeme talked about the level of expertise and so, what we tend to see is actually quite this expertise sits within the First Peoples disability community, but what people are drawing on is expertise from outside the community. So, they might, for example,

go to the Aboriginal health sector and talk about, you know, can you give us advice on disability?

So, what you might get there is a medical perspective on the disability, but that's pretty much where it starts and ends, that will not understand the social experience or barriers of people with disability face and you may not understand the cultural dimensions of how disability is seen. So, for an Aboriginal person with disability, you have a medical or clinical dimension to the disability, you have a social presentation with the disability and you have a cultural presentation. So, we need to be embodying how we design processes to capture that. So, when you're starting out on your engagement, you almost need to take a step back and understand the nature of the problem that you're trying to engage with and stop, you know, there's this tendency, I think the language is around low hanging fruit, what happens is if you only address the low hanging fruit, the rest of it gets placed in the other side of it, which is the too hard basket, and often you will see people in... Aboriginal people with disability, particularly if living in remote areas, get kind of those issues, get put in the too hard basket and we never actually get to solving those issues of how we provide access to those who are most in need.

So, that's just to give you an idea of this, and I'll talk more about some of my, I can't come back to Mel's point around co-design and some of my experiences, but I just would like to show now, if I can, I've prepared a slide, one single slide, if Social Deck can have that up now and this is the slide that I had prepared and this is the vision, 'cause what we're seeing in community is we're not supported to provide... we're just kind of stretched like a jelly snake to provide support and advice across the various disparate and fragmented approaches to policy. So, what we're trying to do in communities, is come to a vision with how these things can align, which is the vision that actually comes from the First Peoples Disability Network, so a community organisation, I'm a member of that, I'm Aboriginal, I'm deaf, so I'm still part of that and I'm working now with Western Sydney Uni to, how can we align some of these policy approaches? So, this is the vision that you would see and we're inviting governments to buy in on this across it, rather than operate in fragmented ways. So, the top bubble you might see is strengthening the community sector. So, that's relates to some of the work that is happening in closing the gap. So, that's the language that's used around closing the gap and there's a disability dimension to that, to be of closing in the gap, but our interest is how do we work with the disability part of it. On the left and the right side, that's related to things that are coming out of the National Disability Strategy. One relates to data, we understand data is the language of government and we need to, not just have better access to data, but guidance on how to interpret data, because it does become, it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle, you need to know how to put the jigsaw puzzle together and you need to know where to look. So, how do you interpret data to improve policy outcomes? And that is actually informed and research, and this is research that is not done by outside our community, but within the community. So, a lot of the research is done by people who are drawing from the, they locate their research in the disability service sector, and that's one part of it, but you're missing the voice of Aboriginal people with disability and how these experiences are coming through.

So, this is what we're trying to do and down the bottom is some of the work that we're trying to do at western Sydney, to develop a teaching program around that. So, what we're looking to do is saying, look, here's a community vision on how we can bring almost upending the

too hard basket, which is how policy is very fragmented and going, how can we aligned it to a consistent approach? And we're calling this a cultural inclusion strategy. So, this was based on a publication of our research that we did out of First People with disability and culture is one dimension, so that's the Aboriginal side of it, where we can see our own voices and our own stories presented in policy and inclusion is a disability part of it, which is saying we are welcoming of people and so, that's how we're inviting people to come into it, which actually is empowering because this is something that is actually owned and driven, that reflects a vision of the disability community. So, that's my introductory talk, I'm handing it back to Mel, in the Social Deck and be able to take questions.

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Thank you so much Scott, that was a fantastic introductory talk and a really great overview of some of that important work that you're doing as well. Before I go to... we're gonna show a video next, but I just want to reiterate that if you do want to ask some questions, you can do so in the chat and that, you know, you should be able to pop them in there and we'll be taking account of those and we will leave all the questions, the answering the questions until the end of the session as we're running just a little bit short of time. So, yes, feel free to post in the chat. Now, I do, as I mentioned, have a video to share with you. The three minute video provides a brief explanation of what you should consider when designing engagement activities so it's inclusive of people who are autistic. The video has been recorded at the Social Deck here, our project and analysis consultant Alix Harrigan, who's also our inclusion officer at the Social Deck. Just on that note, having an inclusion officer, so someone who's responsible for helping the rest of your organisation to always think first about making your activities inclusive and accessible is a really critical step that we would encourage organisations, both government and business alike, to have in place.

So, people who have autism have wide ranging needs, where there's never a one size fits all approach. People with complex communication needs, such as someone who might be non-verbal, should still be able to contribute at your engagement event, this simply requires that they are given a range of ways to contribute. So, in this video, Alix will share some more general things that you can do and also to consider when designing your engagement approach that will help to make it more inclusive for many autistic people and we'll start the video now.

(VIDEO STARTS) ALIX:

Hi, I'm Alix, I'm from the Social Deck, and I'm here to speak as an autistic person who works in community engagement. The first thing I'm going to tell you about autism is not to make assumptions. Autism is more common than many people realise, and it doesn't all look the same. You should never assume that there's no one autistic among your stakeholders. For one thing, that probably isn't true and for another, adjustments that make things easier for autistic people are often helpful to everyone. So, I'd like to give you some examples of how you can make an engagement more accessible for autistic participants. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it should provide a good starting point. As I said, don't assume that you can tell what access needs a person does or does not have or that all autistic people have the same needs and preferences. That being said, please accept these general tips. We can provide information such as about the venue, what to expect, online tools that will be used in advance.

I will flag, however, that saying the agenda can add stress if things go over time. Instructions for participants should also be as clear as possible. Avoid leaving it to people to fill in the blanks, that can be a real barrier. One tip is to preface questions with how they should be answered, like saying, briefly describe. When you plan out your engagement, think about things like making it easy for people to leave, using clearly defined spaces for different purposes, providing low sensory spaces, these are spaces that are quiet and don't have bright light and are also fragrance free, and giving warnings before activities change. There are also considerations about how you format your engagement process. Probably the most important thing here is to give people different ways to engage, engaging in person, in writing verbally, visually, creatively with assistants, make sure that people have a way to take part that works for their needs. I also recommend making sure people have plenty of time to think when they're asked to respond to something.

I like to say that I think well, but I don't think fast. You'll probably get a more genuine and thoughtful answer if you give people that bit of space. I want to mention survey accessibility as well. That's a whole topic on its own, but the central principle here is to avoid ambiguity or questions that are open to interpretation. Start applying these suggestions to your engagement planning and soon they should become second nature. (VIDEO STOPS)

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Thanks, Alix, and Alix is one of our team who, you might have noticed, has been interacting with you today on the team's chat, including posting links. If you do have questions for Alix, she'll also be available to answer these in our Q&A session shortly. OK. So, we're going to move on to the next session and this is around some practical tips for applying accessible engagement in your organisation. I hope that one takeaway from today is that when you engage people with disabilities throughout your policy design, it will improve your policy and potentially make it more effective for one fifth of the people impacted by it. It will definitely help you to avoid unintended consequences of your policy on a large proportion of our community. Now, it's time for a summary, a little more detail about some of these tips. We hope you can take these important things and keep them in mind to help your next engagement be more inclusive and accessible. So, in six parts, this includes, number one, that any public community or consumer engagement includes people with disability in your target audience and stakeholder lists.

Make sure people with disabilities feature in your engagement plan. If you don't have this, you're not reaching the community. Once you've identified this, it's a simpler step towards ensuring that you have some activities and communication to reach people with disability included in your plan. Number two, is make sure your venues and online platforms are as accessible as possible, and to do this, you do need to plan early. It's very hard to find a venue or even a platform that's perfect, but we use a checklist with any venue we might book for an engagement activity, and that includes when we're doing engagement that's not disability specific. The set up for your event and what you do as people arrive is also really critical. For example, making sure there's a table for people who are deaf or hard of hearing at the front of the room where they can see the Auslan interpreter. This requires that you have people at the registration desk to point people to tables that might suit their needs. We are regularly told by some organisations that they can't have Auslan in an event, because they don't plan their event or workshop early enough. It's really important that that planning is done early and that you can book that accessibility in first, this will help to

alleviate stress later. When you're holding the event, think about the needs of the people attending and how they'll experience the event. For example, as we've heard, some of the things, avoiding large groups around tables, where people might find it hard to have their voice heard, having different ways for people to add input in group environments, for example, a digital tool, post-it notes or the ability for someone to leave the group and speak with someone one on one. And it's also important to have quiet spaces for people who might need a break or might become overwhelmed by certain topics. So, in online engagement as well, say, for example, doing online workshops, it's really important to tell people what platform you're using so that they can set up their own accessible needs to use it, and be honest when you know that something might not work as well as, with say, screen readers and try to offer an alternative.

For example, we often use an online engagement tool in webinars, but we always offer to provide people who register, who are vision impaired, a plain text version of the questions and slides we'll include. Then number three is to not do it just alone, there are so many resources available online and also within government to help you think about how you might engage with people in a more accessible, inclusive way. For example, there are those checklists for events and a range of resources for designing accessible engagement activities and Alix is actually posting a list of these resources in the chat, we will also distribute these later. As Scott mentioned, disabled people's organisations as well and Graham as well, around disability representative organisations are another really, really important resource to support your engagement processes. We almost always partner with disability organisations, again, not service providers, but with disability organisations when we're delivering engagement strategies to reach people with disability.

So, you could consult disability representative organisations or disabled people's organisations prior to finalizing your engagement plans for reaching people with disability. I think we've posted a list on the chat, the one that's on the DSS website of the disability representative organisations, and this is probably a good start. Number four is to make sure that people can contribute their views in a range of different ways, so that they can feel safe and comfortable giving input. This is really important, especially when people are being asked to share experiences, they need options about how they might input and we suggest having the option of either face to face when Covid permits and online group sessions, such as focus groups and workshops, as it helps people to share input together. An option of having a phone or a video conference interviews, which many people prefer when sharing difficult stories, is also important. Some people also might not be able to access online group activities, so phones are still important.

Visiting places where people with disability already are in the community and this might include things like supported accommodation, where people are accessing support from advocacy or services or even events such as disability expos, which happen in various locations around the country, and then using familiar platforms that people are already engaging with, even things like Facebook, to start discussion boards and generate input. At face-to-face events, you might also use topic stations and conversation cards, as we mentioned before, as ways that people can provide input without having to speak in a group. Number five is not to put people with disability in one box or category when designing your engagement. Always think about how you can make your mainstream community and citizen engagements more inclusive rather than designing separate activities. So, this might be

through providing surveys and other engagement materials in easy read and in Auslan, you can see some of these examples on dssengage.dss website.

Also, always giving people the opportunity to tell you what accessibility needs they might have when attending your engagement activity, either online or face-to-face, and in addition to this, we really strongly suggest having Auslan and live captioning available at any major consultation event. There's also a need that to make sure that presenters are really well trained and that anyone in your organisation who might undertake engagement to deliver inclusive presentations. And then lastly, having an engagement and event checklist for your organisation. We've mentioned this a couple of times, really make sure that your activity is as accessible as possible. The last tip I have, number six, is be genuine about why you're engaging. So, this applies to engagement with anyone in the community, but for people with disability and for First Nations people and people from CALD backgrounds and other diverse groups, it's really critical and that's because trust in an engagement process is so important and it helps and it means that people can feel comfortable contributing their views.

For example, if it's not actually co-design, don't say it is co-design and always tell people how their data and their input will be used. OK. So, that's the tips from me, but we do have a number of questions that have come through in the chat already and I want to sort of put them to some of our panelists and our experts and Scott and Graeme, thank you very much for taking these questions. The first one is to Graeme, Graeme, the question was posed in the chat, how can you ask a group of people to stand for something, for example, you know, a national anthem without upsetting or offending people in a wheelchair or with other mobility concerns?

GRAEME INNES :

Yeah. It's an interesting question. Thanks Mel and thank you to the person who asked the question. I mean, we have certain traditions in our community in terms of how we interact about things and I would say that you don't have to meet those traditions beyond reason. So, I think that what I would do in that particular situation is to announce the playing of the national anthem and people will choose to stand if they are able to or if they want to, rather than actually giving a directive or a command, all stand for whatever. So, I think that's how I'd do it, a bit more softly, recognizing that people are different and that some people with disabilities may not be able to stand, that some other people might choose not to stand. Why make a point of making an example of those people?

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Thanks so much, Graeme, I think that's a fantastic answer. I think also just as another tip. One thing that we've noticed when we've been doing face to face consultations in terms of making things more accessible is to really clearly explain, for example, if you're doing the housekeeping, not assume that you just say, 'Oh, the toilets are over there and then point over there.'

GRAEME INNES :

Oh, yeah. Yeah. MELANIE BUTCHER: (LAUGHS) So really, to just be able to say, OK, the toilets are, you know, at the back of the room, if you're looking towards the back of the room and you go right and the accessible toilet is the first one on your left, is just a really simple thing and I think small things like that can be really helpful. OK, I've got a question to Scott

now. Scott, are you familiar with the APS framework for engagement and participation? And did you or do you know if people with disability were involved in developing that?

DR SCOTT AVERY:

I can only answer that, that some of the engagement that we had with the Australian public service was around recruitment, but this goes back many years and to be honest, I had one meeting with them and I think this was one of the ones that fell into the too hard basket, where you have a strategy which is around people with disability being employed with the public servant or Aboriginal, we wanna see cultural voices and so, I think the general composition of the public service, in general, for the APS, the level of engagement we had was very... mind goes back quite some years. I would not know whether the First Peoples disability workers has picked that up, but I think that's a really good example of where you have a strategy and employing people with disability, but we now know, we could have people who are Aboriginal in there as well and having that. So, it's kind of a one dimensional approach to it. So, without being overly critical, I think this is the next frontier of how you actually broaden the idea of inclusion through visibility and so, I kind of make a point now of saying how proud I'm of being deaf because people will see me in the Aboriginal community, I'm actually deaf.

They might not see that 'cause you can't see the cochlear implant there and I'm going, I'm actually kind of proud to be part of that community. So, I kind of make a point of saying that, you know, you can kind of, I give a really crude analogy of football coaches, that you can go for a league team and an AFL team as well, you could be two things in this country and it's OK. So, I think this is... but this is just a general, how government policy is structured and I think pushing it almost starting from the other way and going, here's a really complex problem, how can we see this issue of complexity and change the way that governments address things that really cut right across many, many government agencies? I think that's the next frontier.

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Yeah, thanks very much, Scott. Really, really good points there. Back to you, Graeme, you said language is important, I absolutely agree with you. How can we make sure that our language is inclusive of everyone with disability?

GRAEME INNES:

Well, we'll never get it absolutely right in the same way as we don't get it absolutely right in terms of language which may cause offence or might disadvantage women or people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. That doesn't mean that we don't try and the best way to ensure that we use language which is not ableist, is to talk to people with disabilities about it. So, consult about that, ask if the use of a particular word or phrase is appropriate or not, but don't, you know one of the problems I think that we experience in Australia as people with disabilities is that decisions, all sorts of decisions are made about us and I'm sure Scott will confirm this. All sorts of decisions are made about us based on assumptions, and those assumptions are normally limiting and negative and the assumptions are normally wrong. So, if you don't know, then talk about it, ask about it.

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Yeah, thanks very much, Graeme, and I know we've learnt a lot from people with disability,

but also our co-facilitators with disability that, you know, and just watching the way that people interact is one of the best ways to learn, I think as well. Scott, do you think it's important that we have resources and materials that are tailored to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? And do you have any advice about this when doing engagement?

DR SCOTT AVERY:

Yeah. I do see, and I think it's a cultural thing. So, what I think you will see is, you know, how the image that I showed up on the one slide. I actually prepared that with the First Peoples Disability Network, there was an Aboriginal graphic design person so that I could receive and reflect. So, they see that and they welcome that because there's cultural images that they would understand, they can see it reflected and it goes to simply when I turn up to these consultations, they're respecting my voice, I can see my voice being reflected and I could see my culture being reflected. So, often the tone and people have an idea and they're going on how I would do engagement, but there's a style and tone to how these are communicated and I think the more you're able to be responsive to the style and the tone of the communications and this is where you're coming into First Nations communities, it's what we see and how, you know, what are the words and that and the community will be the best guide to that and I imagine there'll be similar situations if you're going to different ethnic communities around disability, that will have their own culture, cultures around expression. So, the deaf community having Auslan, it's a communication, but it's also an expression of their culture. So, it gives respect to their language and culture and I think that's where the use of having culturally compatible resources around disability, will make people feel more welcomed or included or a sense of belonging in part of it.

MELANIE BUTCHER:

Yeah, thanks very much, Scott. I just wanted to also address one of the questions that has come up as well, and it was if we're working to tight timeframes beyond our control, how can we ensure that we're still engaged with people with disability? Just before I go to either of our speakers, if they have any comments on this, I'd say from my point of view and from our point of view at the Social Deck, you know, it seems like a hard thing to do, however, I think the most important thing that you can do here is to, as early as possible, engage with the community and know that you're going to engage and to start preparing. As I said before, ensuring that people with disability are included in the engagement plan, but as soon as possible, start reaching out to understand if you need to be getting Auslan interpretation, if you're, you know, fit for captioning, if you can get some dates locked in, there the sort of things that can be done earlier and also reaching out to people with disability and disabled people's organisations to find out the best ways to reach people as soon as possible has certainly worked sort of the best to counter that from us.

I don't know if either Graeme or Scott, you had comments on that?

GRAEME INNES:

I would just say that good consultation and good policy development takes time. So, if your people to whom you report, whether they're senior public servants or politicians, say to you that the, you know, the timeline is critical. Well, the first thing you need to do is point out that the result will be more effective, more successful if you take the community with you and that counts consultation. So, when you make that time judgment, you are making a decision not just to shorten the time, but do not take the community with you and that's got to be a strategic judgment that you make. Apart from that, as Mel says, once you're given a timeline

and people have made that judgment, then, you know, you have to work within it, but try and have... The other thing that I would say is that plan for your consultation. So, have a standard plan for consultations, so that you already have the contacts for Auslan interpreters and the contacts for accessible material that you're going to produce, so that when someone presses the consult button, that stuff's already in, you're not scrabbling around trying to put all that together, because you're gonna have to consult again and again and again.

DR SCOTT AVERY:

And if I can just add the whole idea of short time frame versus longer time frames, I think with a longer time frames, you really gonna get in your hands writing to those deeper structural issues which are creating the shorter term time frames, and I think we need, as an advocate who's been turning up to many of these consultation, what breaks your heart is your gonna go a little too hard and you give them this advice, they're going, no, we need to create space where we address some of the more deeper structural barriers which are creating the short term access barriers in the first place. And I think as advocates, if you're in government and you're writing policy, you kind of need to be an advocate just to create space for those longer term structural there even if you can't within maybe your timeframe, if you need to say, we are not addressing these deeper structural issues around, why do people, you know, like even the social issues around, you know, do I feel apprehensive about being consulted in the first place?

Given people have been, you know, almost expect, you know, bad things to happen, you know, because they haven't had good experiences in the past. The people who you want to speak up may not be the ones just because of that sort of condition and culture and I think this is where you need to understand access is more than just kind of the sort of facilitating you being in the room, it's do you feel a sense of belonging once you're there and will you feel comfortable to speak out?

GRAEME INNES:

That's absolutely right. Quick and dirty is quick, but it's also dirty.

MELANIE BUTCHER:

I hear fantastic points, really, really important, I'm really glad that you could make those both of you. We are coming out, we're actually at time, so we'll need to wrap up. I'm aware that there's some other questions that have been put into the chat, we will follow up with some resources to participants and a summary as we did in the previous one, so, yeah, don't worry, we will definitely follow up with you. I really wanna thank so much to Graeme and Scott for being here today and also Alix, for providing your video as well and for answering lots of questions on the chat, you know, we really appreciate your time and your expertise, so thank you so much. We do also plan to make the video of today's webinar available, so you'll be sent an email when that video is live, so you can also share that with your colleagues. And a reminder that there's already the accessible communication seminar available on DSS's website and YouTube channel as well. So, if you search Department of Social Services YouTube, you'll find it or just contact us if you need to ask we can send you the link.