

## **Community consultations: Engagement in the Deaf Community:**

Through the consultations on Zoom, a number of observations were made that could serve to understand how the Deaf community engages with each other to resolve issues and to learn collaboratively together.

Knowing these will help us understand how the Deaf community operates much like how Maori observe tikanga (customs) or kawa (protocols/rules).

These observations are not intended to be a guideline of how individuals or organisations could engage or consult with Deaf people, this is an important larger scope of inquiry. For further inquiry, we can refer to the [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#) which is an internationally recognised standard of community engagement. The Spectrum lists the following in increasing degrees of importance; *Inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower*. As a result, “an effective consultation programme can contribute to higher quality legislation, the identification of more effective alternatives, lower administrative costs, better compliance, increased public buy in and faster regulatory responses.”<sup>1</sup>

**Connections:** Connections are important. When Deaf people meet, they find out where people come from and what interests they have. They introduce each other to new members and gauge their areas of interest. Sharing connections is a way of boosting the health of the community.

**Information:** Information and informing members is valued. Knowing how the government and organisations are working for and with deaf people is important to the community. The Deaf community have unofficially appointed “gatekeepers,” people who take responsibility for passing on information that could help the community learn and grow together. Having some information come from trusted Deaf leaders and not via a second or third party is another value.

**Safe spaces:** Information and action usually happens in safe spaces both formally and informally. For example having meeting rooms made available easily and informal drop in’s by overseas visitors often build connections.

**Participate:** Participation in the community is considered vital to protect and preserve the community. People can consider participation in the community within and outside of professional positions as important to develop relationships and gain trust. An example is the expectation to stay for a while after an event finishes. This is an important way of winding down and you may end up getting more information and building better connections.

How **Maori Deaf** engage is a separate but equally important consideration as well as the other parts of the Deaf community i.e. Pacific, Deaf Blind, Deaf with other physical disabilities, Deaf immigrants and Deaf in small towns. This needs to be explored.

Knowing Sign Language is just the start: it is a process of engagement. If you have an interest in improving the status of the community this is valued.

Engagement in the Deaf community is complex and multi-layered. Understanding how this works goes some way in protecting and preserving the values of the Deaf Community and resolving some of the challenges of engagement.

**Recommendation:** to explore how to better engage with the Deaf community and to develop best practice guidelines for engagement which refer to Deaf Values.

---

<sup>1</sup> Citing Donald G Lenihan (Advisor on Public Engagement to the Government of New Brunswick, Canada) in OECD Studies on Public Engagement “Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services” (2009) at 22.