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**Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres  
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**Module 4**

**Learner Manual**

**BSBFNG402 Interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
organisation members and the community**

**BSBOPS306 Record stakeholder interactions**

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## Introduction

This Learner Manual addresses the Units of Competency BSBFNG402 Interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation members and the community and BSBOPS306 Record stakeholder interactions.

The Learning Objectives are:

- Describe the purpose of community meetings.
- Summarise protocols in gathering information from community members.
- Summarise challenges when working with community members.
- Describe the processes of gathering and sharing information from community members.
- Summarise the key features of good business writing.
- Describe the purpose of a Customer Management System (CMS).
- Summarise the purpose of a Confidentiality Policy.

## Definitions of Community

The term 'community' was initially an imposed idea for the purpose of control over and management of the Aboriginal populations. As part of the history of colonisation, people were dislocated into reserves and missions. This included disruption to people's social, political and religious life<sup>1</sup> and the relocation of distinct groups from different areas. Early constructions of 'community' did not recognise language and social and spiritual differences between groups.

Today, Aboriginal community groups vary considerably in their economic, social and geographic circumstances. The National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) developed a model of Aboriginal societies that included four broad categories of the community: traditionally oriented, rural non-traditional, urban and urban-dispersed communities. The following definition remains relevant today:

*In the main, Aboriginal society is structured around the community. There exist very strong kinship ties within each of the communities and within each of the categories. These kinship ties overlap the various categories thus forming very strong relationships among all Aboriginal people of this country.*

## Aboriginal Perceptions of Community

The defining characteristics of Aboriginal perceptions of community are primarily based on family relationships, involving a sense of belonging along family lines and country or area of origin. Aboriginal perceptions of belonging to a community can be both physical and psychological, based on shared interest or shared location. For some groups, the concept may also hold a political and abstract dimension—an understanding of the entire cultural group of Aboriginal people working against oppression and towards self-determination. This concept of community is often used by those who are in leadership positions and representing Aboriginal interests. Community can also be a broad and fluid concept, uniquely shared by people and by those that work in the area.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Expressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as cultural and spiritual life.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/aboriginal-health/working-together-second-edition/wt-part-3-chapt-15-final.pdf>

## Community Meetings

Community organisations may organise community meetings to discuss issues which they feel are of concern to the community. Other groups or individuals may organise community meetings as well e.g. local area health on health needs in the community.

By listening and talking to people in attendance, organisations will keep informed about current issues.

Accurate information about events and issues in communities, as well as its needs, wants, desires, frustrations and disappointments, can only come from the people in the community.

Key points to consider in holding community meetings include:

- Ensuring all stakeholders are invited including Elders.
- Contacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the area.
- Organising transport.
- Ask community to sign in with their address and contact details, e.g. mobile phone numbers and emails (if they have one).
- Delegate 2 people to scribe for the meeting.
- Guest speaker.
- Venue's acoustics.
- Have surveys ready for community to complete.
- A good facilitator that isn't connected to the issue. The facilitator also needs to be able to draw out the responses from all people in the meeting.
- Ensuring all those in attendance have an opportunity to be heard.
- Have breaks scheduled.
- Provide refreshments, water etc. If you have the funding, provide food.
- Advise on evacuation procedures.

There are four aspects that may be undertaken in monitoring the trends and changes:

- Identifying community needs.
- Monitoring community trends.
- Incorporating community needs into organisational policy.
- Reviewing policy as community needs change.

## Protocols in Gathering Information

A protocol is an appropriate way of behaving by respecting the customs and laws of the members being represented. Community leaders need to know and follow the protocols of their community and of those communities with which they may make contact.

Protocols will govern how information is gathered and who can share information with whom. If the information is women's business then only women can talk about it. If the information is men's business then only men can talk about it. Some information may only be shared with the Elders.

Leaders need to be aware of the protocols as a matter of respect, including who may be included in the consultation process.

Certain groups or individuals should be kept informed of community issues because of their standing in the community. Elders, especially, should be aware of major decisions being made about the community's future.

Community leaders may be required to deal with a lot of different communities. While communities will share some common protocols and customs, due to the diversity of language, culture, religious beliefs, history, location and laws, these will vary.

Addressing people correctly is very important and there are many different customs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The use of 'Uncle' or 'Aunty' before a person's name shows respect and infers seniority. In the Torres Strait it is sometimes not appropriate to refer to a brother's wife by name. In some Aboriginal communities a man cannot speak directly to or sit next to his wife's mother. At times it can be inappropriate to mention the name of a person's totem.

There are no set rules for relating with every Aboriginal community. Every community will have its own unique way of consulting and negotiating. This means in most cases, it is wise to find out the proper ways of consulting and communicating with each community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain extensive community networks across Australia. It is respectful practice to draw on these networks through family, friends and trusted contact, to learn about a community and seek guidance from those who have established relationships or experience engaging there.

If you are external to a community that you need to consult with, before travelling to a community, you should make efforts to identify the appropriate local contact person, cultural authority or organisation to speak with. Making contact in advance to introduce yourself, explain your role, outline your purpose for visiting and request guidance on local protocols is essential. Where appropriate, arranging an informal introductory meeting supports transparency, builds trust and ensures that your work aligns with community expectations and culturally respectful engagement practices.

## Data Sovereignty

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people<sup>3</sup> have been successfully governing Indigenous data (including information and knowledge in any format or medium) since time immemorial. This has been a critical factor ensuring the ongoing survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Recognising the importance of data for self-determination, this Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data (the Framework) provides a stepping stone towards greater awareness and acceptance by Australian Government agencies of the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty. The Framework aims to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people greater agency over how their data are governed within the Australian Public Service (APS) so government-held data better reflects their priorities and aspirations.

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' refers to Australia's first peoples. This term is generally preferred by members of the Working Group.

The Framework puts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at its centre. It recognises better outcomes are achieved if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in matters affecting them, including use of data to inform policymaking in government.

The Framework has been developed with the intention of providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people meaningful access to relevant government-held data. Without access to these data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will continue to be at a disadvantage in realising their right to self-determination. The Framework also calls for data-related capability building, both within the APS, and amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations. Data capability is essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination in our digital age.

The Framework provides guidance to the APS in improving governance practices for data related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It seeks to move the APS beyond traditional methods of consultation, to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an equal position at the decision-making table on matters affecting them. Implementation of the Framework will support efforts to implement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, in particular Priority Reform Three (*Transforming Government Organisations*) and Priority Reform Four (*Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level*).

However, change to data governance practices alone will not be sufficient to shift the dial on governance of Indigenous data. Legislative and policy changes to current ways of managing data assets within government (including in relation to local and regional data) are also required. These changes are also necessary to help close the gap in outcomes. Through the partnerships formed to develop this Framework, there were calls for a one-stop-shop for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to government-held data; the appointment of an Indigenous Data Commissioner; and the inclusion of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations as potential accredited users under the [Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022](#). The APS will work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to investigate these matters as a priority.

Though the Framework as it currently stands only applies to APS agencies, it is also relevant to Indigenous data held by States, Territories, and Local Government. Members of the partnership formed to develop this Framework emphasised that data held by States, Territories, and Local Governments are of particular relevance to Indigenous communities. Application of the Framework to other levels of government should leverage off the mechanisms of monitoring and accountability grounded in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. As parties to the National Agreement embed the Priority Reforms, they will need to work together to improve the governance of Indigenous data. The success of this Framework will depend on APS agencies implementing all actions relevant to them in full. In this respect, actions in the Framework should not be treated as optional. Full implementation is essential if the Framework is to avoid becoming just another document that sits on a shelf and gathers dust.

The Framework is a stepping stone towards better governance of Indigenous data. It will need to evolve over time as agencies continue to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Genuinely listening and responding to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is an ongoing process. Every journey begins with a step. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> © Commonwealth of Australia, Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data.

A proposed **Bureau of Indigenous Data (BoID)** is recommended as an independent, cross-jurisdictional authority to lead Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance in Australia. It aims to empower First Nations ownership over data creation, access, and analysis, with plans to be established under its own legislation by 2028.

Key details regarding the proposal and existing governance:

- **Purpose:** The BoID is designed to promote understanding of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and steward an intergovernmental plan for Data Governance.
- **Establishment Timeline:** The proposal suggests setting up the Bureau within an existing federal agency within two years, with a shift to an independent body by 2028.
- **Structure:** It would be guided by a new Indigenous Data Board and co-funded by all Australian, state, and territory governments.
- **Current Context:** The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) currently oversees the *Framework for the Governance of Indigenous Data*, which is being implemented across the Australian Public Service (APS) to improve how Indigenous data is managed.
- **Related Initiatives:** The Indigenous Data Network (IDN) works on similar goals, helping communities manage their own data.

This initiative stems from a review highlighting the need for stronger Indigenous control over data and data sovereignty.

### Seeing the Big Picture

An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community organisation does not exist in isolation because it is a part of a larger Indigenous community and furthermore, a part of the larger combined Indigenous and non-Indigenous community.

A community leader should make it his/her business to be aware of the issues in the larger community and how those issues may affect their organisation. These leaders are able to see the big picture and if necessary, explain the big picture to the relevant people in the organisation.

In building the big picture a community leader understands the needs of the community and the problems it may be experiencing. The leader is able to work with others then to analyse the problems and together they decide on what action is to be taken.

To ensure an organisation can tackle the community's needs, it first has to identify those needs.

## Identifying Community Needs

Issues are identified by researching community needs. Research methods may include asking the community or employees to carry out research. Facts and figures, for example, on general literacy levels, cost of food or numbers of people with diabetes, can be gathered to assess exactly how many people are affected by a certain issue. Confidentiality, though, must be ensured.

The people who know the community best are the people who live there. In particular, the Elders and other respected individuals will be able to give assistance about historical events and how particular issues first arose.

Community members can inform organisations whether any action has previously been taken or if action needs to be taken immediately. They will probably know who exactly is involved and who needs to be consulted.

Some other methods of gathering information from the community that a Board may use are:

- Talk back radio.
- Telephone.
- Researching organisation records.
- Asking individuals to fill in questionnaires/ surveys.
- Observation techniques, looking and listening.
- Having a casual yarn.
- Social media.
- Organising a workshop.
- Websites.

## Records Management

Good governance includes having effective record management systems to collate and store the valuable data and information that is obtained from the research conducted by the organisation e.g. at community meetings. The information needs also to be readily accessed.

The issue of confidentiality is one that requires policies and procedures that will maintain the integrity of the information/data as well as having a system of back up.

Organisations need to be vigilant and have processes in place to safeguard their data especially by having back -up systems in place.

## Community Needs and Organisational Policy

In order to ensure that organisations are in tune with the needs of their community, the respective boards must work out the difference between what is a “need” and a “want”.

Basically, a need may be described as something that is necessary for the community’s welfare.

On the other hand, a want is something that is desirable but which may not be necessary for the betterment of the community. One example of the difference may be that a community may need a better access road due to flooding during the wet season whereas it may want a new billiard table for the social club

The policy addressing community needs may be that new projects be given to a projects committee who will report back to the Board.

The policy development process for an organisation may involve the following steps:

- Agree on a goal - establish what the policy is about.
- Assemble a policy development group. The group will change from one policy to the next as relevant experts, community members and interested parties should be included in the policy-making decision process to make sure that the policy meets community needs decide on the format, time and place of meetings.
- Delegate tasks.
- Research facts and figures. This may include researching state and local government data and ensuring that the policy is costed.
- Community consultation. Include all community groups and individuals that the policy is going to affect.
- Making recommendations.

## Customer Management System (CMS)

### What is a CMS?

Good governance includes having effective record management systems to collate and store the valuable data and information that is obtained from the research conducted by the organisation e.g. at community meetings. The information needs also to be readily accessed.

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There are many interpretations of the abbreviation CMS, the most common being:

- Customer Management System
  - also known as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- Client/ Case Management System
- Content Management System

For the purpose of this unit, Customer Management System has been identified as the most relevant term.

A simple form of CMS could be a spreadsheet; however more complex software is also available.

Customer management systems have been specifically designed for service-delivery, not-for-profit organisations. These systems are often built to support the types of information and data that many non-profits require to deliver their services, such as keeping track of intake issues, family relationships and outcomes.

Whatever CMS you choose, it needs to be able to capture key information about:

- The services you provide.

- The 'customer'.
- When, why, what and how the 'customer' engages with your services.
- The outcome of that engagement.

You should also be able to easily retrieve, interrogate and report on that information.

A CMS should record the basic demographic information of the 'customer' as well as some key relationships and collect basic name and contact details of a referrer and the names of funders. Desirable features include the ability to:

- Link 'customers' in family or other groups.
- Collect socio-economic information.
- Add fields for information that may be specific to the services that you offer.
- Collect additional information on a referrer.
- Collect funding contract details (contract manager, fund value, service numbers).

### **Queries and reporting**

A system should have standard reports that help you answer important questions about clients (customers), such as how many clients (customers), have received a particular service in the past year, the average length of time they are engaged in a service, and the number of clients cared for by a particular caseworker. Queries should be easy to build and flexible and not limited to certain fields.

Ad hoc reporting is important to consider too: can staff create reports 'on the fly' and in real time, defining what formats and information are used, for both rows and columns?<sup>5</sup>

## **Organisational Policies, Procedures and Protocols**

Confidentiality can be defined as the process of "ensuring that information is accessible only to those authorised to have access and is protected throughout its lifecycle".

Confidentiality is an important principle in community business because it imposes a boundary on the amount of personal information and data that can be disclosed without consent.

Knowing that confidentiality practices are in place allows the person giving sensitive and personal information, to feel secure and that they can trust that their privacy is being protected.

A confidentiality policy may state that only those working with the organisation will have access to the data provided and systems and safeguards may be put in place such as the allocation of passwords etc., to view confidential information. Access logs may be programmed which are constantly monitored and being checked, and data ownership is assigned to senior members of staff who are responsible for reviewing these logs and the integrity of data.

In the event that a person gives an organisation personally identifiable information about themselves, such as their name, address etc., the organisation will require specific consent that it can release that information.

Sample Indicators that may be put in place include:

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<sup>5</sup> <https://digitaltransformation.org.au/guides/information-systems/what-clientcase-management-system-cms>

- Professional relationships with customers, clients, communities, colleagues and other professionals are maintained.
- An organisational complaints procedure is in place to address noncompliance.
- Client and organisational information is kept confidential; informed consent is sought before any confidential information is shared unless this is required by law.
- Adequate record keeping is in place to protect the privacy of customers/ clients.

## Privacy Act (1988)

The Privacy Act 1988 regulates the way individuals' personal information is handled.

As an individual, the Privacy Act gives you greater control over the way that your personal information is handled. The Privacy Act allows you to:

- Know why your personal information is being collected, how it will be used and who it will be disclosed to.
- Have the option of not identifying yourself, or of using a pseudonym in certain circumstances.
- Ask for access to your personal information (including your health information).
- Stop receiving unwanted direct marketing.
- Ask for your personal information that is incorrect to be corrected.
- Make a complaint about an organisation or agency the privacy act covers, if you think they've mishandled your personal information.<sup>6</sup>

## Identify Issues Jointly with the Community

The underpinning principle of raising and discussing issues of importance with the community is about moving from private concern to public action. It is a relationship-based method underpinned by a range of values and guiding principles.

Some principles, to consider when working jointly and collaboratively with the community include:

- Working "with" people rather than "for" them.
- Enhancing participation in community activities and in decision making especially for the most disadvantaged.
- Focusing on geographic communities as integrated wholes, not just target groups.
- Building on the existing strengths, skills and organisational capacities of communities.
- Providing opportunities for relationship building within and between communities.
- Building relationships between people who have power and resources and those who don't.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-legislation/the-privacy-act/rights-and-responsibilities#who-has-responsibilities-under-the-privacy-act>

## Community Engagement

Community engagement is the public processes in which the general public and other interested parties are invited to contribute to particular proposals or policy changes. Community engagement has the potential to go beyond merely making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes. It entails a more active exchange of information and viewpoints between the sponsoring organisation and the public; however, the 'public' is defined.

Community engagement needs to be planned and delivered in a culturally safe venue or meeting space and you need to ensure that the community leaders and different members of the community are invited to represent all of the voices that need to be heard.

Community engagement is an ongoing, relationship based process that focuses on building trust, maintaining connections and working collaboratively with the community over time. It involves listening, sharing information, participating in community activities and developing respectful partnerships that support long term outcomes.

Engagement is not limited to a single meeting or decision. It is a continuous process that recognises community leadership, cultural protocols and the importance of genuine partnership. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, engagement often includes yarning, informal meetings, involvement of Elders and acknowledging existing governance structures.

## Communicating Effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Some communication features to be considered are as follows:

### Rapport

In many traditional cultures, a high sense of value is placed on building and maintaining relationships. Taking a 'person before business' approach will help form this relationship and build rapport.

- Introduce yourself in a warm and friendly way.
- Ask where people are from, share stories about yourself or find other topics of common interest.

### Time

In Western culture, emphasis is placed on time to meet deadlines and schedules. Time is perceived differently in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, as more value is placed on family responsibilities and community relationships.

- Consider allocating flexible consultation times.
- Take the time to explain and do not rush the person.

### Making decisions

Due to family kinship structures and relationships, decision making usually involves input by other family members.

- Check with the person if their decisions require consultation with family.
- Allow time for information to be clearly understood.

- Be respectful if you are asked to leave the room or the meeting for matters to be discussed in private by the family.<sup>7</sup>

## Challenges when Working with Community

### Lateral Violence

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face many challenges and some of the divisive and damaging harms come from within the community. Lateral violence is often described as ‘internalised colonialism’ and according to Richard Frankland includes:

“The organised, harmful behaviours that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group: within our families; within our organisations and; within our communities. When we are consistently oppressed we live with great fear and great anger and we often turn on those who are closest to us.”

The theory behind lateral violence explains that this behaviour is often the result of disadvantage, discrimination and oppression and that it arises from working within a society that is not designed for Aboriginal ways of doing things.

Lateral violence, also known as horizontal violence or intra-racial conflict, is a product of a complex mix of historical, cultural and social dynamics that results in a spectrum of behaviours that include:

- Gossiping.
- Jealousy.
- Bullying.
- Shaming.
- Social exclusion.
- Family feuding.
- Organisational conflict.
- Physical violence.

Lateral violence is not just an individual’s behaviour. It often occurs when a number of people work together to attack or undermine another individual or group. It can also be a sustained attack on individuals, families or groups.

The use of the term ‘violence’ can be confusing. It is important to understand that lateral violence doesn’t just refer to physical violence but also social, emotional, psychological, economic and spiritual violence.<sup>8</sup>

Cultural safety and security help create positive, empowered environments where the problems of lateral violence can be solved. Cultural safety encapsulates the relationships that are needed to foster in communities, as well as the need for cultural renewal and revitalisation. Cultural security on the other hand, speaks more to the obligations of those

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/151923/communicating.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/151923/communicating.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/publications/chapter-2-lateral-violence-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities>

working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure that there are policies and practices in place so that all interactions adequately meet cultural needs.

Whatever words you use, cultural safety and security requires the creation of:

- Environments of cultural resilience within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Cultural competency by those who engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>9</sup>

### **Prejudice and Distrust of Organisations by the Community**

The highly statutory or crisis-driven nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mainstream service experience epitomises the lack of long-term genuine partnerships. Services that listen to First Nations communities and develop offerings that are welcoming, inclusive and non-threatening will in return gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the families and communities they are designed to support.

There are many barriers that restrict access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to services, including:

- Intergenerational trauma and past experiences resulting from colonisation.
- Lack of genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Fear of judgement, child removal or negative previous experiences.
- Poor linkages and service coordination across organisations.
- Low accessibility of services in rural and remote areas and
- Lack of knowledge and understanding from First Nations communities around what is available.<sup>10</sup>

The work of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations can be made difficult by racism and prejudice. Racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be understood using the ABC tripartite model of attitudes (A for affective, B for behavioural and C for cognitive). The affective component, in this case, is the emotional response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Research has shown that racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is related to a number of affective components. Particularly, negative affect and anger have been associated with modern and old-fashioned forms of racism. The behavioural component captures how attitudes influence discriminatory behaviours towards the target. This has been evidenced by the blatant discrimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Importantly, research evidence reveals that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples report ongoing receipt of negative differential treatment and discrimination. The cognitive component of racism relates to false beliefs and stereotypes held about the target group. False beliefs and stereotypes held by non-Indigenous

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<sup>9</sup> <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/chapter-4-cultural-safety-and-security-tools-address-lateral-violence-social-justice>

<sup>10</sup> <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/aboriginal-mainstream-service-experience-where-are-we-now-how-data-has-shaped-our-response/>

Australians about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is prevalent and has been particularly evidenced for false beliefs regarding “special treatment”. These negative beliefs contribute to the detrimental treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>11</sup>

## Information Bias

Information bias is any systematic difference from the truth that arises in the collection, recall, recording and handling of information in a study, including how missing data is dealt with.

Major types of information bias are misclassification bias, observer bias, recall bias and reporting bias. It is a probable bias within observational studies, particularly in those with retrospective designs, but can also affect experimental studies.<sup>12</sup>

People's cultural beliefs, values and world-views influence thinking, behaviours and interactions with others. It is important to reflect without judgement before, during and after interacting with people whose beliefs, values, world-views and experiences are different to your own.<sup>13</sup>

## Sharing Information with Stakeholders

There are many different kinds of community meetings, as we've seen in the sections above but the thing they all have in common is that all of them are of concern and interest to all the members of the community.

Any business conducted at meetings of the community and in the community is that community's business. Some community members will be more interested and involved in community matters than others but every community member is entitled to know what is happening. It is the responsibility of those who initiate, facilitate, organise and conduct meetings to make sure that everyone in the community has the opportunity to know what is happening.

No organisation, group or individual has a right to keep information secret where it concerns or affects any community member and this only undermines community cohesiveness. This applies to individuals and organisations within the community as well as those coming from outside.

Receiving feedback and acknowledgement in timely and appropriate ways is vital to the process. Whether community members contributing their skills and knowledge to their own community organisations or to organisations from outside, lack of feedback may lead to:

- Lack of trust in the individual and organisations concerned.
- Unwillingness to provide information or work with that person/group again.
- Misunderstandings, rumours and negative conflict within the community.

While it is important that everyone has access to information about meeting outcomes, there may be some people or groups who need to know more quickly. This may be because they will need to take action to progress the projects detailed in meeting outcomes, or that the outcomes will require or enable them to take action on related matters. This means that there may be a time frame and a priority list for sharing of meeting information.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00049530.2022.203904>

<sup>12</sup> <https://catalogofbias.org/biases/information-bias/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/151923/communicating.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/151923/communicating.pdf)

The community organisation must have set policies and procedures in place for dissemination of information to the community. These will include appointing a person to share the outcomes of community meetings. If the meeting has been initiated or facilitated by an organisation within the community, then this role will most likely be assigned to one or more Board members or staff of the organisation.

If the role is focussed on liaison with the community and it might be an additional role of staff or a special role of Board members. For example, an organisation might have a Publicity Officer who takes on this community liaison role. If it is a 'one-off' community meeting, then the person or people responsible for initiating it must find a way of sharing outcomes with the community.

When people and organisations inside the community don't fulfil their obligation to share outcomes with everyone who wants it, community members are able to let them know that they disapprove. They may be able to exert pressure on those concerned to provide the information.

### **Time Frames and Priorities**

At the time decisions are made in community meetings, it needs to be clear to the Chairperson and all present who will perform the community liaison role. Following community meetings, the people in the community liaison role should make contact with the Chairperson and all those required to action decisions. This will help them confirm which community members are directly affected by meeting outcomes.

These people should be informed first and as quickly as possible, along with key community members (Elders, Traditional Owners) who were not present at the meeting.

All other people should be informed as soon after the meeting as possible. Ways of informing people may include:

- Sending the minutes in the mail or by email.
- The organisation's website, if appropriate.
- Social media.
- A copy being made available at the offices of the organisation.
- Verbal communication, if required.

In some communities the customary, kinship based networks mainly use verbal communication which is an ideal way for information to reach everyone in a community.

Information can be sent quickly through established networks where community members attend meetings. The Chairperson of a community meeting may directly ask participants to spread outcome information through their networks. If participants need to return to a subsequent meeting with information or decisions made by the group they represent, then they would network with these people to make these arrangements.

As a Board Member, staff member or a member of the community, you may be required to:

- Action decisions taken at a community meeting.
- Work with others to action decisions.
- Coordinate the work of others to action decisions.

Board members may action the decisions if it is not appropriate to delegate the work to staff. If the Board member does delegate the work, then it is the Board members responsibility to make sure that

it is done appropriately and within the expected time frame. This can be achieved by briefing staff clearly and being available for advice and then overseeing the work.

When the community or organisations members take the time and trouble to make decisions, it is important that action is actually taken. Do not allow situations to arise where community members are disappointed that no action is taken.

## **Sharing the Organisation's Activities and Board Decisions with the Community**

When providing information to the community about the organisation's activities it is important to give people all the information they need to be able to decide whether or not they want to be involved or engaged with its services.

How organisations communicate makes a difference to the way people feel. The language used must be familiar to the people being engaged with so that they feel comfortable

It is useful for an organisation to take the time to establish protocols or guidelines for Board members, staff, volunteers or anyone representing the organisation. This will maintain a level of consistency and add value in the promotion of any of the organisation's activities.

Think about ways of getting information to the target audience for the organisation. The organisation needs to consider all the usual means of communication. These include:

- Letters in the post / newsletters.
- Email and telephone calls.
- Social media.
- Face to face conversations.
- Posters or notices pinned up around the community.
- Announcements on radio.
- Announcements at other meetings.
- Advertisements in newspapers.
- Flyers in the post or delivered by hand.

## **Advise the Community of Board Decisions**

Besides community members there are key people the organisation needs to develop regular communication with. The organisation must keep these key people up to date at all stages as the forum is organised. These might include:

- Members of the board.
- Committees within the organisation that are calling the forum.
- Staff members with responsibility for meeting arrangements.
- Elders, Traditional Owners and others with community authority.
- Community members with authority or knowledge in areas relating to the purpose of the information.
- People managing the facilities and services to be used for the forum (e.g. venue, catering).

## Business Writing

Business writing is a type of writing that is used in a professional setting. It is a purposeful piece of writing that conveys relevant information to the reader in a clear, concise, and effective manner. It includes client proposals, reports, memos, emails, and notices. Proficiency in business writing is a critical aspect of effective communication in the workplace.

### Principles of Good Business Writing

#### Clarity of Purpose

Before beginning a business document, memo, or email, one should ponder two primary questions:

- Who is the reader?
- What do I want to convey to the reader through my writing?

Clarity of purpose gives a direction to the writing and develops its tone, structure, and flow.

#### Clarity of Thought

Thinking while, rather than before writing, makes the writing less structured, meandering, and repetitive. Business writing requires the skill to reduce long, rambling sentences into concise, clear ones. One needs to extract what is significant to write clearly.

#### Convey Accurate and Relevant Information

The primary goal of business writing is to convey valuable information. Inaccurate or irrelevant content affects the purpose of the document. For effective business writing, information must be value-additive and complete.

#### Avoid Jargon

A simple and uncluttered writing style goes a long way in communicating the message to the reader. Grandiose writing full of industry-specific buzzwords and acronyms should be avoided to the maximum possible extent. Otherwise, the reader may be unable to comprehend the document or lose interest in it.

#### Read and Revise

- Reading the passages out loud after completion can reveal flaws and gaps in the arguments. It is recommended to welcome constructive feedback from colleagues and revise the document for improvement.

#### Practice is the Key

- Proficiency in business writing can be attained through regular practice. Paying attention to the vocabulary, sentence structure, and style of writing while reading can help to develop the same instinct while penning one's thoughts down.

#### Be Direct

- Presenting the crux of the passage in the first 150 words is a good idea when it comes to business writing. It saves the reader time and sharpens the argument.

#### Avoid Verbosity

- If the meaning can be conveyed in three words, it should not be stretched to five. Verbosity works against making the writing engaging to the reader. For example, instead of writing "the article uses more words than are needed," write "the article is verbose."

## Correct Grammar and Sentence Structure

While a grammatical error may come across as unprofessional, good grammar portrays both attention to detail and skill – traits that are highly valued in business.

Business writing evolves with time, so do grammar and conventions. For example, emoticons, when used judiciously, are gaining acceptance in business writing. A good writer needs to stay updated with the conventions to hone their skill.

## Easy to Scan

Business executives value a document that can convey its message in a cursory glance. Business documents can be enhanced through the use of numbered or bulleted lists, clear headings, concise paragraphs, and judicious use of bold formatting to highlight the keywords.<sup>14</sup>

## Using Plain English

The main advantages of plain English are:

- It is faster to write.
- It is faster to read.
- You get your message across more often, more easily and in a friendlier way.

Plain English is a message, written with the reader in mind and with the right tone of voice, that is clear and concise.

Some features of Plain English are:

- Short sentences.
- Active verbs.
- Use of passives where appropriate only.
- Use of 'you' and 'we'.
- Use of words that are appropriate for the reader.
- Avoiding nominalisations.
  - Nominalisations are formed from verbs.
  - A nominalisation is a type of abstract noun. In other words, it is the name of something that isn't a physical object, such as a process, technique or emotion. For example, if the verb is 'Complete', the nominalisation is 'Completion'.
- Using lists where appropriate.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/career/business-writing/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.plainenglish.co.uk/how-to-write-in-plain-english.html>