



Engagement Protocols for working with Disability Representative Organisations

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1. Purpose of this document

The Engagement Protocols for working with Disability Representative Organisations (Engagement Protocols) is a guide for Australian Government entities on engaging with organisations funded through the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the department), under the Disability Representative Organisations (DRO) program.

The Engagement Protocols aim to explain the mechanism for engaging DROs and guidance on activities that are in scope of the DRO program.

2. Overview of the DRO Program

2.1 About the program

The DRO program provides the opportunity for all people with disability and their representative organisations to communicate their views to government.

The funding enables organisations to provide systemic advocacy for Australians with disability.

Systemic advocacy seeks to address social barriers and discrimination faced by people with disability as a group. Funding under the DRO program enables organisations to:

- promote an understanding of the lived experiences of people with disability
- promote and advocate for the rights and dignity of people with disability
- support the participation of people with disability in aspects of community life.

DROs are independent from government and therefore operate autonomously and prioritise which activities to engage with to represent their cohorts.

Some DROs represent people with a specific impairment, while others represent people with disability across particular populations or demographics.

A list of DROs can be found at <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/disability-representative-organisations-program>.

Direct, early and meaningful engagement with DROs is important to achieve policy outcomes that appropriately consider both direct and indirect impacts on people with disability. Alongside *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031* (found at <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads/strategy>), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) underpins the DRO program. It requires consultation and active involvement with people with disability on matters that affect them, through their representative organisations (Article 4(3)).

DROs promote and work within the human rights model of disability, in recognition that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people with disability should be promoted and protected on an equal basis with others. The DRO program funding is not intended to subsidise substantial co-design or long-term engagement by government, such as significant reform work.

Government entities may need to consider providing DROs additional funds in some circumstances. See [Section 2.3.2 Activities that may require additional funding](#) for further details.

There is also an expectation that DROs will attract ongoing funds from other sources from across and outside of government to support their advocacy role.

2.2 Funded DRO program activities

DROs participate in a range of engagement activities on behalf of the Australian Government. These activities ensure that the diverse voices of people with disability are represented in decision-making, legislation, policy development and the implementation of programs and policies.

Activities may include:

- Active and accessible consultation with people with disability and their families and carers on matters that are the government's responsibility that affect them.
- Participating in a wide range of engagement activities to inform government, especially as they relate to the government priorities, such as the areas identified in Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, located at www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/australias-disability-strategy-2021-2031. This may include:
 - Informing government about issues relevant to people with disability and their experience with mainstream service systems that the government has responsibility for, including by providing advice and recommendations to improve the accessibility of mainstream service systems where they interface with other levels of government.
 - Informing government about issues for which other levels of government have shared responsibility.
 - Providing advice and recommendations on proposed legislation or policies affecting the disability sector, and other sectors relevant to people with disability.
 - Providing input into reviews, inquiries and consultative processes.
 - Enabling the direct experiences of people with disability to be considered in co-design and consultation processes.
 - Collecting and analysing information representing the views of people with disability about the inclusion of people with disability in services, policies and programs.
 - Providing social policy or research papers to government.
- Other activities to promote an understanding of the lived experiences of people with disability, promote and advocate for the rights and dignity of people with disability, and foster support for the participation of people with disability in aspects of community life, including:
 - Disseminating and coordinating information about government policies, programs and systems.
 - Developing and delivering communications and media campaigns in line with Article 8 of the UN CRPD.
 - Promoting an understanding of the lives of people with disability; promoting, protecting and advocating for the human rights of people with disability and fostering support for their participation in all aspects of community life.
 - Encouraging and advocating for the dignity, rights and well-being of people with disability.
 - Promoting and advocating for specific objectives contained in relevant provisions under the UN CRPD.
- International representation by Australians with disability, as part of UN CRPD and related UN Treaty obligations, at approved international representation events.

2.3 Coordination of DRO program activities

The National Coordination Function (NCF) has been established to support DRO program activities and improve collaboration between DROs by providing secretariat and other key coordination functions.

The NCF enables DROs to more effectively organise and prioritise their engagement to improve the productivity and impact of the DRO program. Through these activities, the NCF is intended to deliver:

- Improved collaboration between DROs, leading to more coordinated input and advice to government.
- More streamlined and strategic reporting to the department on the outputs of DRO work, providing a clearer picture of DRO success and supporting reporting requirements.

2.3.1 Processes for engaging with DROs

Government entities wishing to engage with DROs should contact the NCF or directly contact the organisation/s representing the cohorts they wish to engage with.

2.3.2 Activities that may require additional funding

Some activities in scope of the DRO program may require additional funding to ensure organisations have capacity to participate. There are five main circumstances where additional funding may be appropriate:

- Short-term intensive activities, such as an expert panel or multi-day workshops.
- Ongoing or substantial activities that require regular engagement of more than 10 hours over a 12-month period.
- Activities that require on-costs for organisations beyond standard operations, for example:
 - resource-intensive activities that engage hard-to-reach cohorts
 - engagement activities that require substantial contextualisation to make them accessible for the cohort
 - partnering for the development of products.
- Facilitating workshops with people with disability to inform government.
- Activities that do not relate to Commonwealth responsibilities including consultation on state or territory programs.

More information on processes for payment for activities that may require additional funding is available at [Section 3.2 Payment for DRO services](#).

3. Protocols for working with DROs

3.1 Timeframes for consultation

Government entities should provide DROs with sufficient time to respond to consultation and engagement requests to facilitate meaningful and effective participation. Prior to engaging with DROs, government entities should research their relevant topic area to understand if there are any existing recommendations, activities or advice. When undertaking consultation, wherever possible, government entities should discuss and reach an agreement with DROs on a tailored timeline to suit the capacity and capability of relevant organisations, and the nature of engagement required.

For **meetings and committees**:

- Government entities should provide any papers to DROs at least 5 business days prior to a meeting.
- Meetings should be scheduled at least 10 business days in advance to ensure accessibility requirements, such as interpreters and captioning can be met.
- Meeting transcripts or summaries should be made available to attendees.

When **seeking feedback or input**:

- DROs should be given at least 10 business days to respond to standard requests.
- Where DROs are asked to consult with their members and stakeholders as part of this process, appropriate and realistic timeframes for this engagement should be discussed.

When **partnering on projects/service delivery**, government entities should work with DROs to agree on an appropriate budget and timeline for the delivery of partner projects - noting that these might vary depending on the complexity of the project.

Where **engagement or feedback** is required from DROs within a shorter than minimum required timeframe as outlined above, the reasons for priority consultation should be clearly communicated.

DRO capability to participate in activities may vary depending on available resourcing and organisational priorities. DROs may therefore require additional time to respond to consultation requests.

3.2 Payment for DRO services

Most one-off engagement with DROs on activities outlined in [Section 2.2 Funded DRO program activities](#) will not require payment to DROs as the engagement would likely be within the scope of the DRO program funding. Additional funding may be required depending on the level of resourcing needed for that engagement.

Where a government entity requests DRO representation in a time-intensive engagement or other engagements outside the scope of the DRO program, the department recommends government entities consider paying sitting fees for their participation and contribution.

Sitting fees should be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the scope of the engagement and agreed upon with the relevant DROs. Government entities should consider how payment rates vary between organisations, engagement timeframes, resourcing and the position of the representative(s) involved in the engagement.

Government entities may like to consider the Remuneration Tribunal (Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-time Public Office), found at www.remtribunal.gov.au/part-time-offices.

3.3 Supporting DROs to participate in engagements

3.3.1 Ensuring engagements are accessible

Government entities are responsible for ensuring that engagement activities (i.e. meetings and resources) are accessible. This is important as some engagements may require additional planning, booking and/or external supports.

For further information on ensuring engagements are accessible, please refer to the Good Practice Guidelines for Engaging with People with Disability (The Guidelines), found at www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/good-practice-guidelines.

3.3.2 Ensuring engagements are culturally safe

When engaging with DROs, consideration of cultural safety is essential. This means ensuring the engagement is inclusive of all participants, their needs and their identity. Government entities may wish to consider whether the location or delivery method of the engagement is culturally appropriate and have relevant information available in languages other than English.

4. Effective follow up after a consultation

Following an engagement with DROs, government entities should provide information to organisations or participants about the outcomes and impact of their participation. This can include informing them of the changes made because of their feedback, how the information will be used, who it will be shared with, when decisions/changes might occur or if their feedback was not implemented. Reasons for these decisions should also be communicated to organisations or participants.

5. Review

The department and DROs will review this document annually or as required to ensure it is providing sufficient guidance for government entities to engage effectively with DROs.

The Guidelines will be taken into consideration for any reviews of the Engagement Protocols. The Guidelines have been developed as part of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 to facilitate improvements in the engagement with and inclusion of people with disability in community consultation, legislative reforms, policy development and government decision-making.

DROs are encouraged to provide feedback to the department or the NCF on the effectiveness of the Engagement Protocols as part of these reviews.

Please contact SystemicDisabilityAdvocacy@Health.gov.au should you require clarification or additional information regarding the DRO program.