
Module 2

Guidebook

Module 2 turns attention toward the process of coming to plan and conduct social research within everyday work practices. To do this, a process utilised by the Toowoomba Regional Council's Community Development and Facilities Branch is explored to provide an example of the ways that social research might be incorporated into program delivery; in this instance, within the evaluation and reporting stages of community engagement program delivery.

Following an exploration of the ways that social research might be embedded into the practice of program delivery, attention is given to designing the social research project. Good social research is *planned research*; the *Research Design Checklist* detailed in the Module 2 Resources section offers a strategy for planning the social research project.

Module 2-1 The Program Scope and Evaluation Process

The *Program Scope and Evaluation Process* is introduced as the platform upon which social research might be conducted in the local government setting. As currently utilised by Toowoomba Regional Council, the *Program Scope and Evaluation Process* integrates community engagement program development and delivery planning with explicit evaluation and reporting stages. It is within the evaluation and reporting stages that social research finds specific application.

There is a dual purpose here. Firstly, the exposure to community that the delivery of community engagement initiatives provides opens a key opportunity for conducting social research. When 'face-to-face' with community it simply makes sense to capture views from community to enhance local government practice.

A second purpose derives from what the evidence captured as part of the social research program provides. Not only will this research informed insight into community offer the opportunity to better understand community, but it will also provide invaluable 'data' to enhance reporting on the effectiveness of the community engagement initiative, as well as guide planning for future initiatives.

Module Content

Module 2 introduces processes for planning and conducting social research, with a focus on:

- the 'Program Scope and Evaluation Process' for planning and conducting community engagement.
- the evaluation of community engagement programs using social research.
- the design of effective social research.

Module 2 details processes underpinning the effective design and conduct of social research, and lays the foundation for the conduct of research explored in Module 3, 4 and 5.

Module Activities

2-1 Using the Program Scope and Evaluation template

2-2 Using the Risk Register template

2-3 Using the Research Design checklist

Social Research Toolkit:

using social research in local government
community engagement

In this regard the *Program Scope and Evaluation Process* offers a versatile process for incorporating social research into the planning, delivery and evaluation of community engagement initiatives. When conducted as part of the *Program Scope and Evaluation Process*, social research enables the collation of views directly from community.

The accompanying video guide for using the *Program Scope and Evaluation* template, accessible in the Module 2 Resources section, steps through each component of the process. While the first sections of the template deal with the description of the planned engagement initiative, of particular relevance to the Social Research Toolkit is the description of the *Evaluation and Reporting* stage. It is in evaluating and reporting findings from the *Program Scope and Evaluation Process* that social research finds specific application.

Module 2-2 Designing Research

Good research is planned research, and in this section of Module 2, attention is turned toward the design of a social research program to accompany community engagement initiatives. Importantly, the research design process is considered in terms of the *Program Scope and Evaluation process*. It is suggested that a social research program could be incorporated into any community engagement initiative to not only enable a research informed evaluation of the engagement initiative but to also contribute to a growing stock of data about community.

Using engagement initiatives to provide a stock of data on community is an innovative way to build a research informed view of the community. The data derived from each engagement initiative will compound to build a growing and contemporary understanding of community views and sentiment, enabling further, and more refined engagement initiatives to emerge. This data will also become invaluable for reporting back to the local government organisation; for use as the evidence base to justify programs, to tender for further programs and to maintain funding streams.

But again, it is stressed that to remain valid, any data derived from community must be drawn from a well-planned and executed social research program. The *Research Design Checklist* introduced in this Module will accompany the *Program Scope and Evaluation Process Template* and *Risk Register Template* to provide a rigorous means of planning for and reporting on community engagement initiatives and accompanying social research programs.

Module 2 Case Example

An important further resource within the Module 2 Resources section is the *Case Example*. This case example details a research design prepared for an actual program developed and delivered by Toowoomba Regional Council. The case example details how the *Research Design Checklist* might be used, and how the deployment of social research within community engagement program delivery can be undertaken.

Spend some time reviewing this case example to gain an insight into the ways that the use of social research might be undertaken within the daily practice of community engagement program design and delivery.