
VCAT **Stakeholder Engagement Framework**

2018:2022

Foreword

Stakeholder engagement is critical for VCAT in delivering an accessible and effective justice service for all Victorians.



Justice Greg Garde
AO RFD



Our stakeholders – whether they are customers, government agencies, the legal profession, support services, or peak bodies – represent broad sectors of the community and have valuable insights and perspectives that assist VCAT to effectively service the community’s diverse needs.

To meet our commitment to increasing access to justice and delivering an outstanding service, we must work collaboratively and build responsive relationships with our stakeholders. Access to justice is a collaborative effort. This Framework adopts an approach to stakeholder engagement that aligns with our values of being approachable and accessible; while maintaining our values of independence and impartiality.

The International Framework for Tribunal Excellence¹, states that:

“Tribunals serve the public through the provision of accessible, fair and efficient dispute resolution services. In delivering that service they are accountable to the public. Regular stakeholder/community engagement... (is) also part of ensuring that the tribunal is accountable to the public.”

Tribunals should actively seek the views of key stakeholders... and the community in evaluating aspects of tribunal services and in the process of identifying areas of improvement.”

A key priority under our *Strategic Plan: VCAT for the future 2018-2022* is strengthening the effectiveness of our stakeholder relationships and improving the ways we consult, collaborate and respond.

This ‘whole-of-VCAT’ Stakeholder Engagement Framework seeks to build stronger, more responsive stakeholder relationships, define roles and responsibilities and facilitate purposeful two-way feedback mechanisms.

At the same time, VCAT is an independent judicial organisation and maintaining this independence and perception of independence in relation to our stakeholders is paramount.

The Framework responds to findings from a previous stakeholder engagement survey, submissions in the *Access to Justice Review* and consultations as part of our 2017 strategic planning process, which suggest the tribunal needs to be more responsive to stakeholder concerns and perspectives.

To achieve this, we recognise that stakeholder engagement must be embedded within VCAT's culture and core functions. This Framework aims to incorporate stakeholder engagement at a strategic level, within our project and program governance and our day-to-day operations.

In line with VCAT's Leadership Model, all our leaders – members and staff – are responsible for the success of VCAT's stakeholder engagement. This includes playing an active role in communicating our priorities externally and being open to new opportunities to build relationships.

We also recognise that across the organisation VCAT members and staff are interacting with stakeholders every day. For example, through customer services, conferences, meetings, one-on-one communication, phone calls and workplace visits. This informal engagement contributes to the open and responsive relationships we seek.

We value the contribution our stakeholders make in assisting us to deliver well-targeted services. Adopting the principles and guidance in this Framework will enable us to better deliver on our objectives for the benefit of all sectors of the community.

Justice Greg Garde
AO RFD, President

¹ International Framework for Tribunal Excellence, June 2017, www.coat.gov.au/publications/frameworks.html

VCAT's vision is to serve the needs of the community by resolving disputes in a timely, cost-effective and efficient way. To achieve this, we need to engage people with a vested interest in what we do through effective two-way communication and interaction.



Purpose of the Framework

Stakeholder engagement is fundamental to our ability to deliver on our strategic objectives. This involves listening to our stakeholders, keeping them informed and ensuring we respond to their priorities and perspectives in a timely and productive way.

VCAT's Stakeholder Engagement Framework sets out how we will do this. It includes how we identify our stakeholders, the

range of mechanisms we use, how we ensure we are engaging meaningfully and how we evaluate and communicate our performance. This Framework seeks to ensure our stakeholder engagement is consistent, on-going, co-ordinated and purposeful. It requires all our major projects, programs and initiatives to develop and implement Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plans.

AUDIENCE FOR THIS FRAMEWORK



The Stakeholder Engagement Framework is relevant for all areas of VCAT – our divisions, lists, registry, administration, strategic projects and programs.

Objectives of stakeholder engagement

Our services deliver better outcomes when our stakeholders are engaged. We consider stakeholder engagement important for a number of reasons including:

- » ensuring a good understanding of the views and expectations of our stakeholders
- » ensuring our service design and delivery meets community needs in line with VCAT's Design Principles
- » informing stakeholders about VCAT's role and legal requirements
- » identifying opportunities and risks for our organisation
- » informing the development of our strategies and priorities
- » fostering positive, productive stakeholder relationships.

BENEFITS FOR VCAT

- 01 Increased access to VCAT through improved understanding of stakeholder and community need
- 02 More efficient, affordable and high quality services through greater collaboration
- 03 Enhanced perception and confidence in VCAT through open communication
- 04 Greater participation by under-represented groups through inclusive engagement, such as the Koori community and people with disabilities
- 05 Improved understanding of VCAT's role and awareness of our services

BENEFITS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

- 01 Opportunities to contribute to the development and delivery of our services
- 02 More open and transparent lines of communication
- 03 Opportunities to have issues heard and addressed for their benefit or the benefit of their constituents
- 04 Greater understanding of VCAT's processes and operating environment

Our key stakeholders

VCAT interacts with a diverse range of external stakeholders – from those who have an interest in justice outcomes for the Victorian community, to those who receive our services or are impacted by VCAT decisions.

They include the following categories:

- » customers and the community
- » government (at all levels from the Attorney-General to local government)
- » legal organisations and professionals
- » advocacy and community support groups
- » not-for-profits
- » professional organisations such as Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association (VPELA)
- » media.

IDENTIFYING OUR STAKEHOLDERS

The AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard gives guidance on how to identify stakeholder groups. It is an internationally recognised standard widely adopted by government and non-government organisations. Jurisdictions including the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the County Court of Victoria are adopting this standard, as well as the Victorian Auditor General's Office.

To assist in identifying our stakeholders we categorise them according to the following attributes:

Influence

Groups or individuals who can impact VCAT's or VCAT's stakeholders' strategic or operational decision-making.

Dependency

Groups or individuals who are directly or indirectly impacted by VCAT's services, or on whom VCAT is dependent in order to operate.

Responsibility

Groups or individuals to whom VCAT has legal, operational or ethical responsibilities. For example, responsibility under Victoria's *Disability Act 2006* towards people with disabilities and vulnerable Victorians seeking equal access to justice.

Different perspectives

Groups or individuals whose different perspectives could lead to a new understanding of an issue and identification of opportunities for action that might otherwise not occur.

Our approach

VCAT's approach to stakeholder engagement is based on the principles of the international AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard² and the International Association for Public Participation³ (IAP2).

Both are designed to help organisations select the most appropriate level of participation required for each stakeholder group.

The diversity of our lists, stakeholders and issues we deal with means that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to engaging our stakeholders. Different methods are needed depending on the stakeholders, the issues, sensitivities, timeframes and desired outcomes. The IAP2 provides a tool (see page 9) for ensuring the level and method of engaging stakeholders is fit-for-purpose.

MAINTAINING VCAT'S INDEPENDENCE

It is important to manage issues of independence and impartiality especially when a stakeholder is likely to appear regularly before VCAT as a party (for example, Consumer Affairs Victoria appears frequently in the Residential Tenancies, Review and Regulation and Civil Claims List). This involves drawing clear boundaries around the issues we engage on and how we engage – including complying with VCAT's policies, strategic priorities and legislative requirements.

Maintaining the tribunal's independence, and perception of independence, means that it may not be appropriate to act on every concern a stakeholder has. We can, however, ensure we acknowledge the feedback, even if we decided it was inappropriate to act on it.

² AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard 2015
www.accountability.org/standards/aa1000ses.html

³ International Association for Public Participation website
www.iap2.org.au/Home

Levels of engagement

The tool on the next page is a guide to levels and methods of engagement. The appropriate approach varies depending on the purpose of engagement, the stakeholders, timeframes and the issues.



Stakeholder engagement can be regular and formal or on an as-needs basis and informal. It includes a 'promise' to stakeholders which explains the purpose and level of their involvement.



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Stakeholder engagement goals	To provide balanced, objective, accurate and consistent information to assist stakeholders to understand a process, new initiative or program.	To obtain feedback from stakeholders on analysis, alternatives and/or outcomes.	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their perspectives and needs are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the stakeholder including the development of alternatives, making decisions and the identification of mutually preferred solutions.
Promise to stakeholders	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge perspectives and aspirations, and provide feedback on the outcome.	We will work with you to ensure your concerns are reflected in the program/project developed and provide feedback on how your input influenced the outcome.	We will partner with you on service delivery models and innovations, work with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your recommendations into the decision-making outcomes to the maximum extent possible.
Methods of engagement include	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Tailored communication » Meetings » Public submissions » Website » Social media » Factsheets » Industry seminars » Public events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » User groups » One-on-one meetings » Public forums » Surveys » Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Workshops » Project reference groups » External user testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Stakeholder committees » Co-design workshops and working groups

Our engagement activities

VCAT interacts with stakeholders in different contexts, for a range of purposes. The types of engagement and responsibilities fall broadly into five categories.

01

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Responsibility: President and CEO – supported by Strategic Communications.

Involves: Promoting our strategic agenda to external stakeholders at senior levels, managing sensitive issues, providing insights and advice to Government on policy formulation affecting VCAT services and identifying opportunities to work with stakeholders on integrated service models. For example, submissions to policy reviews, funding submissions, meetings with the Attorney-General and the Department of Justice and Regulation.

Objective: To ensure VCAT is able to deliver responsive and effective services for the long term – by responding to changes and risks in the external environment and promoting innovative solutions to specific issues.

Level: Inform and consult.

02

LEGAL AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Responsibility: Heads of Division and Heads of List; Principal Registrar and Registrars; Director of Operations and Manager of Operations. Supported by Strategic Communications.

Involves: Two-way communication and feedback with individual stakeholders or groups of stakeholders about process changes and areas for improvement. For example, ad hoc meetings, user group meetings, information sessions, industry conferences and seminars.

Objective: To improve processes and make it easier for stakeholders and people they represent to understand and navigate VCAT's legal processes.

Level: Inform and consult.

03

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Responsibility: Project, Program Managers/Sponsors, with oversight from Steering Committees – supported by Strategic Communication.

Includes: Services, programs and specific projects of strategic priority for VCAT.

Objective: To ensure successful program/project delivery and desired outcomes for customers and VCAT – by involving stakeholders with specific expertise and individuals/groups who are impacted.

Level: Inform, consult, and collaborate.

04

INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Responsibility: Project Managers/ Sponsors, Steering Committees for example, Diversity Committee; Koori Engagement Manager. Supported by Strategic Communications.

Involves: Actively including under-represented stakeholders in VCAT's consultation processes, such as the Koori community and people with disabilities, as outlined in the Koori Inclusion Action Plan and the Accessibility Action Plan.

Objective: To improve access and participation against agreed measures of success, ensuring the needs are well considered within the design and innovations of our services.

Level: Inform, consult, involve and collaborate.

05

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND AWARENESS-RAISING

Responsibility: Strategic Communications.

Involves: Two types of activity:

1. engaging users in the design of our services and
2. raising the community's awareness and understanding of VCAT's role and how to access the tribunal.

Objective: To improve access and participation by:

1. delivering customer-centric services to meet the needs and expectations of the community;
2. promoting a greater understanding of VCAT and our processes.

Level: Inform, consult, involve and collaborate.

06

MEDIA

Responsibility: Strategic Communications.

Involves: Managing media requests for information, informing media of suppression orders, responding to media and social media coverage, in line with VCAT's Media Policy.

Objective: To support accurate reporting and promote positive perceptions of VCAT, and ensure media compliance with *VCAT Act and Open Courts Act*, including protecting the rights and privacy of parties.

Level: Inform.

Our values and engagement principles

Our values guide the way we work with stakeholders. We are:



Fair
Professional
Efficient
Independent
Approachable
Accessible

Our principles for engaging stakeholders are:

01

INDEPENDENT

VCAT's independence is critical to ensuring the administration of justice and rights of all parties to fair hearings. In our dealings with individuals and groups of stakeholders we will uphold our independence, and ensure that we do not favour one stakeholder over another.

02

RESPONSIVE

We value our stakeholders and their contribution to improving outcomes. We recognise that engagement is a two-way process and appreciate the benefits of mutual learning and understanding. We listen to our stakeholders and respond to their concerns or suggestions for improvements, recognising that we may not always be able to act on feedback in line with the need for impartiality and independence in delivering justice.

03

PURPOSEFUL

We are specific, purposeful and appropriate in our communications and set expectations from the outset. We have a clearly defined process and scope from the start. While engagement is driven by VCAT's strategic priorities, we are mindful of stakeholders' own objectives and expertise.

04

INCLUSIVE

We commit to including stakeholders in developing new processes and procedures that affect them. We create opportunities to include input from stakeholders who are harder to reach, for reasons such as language, culture, mobility or location.

05

TIMELY

Where appropriate, we will include stakeholders early in a process, project or proposal and before significant decisions are made on matters or issues that may affect our stakeholders. We respond to matters or issues raised by stakeholders in a timely manner.

06

**OPEN AND
TRANSPARENT**

We are open and honest in our transactions and provide information that enables stakeholders to engage in a meaningful way. We set clear expectations about the engagement process, including timeframes and response times. Stakeholders know how to provide input to VCAT outside scheduled engagement activities. We will advise stakeholders on the outcomes.

07

**RESPECTFUL
AND TRUSTING**

We engage in a courteous and respectful way and expect the same from our stakeholders. We listen to and are respectful of different stakeholder perspectives, seek to understand their interests and needs and how they want to engage. We acknowledge that engagement is a two-way process and respect that stakeholders may have different priorities to us.

**We ask our stakeholders
to engage in an
equally respectful
and transparent way.**

Measuring success

Measuring the success of our stakeholder engagement is critical to delivering our objectives outlined in the Framework.

At a VCAT-wide level, the Annual Stakeholder and Customer Satisfaction Surveys enable us to consider what we are doing well and how we can improve our approaches to get the best outcomes for our stakeholders and VCAT.

We measure success of our customer satisfaction against a target of 90 per cent by 2019-2020.

A Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey will be conducted each year for all key stakeholders and user groups across lists. A target will be set after the first year of the survey in 2019 to measure our success against.

In addition, the Customer Service Improvement Program, Operations and Website team conduct regular analysis and reporting of online feedback, complaints and direct feedback from stakeholders. They provide indicator of how well we are responding to the perceptions, needs and concerns of our customer stakeholder groups.

At a project or program level, different indicators may be chosen as part of the Stakeholder evaluation, and will be dependent on the intended outcomes of the engagement activity and determined at a case-by-case basis.



- » Annual Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey
- » Customer Satisfaction Survey
- » Project/program evaluations

Communicating the results of our stakeholder engagement

We will promote our commitment to the principles of stakeholder engagement through a statement on VCAT's website.

In addition, we will communicate results of stakeholder engagement surveys in our Annual Report and reporting against the Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

Checklist for success

- ✓ Keep stakeholders informed and regularly updated on changes and new initiatives that might impact them
- ✓ Have a well-documented Stakeholder Engagement Plan
- ✓ Identify stakeholders who are impacted by an activity or service
- ✓ Be inclusive – balance the needs of marginalised and less vocal stakeholders with vocal and powerful stakeholders
- ✓ Be clear with stakeholders about the intended purpose and outcomes of engagement activities
- ✓ Ask stakeholders how they want to be engaged
- ✓ Provide timely responses to issues and concerns raised by stakeholders
- ✓ Ensure messages are consistent with VCAT's strategic priorities and other program/project messages
- ✓ Seek feedback from stakeholders about the engagement process
- ✓ Communicate outcomes of stakeholder engagement

VCAT **Stakeholder** **Engagement** **Framework**

2018:2022