



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Business plan 2009 - 2011

Community access and engagement

‘promoting public awareness of the purpose, function and work of the Parliament’

- Legislative Council Mission Statement

Background

The strategic objectives and principles of the New South Wales Legislative Council are embodied in the Department of the Legislative Council Strategic Plan 2009-2011. One of the four strategic priorities is ‘community access and engagement.’ This priority is also noted in the New South Wales Parliament’s Results and Services Plan 2008-2009, which states that one of the ways by which the NSW Parliament achieves its role as a representative and legislative body is through ‘community access and awareness of the role and functions of the Parliament’.

The Legislative Council, the Legislative Assembly and the Department of Parliamentary Services all undertake various community education and engagement activities. The Chamber and Support staff of both Houses conduct guided tours and educational talks for a large number of school and community groups throughout the year. The Department of Parliamentary Services Education section provides education and engagement programs for school and community groups, and also for government departments and community organisations.

The restructure of the Parliament in 2008 resulted in the Legislative Council establishing a new direction and realigning priorities. The Legislative Council’s Procedure Office now contains a Procedural Research and Training Unit responsible for developing a more systematic approach to engaging with the community and improving community access to the activities of the Legislative Council.

This business plan provides broad objectives for improving community access and engagement and lists activities which will be undertaken during 2009-2011 in pursuit of these objectives.

Business plan objectives

- 1) To improve access to information about the Legislative Council and its activities.
 - Provide website content that is relevant to the community, with easily accessed, clear information available on the Legislative Council, including legislation currently before the House, committee activities and special events.
- 2) To improve awareness of the role of the Legislative Council.
 - Improve understanding in the community of the role of the Legislative Council within the NSW Parliament and the distinction between Parliament and the NSW Government.
 - Showcase the work of the Legislative Council and its staff in New South Wales and in other jurisdictions.

- 3) To improve engagement with the community.
 - Increase involvement of Legislative Council staff in education activities both within Parliament and in other forums, including public sector and academic environments.
 - Provide accessible methods for members of the community and community groups to participate in, and be informed of, the activities of Parliament.

Our clients

The Department of the Legislative Council Strategic Plan 2009-2011 lists the clients and stakeholders of the Department of Legislative Council. This business plan targets two client groups in particular:

- Key stakeholders in the parliamentary process. This target group includes peak body non-government organisations, government departments and business groups – groups that have an interest in the activities of the Legislative Council through the passage of legislation or through involvement in committee inquiries. Media organisations and bodies such as the Independent Committee Against Corruption and the NSW Audit Office are also contained in this group.
- The New South Wales community. This group includes schools, community groups and community members – those who are affected by the parliamentary process but whose engagement with the process is often limited.

Current community engagement

The Legislative Council currently engages with the community in the following ways:

- 1) Chamber and Support staff provide structured educational talks on the history and role of the Legislative Council to school and community groups during non-sitting weeks, in conjunction with the Legislative Assembly.
- 2) Chamber and Support staff provide visitors with information on the Legislative Council, and respond to their queries.
- 3) The Procedure Office produces publications and fact sheets on the practices and procedures of the Legislative Council. Through its general enquiries phone number and email, the Procedure Office also receives a large volume of queries.
- 4) Staff of the Committee and Procedure Offices contribute to the Department of Parliamentary Services-run schools and community education programs.
- 5) The Committee Office engages with community groups and citizens during the course of committee inquiries, providing information on how to participate in inquiries.
- 6) The Legislative Council website provides information about the function, structure and history of the Legislative Council, as well as information on current committee inquiries and other activities.
- 7) Publications and contributions to professional organisations such as the Australian Study of Parliament Group and the Commonwealth Parliaments Association.
- 8) Parliamentary events and exhibitions (e.g. Australia Day open house).
- 9) The Legislative Council participates in a number of secondment and internship programs with government departments, tertiary institutions and high schools.

These activities will be expanded and incorporated into this business plan, to improve existing community access to and engagement with the Legislative Council.

Community access and engagement – aims and objectives 2009-2011

Legislative Council website and other media

The Legislative Council website provides a substantial amount of information on the Legislative Council – the history of the institution and building, procedures and practices, minutes of proceedings, and committee activities. Links to current and proposed legislation, statistics on parliamentary sessions and the Hansard record are also available. The information currently provided will be made more relevant to users of the website and methods of actively providing information to interested users will be adopted.

<p>Aim: Outreach to the community – providing timely information to key stakeholders in the activities of the Legislative Council and its committees</p>	<p>Delivery date: May – September 2009</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop mailing list options for key stakeholders, including media, ensuring information on activities of the House and of its committees is sent to registered users as the activities arise. • Review processes for responding to information requests from stakeholders and the public 	
<p>Aim: Improve information available on the Legislative Council website and the accessibility and user appeal of the website</p>	<p>Delivery date: May 2009 - Ongoing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a child-focussed section of the Parliament website. • Review website design and accessibility for users, including potential use of YouTube and other internet-based media applications. • Consider making available on the public website (internet), various publications such as ‘Procedural Highlights’ as well as recent articles and relevant sections of <i>New South Wales Legislative Council Practice</i>. 	
<p>Aim: Investigating other media</p>	<p>Delivery date: February – June 2010</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with the operators of the proposed digital television channel covering parliaments of Australia to showcase the work of the Legislative Council. • Develop a DVD on Legislative Council role and activities for distribution to schools, linked to curriculum. • Produce material for print media, and participate in existing public education and information sessions (such as the Sydney Morning Herald’s IQ2 series). 	

Visitor information

The Legislative Council Chamber and Support team provides information to visitors in the form of guided tours, presentations to visiting groups and answering visitor questions. Leaflets provide information on the history and practices of the Legislative Council.

Aim: Provide consistent and engaging information on the Legislative Council	Delivery date: July 2009 - Ongoing
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop template information for the delivery of information to visitors during talks and guided tours.• Review published fact sheets and other leaflets to ensure information provided to visitors is up to date, engaging and readily available.• Active involvement by staff of the Legislative Council in Department of Parliamentary Services education programs, providing consistent information on Legislative Council history and role.• Develop DVD on history and role of the Legislative Council for distribution and display.	

Education and information activities in regional and rural areas

Committees of the Legislative Council frequently visit regional and rural areas as part of the inquiry process, holding public hearings and forums and visiting facilities relevant to the inquiry topic. These site visits provide an opportunity to engage with schools in regional and rural areas.

Aim: Engage with regional and rural schools and communities in the delivery of information about the Legislative Council and its committees	Delivery date: April 2010
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate committee site visits as part of public inquiries with education activities on the history and role of the Legislative Council (in the context of the NSW Parliament) delivered in regional and rural schools.• Adapt existing educational material on role and history of Legislative Council for delivery to schools in regional and rural areas.• Design and develop information sessions on the role and history of the Legislative Council to be delivered to interested members of regional and rural communities during committee site visits.	

Academic involvement and professional education

The staff of the Legislative Council produce academic material on the practices, procedures and history of the Legislative Council. This material will continue to be made available to the existing audience of professional organisations and their respective journals, and to new audiences within universities and other academic institutions.

Aim: Contribute articles to the journals of professional bodies	Delivery date: May 2009 - Ongoing
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue contribution to professional bodies and their journals - Australasian Study of Parliament Group, Australian and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table.• Published articles made available on publicly accessed website.	
Aim: Participation in tertiary education	Delivery date: March 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active involvement in university courses delivering units on function and role of the Legislative Council. (e.g. University of Sydney Graduate School of Government).	
Aim: Deliver training on function and role of the Legislative Council	Delivery date: March 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and deliver Legislative Council-specific information programs for external clients (including Government departments).• Develop template education modules for the delivery of training in the procedures and practices of the Legislative Council to external clients.	

Monitoring progress

Progress towards the objectives of the business plan will be contained in the Department of Legislative Council annual report. The evaluation will include output and activity indicators linked to the proposed objectives and actions.