



# Good Governance Grab

## QUESTION TIME AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

### ANOTHER GOOD GOVERNANCE GRAB FROM THE VLGA

The VLGA has recently received a number of queries about the conduct of question time at council meetings. These queries covered such issues as how questioners and questions are presented, how council meetings are set up, audio and visual access and on-line presentation.

The VLGA is aware that different councils have different approaches to question time. Some require questions to be provided in writing in advance of the meeting, some allow 'questions without notice', some allow questioners themselves to ask the questions, others have the questions and responses read by the mayor while some others don't have question time at all.

This Good Governance Grab is not advocating a single approach to question time or advocating that all councils should have such a procedure.

The VLGA believes that question time at Council meetings is only one way for a Council to inform and engage its community and encourage community participation in local governance. In general terms, the VLGA advocates a broad, multi-faceted approach to achieve these outcomes consistent with the Local Government Act.

Having said that, should councils have a question time, there are some practices and principles which can help it work better:

- Question time is about the provision of information. Responses should be substantive and address the question
- Question time should be chaired in a firm, friendly and inclusive fashion. The rules and procedures should be clearly explained to the gallery
- Engagement can be helped by allowing the questioner, if present at the meeting to ask the question. There do need to be good procedures and meetings management around this though to prevent questions becoming speeches and to ensure that protocols and courtesies are adhered to
- Questions and answers are just that, and should not be allowed to become debates between the questioner and councillors or officers
- Behaviour and approaches demonstrated at Federal and State parliament question times are not an advisable model
- It is risky and inadvisable to get supporters in the community to ask "Dorothy Dixers". It's obvious and not a good look as well as being a misuse of question time



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- You can prevent questions and answers starting debates between councillors by firm chairing and speaking rules. There are appropriate times in the council meeting for issues to be debated
- Remember that question time should, above all be engaging and responsive. It can demonstrate the capability, spirit and accountability of a council. Having the mayor or spokesman reading out questions and answers in a halting monotone can be deadening. Use as many different talking heads as is reasonable
- Seating, acoustics and sight-lines affect the way people feel heard and engaged. Maximise visual and audio inclusiveness

The VLGA would be pleased to assist you with issues around community engagement, provision of information, meetings procedure and question time.

Please contact Ron Exiner or Stefanie Perri on 03 9349-7999.