



Pragmatic opportunism

This snapshot explains what pragmatic opportunism is, why we used it and what we learned. Pragmatic opportunism is a term we use to describe how we proactively looked for opportunities with the GoWell Panel to build on skills, knowledge and interests.

Why did we use pragmatic opportunism?

According to our model of community empowerment¹, pragmatism (being sensible and practical in achieving things) and opportunities can be empowering ways for communities to hone their capability, choices and influence over decisions. We worked with the Panel to increase the likelihood of encountering opportunities by applying pragmatic opportunism.

How did we use pragmatic opportunism?

The Panel used four techniques to consider, negotiate and pursue beneficial opportunities:

1) Proactive networking

We included a range of organisations in Panel workshops to increase the likelihood of finding out about opportunities and receiving invitations.

2) Informed decision making

The Panel got information to help decide if an opportunity was for them by: requesting information/clarification; meeting organisations to discuss the opportunity; and asking for an example of the type of opportunity being offered.

3) Negotiating participation

The Panel negotiated the terms of their participation to make sure opportunities were accessible and useful. Examples included:

- Negotiating to participate in a workshop as a group to feel more comfortable.
- Speaking at a conference on the condition of remaining seated and delivering a prepared conversation with a colleague rather than a solo presentation.
- Accepting a training offer after negotiating the content, format and venue.

4) Planning and reflection

The Panel's local organisations supported them to take up opportunities, coming along to support them or swapping their paid/volunteering shifts. GoWell supported the Panel to identify what they hoped to get out of each opportunity and accompanied them. Debriefs were organised to reflect on the Panel's experiences.

What did we learn?

We found that negotiating participation was in and of itself empowering because several of the Panel had not realised this was a possibility. We learned that informal debriefs were an important way for the Panel to reflect on their experiences and to generate ideas on further ways to build their empowerment.

¹ For more information about the GoWell model of community empowerment, go to: www.gowellonline.com/publications/132_briefing_paper_13_community_empowerment