

## **CAPaD Submission to ACT Budget Consultation Process**

The Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD), is a community group that aims:

- To empower people in Canberra to own and plan for our common future by developing and supporting citizen, community and civil society engagement in public decision making.
- To facilitate opportunities for citizen input to government deliberation.
- To develop and assist citizen capacity to hold governments more directly accountable.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to the budget process. We recognise the budget process as an essential element of good public policy making in a democracy – balancing public revenue as a common good resource and public expenditure as the way we collectively fund common good functions.

We see **three priorities** for the 2019 Budget:

1. Support for government led participatory processes and learning
2. Support for community led engagement and capacity building
3. Funding for the ACT integrity body and the ACT Electoral Commission

### **1. Support for Government led participatory processes and learning**

We commend the ACT Government for undertaking four deliberative participatory processes, supporting the DeliberateACT community of interest and continuing to improve the Government engagement strategy.

We urge the ACT Government to continue to improve the ways in which it includes citizens in policy development, budgeting and implementation and work with the community so we all learn what makes those processes valid and effective.

- Use of deliberative and participatory processes needs to continue.
- Evaluation and dissemination need to be adequately resourced.

We also welcome moves by the ACT Public Service to improve its own capacity to engage effectively with the community, while noting below that the capacity of the community to engage also needs resourcing.

- Improving engagement requires resourcing to build the capacity of both the public service and the community.

### **2. Support for community led engagement and capacity building**

A healthy democracy needs informed and engaged citizens. Engagement is not merely something done to the community; it needs to be done with the community, whether they wish to contribute as individuals or with (or through) organisations/groups.

Moreover, community groups need their own capacity to connect with and engage members of the community and to use deliberative mechanisms.

The Better Suburbs Statement developed by the Citizen's Forum called for government to engage citizens as partners. We support that call and note that this

would go well beyond formal “partnership mechanisms” controlled by government. It would mean that local community groups have the capacity and know-how to connect people at the street, suburb, town and city level so they can work together on community development activities and issues of common interest.

The immediate benefit for the government would be that its own engagement efforts would be more effective. In the longer term we all benefit – as connected communities are critical for building shared visions and goals, which in turn create the basis for accountability and a healthy democracy.

To make this a reality the following constraints need to be addressed:

- The costs of maintaining even a small voluntary group are rapidly growing, modern ICT offers efficiencies but costs money. Funds need to be available to ensure such groups can use modern IT and communications tools.
- Members of local groups need training and support so they can run community development activities in their local areas.
- Any grant funding made available needs to have minimal transaction costs for volunteer groups and ensure community ownership is maintained.
- There is a dearth of meeting spaces for ordinary Canberrans to use when they want to do things together, which creates significant costs in terms of room/hall hire and insurance.
- Every suburb should have community meeting rooms and every town should have a number of community centres (like the Downer Community Centre)

Currently there is no funding for community owned and led deliberation. These processes require good design and facilitation, which means those services have to be bought in or provided pro-bono.

- Resources are required so the community can instigate its own deliberative processes on issues of major shared importance. The civil society led process for a People’s Policy for child protection in South Australia is a model we could follow here in Canberra.

### **3. Funding for the ACT Integrity body and the ACT Electoral Commission**

Legislation for the ACT Integrity body is currently before the Assembly. We believe funding for its establishment and operations is a high priority for the 2019 Budget. In addition the body should have sufficient funds to utilise participatory and deliberative approaches in its work.

- The new ACT Integrity body needs to be adequately resourced, including funds for participatory decision making processes.

The ACT Electoral Commission plays a crucial role in our democracy. Funding must keep pace with population growth and take account of demographic changes.

- Funding needs to cover the costs of ensuring new residents are encouraged to register and vote, and civic education, especially given the high proportion of new residents who are migrants.