

Deliberative Survey

The deliberative survey is a version of the standard 'pre-and-post test' research model in which the effects of some type of experience or intervention are identified by comparison of the 'post' data to the baseline 'pre' data. In this case, the 'pre' survey was completed by conference participants prior to registration on the first day, and the 'post' survey during the second morning.

There are two type of results that emerge from a deliberative survey – the absolute results; and the change in results – and in this case both revealed some fascinating insights.

To summarise the key results and the changes seen from the pre to post waves of the survey:

Current performance in terms of consultation is not strong

- Most participants felt that Government does not give citizens enough opportunity to be engaged in decision making. This was felt to be a bigger problem at the national level than the state level, and was seen in a more negative light still in the second wave of the survey.
- 65% of participants disagreed that too much consultation is done – a figure that increased to 85% in the second wave of the survey.
- Around 85% of participants felt that too much weight is given to the loudest voices, and that not all people have an equal chance to influence public affairs.
- Around 85% of participants agree that the relationship between community engagement and actual decision making is left unclear.
- Not surprisingly given the preceding results, the current performance of community engagement is considered fairly poor – and ratings were lower again in the second wave.
- Similarly, the possible benefits of engagement (quality of decisions, acceptance, and efficiency) were also seen as being only poorly achieved – although most people expected this situation to improve in the next 5 years.
- The biggest perceived barriers to effective engagement changed considerably from wave 1 to wave 2. In wave 1 *getting citizens involved* was the biggest barrier – but this dropped to 8th in wave 2 behind issues such as *unbalanced media coverage, accuracy and completeness of information in the community* and *evidence of the outputs of engagement being used*.

Citizen involvement in the decision making process can be greater

- Coming into the conference about 46% of participants felt that most West Australians wanted to be involved in the process – but 38% that most did not. However, in the second wave 70% felt that most people would want to be involved.
- Over 80% of participants felt that it is important to have citizens more involved than they are now. This increased to 94% in wave 2, but more importantly the proportion who felt strongly this way increased from 23% to 53%.
- One of the main questions is to what degree citizens can be realistically expected to address complex issues thoughtfully and objectively. Before the conference most participants felt they could be expected to either *considerably* (43%) or *a lot* (43%). In the second wave of the survey 72% of participants gave a rating of *a lot* – a very significantly higher overall rating.
- Prior to the conference, 90% of participants felt that the final responsibility for decision making either rested equally between elected officials / experts and citizens, or more towards the elected officials. In wave two however, 25% of participants indicated that they felt the final responsibility lay more with citizens than with elected officials / experts.
- Around 80% of participants felt that roughly equal weight should be given to the views of affected people and to those of the wider community as a whole.
- Most participants did not feel that the right cultural environment exists in WA to allow community engagement to work to its potential.

In conclusion, the survey showed that the potential of community engagement is perceived to remain largely untapped – or at the very least that there is very considerable room for gains to be made. It also showed that (presumably) as a result of participation in the conference, many people changed their views on to what extent citizens can be expected to and would want to participate in the decision making process.



