SERVICES FOR ALL

PROMOTING ACCESS AND EQUITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Statement of Tolerance

Tolerant and just communities are fundamental to the pursuit of democratic values. Local Government will seek to foster harmonious relations amongst all Australians in accordance with the Statement on Community Tolerance adopted at the 1996 National General Assembly (Below).

This National General Assembly of Local Government:

• reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect, regardless of race, colour, creed or origin

• reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, creed or origin

• reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage

• reaffirms its commitment to maintaining Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an overriding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values

• denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.

Further, this National General Assembly calls upon Councils throughout Australia to give practical effect to the above commitments by:

• actively promoting the benefits of a cohesive, multicultural society

• supporting the Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation’s Vision for a united Australia, and local declarations of Reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples

• promoting access and equity in service provision for all members of their communities

• addressing wherever possible the special needs of disadvantaged groups.
Foreword

The Australian Local Government Association is pleased to present this document *Services for All: Promoting Access and Equity in Local Government*. The publication is designed to assist Councils in taking a proactive approach to providing access to quality services and ‘a fair go’ for all residents.

Increasingly all spheres of government are realising the social and economic benefits of a stable and cohesive community and the need to fully respond to all groups making up a democratic society. The result is a better understanding of the strength which diversity can bring to a community, including people working together to develop local business opportunities in the global marketplace.

Australia is a multicultural society, although some people still encounter barriers to services that other Australians take for granted. Access and equity is not about providing separate services to people from non-English speaking cultures. It is about ensuring that all residents gain access to services, facilities and opportunities provided by Councils, regardless of their race, culture, religion, or language.

This publication will allow Councils throughout Australia to assess and develop their response to demands for access and equity, and incorporate the principles of access and equity into their corporate planning processes. The approach taken in this publication is consistent with the Integrated Local Area Planning (ILAP) principles.

The ILAP process involves:

- undertaking a holistic and strategic assessment of local/regional conditions and issues
- developing a common direction or vision for action around selected key issues
- extensive consultation and effective involvement of all key stakeholders
- undertaking joint action wherever appropriate, both within and beyond Council
- establishing arrangements for ongoing co-operation, and
- promoting effective leadership through Council corporate planning.

I commend this publication to you. I believe it provides a timely review of progress to date, together with practical and sensible proposals to assist Local Government to respond to the changing nature of Australian society.

Councillor John Campbell

President

Australian Local Government Association
Preface

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is committed to improving access and equity in Local Government. All members of the community wishing to participate in a local community having a right to fair, equitable, and open access to programs and services funded with public dollars. This publication reflects that commitment.

This work has been commissioned by the Australian Local Government Association with funding from the Commonwealth Government’s Local Government Development Program. The primary purpose has been to review some of the important literature and developments in access and equity issues, and to provide ideas to assist Councils to respond to the multicultural nature of Australian society. The publication is based on research conducted by Blackwell Consultancy, and further developed by the Australian Forum for Cultural Diversity (Dr Amareswar Galla and Dr Jane Stanley).

Chapter One establishes the context for Local Government involvement in access and equity, and the role of Integrated Local Area Planning in addressing cultural diversity.

Chapter Two examines policy initiatives in the area of access and equity for all three spheres of government - Local, State/Territory and Commonwealth.

The focus of Chapter Three is an overview of the Charter of Public Service for a Culturally Diverse Society is presented, including particular considerations for Local Government. Full copies of the Charter appear in Appendix 2.

Chapter Four provides practical suggestions for Local Government to promote access and equity through all its activities, including setting strategic directions for the organisation as a whole, and developing its customer focus.

This work has benefited from consultations carried out to seek a wide range of views. Those consulted included Commonwealth and State Government Departments, local Councils, State and Territory Local Government Associations, as well as ethnic communities and organisations. The assistance of all those who contributed to the report is much appreciated.
List of Acronyms

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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>Australian Local Government Association</td>
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<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
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<td>BIPR</td>
<td>Bureau of Immigration and Population Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCT</td>
<td>Compulsory Competitive Tendering</td>
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<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIEA</td>
<td>(previous) Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs</td>
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<td>DMA</td>
<td>Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECC/MCC</td>
<td>Ethnic Communities’ Council / Multicultural Communities’ Council</td>
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<td>EEO</td>
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<td>NAATI</td>
<td>National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters</td>
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<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non-English Speaking Background</td>
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<td>National Integrated Settlement Strategy</td>
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<td>OMA</td>
<td>(previous) Commonwealth Office of Multicultural Affairs</td>
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<td>SBS</td>
<td>Special Broadcasting Service</td>
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<td>TIS</td>
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Chapter 1: Access and Equity in Local Government

1.1 A NATIONAL COMMITMENT
As part of its national policy platform, the Australian Local Government Association is committed to ensuring that all Australians have equal access to Council services. This publication is designed to review progress in meeting this commitment and to develop a framework to help Councils throughout Australia make further progress in improving services for residents from non-English speaking cultures.

1.2 WHY SHOULD LOCAL GOVERNMENT BE INVOLVED?
The 707 Local Governments in Australia (including Aboriginal Community Governments) are democratically elected, with a mandate from local communities to manage local affairs for the benefit of all residents.

Local Government anchors the Australian system of government at the community level. It is the principal means by which local and regional communities express their identity, enhance their wellbeing, care for their environments, and relate to Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

The challenge for Local Government is to ensure that migrants and their descendants particularly from non-English speaking cultures, along with all other Australians, can fully participate in its programs, comply with its regulations and contribute their knowledge and experience to the local community.

Cultural diversity is a reality in Australia and no sphere of government can ignore the implications of this when planning and delivering services to its citizens.

1.3 WHO MAKES UP OUR NATION?
Cultural diversity is not an abstract concept in Australia; it reflects our experience and identity as a nation. Since the end of World War II, Australia has welcomed almost 5.6 million immigrants from over 150 nations who have contributed to our cultural traditions and helped build a strong and cohesive society.

The 1996 Census showed the following:

- the total population of Australia on Census Night 1996 was 17,892,423
- during the 1990s the proportion of Australian residents born overseas has remained stable at 23%
- almost two and a half million or 13.2% of Australian residents were born in non-English speaking countries
- the population from English speaking countries continues to grow, but at a slower rate than the population from non-English speaking countries. In 1996, people born in non-English speaking countries represented 61% of those born overseas - compared with 54% in 1976
- 13.9% percent of the population aged five years and over speaks a language other than English at home, and in Sydney and Melbourne the figure is about 26%.

Australia today is truly a multicultural society, rich in tradition, linguistically and culturally diverse.

The 1996 Census Community Profiles give detailed local data on ethnicity and can be a useful planning tool for Councils.
1.4 PRINCIPLES OF MULTICULTURALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The principles of multiculturalism have been expressed in slightly different ways by various government documents over the years, reflecting a steady evolution of policy. In the 1997 paper produced by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) *Dispelling the Myths about Immigration*, multiculturalism is described as follows:

...the term ‘multicultural’ simply recognises that all Australians, regardless of their backgrounds, have the same civic rights and obligations. These rights are accompanied by responsibilities to accept the right of others to express their views and values.

In acknowledging this cultural diversity, however, the Government does not accept a diversity of core values. All Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia and the basic structures and principles of Australian society — the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, equality of the sexes and English as the national language. (DIMA, 1997)

1.5 BENEFITS FROM OUR CULTURAL DIVERSITY

There are many social, cultural and economic benefits arising from our cultural diversity:

- it creates jobs — a recent survey of Business Skills migrants showed that the 700 migrants surveyed had directly or indirectly created jobs for more than 3,600 people since arriving in Australia
- it helps trade — the survey also showed that 62% of migrants’ businesses were involved in exporting, with 12% of these businesses exporting goods or services worth more than $1 million p.a.
- it provides expertise — as Australia strives to improve its position in the global marketplace, immigrants provide valuable expertise and resources that give Australia a competitive edge. A good example is Asian immigrants helping Australia to strengthen its trading relationship with Asia and the Pacific
- it encourages tourism — tourism is one of Australia’s biggest and fastest-growing industries, generating billions of dollars of export income and thousands of jobs
- it attracts overseas students — this is another rapidly growing source of Australia’s export income - it has been estimated that overseas students generated some $3 billion in 1996 arising from expenditure on fees, goods and services
- it enriches our culture — immigrants bring a diversity that can be a source of enrichment and opportunity not just for the economy, but for the political, social and cultural life of a local area.

1.6 SUMMARY

The value of cultural diversity and the importance of access and equity is broadly accepted by all three spheres of government. For Local Government the challenge is how to provide a practical response, including the incorporation of planning for diversity into its overall corporate planning processes.

A significant and ongoing obstacle to achieving access and equity at the local level is the problem of inadequate co-ordination between the three spheres of government and the community sector in planning and service delivery.

The measures outlined in this publication are designed to address these challenges and obstacles, allbeit against a background of competing priorities and continuing revenue constraints.
Chapter 2: Government Policy Initiatives

2.1 HOW HAVE GOVERNMENTS RESPONDED TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

Over the past twenty years, all spheres of government have responded to the growing diversity of the Australian population by developing appropriate legislation and policies to ensure equality of treatment for all members of the community. The fundamental principle underlying all these laws and policies is that regardless of race, religion, language, culture or other attributes, all residents must be guaranteed equal opportunity and equal access to services.

2.2 COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT


Access and equity has been part of Commonwealth Government policies since the mid 1980s, and it has been embraced by all spheres of Government. Australian people are often inclined to understate their achievements in dealing with complex social issues and change, while quietly building a tolerant, inclusive, pluralistic society. Multiculturalism in Australia has attracted favourable attention from governments around the world. For example, President Clinton, in his speech to Federal Parliament in November 1996, commented on our success as a multicultural country. The Australian approach works because it has been supported by a coherent, holistic public policy.

The Commonwealth Access and Equity Strategy began in 1985 with the aim of improving service delivery to people born in non-English speaking countries. In 1989 the Strategy was extended to include all groups who may face barriers of race, religion, language or culture, including Australian-born people of non-English speaking background, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and Australian South Sea Islanders in 1995.

In 1992 an evaluation of the Commonwealth Access and Equity Strategy was conducted by the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA). The evaluation found the following:

- the requirement to collect ethnicity data and to use it appropriately was not well met
- the extent of co-operation and co-ordination between agencies was limited
- overcoming the most persistent barriers to access - language and culture - often involves a considerable cost, and it also has budgetary impacts through increasing the customer base.

Following the evaluation, OMA commenced a process of preparing Annual Access and Equity Reports for the Federal Parliament on the performance of Commonwealth departments.

Underpinning government efforts to facilitate full participation of migrants in Australian society is the National Integrated Settlement Strategy (NISS) established by the Commonwealth Government in 1992 and subsequently agreed to by State and Territory Governments and the Australian Local Government Association. Through NISS all spheres of government have undertaken to work together to improve planning and coordination of services for migrants settling in Australia.

Settlement planning activities focus on:

- clarifying who is responsible for providing services
- encouraging co-ordination of service delivery
- better targeting of resources to avoid gaps and duplication, and
- achieving better outcomes for clients in the form of appropriately targeted and accessible services.
A range of Commonwealth documents that may be of assistance to councils can be found on the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs internet site at URL http://www.immi.gov.au

Following the change of Federal Government in March 1996, OMA, together with the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research (BIMPR), was absorbed into the new Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). However, it is understood that the publication of annual Access and Equity Reports will continue.

More recently, the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (comprising Commonwealth, State/Territory Ministers and ALGA) formally adopted the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society. The Charter aims to ensure that government services meet the needs of people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds so that they can participate fully in Australia’s economic, social and cultural life. The Charter represents a refocussing of the Access and Equity strategy so that it is applicable to a far wider range of activities and services conducted by government agencies. The Charter integrates a set of principles concerning cultural diversity into service and activity planning, delivery, evaluation and outcomes reporting.

In March 1997, the Council agreed that national settlement priorities comprise English training, access to the labour market, settlement information, access to housing, translating and interpreting services, support from sponsors, integrating services for refugees and humanitarian entrants, and meeting the settlement related needs of the ethnic aged.

In March 1998 the Council noted the challenge for the Commonwealth Government in formulating programs which are appropriate to prevailing economic conditions and which balance and reflect Australia’s economic, social, environmental, humanitarian and international interests (Council Communique 27 March 1998) and reaffirmed its commitment to the Charter.

The fundamental basis for the current Commonwealth policies, as demonstrated by the Charter, is a clear customer focus, recognising the diversity of individuals and planning customised and flexible services that respond to users’ needs. This is a marked departure from previous policies which tended to promote homogenous services for a single customer group, and to identify migrants and their descendants from non-English speaking cultures (sometimes grouping them together with Indigenous people) as another homogenous but non-conforming customer group with occasional need for special services.

A complementary policy thrust by the Commonwealth Government, which has also been enthusiastically adopted by high performing private sector agencies in Australia and overseas, is to promote “productive diversity” as a goal for organisational structures. This is based on the principle that if an organisation’s staff mirrors the profile of its customers, it will be better able to plan for and deliver products and services to meet customer needs. It will also be able to better collaborate with customers in resolving particular issues that arise in relation to products or services.

## 2.3 STATE GOVERNMENTS

The Victorian, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australian and Western Australian Governments have published policy statements on ethnic affairs or cultural diversity. These incorporate commitments to provide equitable access to State Government services regardless of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia require agencies to report on their progress in improving access to and appropriateness of services. The Tasmanian Government has also produced a set of Principles, similar to New South Wales’ Charter of Principles, and all State Government agencies are required to provide an annual statement on the application of these principles.

A chronology of developments in Commonwealth, State and Territory policy and practice is contained in Appendix One.
2.4 HOW HAS LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONDED TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

Each year the ALGA convenes a National General Assembly of Local Government in Canberra, which is a forum for consultation with Councils. Local Government from throughout Australia can participate and vote on national issues. The General Assembly has a wide brief to consider policy directions and convey the views of Councils to the Annual General Meeting and National Executive. The 1996 National General Assembly of Local Government unanimously passed the following Motion.

This National General Assembly of Local Government:

- reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect, regardless of race, colour, creed or origin
- reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, creed or origin
- reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage
- reaffirms its commitment to maintaining Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an overriding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values
- denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.

Further, this National General Assembly calls upon Councils throughout Australia to give practical effect to the above commitments by:

- actively promoting the benefits of a cohesive, multicultural society
- supporting the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation’s Vision for a United Australia, and local declarations of Reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples
- promoting access and equity in service provision for all members of their communities
- addressing wherever possible the special needs of disadvantaged groups.

In addition, as a member of the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, ALGA has endorsed the *Charter of Public Services in a Culturally Diverse Society*.

At a state level, the following State Local Government Associations have produced policies or reports on multiculturalism or access and equity:

- Local Government & Shires Associations of New South Wales
- Western Australian Municipal Association
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Local Government Association of Queensland
- Local Government Association of South Australia

Even though these policy statements exist, it is a matter for individual Councils to decide whether, and in what form, to give effect to them at the local level.

There is little doubt that Local Government can and does play a major role in including all residents in planning services and programs and ensuring that all members of the community are valued as equal participants in the decision making process.

Local Government is where most members of the community first come into contact with a sphere of government. Each Local Government Area is different in its population, and this will need to be reflected in policies and procedures.
By integrating access and equity provisions into mainstream services Councils will achieve:

- a more equitable distribution of resources
- greater social harmony and cohesion
- increased economic advantages
- increased respect for cultural differences
- a more inclusive community; and
- improved opportunities for all Australians.

The following are examples of projects which have resulted in successful strategies to promote access and equity at the local level.

- The Victorian City of Springvale’s ‘Deeds Not Words’ was one of the major achievements in 1990. For the first time the strategy took multicultural issues out of the Community Services Department and coordinated access and equity responsibilities within the newly established Human Resources Department. This had the effect of planning for access and equity as a mainstream Council initiative.

- The Tasmanian Local Government Multicultural Access and Equity Project (1992) was provided with a small grant from the National Office of Local Government to conduct a training session in cultural awareness particularly designed for personnel working for local Councils in Tasmania.

- In 1990-91, the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory was funded under the Local Government Development Program (LGDP), to run workshops in Darwin and Alice Springs to assist Councils to address access and equity issues. Northern Territory Councils are also involved in the National Integrated Settlement Strategy (NISS), which is co-ordinated by DIMA, and which brings together key players from all spheres of government to improve settlement outcomes for new migrants.

- For One and All. Access and Equity in Local Government: A Guide to Customer Service in a Multicultural Society was a project funded by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs for the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW in 1994. The project produced a manual with practical strategies to assist local Councils in NSW in promoting access and equity.

- Managing Local Diversity; Report on Managing Diversity in Local Government: Professional Development Project (1994) was an Ecumenical Migration Centre project in Victoria. It was funded through the Local Government Development Program and recommended appropriate training for managers in Local Government.

These are just a few of many reports written for Local Government across Australia. The benefits of these funded programs include the fact that they have encouraged other local Councils to take steps to replicate model strategies and processes for promoting access and equity.

2.5 FEEDBACK FROM COUNCILS AND OTHERS

A literature search and consultations repeatedly asserted that Local Government should take increased responsibility for integrating access and equity into both its corporate management and service delivery policies.

While significant advances have undoubtedly been made in providing multilingual information and interpreter services, there still appears to be a gap between the accessibility of services to English speaking customers compared with people from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This gap is exacerbated by the lack of range and flexibility of available services, and the absence of systematic consultation with ethnic groups that could lead to more appropriate service design and delivery.

The findings of the literature review and consultations are summarised below:

- The cost of catering for residents from non-English speaking cultures within tight budgets is a major concern. A 1997 Federal Parliamentary report Fair Go For All, states that, ‘the costs associated with access and equity obligations should be allowed for in the course of budget planning’. This is not happening in many local Councils.
• There is a lack of knowledge about practical ways to address the information and service needs of customers from non-English speaking cultures.

• There is a lack of data and difficulties in defining ethnic sub-groups. This means that measuring the number of potential and actual customers from particular ethnic groups has often been regarded as too hard.

• Access and equity has not been seen as a mainstream management issue, but rather as a welfare add-on which is often relegated to Community Services Departments and Community Development Officers.

• There is a lack of knowledge amongst ethnic communities about what local Councils provide. This is complicated by the three spheres of government providing services which are often not co-ordinated.

• There are inadequacies in provision of language services. A lack of interpreter training courses and accreditation in some languages has created particularly difficult communication problems for certain refugee groups. There is a need for more female interpreters in some languages.

2.6 BARRIERS TO COUNCIL PROGRAMS

Despite real progress in many areas, implementation of Councils’ commitment to planning for diversity appears to be uneven. Implementation often relies on specially funded projects with a limited timeframe. Ethnic community based agencies and Council officers have expressed the view that once a project has been completed ‘nothing happens’ to continue the process. The reasons for this appear to be as follows:

• Often these projects are isolated within the ‘Human Services Division’ and are seen as a welfare rather than a mainstream management issue.

• Many projects are managed by junior or one-off funded project officers who find it difficult to influence other departments of Council.

• Councils will not provide funding for access and equity planning in their general budgets, seeing these issues as separate from mainstream budgeted items.

• Without a dedicated staff member to push for better services for the whole community, Councils often go back to what they have been doing before.

• An integrated approach developed in conjunction with other agencies and government departments is often not seen as a priority by senior Council staff.

• There is a failure to provide effective long term commitment to multicultural policy or to follow up on achievements.

• The customer diversity of local areas is not mirrored in the corporate culture of most Councils, with a result that customer needs are poorly appreciated.

It appears that some Local Governments have had difficulty making quality service a reality for many people from non-English speaking cultures. Quality service in this sense means services which are equally accessible to people in need of them, and which provide a similar measure of benefit to customers across cultural boundaries.

A number of reports indicate particular barriers for people who:

• have poor English skills
• have different cultural experiences and expectations from those of Anglo-Australians
• are most recently arrived
• have experienced torture and trauma in their home countries
• are living in isolated areas, or
• are part of small ethnic communities.

2.7 THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

So long as Councils regard access and equity as marginalised “add-on” components of service delivery they will miss out on significant opportunities for smarter customer-focused management. This publication suggests practical tools for achieving a more integrated and strategic approach to improving performance in all areas of Council operations.
3.1 THE CHARTER’S FOCUS

The Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society represents an approach to access and equity which departs from the previous “deficit model” which was based on correcting instances of inequity. The new approach recognises a positive value for all customers in developing services that can respond to a diverse range of needs. It places the emphasis on building cultural diversity into the strategic planning, policy development, budgeting and reporting processes of government, irrespective of whether these are provided by government agencies, community organisations or commercial enterprises.

3.2 THE CHARTER’S PRINCIPLES

The Charter contains seven basic principles central to the design, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of quality government services in a culturally diverse society. There are questions about performance that can be applied to Local Government operations to assist Council in ensuring that their operations comply with the requirements of the Charter.

1. Access:
   Government services should be available to everyone who is entitled to them and should be free of any form of discrimination on the basis of a person’s country of birth, language, culture, race or religion.

   Considerations for Local Government include:
   - What are the Council’s objectives for provision of services to its customers?
   - What are the criteria for eligibility, and do these create any barriers to access?
   - Can the Council anticipate that some groups will receive a lesser level or standard of services than others – if so, which groups and why?

2. Equity:
   Government services should be developed and delivered on the basis of fair treatment of clients who are eligible to receive them.

   Considerations for Local Government include:
   - Does the Council collect ethnicity data and analyse it in relation to the population that is eligible for receiving services and the population that actually receives services?
   - What management strategies does the Council have in place to align policies and practices with access and equity outcomes?
   - How are management systems evaluated in terms of access and equity outcomes, and what are the results?

3. Communication:
   Government service providers should use strategies to inform eligible clients of services about their entitlements and how they can obtain them. Providers should also consult with their clients regularly about the adequacy, design and standard of government services.

   Considerations for Local Government include:
   - What public information systems does the Council have in place to service a diverse community, provided for which target audiences?
   - What sections of the community are likely to be excluded from the Council’s targeted audiences?

4. Responsiveness:
   Government services should be sensitive to the needs and requirements of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and responsive, as far as practicable, to the particular circumstances of individuals.
Considerations for Local Government include:

- What value does the Council place on its customer service, including provision of services for a diverse range of customers?
- How does the Council tailor its services, including the services provided by external contractors to meet the needs of particular ethnic groups?
- How are mainstream services customised to accommodate the needs of individuals in a culturally and linguistically diverse community?
- Are there mechanisms in place to ensure access and equity for different ethnic groups?

5. **Effectiveness**:

   Government service providers should be result-oriented, focussed on meeting the needs of clients from all backgrounds.

Considerations for Local Government include:

- How is service effectiveness measured by the Council?
- Are there processes or systems for measuring equivalence of outcomes for different ethnic groups?

6. **Efficiency**:

   Government service providers should optimise the use of available public resources through a user-responsive approach to service delivery which meets the needs of clients.

Considerations for Local Government include:

- How are the Council’s resources managed to ensure optimal outcomes for different customer groupings?
- What part does cultural and linguistic appropriateness play in resource management and accountability processes?
- To what extent does the Council benefit from productive diversity through having a staff structure that represents the diversity of its customer profile?
- How does the Council derive efficiencies from the cultural diversity of its staff?
- How does the Council collaborate with external agencies in ensuring that barriers to access and equity are overcome?

7. **Accountability**:

   Government service providers should have a reporting mechanism in place which ensures they are accountable for implementing access and equity objectives for clients (for example, by reporting on this in annual reports or other types of report).

Considerations for Local Government include:

- To what extent does the Council consult and encourage participation by culturally diverse communities?
- How does the Council project an image of fairness and equity for all cultural groups to the community as a whole?

The seven Charter principles are not meant to be prescriptive or to override or diminish any State, Territory or Local Government policies. They are intended to constitute a nationally agreed framework to deliver culturally responsive government services, at all levels, within available public resources and consistent with policy directions.
4.1 DESIRED OUTCOMES FROM PROMOTING ACCESS AND EQUITY

Access and equity is not designed to give any particular group any special advantage. It is designed to enhance program design and delivery arrangements so that they effectively and efficiently take account of cultural diversity in Australia. It is important that all members of the community in a particular Local Government Area are able to fully participate in the Council’s programs, comply with its regulations, and contribute their knowledge and experience to the community.

The following are some of the potential outcomes for a Council and the local community:

- creating a positive public image by ensuring that all residents are aware of Council services, functions and procedures
- providing facilities and programs that meet the needs of residents and which are therefore fully utilised
- providing better returns for the investment of ratepayers’ dollars
- encouraging more effective use of community skills, talents and experiences
- using diversity to bring a competitive edge to the Council’s economic development activity
- creating a community that is fairly resourced by its Council
- increasing community participation and representation in Council elections and decision-making structures
- reducing racial tensions by promoting good community relations
- encouraging greater compliance with Council regulations
- meeting legal requirements in terms of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policies
- setting a framework for positive cooperation between Councils and the other spheres of government in meeting community needs.

4.2 DEVELOPING A POLICY STATEMENT

It is highly desirable that policy statements give a message to the general community that access and equity is being taken seriously by Council. It is appropriate for Council to develop a policy statement which articulates its commitment to access and equity, and the value it places on its multicultural community. It should be written to complement the Council’s Corporate Plan. For example:

**Our Vision**

The Municipality of .................... will:
- plan effectively for its future;
- build partnerships with its citizens;
- lead regional sustainable economic growth;
- achieve an attractive physical environment and civic amenity;
- promote our cultural diversity;
- foster and provide mutual support and caring for people; and
- enable all citizens to take pride in the municipality of ............ as a great place to live, work, play and visit.

**Our Mission**

We will respond to our citizens’ needs by providing services which are:
- equitable;
- accessible;
- safe;
- high in quality; and
- cost effective.

This Corporate Plan sets clear directions, defines a preferred future for the municipality, and outlines a range of commitments for the next three years.

*(Based on the City of Greater Dandenong, Victoria)*
4.3 DEVELOPING AN ACCESS AND EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Leading Councils throughout Australia have taken significant steps to ensure that their corporate and business plans integrate access and equity into all aspects of their planning and corporate operation. Importantly, they have also identified strategies, including clear objectives and targets, to ensure that individual parts of Council’s administration are held accountable for their performance.

One of the most effective ways of achieving this is by the development of an Access and Equity Action Plan. The successful development and implementation of such a Plan will depend heavily on the leadership, support and authority given to it by Councillors and senior managers. The first step, therefore, is to obtain commitment through a resolution of Council.

Issues which will affect the Council’s commitment include:

- the current level of understanding in Council about access and equity
- clearly identified reasons for Council to implement an Action Plan
- likely supporters of the Action Plan
- the level of preparedness of Council, staff and contractors to respond to change.

Once a Council has decided to develop an Action Plan, it should establish clear mechanisms to manage the planning process. The process of developing an Action Plan for Access and Equity can be treated as a project in its own right, and managed accordingly, as is the case with other reform strategies pursued by Local Government.

The following are some suggestions to get the process started.

- **Allocation of the overall responsibility for preparing the plan:**
  responsibility for overall planning and management of the process should be delegated to a small group or an individual. Whether or not Council chooses to allocate primary responsibility to an officer, a team of staff members or a consultant, clear lines of responsibility and accountability must be established. Effective management of the program requires expertise and knowledge of all of Council functions. Council must recognise and adequately resource this role.

- **Establish and resource an Access and Equity Steering Committee:**
  one approach may be to establish an Access and Equity Steering Committee, to advise the Council on developing and implementing the Action Plan. The Committee’s composition should reflect the Council’s commitment to developing a partnership with the community, and it should be chaired by someone with clear authority such as the Chief Executive Officer or a Director of Council. The responsibility for convening regular meetings and follow-up actions from this committee must also be clearly delegated.

- **Establish an Access and Equity Implementation Group within Council:**
  in a large Council it may be desirable to establish a small group to provide a ‘bridging role’ between the Access and Equity Steering Committee and the divisions of Council. It may also be desirable to include representatives from those agencies contracted to provide services on behalf of the Council. This can be a task force that can focus on implementing the recommendations of the Steering Committee as they arise.

- **Consultancy Support:**
  the Council may need to engage external consultancy support to assist in co-ordinating or undertaking specific aspects of the project. This can be particularly useful where specialist expertise is required or where in-house resources and expertise are limited. However, where a consultant is employed, it is important to ensure that this does not diminish staff commitment.

- **Staff support:**
  in the initial stages of the project, all staff need to understand the issues of Access and Equity and the Action Plan project. It is important that all staff are aware of Council’s policies and understand the implications for their work. This could start with:
• a short presentation for all staff about what access and equity means and on the process proposed for the Action Plan

• a more detailed program of initial orientation of staff in those areas central to the project. This could include a talk from one or two representatives from different ethnic groups to outline difficulties they encounter in accessing services.

Ultimately, the success of the Plan will depend on Council staff, whether they are responsible themselves for service delivery, or they supervise contractors who deliver services. It is therefore critical that they are involved in and committed to developing the Plan.

Effectively involving staff takes time and requires clear two-way communication. Staff need to know how the Plan will affect them and what they may be required to do in developing the Plan. It is useful to develop processes which motivate staff and which are targeted to meet their needs.

• **Involving community organisations:**
  communication with these organisations very early in the process will be invaluable, to let them know what the Council is doing and why. Consultation at the planning and information gathering stage will not only assist greatly in getting the planning and information right, but will also build relationships which will encourage cooperation during implementation.

There are many reasons why Councils should involve local community organisations:

  - to find out about the needs and priorities of people from diverse culturally and linguistic backgrounds
  - to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and services, identifying what works and what are the barriers to access and equity
  - to inform groups and individuals about Council policies, programs and services or to inform residents about any changes to these
  - to identify groups which are not using programs and services and discover the reasons for this
  - to identify possible solutions to issues which are of concern to people from diverse cultural backgrounds
  - to assist in formulating policies
  - to assist in setting objectives and targets
  - to assist in reviewing plans.

• **Involving government agencies:**
  implementing the Plan may need support from other Councils or other spheres of government. It is therefore useful to involve key contacts in these agencies to share information about access and equity. This is particularly important where there may be implications for resource sharing that flow from the Action Plan.

Strategies to involve government agencies could include:

  - forwarding information and reports
  - including officers in the steering committee or forums
  - providing briefings on developments
  - engaging officers in aspects of the project.

In addition, opportunities exist to share experience, obtain information, avoid duplication and advocate for funding and policy changes through the Council’s State/Territory and national representative bodies, regional organisations and direct contact with government departments.

### 4.4 WHO LIVES IN THE LOCAL AREA?

An essential step in developing the Action Plan will be to describe the people it is designed to help and what their needs are.

Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures can identify which are the main ethnic communities in a Council’s area, and provide a lot of information about those communities (their age, income, education levels etc). The figures are based on census data collected every five years and thus can often be out of date. More general inter-censal information is also
available from surveys by ethnic organisations such as the Ethnic Communities' Council/Multicultural Communities' Council (ECC/MCC) in each State or Territory, Education departments, Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) and other government agencies. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) can provide information down to local government area (LGA) from the DIMA Settlement Database. This is updated yearly from the date of the last census, and is available either from Canberra or through the DIMA State Offices. It is normally unnecessary for a Council to undertake expensive research itself.

The following kinds of demographic information can help to ensure that the Action Plan addresses the needs of the particular ethnic residents of the local area

- Birthplace/Country of origin
- Language(s) spoken at home/preferred language
- Age
- Location (address-street name/suburb).

Additional ethnicity data which can be sought includes:

- Length of residence in Australia
- English language proficiency
- Literacy in first language
- Birthplace of parents (to enable identification of second generation migrants with one or both parents born overseas)
- Religion
- Education/qualification level
- Housing tenure
- Gender/family composition.

In collecting these data from ABS or other sources, it is appropriate to consider its limitations, in terms of what it actually reveals. There are considerable dangers of reading too much into the data, through applying ethnic stereotypes to its interpretation.

Ethnicity data is useful as it allows for a demographic profile to be constructed for the local community, identifying key characteristics of the Council's customers. This will directly assist the Council in designing and target marketing its services.

Quantitative data about different ethnic groups can be complemented by other material. The documented and oral histories of ethnic groups within any community can be a valuable source of information for the development of an Access and Equity Action Plan. These histories can be used to inform all sectors of the community and Local Government, and to inform the planning process. Historical information may be available from local historical societies, ethnic community based organisations and academic sources.

The profile of the local population can be used as a framework for measuring how successfully the Council has targeted and marketed its services. The profile of those people receiving services can be compared with the profile of the whole community, to see if equitable access is being achieved. If it is evident that some groups are missing out on services, it will then be necessary to explore the reasons for this using additional research techniques (by reference to community histories, or qualitative research techniques described in the following section). A similar approach can be taken in relation to evidence of non-compliance with regulations by a particular ethnic group.

### 4.5 HOW EFFECTIVE ARE EXISTING SERVICES?

Ethnic communities are not a single homogeneous unit. One ethnic group can vary widely from another and have completely different needs. Ethnic communities may themselves include individuals with diverse needs and values. Although language may provide significant differentiation between some groups, it would be a mistake to assume that
language is the only barrier to access and equity, and that this can be overcome simply by providing translated material. There are many other reasons why some ethnic communities fail to make full use of Council services.

One Commonwealth agency, for instance, provided a Vietnamese speaking officer on their enquiry counter and advertised this widely - very few Vietnamese speaking people came in to the office to use this service. When they moved the service out of the building and into a local community centre, they were flooded with clients. It appeared that many Vietnamese people in that area were refugees with bad experiences of government in their home country and were too frightened to come into a government building (Commissioner of Taxation Annual Report 1992/93).

Some more established ethnic communities have different kinds of problems in accessing services. Many members of these communities are elderly people who tend to lose their English language skills as they get older and revert to their first language. They may have mobility problems. There are also significant cultural barriers – for example many cultures place restrictions on physical contact or discussion of personal information between men and women, and this may impact on delivery of personal services such as health care.

The Council may need to conduct qualitative research to examine the precise nature of the barriers to access and equity which arise from the Council’s operations. Council staff who have direct customer contact can almost certainly provide useful anecdotal information. Useful information and help with research can come from talking to ethnic community organisations. Many of these organisations have welfare officers who understand the problems of access and equity experienced by their customers. Most organisations have a mailing list of members of their community and may be willing to help by sending out a research questionnaire with their newsletter.

There are several techniques for more systematic collection of information such as:

- assessment of existing customer feedback
- customer satisfaction surveys
- analysis of existing records on customer service delivery
- further quantitative and qualitative research on services.

Existing customer feedback may be limited to lodgement of customer complaints, or it may consist of more systematic client feedback built into service delivery. All forms of feedback should be assessed in terms of the information it provides on customer satisfaction, and the implications for access and equity. Available sources of feedback can be supplemented by carrying out specific surveys, and these may be specifically targeted to groups that appear to be missing out on services.

Existing data on customer service delivery can be obtained from some service records. This requires that service records include ethnicity data, or that the nature of the service delivery is in itself an indicator of ethnicity (eg for use of language support services). Specific surveys to supplement these records can be conducted by the Council either contracting with a market research company or undertaking the research itself.

Periodic qualitative research can include distributing a questionnaire throughout the local area which asks for information about each person and their family, their contact with Council services, and their knowledge of Council regulations. Such surveys are most effective if conducted face-to-face, and of course some support with communications in languages other than English may be required.

Research on a smaller scale can use a number of focus groups of about 8-10 people selected to reflect the community groups in the area. Members of the focus group can be asked questions about Council services and regulations to gain insight into how they affect particular customer groups. It is critical to this type of research that the focus groups reflect the community in terms of such characteristics as age, education, and the areas in which they live.

It is important to develop a consistent, organisation-wide approach to information gathering which includes a range of techniques for collecting information and training staff. This should include development of an effective, co-ordinated system for data collection, analysis and record keeping.
4.6 DO COUNCIL PRACTICES ENCOURAGE ACCESS AND EQUITY?

The next step in the preparation of the Plan is to review the Council’s operations to remove barriers to access and equity. The review process needs to address all practices, protocols and processes including those which have been long established and which inadvertently disadvantage ethnic communities. The Council should pay particular attention to the practices and processes which may impact on the specific groups in the local community which research indicates experience greatest disadvantage (as revealed by the demographic profile and supplementary research).

There may be multiple barriers to services for people in certain groups such as:

- older people
- women with family responsibilities
- young people separated from families
- some minority religions
- single women
- single parents
- people with a physical disability
- gay and lesbian people.

Policies and operations need to be reviewed in the context of focusing services on a diverse range of customers.

4.7 INVOLVING ALL SECTIONS OF THE ORGANISATION

The review of policies and operations should stress that access and equity is not just a consideration for a specialist section of the Council. It should be a core consideration of all aspects of the Council’s administration. Some examples of how Council activities can impact on access and equity are as follows.

Human Resources Management:

The way in which the Council hires and promotes its staff influences the ability of the organisation to benefit from productive diversity. Selection of individuals who meet a highly prescriptive and standardised set of criteria may produce a homogenous workforce, consisting of like-minded people. Selection of individuals who can complement rather than replicate existing skills may be beneficial to building effective teams. Encouraging formation of a workforce that represents the cultural values of its customers can result in a smart thinking organisation that knows and responds to its market.

Once recruited, the Council can help its staff by:

- recognising their ability to work with and manage diversity as criteria for promotion
- training staff at all levels to be culturally sensitive
- including examples of cultural diversity in all professional training and development
- training staff in the use of telephone interpreter services and the use of on-site interpreters
- informing local ethnic organisations and ethnic media about vacancies including those where bilingual skills are desirable
- recognising qualifications, skills and experience of all employees
- Accrediting staff at language aide level through Federal or State testing agencies

The Council’s employees have diverse knowledge and backgrounds. The Council’s human resource managers can draw on their knowledge by:

- compiling a register of staff with second language skills to assist non-English speaking clients
- helping and encouraging bilingual or multilingual staff to maintain and improve their language skills or to become accredited interpreters and translators
- developing a system of referring inquiries or requests from people who need language support to the appropriate members of staff.
All managers should be alert to evidence of racial discrimination of any kind within the organisation, and affecting the interface between the Council and its customers. Human resources managers should develop strategies for the Council to address racism in a preventative and corrective manner.

**Human Services:**
many Councils are involved in provision of services for children, youth and elderly people. In all these areas, different cultures may have a wide range of values that may not be well understood by staff, and which if ignored can introduce barriers to services being utilised. Cross-cultural training of service staff (including staff of contracted agencies) is appropriate, but consideration should also be given to raising the awareness of those responsible for service design and resource allocation. Involving a wide range of customers in service design is highly appropriate.

**Town Planning Services:**
much of conventional town planning regulation is heavily biased in terms of cultural values, and Council’s may need to conduct reviews with this in mind. Different cultures may use space and build structures in different ways, and this has the potential to enrich the physical environment, but it often puts people into conflict with unsympathetically enforced standards. Handling of complaints and advertising proposals for public comment can reinforce cultural bias against minority groups and interests. Town planning at a strategic level can make a positive contribution to cultural wellbeing by recognising the needs of the broad community, and providing spaces and facilities for different types of use.

**Engineering and Infrastructure Services:**
responsibility for signage regulation involves liaising with a customer group which may have diverse values. Capital works programs can have a significant impact on heritage values of settlements, and aesthetics as a whole. Inquiries about road and pavement maintenance and provision of utilities will often require an ability to communicate effectively with a culturally diverse customer base.

**Environmental Health:**
enforcement of regulations needs to take account of the different value systems, past experience and understanding of different sections of the community. Regulations need to be critically examined for cultural bias. If the regulations are justified, the process of enforcement needs to be combined with public education with a view to constructive collaboration with the community as a whole. If enforcement appears to be targeted at any particular group, the reasons for non-compliance should be assessed so that the Council can work with the community to establish shared objectives.

**Parks and Gardens:**
there is considerable opportunity for Councils to celebrate the cultural diversity of local communities through incorporating cultural components into landscaping. They may be able to tap into the horticultural skills of different sections of the community. The value placed on different types of space, and cultural barriers to effective use of open space, need to be recognised in planning and design.

**Animal Control:**
dealing with complaints, customer service and public relations in this area can be highly sensitive, involving interpersonal conflict and emotional reaction to events. Council officers should develop their skills in cross-cultural communication, and be aware of how to call on language or other support when needed.

**Library Services:**
these services are vital in providing for all cultural and linguistic groups in the local community. There may be advantages in locating book collections in particular ways (eg adult’s books with children’s books for ease of family use, separation of collections where customer groups are in political conflict). Materials that assist people in gaining English language skills, as well as proficiency in other languages, need to be considered. Systems are required that will ensure an effective response to customer inquiries about services, including special requests for particular resources and materials. The cost of access to specialist collections should be considered in terms of equity. Community consultations are desirable to assist decisions on stock purchase.
**Sport and Recreation:**

there are often considerable vested interests in targeting resources to particular activities, often involving mainstream competitive team sports. Resource allocations need to take account of the full range of recreational interests of the community. Facilities need to be planned for maximum use by a broad range of customers with varying values, and this may require paying particular attention to the design of such infrastructure. As changing rooms and showers, as well as spectator facilities and recreational activity areas. Events need to be planned so that all sections of the community can feel ownership of publicly funded facilities, and so that recreation provides for expression of cultural diversity. Reconciliation can be promoted through community events. Participation rates by different groups in the community can be measured and assessed.

**Community Grants:**

eligibility criteria and decision making processes need to be established in a way which will not exclude particular groups within the community. Information about funding possibilities needs to be targeted to reach people from non-English speaking cultures. Allocation of resources should be assessed in terms of delivering access and equity.

4.8 **ENSURING ACCESS AND EQUITY FROM OUTSOURCED SERVICES**

Where Councils have outsourced the delivery of services, contracts should be reviewed to ensure that the access and equity objectives and targets are reflected, and if not, that contracts are varied as appropriate when they are due for renewal.

To ensure that residents from non-English speaking cultures benefit from competitive tendering, Councils should:

- ensure that calls for tendering are also advertised in the ethnic press
- require contractors to consult ethnic communities when preparing service agreements, so that agreements incorporate requirements for effective services to residents from non-English speaking cultures
- highlight particular access and equity issues that need to be addressed, including barriers to access and equity that need to be overcome for particular groups
- ensure performance indicators for contractors include a broad range of quality measures which specifically include the quality and responsiveness of services to ethnic residents
- ensure contracts include adequate allowance for any extra cost involved in providing effective services to residents from non-English speaking cultures
- evaluate tenders in terms of value for money in delivering benefits to all sections of the community
- ensure contracts include accountability measures such as reporting on service standards and clearly defined performance indicators.

In Victoria, guidelines for Local Government have been developed to assist Councils to effectively implement CCT in a manner that ensures that people from diverse backgrounds are included in the tendering process. The manual *Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) Procedures* has been distributed through the Institute of Municipal Management (Victoria). These address practices for developing service specifications, tender evaluations, contract monitoring and evaluation.

4.9 **COMMUNICATING WITH THE CUSTOMER**

Communication is a critical part of all phases of the action planning and implementation process. This is a two-way channel for the Council obtaining information about ethnic communities, and for the Council providing information to these communities.

The Council should have enough information about the community groups in its local area and their use of its services to be able to review relevant written materials. These include policies, manuals and information/promotional materials used by the Council to communicate with its residents. They should be assessed to see if they are effective in communicating with residents from non-English speaking cultures.
These written materials may need to be translated into some other languages for those communities which Council’s research shows have poor levels of English. However, it is as well to be aware of the fact that store-rooms of many government offices are filled with boxes of translated materials which lie gathering dust. People with poor English do not tend to walk into government offices, so distributing translated information through these offices does not work. Planning how to get translated information to the people who need it is critical.

Communicating with community organisations, including Migrant Resource Centres and social clubs, is a good way to start. They may be able to distribute information to their members for the Council. The Council can ask the community organisations for ideas - they know their own communities. If the Council cannot find a satisfactory way of distributing its materials, there is no point wasting money on producing them.

Community organisations can also help the Council to assess whether its English written materials are written in a way that their communities are likely to understand. Often translation is unnecessary if information is written in plain, simple English, with appropriate illustrations.

The following is a checklist that can be applied to the Council’s communications strategies.

**Does your Council use the following strategies?**

**Public information**

- A general Council newsletter is distributed to the ethnic media (print and electronic) and ethnic agencies.
- Plain English is used in all publication communication such as letters, regulations, Council meetings etc.
- Information is in relevant multilingual format to promote community education about Council programs and services. Where possible, graphics are used to help those with low literacy skills to understand about services such as immunisation, recycling, building controls etc.
- International signs are used wherever possible, or a combination of symbols and words.

**Internal Information**

- To facilitate the use of translating and interpreting services, two way telephones or conference (hands free) telephones are available in all public contact areas in Council offices.
- Staff are trained in the correct way to use an interpreter, either by telephone or on-site.
- Language identification cards are available at all public contact sites.
- Bilingual staff are tested, trained and used for interpreting assistance where appropriate.
- As a general rule, children are not used as interpreters.
- Listing of bilingual staff contact information is easily accessible.

**4.10 MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Without constant monitoring and periodic evaluation the Council will have no way of determining whether it is achieving its goals or whether the Action Plan’s implementation is achieving better service provision and value for money. Evaluation strategies should be developed in connection with setting goals, targets and timeframes. Evaluation will enable the Council to review or modify the Plan, allocate resources more effectively and enhance outcomes.

The evaluation process should be designed to take account of:

- how often evaluation should take place
- documentation required to support the evaluation
- criteria for measuring performance
Key performance measures for monitoring and evaluation purposes could include the following:

- participation rates of specific groups on Council’s services and programs
- systems in place which encourage consumer participation including service pricing policies, bi-lingual staff, plain English publicity and culturally appropriate services offered at suitable times
- feedback and complaints
- needs-based local area planning and surveys used to inform budget process and service planning
- resource allocation, in terms of operational and capital works budgets, reflecting equity. The allocation could be based on data collection (population and service usage figures), staff training, provision of interpreters and translations etc.

A good evaluation process will inform Council about the success of its Action Plan, and it will also identify where more work needs to be done to change policies and procedures.

An annual Access and Equity Report can be prepared for the Council by the Access and Equity Steering Committee, project group or project officer, on the basis of an evaluation. Recommendations can then be made to Council about amending and improving the Action Plan and relevant Council policies.

Recognition of achievements and outcomes under the access and equity banner need to reinforce the belief that it is of value to:

- members of the community
- Councillors
- Council staff
- Government agencies
- other Councils.

This should be a core component of information provided in the Council’s Annual Report.

The Council’s Action Plan must be a dynamic plan which can change over time to respond to the local needs of people from non-English speaking cultures, but which provides ongoing accountability for implementing the principles of the National Charter.
References


Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Council of Australia (1990) *They May Mean Well, But…*, An Examination of First-Round Access & Equity Plans of Eight Commonwealth Government Departments, Sydney


Local Government and Shires Association of NSW (1994) *For One and All – Access and Equity in Local Government: a guide to customer services in a multicultural society*, Sydney

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs (1996) *A Fair Go For All*, Report on Access and Equity, Canberra


Local Government Structural Reform Advisory Committee (March 1996) *Advancing Local Government in Western Australia*, Perth


The literature review shows that the pre-conditions to achieving access and equity have evolved over quite some time. The following sequence was complete up to the end of 1997, but may not be exhaustive.

**COMMONWEALTH**

- In **1945** the Commonwealth Government established the Department of Immigration.
- **1973** a major achievement was the introduction of the *Telephone Interpreter Scheme* which later developed into the national, 24 hour, seven days a week Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS).
- **1975** the *Racial Discrimination Act* made it unlawful to discriminate against people because of their race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origins.
- **1978** the *Review of Migrant Programs and Services* (Galbally Report) was published. Its principles were that the needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community but that special programs and services - known as *ethno-specific services* - were necessary at the time to ensure equality of access and provision.
- **1979** saw the establishment of the *Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia* (FECCA). Since then FECCA, as a peak national organisation in Australia, has represented and promoted the concerns and aspirations of ethnic communities throughout Australia in co-operation with its constituents, and the eight State and Territory Ethnic Communities’ Councils. It has also provided well researched reports which include:
  - *'They May Mean Well, But..'* which was an examination of the first round of Access and Equity Plans of eight Commonwealth Government Departments.
  - A second report, *'It’s Different Out Here: Access and Equity at Regional Level'* was part of a comprehensive evaluation by the Access and Equity Task Force within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in February 1992.
  - A third report, *'Getting Started: Access and Equity in Local Government'* was a logical progression from the previous two studies. It emphasised the importance of ethnic community organisations as vital partners with Local Government in providing services for Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds who may not be competent in English, and whose lifestyles reflect the different cultures that make up this society.
- **1980** the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) commenced. (SBS radio started in 1975). There is nothing like the SBS anywhere else in the world. It provides a diversity of programs accessible to the entire Australian community and is widely acclaimed as an innovative cultural, educational and information channel.
- **1985** as one component of a broader social justice policy, the Access and Equity Strategy was introduced by the Commonwealth Government to improve access to Government services and programs by people from non-English speaking cultures. All portfolios were required to produce a three year Access and Equity Plan which identified obstacles to access and equity.
- **1986** the Review of Migrant Programs and Services recommended that increased resources be provided to the Access and Equity Strategy. Responsibility for administering the strategy was transferred from the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) to the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) in 1987, following OMA’s establishment in March of that year.
- **1989** the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia was launched representing the Government’s policy response to the changing composition of the Australian people. The Access and Equity Strategy was extended to address all groups facing racial, religious, cultural or linguistic barriers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Australian South Sea Islanders 1995.
- **1989 - 1991** The National Office of Local Government funded, as part of the Agenda on Multiculturalism, over 20 projects at a cost of $0.75m. The projects were designed to assist Local Government nationally to better respond to the needs of non-English speaking residents. This funding produced a lot of useful work as well as three national conferences.
• **1991** saw the Australian Language and Literacy Policy launched. The principles included English as the national language of Australia. English language skills empower people to participate fully in Australian society. Commonwealth funding for adult English as a Second Language (ESL) continued to be provided primarily through two programs; the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), administered by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, and Jobseeker, administered by the Department of Employment, Education and Training in 1994-1995.

• In **1992** an evaluation was carried out by the Office of Multicultural Affairs of the Access and Equity Strategy. The Government endorsed the 43 recommendations of the evaluation.

• In **1992** the National Integration Settlement Strategy (NISS) was developed, representing a formal, shared recognition of the responsibility of all governments for the delivery of services to migrants. This was supported by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, and the Australian Local Government Association.

• In **1994** the National Multicultural Advisory Council was appointed to provide advice on multicultural policy issues. In the same year the Multicultural Advisory Council’s report ‘Multicultural Australia: The Next Steps Towards and Beyond 2000’, reviewed the progress of policies and programs since the 1989 National Agenda.

• In November **1995** a National Accord was signed between the Commonwealth Government and the Australian Local Government Association. The Accord, among other things, acknowledged a joint responsibility to improve services to residents from non-English speaking cultures and to include them more fully in local political, economic and social processes.

• **1996** the Ministers of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs adopted a new Charter of Public Service for a Culturally Diverse Society. The Charter is a broad statement of rights and responsibilities of public authorities and their clients in a multicultural society. **Note: Adopted by all jurisdictions.**

**STATE GOVERNMENTS**

**New South Wales**

• **1976** the NSW Government initiated a wide ranging review into the needs of people from non-English speaking cultures in NSW.

• **1979** the Ethnic Affairs Commission was established as a permanent government agency.

• **1983** the Ethnic Affairs Policy Statement program was established and agencies were required to incorporate ethnic affairs strategies into policy and planning.

• **1993** a Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society was introduced in NSW.

• **1996** the Government adopted a whole-of-Government approach to ethnic affairs. An ethnic affairs action plan was launched by the Premier which set out the role the Government is to play. Agencies were obliged to report to the Ethnic Affairs Commission on their initiatives and future plans in providing services in a culturally diverse society.

• **1997** the principles of cultural diversity were adopted by the Government in legislation. The Ethnic Affairs Commission was obliged to prepare, and table in Parliament, an annual report on the status of ethnic affairs in NSW.

• **1998** the first annual report on ethnic affairs, ‘Ethnic Affairs Report 1997’, was presented to the NSW Premier, who is also the Minister for Ethnic Affairs.

**Victoria**

• **1989** the Local Government and Ethnic Affairs Ministerial Advisory Council was established. The aim of the Council was to assist Local Government and non-English speaking community organisations to work together and address access and equity issues at the Local Government level.

• **1992 to 1996** the Victorian Government developed an extensive Multicultural Affairs Policy which incorporated all Government Departments. The Multicultural Affairs Unit replaced the Ethnic Affairs Unit and the Victorian Multicultural Commission replaced the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission.

The policy includes the following areas:
- Language proficiency allowance
- Women
- Community services
- Health
- Multicultural education
- Aged care
- Grants
- Law and order
- Business and employment
- Local Government
- Interpreting and translating services
- Youth
- Multicultural media
- Arts
- Annual reports - all Victorian Government departments, agencies and statutory authorities were obliged to present to Parliament an annual report on their activities and administration.

The Victorian Government also introduced the Victorian Interpreter Card which provides access to free professional interpreting for Victorians who encounter difficulties communicating in English with State government departments and agencies. A *Pledge by the Government of Victoria to the People of Victoria* has been translated into 21 languages.

**South Australia**

• Prior to 1993 the SA Multicultural Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Office of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs pursued a strategy that focused on Multicultural Management Commitment Plans (MMCPs) for the implementation of multicultural policies, programs and initiatives.

• In 1993 the MMCP process was reviewed. It was decided that agencies should be free to achieve outcomes within the context of their own planning and review process without the requirement of MMCPs.

• In December 1995 the South Australian Government launched the *Declaration of Principles for a Multicultural South Australia*. The *Declaration* is a major government initiative established to ensure that access and equity underpins the policies, strategies and practices of all State government agencies in South Australia.

• In 1996 the Premier requested the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission to undertake an evaluation of access and equity across the South Australian public sector.

**Queensland**

• In 1993 The Queensland Ethnic Affairs Policy was launched and included a commitment to improving the design and delivery of services, taking into account the cultural diversity of the Queensland community.

• In 1996 an independent Review of Ethnic Affairs was conducted by the Queensland Ethnic Affairs Ministerial Advisory Committee. The review report was tabled in Parliament on 25 March 1997 and the Government is currently considering the recommendations of the review.

Western Australia

- **1984** the Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission was established as an independent statutory authority responsible to the Minister for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs. A distinctive feature of the Commission in Western Australia was the inclusion of a Sunset Clause, in the Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Act 1983 which stated that “upon the expiration of eight years calculated from the date on which this Act comes into force, the Commission shall cease to exist.” (Section 21 (1), 1983)

- **1991** the Office of Multicultural Interests replaced the Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission.

- **1992** the Western Australian Government introduced the Language Services Policy which aims to ensure that all Western Australians, regardless of their background or English language proficiency, are equally entitled to access the services and programs provided by State public sector agencies.

As part of the Language Services Policy, the Western Australian Government introduced the Western Australian Interpreter Card to assist the non-English speaking members of the Western Australian community obtain free interpreting services when dealing with State public sector agencies.

- **1995** the Western Australian Government launched its Multicultural Policy, WA ONE, which aims to assist the Government to manage cultural diversity in a way which maximises the cultural, economic and social benefits of diversity and maintains community cohesion and social harmony.

The Western Australian Government’s commitment to WA ONE is reflected in the *Pledge by the Government of Western Australia to the People* which is available in 21 community languages.

The Office of Multicultural Interests has developed guidelines to assist State Government agencies in implementation of WA ONE, entitled ‘Valuing Diversity: Guidelines for Government Agencies’. These Guidelines will assist agencies to respond equitably and efficiently to their culturally diverse clientele through the development and implementation of appropriate policies, programs and practices.

The Guidelines will also assist agencies to ensure that their human resource management practices respect the cultural diversity that exists within the workplace, and that these practices are free from unlawful discrimination.

The Western Australian Government has also developed a Community Relations Strategy to foster community harmony and to combat racism and prejudice. *Living in Harmony, A Community Relations Strategy for Western Australia*, is a whole-of-government approach, providing a framework for co-ordinating the community relations initiatives, strategies and activities currently being undertaken in Government agencies, in community organisations, in Local Government and in schools.

The Strategy, which was launched in October 1997, has also been designed to act as a catalyst for new community relations activities from all interest groups including the three spheres of government and the corporate sector.

Tasmania

- In Tasmania the Ethnic Communities’ Council has provided Aims and Objectives on ‘Access and Equity For All Australians’.

- The Government has introduced ‘Principles for Tasmania’s Culturally Diverse Society’, to guide the development of policies and services in all public sector organisations, and an annual reporting mechanism.

Northern Territory

- **1990-91** the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory was funded to run workshops to understand the needs of non-English speaking residents in Local Government.

- **1997** the Northern Territory Interpreter Card was released in October. The Interpreter Card aims to simplify access for people from culturally diverse backgrounds who have communication difficulties with government departments and agencies.
Appendix 2: Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society

INTRODUCTION
Access and equity policies aim to ensure that government services meet the needs of people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds so that they can participate fully in economic, social and cultural life. The importance of these policies has been recognised at Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local government levels.

The Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision has considered performance indicators which, amongst other things, reflect access and equity components of service delivery. In 1995, the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs agreed that increased efforts in access and equity were required by Australian governments.

ESTABLISHING A FRAMEWORK FOR BEST PRACTICE IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICE DELIVERY
A principal reform objective in OECD countries is to strengthen a customer-service orientation in public institutions. Charters of customer service provide a clear framework against which the effectiveness of service delivery can be monitored. They have been developed by private sector organisations, and Government Service Charters are being adopted in the public sector.

The Commonwealth access and equity strategy is being expressed in terms of this Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society, aimed at ensuring government services meet the particular needs of users and achieve intended outcomes for them. In a culturally diverse society like Australia it means making services culturally appropriate, accessible, consumer-oriented and effective.

CHARTER OF PUBLIC SERVICE IN A CULTURALLY DIVERSE SOCIETY
The Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society represents a new approach to access and equity. Too often access and equity have been an after-thought, an add on if service providers are aware of the difficulties people from different language and cultural backgrounds can face in accessing Government services and getting results from them. The Charter places the emphasis on building these cultural diversity considerations into the strategic planning, policy development, budgeting and reporting processes of government service delivery - irrespective of whether these services are provided by government agencies, community organisations or commercial enterprises. (The access and equity strategy has never been applied to government business enterprises such as Telstra and Australia Post, and it is not proposed to do so now. The strong customer service orientation of these bodies should ensure they service the needs of their diverse clientele.)

The Charter summarises seven principles central to the design, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of quality government services in a culturally diverse society: these are access, equity, communication, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. A set of practical implementation and monitoring strategies is appended to the Charter to provide best practice guidance to governments on implementation and reporting.

Some of the strategies may be considered pertinent to more than one principle. For instance, cultural diversity training for staff can facilitate not only the development of non-discriminatory services (access) but also improvements in the way clients are treated (equity) and the sensitivity of services to the needs of diverse clients (responsiveness).

The formulation of these seven principles, and the related guidelines, has taken into account Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Government statements on service delivery in a culturally diverse society. Consequently, the principles and associated strategies constitute a genuinely Federal framework for delivering culturally responsive government services that can be consistently applied across all levels of government.

This framework is intended to commit all Government service providers to integrating the Charter's seven principles into their strategic planning, policy and corporate reporting processes so that the services they provide enable Australians of all backgrounds to have the opportunity to achieve their potential and participate fully in our society.
The Principles

1. ACCESS

Government services should be available to everyone who is entitled to them and should be free of any form of discrimination irrespective of a person’s country of birth, language, culture, race or religion.

2. EQUITY

Government services should be developed and delivered on the basis of fair treatment of clients who are eligible to receive them.

3. COMMUNICATION

Government service providers should use strategies to inform eligible clients of services and their entitlements and how they can obtain them. Providers should also consult with their clients regularly about the adequacy, design and standard of government services.

4. RESPONSIVENESS

Government services should be sensitive to the needs and requirements of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and responsive as far as practicable to the particular circumstances of individuals.

5. EFFECTIVENESS

Government service providers should be ‘results oriented’, focussed on meeting the needs of clients from all backgrounds.

6. EFFICIENCY

Government service providers should optimise the use of available public resources through a user-responsive approach to service delivery which meets the needs of clients.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY

Government service providers should have a reporting mechanism in place which ensures they are accountable for implementing Charter objectives for clients (for example, by reporting on this in annual reports or other types of report).
BEST PRACTICE STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING AND REPORTING ON GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN A CULTURALLY DIVERSE SOCIETY

The following implementation and reporting strategies are not intended to be prescriptive. The implementation strategies identify a range of possible best practice activities which can help government service providers to incorporate and utilise cultural diversity in their policy and service delivery activities. Similarly, the monitoring and reporting approaches identify possible means that can help providers determine whether their practical strategies are proving to be effective.

The precise nature of implementation strategies, performance indicators and reporting mechanisms will ultimately be a matter for government departments and agencies to determine.

1. Practical strategies for achieving access:

- **Commitment to quality client services:** Agencies recognise the special needs of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, for example for English or other language assistance through the use of interpreters, in order to make services accessible and appropriate. Understanding customer needs assures quality in service.
  
  - Agencies need to be aware of possible double disadvantage that may be faced by indigenous or ethnic women, youth, older persons and disabled people when seeking to access government services.
  
  - Agencies need to recognise the needs of clients in remote areas through developing outreach and community liaison arrangements. (This is also relevant to the incorporation of equity and communication considerations in service delivery arrangements.)

- **Training:** Public sector training programs in policy development, service delivery, and program management incorporate cultural diversity issues.

- **Prevention of discrimination:** Staff receive ongoing cultural diversity training so that they develop knowledge and skills to work effectively from a cultural framework.

Achievement of equal access to government services could be monitored by:

- Ensuring the regular collection, maintenance, analysis and use of data on potentially disadvantaged groups on the basis of their cultural and linguistic background, and using other data sources as appropriate.

- Where appropriate, reporting on proportional take up rates of clients categorised by their country of birth or cultural or linguistic background compared with their percentage composition of the total population in the service target group or catchment area.

While it is recognised that not everything can be quantified, some measurable indicators of access (such as proportional take up rates) can be useful in helping agencies to determine whether a strategy has succeeded or not - or to what degree it has succeeded.

2. Practical strategies for achieving equity:

- **Recognising and valuing difference:** Clients have different opportunities, education, skills and needs; agencies take account of these differences in the ways services are designed and delivered (for example, by either employing ethnic or indigenous staff to deal with sensitive issues that affect ethnic or indigenous clients; or by developing networks with relevant agencies which could provide support to staff members on specific ethnic or indigenous issues).

- **Removing barriers:** Agencies help clients to overcome possible disadvantage caused by country of birth, language, culture, race and religion (for example, by employing ethnic or Aboriginal liaison officers) so that everyone receives fair treatment from government services.
Achievement of equity by government services could be monitored through:

- Qualitative information obtained via consultations with client groups.
- Use of program outcomes reports and, where appropriate, evaluation case studies to illustrate relative impact on different client groups.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in quantifying certain processes and outcomes, some measurable indicators of equity (such as a reduction in the level of complaints about unfair treatment) will help agencies determine whether a strategy has succeeded, and to what degree it has succeeded.

3. Practical strategies for achieving communication:

- **Informing eligible clients:** Agencies use a range of information strategies to inform clients from different backgrounds about services. Strategies include the provision of information in languages other than English, and through both print and electronic media.

- **Consultation:** Agencies consult with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds at all stages in program planning, design, delivery and evaluation, and provide feedback to customers about the outcomes of these consultations. Agencies also consult with other providers and levels of government, as appropriate, to ensure co-ordination of services appropriate to clients’ needs.

- **Participation:** Where appropriate, agencies include people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds on decision-making and advisory bodies so that a broad range of views is brought to bear on all key decisions. In this regard, agencies make use of existing registers of people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to make appointments to these bodies.

Achievement of informative, consultative and participatory government services could be monitored through:

- Evidence of the use of information strategies, including the use of television and Aboriginal and ethnic radio and translated materials, so that all clients, whatever their background, receive appropriate information about services.

- Numbers of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds involved in consultative arrangements.

4. Practical strategies for achieving responsiveness:

- **Flexible services:** Agencies optimise the reach and impact of mainstream government programs through adapting their service delivery to the particular needs of different clients.

Achievement of cultural sensitivity and responsiveness of government services could be monitored through:

- Evidence of client needs assessments undertaken and taken into account.

- Evidence of staff undertaking cultural diversity training.

- Measurement of the level of client satisfaction with services through structured feedback.

- Evidence of marketing of services to all sections of the community.

5. Practical strategies for achieving effectiveness:

- **Collecting data:** Agencies collect data to identify the possible causes of disadvantage associated with a client’s cultural and linguistic background which could affect their accessing and benefiting from government services. Key characteristics could include birthplace; whether a person’s first language spoken was English, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background; Australian South Sea Islander background; date of birth, year of arrival in Australia; birthplace of parents; sex; and religion. The collection of data will not always include all these items. The relevance of these data items will vary depending on the service delivery context.
Government service providers need to acknowledge the importance of protecting individuals’ privacy when collecting data. Consideration needs to be given to:

- collecting only data essential to the particular service delivery or evaluation purpose;
- guaranteeing anonymity; and
- ensuring that all data collection proposals are non-intrusive.

- **Performance monitoring and reporting**: Agencies develop appropriate performance indicators for assessing if program outcomes have been achieved for clients, consistent with stated objectives.

- **Utilising staff skills**: Agencies recognise, utilise and remunerate the linguistic skills, cultural knowledge and community contacts of their staff, as appropriate.

**Achievement of ‘results-oriented’ government services could be monitored through:**

- The extent to which clients of a program achieve agreed objectives within a specified time frame.
- Percentage and number of clients satisfied with quality of service; and helpfulness of staff.

By having in place measurable indicators of effectiveness (for example, client satisfaction survey data) agencies will be better able to determine whether a strategy is successful or not.

6. **Practical strategies for achieving efficiency**:

- **Planning**: The needs of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are considered in all stages of the program cycle: strategic planning (especially inclusion in vision statements or corporate goals); policy development; program design; service delivery; and evaluation and reporting.

- **Managing resources**: Within available resources, agencies continuously improve the quality of service delivery and seek innovative ways of bringing services to clients; for example, through new technology and partnerships with other agencies. These initiatives take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of clients. Agencies also recognise the needs of clients in remote areas through developing outreach and community liaison arrangements.

**Achievement of efficient government services could be monitored through evidence of government agencies allowing for costs associated with developing culturally responsive and accessible services in the course of their budget planning. Where a service is delivered by a non-government contractor these considerations would need to be factored into agencies’ tendering bids and contracts.**

Having indicators of efficiency can help agencies to determine whether a strategy has succeeded and the degree to which it has succeeded.

7. **Practical strategies for achieving accountability**:

- **Public accountability**: Accountability is focussed on outputs and results as well as inputs and processes. Government departments and agencies also need to report on the outcomes they have achieved for clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This can be done through departmental/agency annual reports.

- **Contractual obligations**: Where a program or service is delivered via an intermediary, such as another level of government or a non-government organisation, the funding conditions in contracts specify relevant access and equity accountabilities (for example, collection and reporting of information on client characteristics).

**Achievement of accountable and transparent government services should be assured through the reporting mechanisms specified above.**