Summarising: Smith (2001), Community Participation Agreements: A model for welfare reform from community-based research
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990-2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
Community Participation Agreements: A model for welfare reform from community-based research.

Research Publication:
CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 223/2001

Name of Researcher(s):
D.E. Smith

Time period:
2001

Geographic location:
Mutitjulu (Northern Territory)

Methodology:
This is a case study, with information collected from a combination of extensive community consultations, interviews and associated fieldwork with individuals, Council members and service delivery agencies, both within Mutitjulu and at surrounding outstations, over March – August 2001.

Aims:
This paper focuses upon the principles and processes involved in the development of a community-wide Participation Agreement at Mutitjulu. The paper also proposes a set of goals and issues that could be contained within a Community Participation Agreement.

Selected findings and insights:
The concept of a Community Participation Agreement was founded upon 'mutual obligations' whereby the community accepted responsibility for particular behaviours or activities and, in return, government agencies agreed to provide particular services. The paper identified many factors that could impede the development of a Community Participation Agreement, including:

- rapid expansion of the population and the high levels of mobility;
- multiple health problems and high levels of substance abuse;
- entrenched dependence on welfare and significant irregular flows of 'untied' monies through the community;
- low levels of work experience and skills, especially the younger generation who regarded employment as a casual activity;
- low levels of educational attainment (86% of the Mutitjulu population were without any educational qualifications and entry level into secondary education was estimated at Year 3 level);
- poor coordination and planning among local training providers;
• the undermining of community governance and decision-making by the large number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations at regional levels; and
• lack of coordination of delivery of government services.

The study also identified a range of factors which could facilitate the development of an Agreement:
• a Council advocating a reduction in reliance upon welfare;
• employment and small enterprise opportunities due to the close proximity of Mutitjulu to Uluru National Park, and its associated tourist industry;
• access to nearby local infrastructure and institutional support; and
• a recent Commonwealth and State/Territory government policy of improved coordination of service delivery.

Regarding participation in a Community Participation Agreement, this is also seen to include:
• the choice of activities;
• accessing the benefits flowing from the program;
• the planning and management of the program;
• decision-making about program objectives and guidelines; and
• monitoring the process and outcomes.

Key requirements identified during community consultations and proposed in the paper included:
• a community plan for vocational and life-skills training, including developing links with local and regional training providers;
• instruction that can be reinforced in the Indigenous language;
• intensive support and assistance for individuals e.g. a mentoring approach to work and a close working relationship with supervisors;
• personalised work environments and direct transmission of skills and knowledge by learning on-the-job;
• a skilled and job-ready labour pool; and
• where possible, realistic stepping stones into the local economy.

The paper also reinforces that at the community level, the most influential factor was strong governance structures and accountable decision-making processes.

Educational implications:
This paper provides a detailed account of the many challenges facing a small remote Indigenous community which can only be addressed by a coordinated approach across the delivery of a wide range of government and non-government services, including those delivered by the local Indigenous community. The study identifies the central importance of education and training to addressing socioeconomic disadvantage of such communities by helping the community build its overall capacity while at the same time increasing
the skill levels of individuals. For example the study highlights the need for education authorities and local schools and training providers to consider:

- their relationship with other government and non-government agencies in terms of overall regional development;
- their roles in health and substance abuse education;
- adapting training delivery to meet local circumstances, including use of local languages as necessary;
- continuing support for job seekers and those recently employed to ensure that they are able to adapt to mainstream employment conditions while also assisting prospective employers in creating a culturally sensitive work environment; and
- working alongside employers to provide targeted on-the-job training.

Relevance:

*Domain 2: School and community educational partnerships*

Cross-cultural understanding of purposes and value of education
Use and negotiation of educational partnership agreements between schools and communities
Educational partnership agreements and SRAs

*Related papers:*
