



STRETCH²ENGAGE

Engagement Framework

for the Mental Health (MH)
and Alcohol and Other
Drug Services (AOD)



Queensland
Mental Health
Commission

Prepared for The Queensland Mental
Health Commission

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STRETCH²ENGAGE FRAMEWORK

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Introduction to the Stretch2Engage Framework

Stretch2Engage provides a framework for use by the public, non-government and private mental health and alcohol and other drug services.

Defining engagement

Stretch2Engage defines engagement as:

'Encompassing the processes and techniques that organisations employ to involve people using services, and their families, carers and friends in the design or redesign of their services.'

They make the very clear distinction between engagement and therapeutic engagement which focuses on the rapport and relationship built between a clinician and/or other workers for the purpose of providing direct support or treatment to a person.

Values

Stretch2Engage is founded on values which acknowledge engagement of people with a lived experience, their families and carers as a human right fundamental to citizenship. This value sees engagement as being important in its own right while acknowledging the benefits to services who engage effectively.

To give effect to these values, the principles require organisations to think and act differently. They call upon services to think about their engagement activities by asking the question:

'How can my organisation more effectively engage?'

This question differs significantly from the usual approach of asking the question how we can enable people with a lived experience, families, carers and friends to engage.

These different questions change the emphasis of engagement activities. It moves the focus from inviting and building the capacity of people with a lived experience, families, carers and friends to engage, to one which seeks to build the organisation's capability. The change of focus influences how engagement is viewed, funded, assessed and evaluated by organisations.

Changing culture

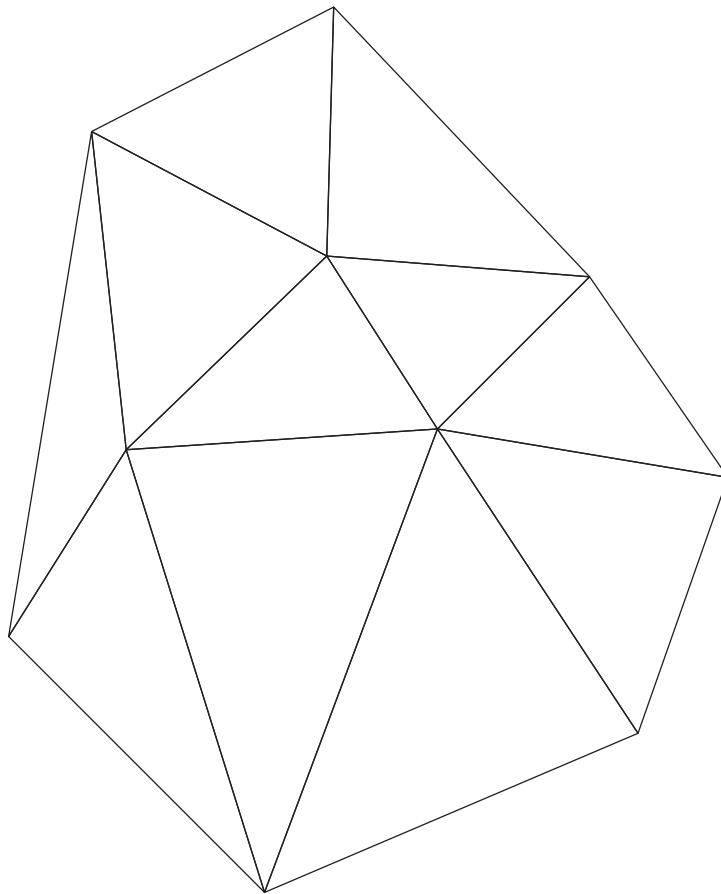
Moving towards this change of emphasis involves culture change for many organisations. Based on contemporary approaches to organisational change, the draft principles are based on notions of stretching beyond what is already known and resisting inevitable pulls to maintain the status quo. Put simply, organisations, stretch to change but in the process may have a tendency to return to the known practices and approaches, much like a rubber band.

The Stretch2Engage Domains

Through the consultation process seven value domains were identified to organise the Stretch2Engage framework around. These seven value domains are:

1. **Stretch2Be Curious:** Eager to know or learn.
2. **Stretch2Be Clear:** Initiatives are transparent in their reason and are easily understood.
3. **Stretch2Be Champion:** Vigorously lead, promote and support the organisation in their engagement initiatives.
4. **Stretch2Be Creative:** Use of imaginative methods to evoke new ideas.
5. **Stretch2Be Collective:** intentionally seek out and engage people from diverse backgrounds and experiences.
6. **Stretch2Be Comprehensive:** Willing to explore all aspects and embrace divergent views.
7. **Stretch2Be Committed:** Pledge to ongoing service engagement initiatives.

The Stretch2Engage framework uses these value domains to identify practice principles and how they can be applied in service engagement activities. These examples are not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive.



How is great service engagement achieved?

In developing this Stretch2Engage framework people stressed that for great service engagement to be experienced, organisations must:

1. Take responsibility for initiating and leading service engagement activities.
2. Create an organisational culture that values and is committed to service engagement practice.
3. Recognise that service engagement can in part redress power imbalances between people that provide services and people who use, have used or may use the services being provided.
4. Recognise service engagement activities as being distinct from service provision activities.
5. Commit to recognising and utilising the expertise of those who use the services and other community members who the organisation seeks to serve.
6. Engage prior to developing or redeveloping services to facilitate co-design.
7. Ensure that engagement activities are relevant, stimulating and energising for people involved.
8. Ensure that they engage with many, diverse voices, foster robust discussion and do not retreat from disagreement as this can lead to innovation, although good service engagement does not necessarily equate to the number of participants involved.
9. Use the wisdom and expertise of unique local community groups to ensure that the engagement processes employed are culturally safe, relevant and appropriate.
10. Seek feedback on service engagement processes, recognising that the effectiveness of service engagement is measured through the experience of those being engaged.
11. Have a go, even if their service engagement strategies are not perfect, using everyday methods, ideas and resources already available to them.





STRETCH2BE CURIOUS

Eager to know or learn

Practice Principles

Services who engage with people well:

1. Listen with a genuine intent to hear and have the courage to be open about what they don't know.
2. Resist engagement processes, which focus solely on asking people what they want and design powerful questions for the purpose of raising new possibilities, challenging the beliefs that solutions are already fully known.
3. Resist implementing new practices without input from people accessing services and remain curious about testing new ideas.

Practice Example

The following is an example of a service engagement activity which embraces the value of being curious.

A service paints a large wall in their reception area with blackboard paint. Each week the service poses a question and writes it up on the blackboard wall. The service leaves chalk out and invites people to write up their answers to the weekly question.

Questions could be general such as:

- “What do you love about our service?”
- “If you were the Boss, what would you change about our service?”
- “How could we do better?”

Or more specific such as:

- “What activities would you like us to provide next month?”
- “If we set up a homework club on a Tuesday afternoon after school, would you come along?”

Feedback on decisions made regarding these questions could also be written up on the blackboard.





STRETCH2BE Clear

Initiatives are transparent in their reason and are easily understood.

Practice Principles

Services who engage will people well:

1. Understand that the contribution that people make to service engagement is valuable and being clear in purpose minimises the risk of wasting people's time and personal resources.
2. Resist unfocused inquiry and know the reason and purpose for engaging with people.
3. Resist assuming that all people engage for the same reasons and understand there are a range of motivations for why people participate in service engagement activities.
4. Resist utilising people's participation in service engagement activities as a way of monitoring personal progress and generate information and ideas for the sole purpose of service improvement and service design.
5. Resist using engagement activities for therapeutic intentions and ensure activities leave services with possibilities to be better and stronger.

Practice Example

The following is an example of a service engagement activity which embraces the value of being clear and having clarity.

A service invites people involved in the service to participate across a number and range of forums that contribute to strategic and day to day areas of operation of the service. For example, people could participate at the following:

- governance level strategic sessions;
- planning level discussions about new services/tenders;
- operational level discussions about day to day service delivery and decision making including input into the development of policies and procedures.

Minutes/notes from these sessions could be made available to everyone to access. This type of service engagement means that people feel involved and included in the service and there is little or no "complaints" about services but rather issues or challenges are everyone's responsibility.





STRETCH2BE Champion

To vigorously lead, promote and support the organisation in their engagement initiatives

Practice Principles

Services who engage with people well:

1. Resist relying on people to engage and actively initiate engagement.
2. Understand failure to engage with people is a problem of the service not the people the service is trying to engage.
3. Resist structuring initiatives that suit convenience alone and adapt the nature of engagement strategies to meet priorities and needs.
4. Resist reacting to problems as they arise as their only engagement strategy and appreciate and anticipate the need for embracing change to remain relevant.
5. Resist the assumption that people feel comfortable to approach services directly and host environments that are welcoming and appreciate the personal challenge it may take for some people to be present, based on their previous experiences.

Practice Example

The following is an example of a service engagement activity which embraces the value of championing and being a champion.

Most services use annual surveying as a tool for service engagement. A more proactive way of doing this would be to involve people to help design and collect feedback from participants, on their time and on their turf. This could be face to face or on the phone. This could be a powerful approach to gathering feedback.

Consider involving people in staff recruitment on interview panels for key roles or perhaps invite short-listed candidates to join a group activity at the service to give everyone a chance to interact on a social and more casual level. This reinforces to potential new staff and people who use the service the service's commitment to service engagement.





STRETCH2BE Creative

Use of imaginative methods to evoke new ideas

Practice Principles

Services who engage with people well:

1. Resist using a single engagement approach and design multiple engagement strategies.
2. Acknowledge people prefer to engage in different ways and design engagement processes to match. Services challenge the use of engagement technology that may be fit for purpose but does not leave people energised.
3. Resist using communication strategies that make it hard to participate and use a range of communication styles and mediums so people with different experiences, abilities, cultures and ages have the opportunity to participate.

Practice Example

The following is an example of a service engagement activity which embraces the value of being creative.

A service utilises social media to post videos, photos etc to pose questions to people who may be difficult to reach via traditional methods of service engagement. The service asks people to respond using whatever creative way they can think about to respond to questions. This might be making a short video or audio message, writing a story, recording a song. The service makes sure that you make available the necessary technology for those who might need access. This could be a great way to engage with people who are not comfortable engaging in the traditional ways by taking part in a survey or participating face to face in a formal meeting.





STRETCH2BE Collective

Intentionally seek out and engage people from diverse backgrounds and experiences

Practice Principles

Services who engage with people well:

1. Resist hearing from and responding to single groups and seek the cross-fertilisation of views and ideas from a wide audience, including people accessing services, families, significant others, staff, external stakeholders & the wider community.
2. Resist diminishing the value of the contribution from people who find it difficult to engage and extend invitations to people to engage with them and keeping the invitation open if at first people decline.
3. Resist favouring or penalising people for their decision to participate or not and ensure engagement is clearly framed as an invitation, with clear intention and choice of participation.
4. Resist utilising “service representatives” as the only mechanism for hearing diverse views and ideas and seek wide involvement and participation to co-design better services.
5. Resist using paid staff representatives to act as a proxy for voicing the needs and views of many diverse individuals and approach people using services as having expertise and good ideas.
6. Resist devaluing people’s contributions by addressing reciprocity as part of engagement processes and value highly the ideas and feedback people offer and are transparent about the recognition that will be provided to recognise contributions.
7. Resist determining service direction based on management perceptions alone and harness ideas that emerge from broad based discussions across all levels within their organisation that lead to service excellence.



Practice Example

The following is an example of a service engagement activity which embraces the value of being collective.

In an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service, new services are not designed or tenders for funding are not written before genuine engagement with the community is undertaken and through this, the community identifies and defines outcomes and measures. Engagement with the community is undertaken by people who have knowledge, expertise and respect of the community and recognises cultural authority. The community is not viewed as a homogenous group, and no preconceptions are made prior to engagement.





STRETCH2BE Comprehensive

Willing to explore all aspects and embrace divergent views

Practice Principles

Services who engage with people well:

1. Resist discouraging people from raising concerns and dismissing new ideas without investigation and exploration and nurture a culture of engagement which fosters interactive and creative conversations and challenges current practice.
2. Resist disregarding conflictual viewpoints by providing simplistic responses to complex challenges and embrace the complexity of diverse views and find ways to move beyond the status quo of current service delivery.
3. Resist supporting 'maintenance' or business-as-usual thinking by only engaging people with similar views and intentionally invite people, with different backgrounds and experiences, to bring critical thinking to strengthen and test new ideas.

Practice Example

The following is an example of a service engagement activity which embraces the value of being comprehensive.

A service regularly uses role plays where service providers step into shoes of someone accessing their service (and vice versa) to brainstorm solutions to identified issues and challenges. This often leads to a deeper understanding of each other's situation that can then lead to different solutions.





STRETCH2BE Committed

Pledge to ongoing service engagement initiatives

Practice Principles

Services who engage well:

1. Resist disconnecting engagement from its core business by valuing it for the purposes of service promotion or accreditation activity only and view engagement activity as a key component of a sustainable service.
2. Resist asking people to simply rubber stamp pre-determined options and challenge themselves to only offer genuine engagement invitations.
3. Resist naming limited resources as an excuse to not engage with people and invest sufficient resources to develop sustainable engagement mechanisms.
4. Resist viewing engagement as a one-way process and develop feedback loops which ensure that all contributions to service engagement are acknowledged and resulting actions are communicated.
5. Resist repeatedly requesting data from people and search from the widest range of sources and existing information that can strengthen the alignment between what services offer and how they are experienced.
6. Resist relying on quantitative data and observational reporting alone to be informed of the relevance to people and value people's narratives as important to service direction and view the effectiveness of engagement in how it is experienced.

Practice Example

The following is an example of a service engagement activity which embraces the value of commitment.

Service engagement is included in organisational and service budgets and plans, so that service engagement is a real commitment and recognised as part of the service or organisational culture.

Capturing and sharing the 'stories' of people to explore why, when, how they engage(d) and disengage(d) as part of the culture of communication in an organisation or service demonstrates a commitment to actively listen to people and the community and working in a partnership.

Ensuring that feedback of information is a part of the service engagement process demonstrates a commitment to transparency.