

Client Engagement Strategy

2023 - 2026



Vision

All Tasmanians are safe, respected and have their voices heard in the delivery of our services and client engagement activities.



Purpose

- To provide legal services to help Tasmanians understand their rights, navigate the system and resolve their legal issues, and get the assistance they need.
- To support and advocate for vulnerable and marginalised Tasmanians.
- To work with our clients, staff, legal partners, and community to improve the legal system.



Values

Honesty

we communicate openly and clearly; we provide clear, accurate and realistic advice; are accountable to our clients, our partners and our community.

Courage

We speak up, listen to different view, and willingly take on feedback, we advocate for our clients, our sector and our organisation; are open to new ideas and adaptable to change.

Engagement

We are involved in the design of services, programs and policies; we are committed to best outcomes for our clients and our community and work collaboratively with our partners and our clients.

Introduction

The Client Engagement Strategy supports TLA's commitment to placing our clients at the centre of everything we do. Its purpose is to build clients' voices into all areas of our organisation, informing and shaping the design and delivery of our services, policies, and advocacy work. This will ensure that all our decisions are evidence-based and client-focused, and our services are meeting our clients' needs. The Client Engagement Strategy provides a framework to build on the client engagement work we have begun and to extend these activities across TLA.

Client engagement is a key plank in the client-first approach outlined in our Strategic Plan 2020-23. The common thread across each of our three priority areas – community, communication, and collaboration – is a commitment to engage with our clients, to recognise and value their diverse perspectives and experiences, and to integrate their experiences and perspectives in the work we do.

It underpins our strategic goals to deliver high quality, accessible legal services that are responsive to the needs of our clients, and to improve their experiences and outcomes. Client engagement aligns with our goal to build evidence-informed decision making across our organisation, adding valuable experiential knowledge to research, practice and policy knowledges.

The Client Engagement Strategy is a framework to build the full range of client voices into decision-making across TLA over the next three years. It provides the foundation for client engagement practice to be embedded in our organisational culture into the future. It has been developed in consultation with our key stakeholders, including clients and partner organisations, and TLA staff.

The Client Engagement Strategy is supported by the [Implementation Plan](#) and [Guidelines for Client Engagement](#).

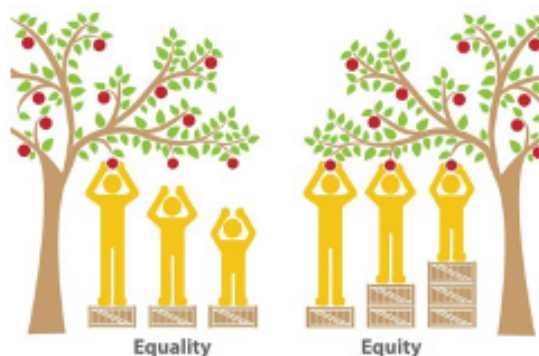
The Principles of Client Engagement

Engaging clients effectively is empowering because it supports people who are affected by decisions to have a say in them. It is meaningful because it produces useful information that drives decision-making. It is ethical because it is built on respectful and inclusive practices. Good engagement with clients and people with lived experience is built on principles that guide practice.

Power, equity and partnership

Effective, meaningful engagement with our clients is built on equal partnerships and relationships. We understand the location and exercise of power and how systems, structures and interactions can create barriers or redress power inequalities.

Structural inequalities are inherent in the legal system. The relationship between a client and their legal service/ lawyer privileges legal practice knowledge of law and the legal system. To understand what is important for clients in our service delivery and make our services more impactful, we recognise the value of the client's experiential knowledge (experiences and perspectives) as equal to practice knowledge. We communicate and use language that is inclusive and accessible and create physical environments in our reception areas and work spaces that are welcoming and safe.



To enable our clients to feel confident and empowered to engage with us and share their experiences, we need to create a safe environment through processes that remove barriers to equal participation. Partnerships are built on transparent and accountable processes, focus on solutions, and support the participation of clients and community representatives.

Diversity and Inclusivity

Our clients have diverse perspectives and experiences and may face different challenges and barriers when we are seeking their engagement. Good client engagement values, and is inclusive of, the wide and varied experiences our clients and community members with lived experience bring to this process.

Our processes are designed to support and enable people to express their differences and different experiences. This means anticipating potential barriers and addressing them, whether they are due to disability, literacy, language, culture or financial disadvantage.

Respect and Care

Our engagement practices are respectful of our clients and treat them ethically. Ethical practice includes protecting the privacy of our client participants, being non-judgmental, honest and open in communications and recognising the contribution of time and expertise with payment. It also includes taking care of client participants by acknowledging the emotional context of their engagement. Sharing personal experiences about legal issues, TLA's services and the justice system can be highly sensitive and emotional. It can also be emotional for TLA staff to hear clients' experiences and perspectives. Keeping this front of mind and applying trauma-informed practice underlies all our client engagement process and practices.

Expectations, Authenticity and Reflection

A shared understanding of the expectations, assumptions and goals is essential for client engagement to be meaningful and mutually rewarding. The purpose and intended outcomes for any client engagement should be clear and should be discussed and agreed upon by all involved at the outset, and again through the process, if appropriate.

Participants in engagement activities can benefit from the experience in many ways, including helping to improve services so that others have better experiences than they may have had; being part of a broader policy or advocacy project for system reforms or representing the experiences and needs of their community. It is important that people engage with realistic expectations of what can be achieved, and that they see how their input has contributed to the outcome.

Reflection is built into our engagement activities, so that we, and our client participants, are continuously learning and improving the processes and practices we use.

The Types of Client Engagement Activities

Clients and people with lived experience can be engaged through a range of activities. The five key activities: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower, come from the model developed by the International Association for Public Participation. All five activities and approaches are equally valuable. Client engagement is most effective when the activity used is appropriate for the particular purpose it is intended. More than one approach may be required for a specific project and each approach should be tailored for the specific needs of the participants. The Guidelines for Client Engagement has details about activities and how to use them.

Our Goals

Goal 1:

We will embed client engagement practice across all areas of TLA.

Our organisational priorities are: to provide legal services and advocate for vulnerable and marginalised Tasmanians; to inform, engage and empower our clients and community, and to collaborate with our partners and stakeholders to improve the legal system. We will achieve this by inviting and supporting clients and community members to partner with us in a range of appropriate, relevant and tailored engagement activities where their voices can be heard. This includes building client feedback processes into all our services, including clients' voices on project steering committees to advise on projects and policy development, and establishing lived experience advisory groups to inform and guide us in our priority area.

Client engagement is a new approach for TLA and for our clients and community partners. We will commit the resources and time to working with clients and community organisations in ways that ensure their engagement is meaningful, productive, well-supported and sustainable. Our engagement activities will aim to be inclusive and respectful of the wide diversity of our clients and their experiences and perspectives. The clients and community members who participate will be informed, empowered and supported to provide a positive and mutually beneficial experience. We will develop guidelines and policies and build the capabilities of our staff to undertake this work.

Goal 2:

We will improve our services by making them more client-centred.

We aim to provide high quality, accessible legal services to Tasmanians, especially those who are most vulnerable. When our services are more client-centred, they will be easy for clients to use and understand (accessible), culturally welcoming and sensitive to clients' safety risks (safe) and responsive to our clients' diverse needs and vulnerabilities (inclusive and respectful). More client-centred services will provide better experiences for our clients and be more likely to produce better outcomes. The data from client engagement activities will be collected, analysed and reported using our Measuring and Evaluation Framework, ensuring it is consistent, comparable and informs our strategic priorities and how our services operate.

To achieve this, we will foster client-centred processes, creating a range of opportunities for clients to have their voices heard in services, policies and projects that affect them, build client engagement activities into our service evaluation, planning and design across all programs and practice areas. We will ensure that the processes we use aim to give a voice to clients who face the greatest barriers to engagement. We will develop a network of client advisors who are keen to partner with TLA to improve our services. Working with our clients and staff, we will adopt a consistent approach to continuous improvement into all our services.

Goal 3:

We will build a sustainable client-first culture across our organisation.

Developing a client-first culture at TLA will be a significant cultural shift across our organisation. Client engagement is a central element in this, requiring leadership and appropriate support and resourcing to implement it effectively. We are committed to embedding client engagement through staff training, appropriate resourcing, including employing dedicated staff and specifying client engagement responsibilities in management roles. The time and resources required for staff to undertake client engagement activities will be recognised through our budget commitments and management of staff workloads. We will build the knowledge and capabilities of our staff, and develop policies, guidelines and training to support them to incorporate client engagement activities in their work.

Implementing our Client Engagement Strategy

The Client Engagement Strategy provides a three year road map for implementation. It is supported by an Implementation Plan. The actions and success measures below will be reflected in our annual planning process, with progress updates in our quarterly and annual reports. Governance for the implementation of the Client Engagement Strategy 2023 – 2026 is the responsibility

of the Associate Director – Legal Practice. The work will be led by the Manager, Community Legal Education and Information (CLEI), the Senior Policy and Projects Officer and the Client Engagement Officer. The Client Engagement Leaders Group, comprising members of the Executive, managers and client advisors will advise and monitor the implementation process.

Goal 1:

We will embed client engagement practice across all areas of TLA.

Actions:

- o Employ a Client Engagement Officer
- o Develop Client Engagement guidelines and policies to support our client engagement activities and processes
- o Support managers and key staff to become leaders through professional training and skill development
- o Build on previous work by:
 - Conducting the two yearly Client Satisfaction Survey
 - Working with the First Nations Advisory Group and Family Violence Reform Group to strengthen and maintain membership and representation.
- o Establish advisory groups for other key priority areas including child safety and disability.
- o Work with our partner organisations and clients to create a Client Advisory Register.

Success:

- o Our engagement work is supported by dedicated staff.
- o TLA staff and client advisors are informed, supported and empowered to participate in engagement activities.
- o More clients and community members with lived experience are directly engaged with TLA's decision-making and service design and delivery.
- o Clients are satisfied with TLA's engagement activities and processes.
- o Advisory Groups are working with us and informing our decision-making in all our priority areas.
- o TLA is developing a solid base of client advisors and participants with lived experience in a Client Advisory Register to support our engagement work.

Goal 2:

We will improve our services by making them more client-centred.

Actions:

- o Client engagement staff (the Client Engagement Officer and Policy Officers) will work with program and practice area managers to implement and report on appropriate client engagement activities.
- o Development of a universal client feedback survey template for service evaluation to be adapted to be program specific.
- o One key element of service delivery (such as written information, communication key messages, inclusivity, client safety, cultural safety) is identified each year in consultation with clients and staff, tested in client feedback surveys.
- o Each practice area in all regional offices have invited at least 1 client advisor to join the Client Engagement Register.

Success:

- o Increased reporting of satisfaction across all TLA services in the Client Satisfaction Survey.
- o Client feedback shows continuous improvement in our service delivery.
- o Services are changed in response to client feedback.
- o TLA has a solid base of client advisors and participants to support our engagement work.
- o Staff report increased satisfaction with service provision.

Goal 3:

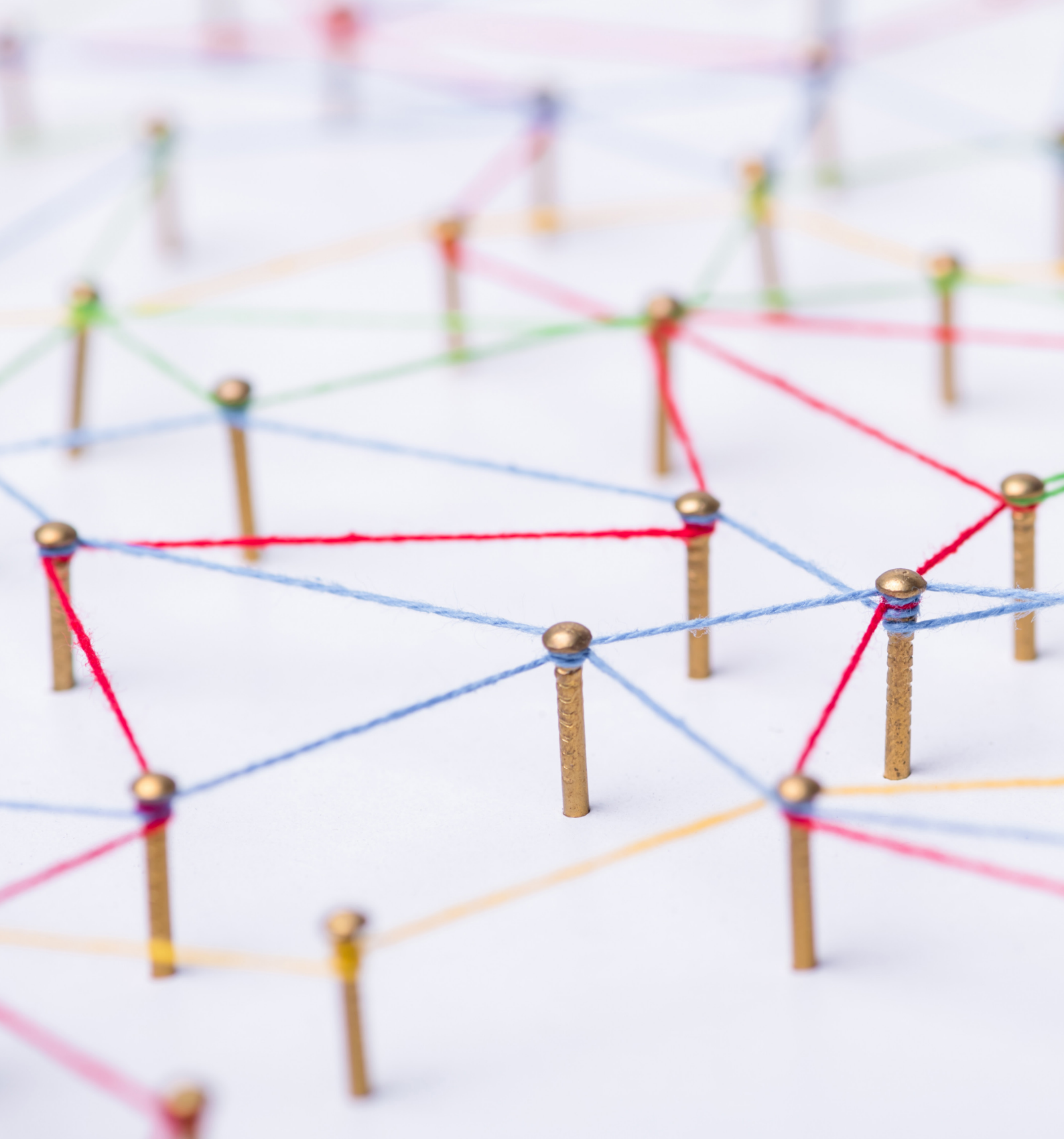
We will build a sustainable client-first culture across our organisation.

Actions:

- o TLA leadership will champion client engagement through their active involvement in key roles and budgetary and human resource investment.
- o Establish a Client Engagement Leaders Group to advise and monitor the Strategy implementation. It will include members of the Executive, managers and client advisors.
- o Annual reporting on client engagement activities across all practice areas and programs to include what engagement activities have been conducted and how services have been changed in response to client feedback, with clients' stories about their experiences
- o The Client Satisfaction Survey will be conducted every two years
- o Managers and key staff to undertake client engagement training and capacity building
- o Build responsibility for client engagement activities into leaders' (Associate Directors and managers) Statement of Duties.


Success:

- o Clients report increased satisfaction with TLA services
- o TLA staff report increased satisfaction with their work and wellbeing
- o TLA staff understand the value of client engagement and capacity to support it
- o TLA's annual budgeting includes appropriate and sustainable resourcing for client engagement.



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Tasmania Legal Aid acknowledges and pays respect to Palawa/Tasmanian Aborigines as the original owners and continuing custodians of the land and waters of this island, lutruwita/Tasmania where we live and work.

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