



# 10 Top Tips

**How to include people with  
cognitive disabilities in meetings.**

[voiceatthetable.com.au](http://voiceatthetable.com.au)



**Easy English**

# History of Voice at the Table



Voice at the Table started in 2016.



The Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU) started Voice at the Table.



Voice at the Table started because:

People with intellectual disabilities and acquired brain injury do not get to have a say.

For example:

They were not included on boards, committees and advisory groups.



From 2018 – 2020 The Victorian Government funded Voice at the Table.

# History of Voice at the Table



From 2020-2024 got a grant from The Australian Government to fund Voice at the Table.



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services

The grant was called the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program grant.



For more information about Voice at the Table and our training go to:

[www.voiceatthetable.com.au](http://www.voiceatthetable.com.au)



# Voice at the Table

## 10 Top Tips

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Nothing about  
us without us

We recognise the members of self advocacy groups who have worked tirelessly over the years for the right to live in the community and for equality and human rights for all.

## Acknowledgement of Country

**We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community.**

**We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and elders, past, present and future.**



# Tip 1

## What is Consumer Participation?



# What is consumer participation?

## Quote

**“I would love to see a person with a disability working alongside every single politician. I just think it would be a better world”.**

**Colin Hiscoe,  
Reinforce Self Advocacy Group**



## Resources

- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act  
<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/disability-discrimination-act-25th-anniversary-easy-read>
- Victorian Disability Discrimination Act (2006)
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006)
- Disability discrimination Laws  
<https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/disability/>
- Consumer participation and engagement: The Health Issue Centre  
<https://hic.org.au/consumer-engagement-resources-october-2021/>

# Tip 1



## What is Consumer Participation?



Consumer participation is when you are asked what you think about a service.



Services need to ask you how their services must run.



Consumer participation means you can make changes to services.



Consumer participation means your ideas are equal to everyone else's.

# Tip 1



## Why does consumer participation matter?



You need to have a say about the things that affect your life.



In Australia we have laws that say you have the right to speak up.



“I would love to see a person with a disability working alongside every single politician. I just think it would be a better world”.

Colin Hiscoe,  
Reinforce Self Advocacy Group



# Tip 2

**What do I have to do  
to be prepared?**



# What do I have to do to be prepared?

## Quote

**“It is important to make sure all participants on a committee are aware of ABI and its components. Prior to the meeting have the person run a session about ABI. ABI is called the invisible disability because sometimes people assume if you can walk and talk you are O.K.”**

**Peta Ferguson,  
Brain Injury Matters**



Brain Injury Matters

## What do I have to do to be prepared?

### Tips to get ready for meetings



Services are better when everyone's ideas are listened to.



Services need to understand these next tips.



### 1. Equity

What does Equity mean?

Equity means everyone is given what they need to join in.



### 2. Respect

What does Respect mean?

You and your ideas are appreciated and seen as valuable.



## 3. Listen to everyone

People pay attention to what you are saying when you are being listened to.



## 4. Share our learning

We learn by sharing what we know.



## 5. Clear information

When information is accessible and supports you to learn new things.



## 6. Action

What does Action mean?

Action means these meetings will change the way things are.

**“Please treat us like everyone else in the meeting. Be patient. Sometimes we can’t get out what we want to say straight away.”**

**VATT Working Group**



# Tip 3

**Why do I need to know participants' roles?**



# Why do I need to know participants roles?

## Quote

**“It is very confusing (when I don’t know what my role is on a committee) It makes me feel disheartened. Being a member of a committee you should know what is going on and be prepared. If you are not prepared you are just floundering.”**

**Julyne Ainsely ,  
VATT Graduate Training Team**



## Why do I need to know what the roles are?



What is your role?

Your role is what you do in your job as Consumer Advocate.

Having a clear role allows you to work well.



Your role is to talk about your lived experience.



It is important that you know what your role is.

Everyone should know what your role is.

## What does the organisation need to tell you?



They need to tell you what they do.

# Tip 3



They need to tell you what the point of the meeting is.



You need to know what the roles of the Chair and other committee members are.



You need to know:

- the dates for all the meetings
- how long the meetings go for
- how many meetings there will be
- what you will need to read before the meeting.



You need to know that you will be paid and how much.

If anyone is being paid, everyone needs to be paid.



You need to know what the organisation's policies are

- policies like how you make a complaint
- policies about what cannot be talked about outside the meeting.



# Tip 4

**How do I identify  
and remove barriers?**



## What are barriers? How do we take them away?



**Barriers are things that stop you from having a say.**

What stops you from having a say?



### 1. Access Needs

- What are your access needs?
- Everyone has different access needs.



### 2. Information

- Everything you get has to be easy for you to read
- Plain English or Easy English
- Tip 5 tells you more



### 3. Communication

- You should be asked how you want to get your information.
- You should be able to understand all the information you get sent.

# Tip 4



## What do some people with disabilities worry about?



### 1. When you do not know

- where is the meeting?
- where is the Zoom link?
- when is the meeting?



### 2. Will my access needs be met?



### 3. Will I be the only person with a disability?

# Tip 4



## What are the barriers organisations make?

- Are you spoken to like an adult?
- Are you treated like you are an expert?
- Are you taken seriously?



## Was the meeting accessible?

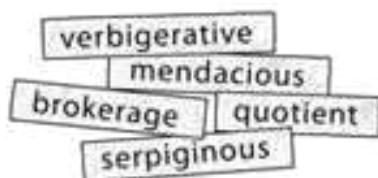
- Do you get all the papers 1 week before the meeting?



- Are agenda points gone over again before you go onto the next point?



- Is there time for everyone to have a say?



- Have hard words and jargon been explained?
- Have you understood everything in the meeting?
- See Tip 8

# Tip 4



## Is the meeting a safe place?

- You do not have to tell your story if it makes you upset.
- You need to feel safe in meetings.



## Is money a barrier for you?



- Ask how you are being paid.



- You can ask to be paid with an honorarium.

# Tip 4



## What are barriers in meeting rooms?

The meeting room must meet your access needs.

- Do you have a physical disability?



- Does light or sound bother you?



- Do you need to stand up and walk around during meetings?
- Do you have fatigue?

**Tell the Chairperson about all your access needs.**



# Tip 5

**How can I be welcoming?**



# How can I be welcoming?

## Quote

**“Before going into a meeting, it would be really nice if the Chairperson could introduce themselves to you”.**

**Lisa Brumtis,  
VATT Graduate**



# Tip 5



## Who is the Chairperson?

The Chairperson runs the meeting.



The Chairperson needs to call you before the meeting.



They need to tell you who else will be at the meeting.



It is the Chairperson's job to support you to feel included.



The Chairperson needs to say it is okay to ask questions.

# Tip 5



The Chairperson needs to tell you they will help you with problems.



Someone needs to welcome you when you get to the meeting.



The meeting needs to start with introductions.

You should get to say a bit about yourself.



## After the meeting

The Chairperson needs to thank you.



The Chairperson needs to ask you

- did you feel included?
- did you get to have your say?
- were you listened to?

# Tip 5



The Chairperson needs to ask you

- what went well?



- what did not go well?



- how can the meeting be better?



# Tip 6

**How do I provide information that everyone can understand?**



# Providing information

## Resources

- SCOPE Access and inclusion eLearning  
<https://www.scopeaust.org.au/services-for-organisations/access-and-inclusion-for-businesses/education-training/access-and-inclusion-elearning/>

### Quote

**‘Send out all the information before the meeting and have someone sit with us and go through the agenda and the minutes. Please use Easy English from the word go.’**

**Amanda Millear,  
Reinforce**



## How do I provide information that everyone can understand?



### What is accessible information?

Accessible Information is information that everyone can understand.



You need to be asked how you want your information to be given to you.



You need to be given enough time before the meeting to read the information.



You can ask for someone to support you if you do not understand the information.

# Tip 6



Make sure you tell people if the information is not accessible to you.



Information you may need in accessible formats are:

- agendas
- minutes



- reports
- presentations
- emails



- handouts
- data

## How do I make information accessible?



Everyone with a cognitive disability has different communication needs.



### Plain English

This is a simple way of writing.

It uses short sentences.

It does not use hard to read words.



### Easy English

This uses pictures and simple words.



### Audio

This uses an audio app to read the text.



### Video

Uses a video recording of someone reading the information out loud.



# Tip 7

**What support do I need to offer?**



# What support do I need to offer?

## Quote

**“She writes down notes, we make a time later on and we go over what has been said. I think it [having a support worker] encourages you to have a say.”**

**~ Patsie Frawley  
Participation in Government  
Disability Advisory Bodies in  
Australia: An Intellectual Disability  
Perspective.**



# Tip 7



## What is an inclusion support worker?

You might want a support worker to work with you

- before the meeting
- at the meeting
- and after the meeting



You need to choose the support worker.

They can support you to speak up at the meeting.



They are there to support you to say what you think.

They are not there to say what they think.



You can ask for your own inclusion support worker or mentor to support you.



## What does a support worker do before a meeting?

- ask how you want to be supported
- go through the agenda with you
- ask what you want to talk about in the meeting.
- go through any worries you have
- go over what you are going say



## What does a support worker do at the meeting?

- take notes for you
- explain things to you when asked
- remind you of what you wanted to talk about



## What does a support worker do after the meeting?

- go over the meeting with you
- write the notes in Easy or Plain English for you
- ask how they can support you better

# Tip 7



## What is mentoring?

A mentor is someone who knows a lot about meetings.

- they will support you in the meetings.
- at the meeting
- and after the meeting



You can learn from your mentor.

Your mentor can learn from you.



## Tip 8

**Does everyone understand?**



# Does everyone understand?

## Quote

**“Ask the person if they need regular breaks, make sure you don’t talk over people, record minutes using dot points and don’t go off topic.”**

**Advice from Brain Injury Matters**



Brain Injury Matters

# Tip 8



## What can I ask for to make meetings more accessible?



1. You can ask for an agenda in Plain or Easy English.



2. Ask for breaks if you need one.



3. Ask they don't put too much on the agenda.

# Tip 8



4. You can ask for each agenda item to be explained.



5. It is OK to ask questions.



6. You can speak up if the chair is not following the order of the agenda.



7. Ask how long each agenda item is given.

# Tip 8



8. Read out loud any written material that was not sent out beforehand.



9. Have 1 question at a time.

Make sure the meeting is not going too fast.



10. Don't use **jargon** and **acronyms**.

Have a hard word list up where it can be seen.



# Tip 8



11. Make sure everyone has a say.  
1 person to speak at a time.



12. After each item make sure everyone has a say.



13. The Chair needs to ask you for your ideas.



14. If there is going to be a vote - everyone should be told what it is about.



## Tip 9

**Has everyone had a say?**



# Has everyone had a say?

## Quote

**“I have been to lots of meetings where I didn’t get my say and that stinks in my opinion” .”**

**~ Amanda Millear,  
Raising Our Voices 3CR Radio show**



# Tip 9



You need to have time to say what you think.



It may take a few meetings before you feel OK to speak up.

That is OK.



Other people cannot talk for you.



You need to be able to say what you think.



Here is a checklist for meetings.

# Tip 9



1. Has everyone had a say?



2. Has everyone had time to ask questions?



3. Has everyone had time to think about their ideas?



4. Has everyone had time to share their ideas?



5. Does everyone know that it is OK to disagree?



# Tip 10

**How do I evaluate the meeting?**





## What does evaluate mean?

Evaluate is when you look at something and work out how good it is and how it could be improved.



## Why do you evaluate?

To make meetings run better.

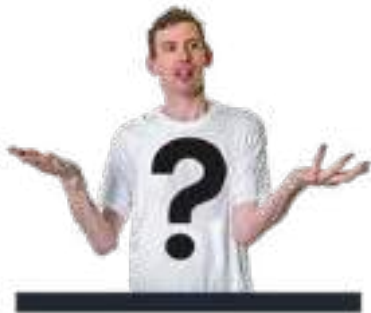


You need to be part of the **evaluation** process.



## What does process mean?

Process means the steps you take to get something done.



## Questions for every meeting



Have your access needs been met at every meeting?



What was the meeting like for you?



Did you understand the information?



Were your ideas heard?

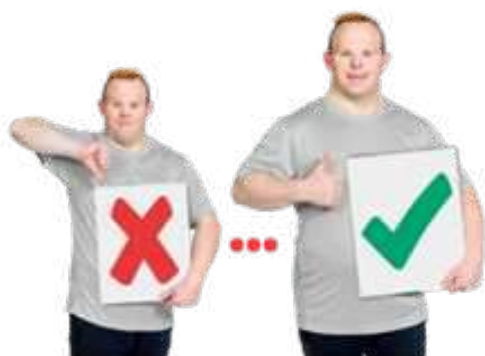
## Questions for the end of the project



Did you feel more confident by the end of the project?



Did the group work well together?



What could have been changed?

# Tip 10



What are goals?

Goals are things you want to reach.



Were the goals for the project met?



Did the project get the information that was needed?

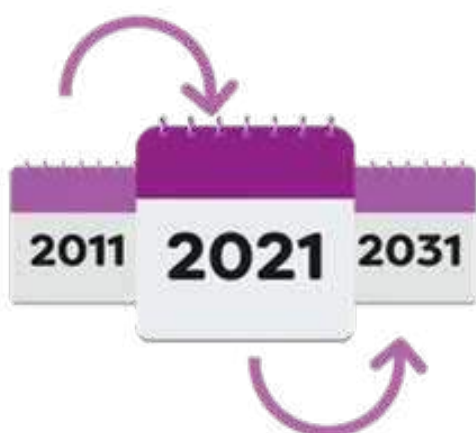
# Tip 10



## What change did the project make?



What are the changes that have happened straight away?



What are the changes that will happen later because of the project?

## Tools to evaluate



Feedback  
What people say



Photos and videos to show what happened  
during the project



Reports - either written or filmed



Data showing what has changed





**For further information:**

**Voice at the Table**

**Address** Ross House, Flinders Lane,  
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

**Phone** 03 9070 9070

**Email** [training@voiceatthetable.com.au](mailto:training@voiceatthetable.com.au)

**CLICK**



**[voiceatthetable.com.au](http://voiceatthetable.com.au)**

