

THE SOCIAL COMPACT

A Partnership between the Community Sector
and the ACT Government

Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	5
A significant relationship	7
Role and contribution of community sector	8
Role and contribution of government	9
Principles for working together	10
Undertakings	11
Community sector undertakings and Government undertakings	18
Future Directions	17
Acknowledgements	19

Authorised by Lucy Bitmead, Executive Director,
Strategic Implementation Group, Chief Ministers Department,
Canberra Nara Centre, 1 Constitution Avenue, Canberra ACT 2601
ISBN 0 642 60277 8

© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra 2004

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the
Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process
without written permission from Customer Services and Information,
Department of Urban Services,
ACT Government, GPO Box 158
Canberra City, ACT 2601.

Produced for the Australian Capital Territory Government.

ACT Government Homepage: <http://www.act.gov.au>

Telephone Canberra 13ACT1 or 132281

Publishing Services No 03/1318

May 2004

Printed on recycled paper.

Foreword

My Government's vision is of a Canberra in which all people reach their potential, make a contribution and share the benefits of our community. We are determined to take the lead in achieving this vision but we cannot realise it without the support and assistance of the community sector.

Canberra is fortunate to have a large number of committed not-for-profit community organisations, self-help groups, community associations and consumer advocacy groups. These organisations, individually and collectively, are working towards a better, more equitable and supportive community.

The Social Compact recognises that the best way to achieve such a community is for the Government and community organisations to work in partnership.

The Social Compact complements The Canberra Social Plan. The Social Plan will guide the Government in delivering services to the community, addressing our strategic priorities and highlighting opportunities for Canberra's social development.

We have learnt a number of lessons from the bushfire recovery process. A tangible example of this is the Child and Family Centres. The ACT Government is establishing two Child and Family Centres to replicate the successful

integrated service model of the Lyons Recovery Centre. At this centre a number of government agencies and community sector organisations worked together to provide services to Canberrans affected by the bushfires.

The Child and Family Centres will involve the Government and community sector working in partnership to provide one-stop local services with a focus on support and early intervention including health, education, parenting and family support services.

The community sector has an important role to play in meeting the needs and future aspirations of Canberrans. I look forward to a close partnership between community organisations and the ACT Government in the future, as we work towards creating the kind of community we all want to live in.

Jon Stanhope MLA
Chief Minister

“ACTCOSS promotes The Social Compact as a document which outlines rights and responsibilities of community sector and Government. We look forward to seeing it change over time to reflect the needs of the parties in the relationship.”

Daniel Stubbs
Former Director,
ACT Council of Social Service

“Having been involved since the inception of this process, two years on, Volunteering ACT commends all those who have worked so hard to get this far. We commit ourselves to ongoing involvement and to the support of The Social Compact and its implementation.”

Mary Porter
Chief Executive,
Volunteering ACT

“Significant time has been invested by community organisations and government to produce a document that articulates the relationship between the two sectors. It is vital that the Social Compact is championed to ensure that it remains relevant and useful to the parties involved and supports positive and productive ways of working together for the benefit of the Canberra community”.

Meredith Hunter
Executive Officer,
Youth Coalition of the ACT

“COTA believes that The Social Compact provides the means for significantly improved relationships between the non-government sector and the Government. The Social

Compact articulates concepts that must be promoted and embraced for the good of our whole community.”

Angus Paltridge
President,
Council on the Ageing (ACT)

“DPI ACT believes that The Social Compact is a very positive opportunity for the sector and for consumers. It has the potential to open new doors of communication and understanding, but these will only stay open if held by real mutual undertakings and most of all by honesty and trust on all sides. It is only a framework for action and will ultimately be tested on the actions it delivers, especially those that benefit consumers. That’s a great challenge for all of us and we welcome it.”

Craig Wallace
President,
Disabled Peoples’ Initiative

“The Health Care Consumers’ Association of the ACT supports The Social Compact as the basis of a relationship of trust between the community and government. It should open up opportunities for more people to be involved in decisions about services provided to them through the community sector. However, the full value of the document will only be realised when the improved relations between government and the community sector result in better amenity for individuals within the community.”

Russell McGowan
President,
Health Care Consumers’ Association
of the ACT

Introduction

The Social Compact is a statement of understanding about the relationship between the ACT Government and the community sector. It provides a framework for relations between the community sector and the ACT Government by articulating the principles of good communication and partnership. It is intended to be a living document, maintaining relevance as relationships develop and evolve. It aims to continue to improve the working relationship for the benefit of people and communities in the ACT.

The ACT Government acknowledges the vital role played by the community sector and gives recognition to its longstanding and significant contribution to community life.

Importantly, The Social Compact sets out undertakings that each sector is committed to in working together for the public good.

The Social Compact is intended to promote mutual understanding and guide community sector and government representatives to adopt processes and behaviour that value the role, contribution, perspectives and expertise of both sectors.

The Social Compact will be used in four main ways:

- to build common understandings and improve dialogue;
- as a guide to the way communication and processes are managed by each sector, and to behaviour in the relationship;
- as a means of drawing attention to and resolving problems in the relationship; and
- as a basis for evaluating and improving how the relationship is working.

The Social Compact does not stand alone. There are two important documents that require the two sectors to work together to achieve optimal outcomes for the community:

- The Canberra Social Plan sets out the ACT Government's priorities and actions across all areas of service delivery and is a template against which government decision-making can be judged over the next 10 to 15 years. It includes a flagship commitment to build a stronger community, including renewing community infrastructure and facilities, and increasing the capacity and viability of the community sector.
- The Community Sector Funding Policy reflects the ACT Government's commitment to move away from 'purchaser/provider' to 'partnerships'. The policy aims to enhance the effectiveness of community service provision and the viability of the community sector.

Shared vision

A foundation for The Social Compact is a shared vision for the future and a belief that with the community sector and ACT Government working better together, this vision is more likely to become a reality.

The long-term vision is of an inclusive community that enables all people to participate and lead purposeful lives - a community that is concerned with the common good as well as the rights and achievements of individuals. The ACT community of the future will 'live out' and demonstrate its values of a fair go for all and respect for cultural diversity and difference. All people will have opportunities to achieve economic security, social relationships, quality of life and a healthy environment.

Photo courtesy of The Canberra Times



A significant relationship

The community sector and government have distinct and complementary roles to play in the delivery of public policy and services, in social planning and in building healthy communities for people in the ACT.

The relationship between the two sectors is significant because they share many goals and values and are interdependent in many roles and functions. The community sector and government cannot achieve their individual goals without constructive working relations built on mutual understanding, respect and cooperation. Even in their distinct roles and accountabilities, there is a strong interface between the community sector and government agencies.

At the same time, some community organisations at times may pursue their objectives without reference to government agencies. Further, community organisations and groups will at times necessarily disagree with government about the relative priority that should be given to different issues or how community needs are best addressed. They may be strident on behalf of their constituency or community in their opposition to government decisions and policy.

In government, departments and Ministers will sometimes act in response to other imperatives and broad

community priorities that put them at odds with views held within some community sectors. These tensions are a part of the public policy process.

A mature relationship between community sector organisations and government can tolerate conflict and be sustained despite disagreements over some aspects of policy.



Photo courtesy of The Canberra Times

Role and contribution of community sector

The community sector includes a wide range of not-for-profit community organisations, self help groups, community associations and consumer advocacy groups. Their collective activity is directed to building community involvement and participation, addressing social needs and strengthening community capacity.

Organisations and groups that make up the community sector are extraordinarily diverse in philosophy, functions, interests and organisational form.

All are constitutionally independent of government and their purpose stems from a desire to meet the needs and aspirations of their consumers*, members, constituents or the wider community. Community organisations and groups that make up the sector range from large organisations managing budgets of many millions of dollars to local groups of people who come together (with no funds) around a shared concern or common interest.

In the ACT, the community sector provides a large proportion of community services, but its functions are far broader than this. It plays an important role in community development and supports a vast range of community and leisure activities.

* Definition of consumers – active user of a service.

Community life and capacity are enriched by the very existence of the many local groups and community associations that bring people together around shared goals, needs and interests.

The community sector provides advocacy with and on behalf of people who for different reasons have little say or power in the community. It also provides pathways for volunteering that benefit individuals and the community at large.

At a broader level, the community sector contributes to planning and participates in and initiates the development of policy by government. The sector supports and empowers consumers to have a voice and influence in service design and delivery and in broader policy and planning decisions. The diversity of the sector mirrors the pluralist and multicultural nature of the community. Its many voices and perspectives are invaluable to our democratic processes.

Decision making by community organisations is most effective when it has strong leadership; skilled and motivated people; good management and staff development; and takes account of, and actively utilises the collective experience, knowledge, perspectives and strengths of the broad community.

Role and contribution of government

The ACT Government comprises a legislative arm, elected by the community to govern, and government departments responsible for advising and conducting government business. The relationship with the community sector occurs in both arenas, although the primary relationship is likely to be with government departments.

The ACT Government has broad responsibility for legislation, social and economic planning, public policy and programs, collecting and allocating revenue, regulation and safety and protection of community members. Most government agencies fund services on behalf of the community but they are also providers of services in areas where needs are more universal (education, health, environment and community care).

Government has a responsibility for promoting participation, building community capacity and addressing social needs. It has a particular responsibility to ensure private interests are balanced against the public good and that there is equity in the way public resources are distributed within the community.

There is a strong relationship between the community sector and government in relation to these government functions and responsibilities. This occurs through consultation processes,

joint policy work, funding arrangements, training and development of new services and community initiatives. How well these arrangements work has a strong bearing on the effectiveness of each sector and the benefits and outcomes that flow for communities and people.

Decision making by government is most effective when it takes account of and actively utilises the collective experience, knowledge, perspectives and strengths of the broad community, as well as expertise within the public sector. Working relations need to be resilient and capable of sustainability through times when policies and resource decisions are contested between the community sector and government.

Principles for working together

Under The Social Compact a number of principles provide the positive basis for partnership and constructive working relations between the community sector and government:

- trust, openness and transparency of communication and processes;
- mutual respect for the capacity and capabilities of each sector, and recognition of their limitations;
- valuing the distinct and complementary roles each sector plays;
- respect for the diversity and independence of community organisations and groups;
- integrity, ethical practice, accountability and leadership in the way each sector operates;
- taking responsibility in the relationship and being accountable for the process and outcomes;
- consumer and community participation in planning, policy development and other decision making processes;
- innovation and continuous improvement in community and government processes and in the planning and delivery of services; and
- flexibility and cultural sensitivity in the processes used to consult with and respond to different groups in the community.



Photo courtesy of Urban Services

Undertakings

The Social Compact is a framework to guide the Government and the community sector in the development and implementation of government policies and services.

For the community sector, the undertakings necessarily have a different status as there is no mechanism, nor is it possible, to enforce the undertakings as requirements or policy. It is hoped that the undertakings guide community organisations and community groups in their work with government. The commitment by community organisations and groups will be based on the undertakings being seen to have value for their members, constituents or consumers and because working in this way improves relations with government.

There are a large number of small local groups and associations within the community sector who may find it difficult to follow all of the undertakings.



The undertakings are not binding on these groups in any way. They are more like standards to be internalised over time in the way such groups operate.

There needs to be shared commitment to the implementation of the Social Compact by both the community sector and the Government. The Government acknowledges that the community sector will take ownership and responsibility for decisions that are agreed as a result of joint planning or policy processes.



Photos courtesy of The Canberra Times

Community sector undertakings

Work with government

Community organisations and groups recognise the importance of working with government to achieve positive outcomes in the community. In their work with government they undertake to:

- seek to understand the roles and responsibilities of government;
- acknowledge the complexity and constraints faced by government in balancing different community interests;
- communicate openly and constructively with people in government agencies;
- understand and acknowledge the limitations faced by people working within government;
- promote commitment to The Social Compact within the community sector and participate in monitoring its impact;
- identify examples of good practice in working together that can be communicated across the sector and to government; and
- commit to engage in quality improvement processes.

Government undertakings

Work with the community sector

The ACT Government is committed to a strong and effective community sector. It recognises the importance of working with the community sector to achieve its goals in the community and undertakes to:

- publicly acknowledge the value, autonomy and contribution made by the community sector and promote this in a positive light across government and to the wider community;
- understand and recognise the role that peak bodies and representative groups play in advocating issues on behalf of their constituencies;
- respect the right of community organisations and groups to work through political channels, as well as with staff of government agencies;
- take account of the specific parts of the community sector that represent the most vulnerable and marginalised people;
- be realistic about the resource capacity of community organisations and groups and acknowledge the costs associated with their participation in planning, policy and community development;
- promote commitment to The Social Compact across government and take responsibility for monitoring its impact within and across portfolios;

- recognise the importance of and support the sustainability and long-term capacity of the community sector; and
- identify examples of good practice in working together that can be communicated across government and to the community sector.

Community sector undertakings

Planning and policy development processes

The community sector commits to working constructively with government in planning and policy development processes. The sector has a critical role to play in representing community's needs and views in the process. To these ends the sector undertakes to:

- facilitate the direct involvement of consumers, community members and volunteers in planning and policy processes;
- take additional steps and work in flexible ways to ensure people who

are more vulnerable and alienated are heard in policy and planning processes;

- use culturally appropriate processes to consult with and involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- accurately reflect community views based on the input of the people the organisation is representing;
- encourage and participate in joint work on policy review and development and planning;
- take ownership and responsibility for decisions that are agreed as a result of joint planning or policy processes;
- undertake and participate in research that informs policy and service design; and
- provide data and qualitative information from the experience of the organisation or group, to government and to other organisations and groups in the community sector.

Photo courtesy of The Canberra Times



Government undertakings

Planning and policy development

The ACT Government will actively work with and involve the community sector in planning, policy development and program development and evaluation. To ensure these processes work for the community and use the expertise and knowledge of the community sector the government will:

- seek and welcome the views of different groups in the community;
- respect the right of community organisations to comment on and challenge the government's policies and programs;

- adopt an approach to consultation that seeks early input in policy development and planning processes, as well as provides opportunities to respond when options have been developed;
- take into account the distinctive needs and interests of small community groups that rely on the efforts of members and volunteers;
- strive for greater consistency in the extent to which the input of the community sector is sought and valued;
- encourage and expand opportunities for joint work on policy review and development and planning;
- take ownership and responsibility for decisions that are agreed as a result of joint planning or policy processes;
- provide pathways for people who are more vulnerable and alienated to have a direct and strong voice in policy and decision making; and
- understand and support different and culturally appropriate processes being used to consult with and involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.



Photo courtesy of the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

Community sector undertakings

Governance, management and accountability

The community sector will strive for excellence and accountability in governance and management of community organisations and groups. This reflects a commitment to:

- a central focus on consumer and community needs and issues;
- high standards of management and accountability in the operations of organisations and groups;
- actively involve consumers and community members in the planning, design and implementation of services and community development activities;
- understand and work within the relevant legal frameworks impacting on governance and management; and
- meet government contractual and reporting requirements on a timely basis.

Government undertakings

Governance, management and accountability

Conduct the business of Government in the spirit of consultation with affected parties and demonstrate a high level of commitment to accountability and scrutiny of government. This reflects a commitment to:

- high standards of management and accountability in the public sector;
- promote efficient and positive communication across departments and programs within government;
- work towards better integration of policies and programs within and across agencies directed to specific population groups or needs in the community;
- promote the acceptance and value of diversity in the community and encourage diversity within government;
- use available research and data from a range of sources in decision making;
- ensure fairness and transparency in funding the community sector; and
- achieve greater consistency across government agencies in the way they fund community organisations.



Photo courtesy of The Canberra Times

Community sector undertakings

Quality in services and community work

The community sector will strive for continuous improvement in the quality of their work with consumers and communities. To this end the community sector undertakes to:

- promote better ways to involve consumers and communities of interest and get their feedback;
- reach out to, support and involve people in the community who are most vulnerable and alienated and have the least resources to address their needs;
- learn about and use culturally appropriate and flexible approaches to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- participate in sector development and training opportunities to keep abreast of new developments;
- enhance the knowledge of consumers and community members to encourage and enable their participation; and
- commit to work with relevant quality standards towards continuous quality improvement.

Government undertakings

Quality in services and programs

The ACT Government is committed to developing and maintaining community services and programs which uphold the rights and entitlements of all to fair and quality assistance. To this end Government undertakes to:

- support research and evaluation to identify and promote good practice in delivery of services, community initiatives and programs;
- invest in training and development in the public and community sectors;
- initiate innovation in government service delivery;
- support development of programs and services that are culturally appropriate and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- encourage and support service providers (government and community) to work with relevant quality standards towards continuous quality improvement; and
- commit to work with relevant quality standards towards continuous quality improvement.

Future Directions

The ACT Government and the community sector commit to collaboratively:

- promote The Social Compact across the entire community sector and all government agencies;
- publish case studies where the relationship is working well;
- develop and implement a Community Engagement Code of Practice to ensure a stronger, more cohesive relationship between the community and the government: and
- develop a mechanism for resolving differences where mediation does not produce an outcome.

The Joint Community Government Reference Group will assist the government in identifying future initiatives to further enhance The Social Compact.

The Social Compact will be reviewed periodically by the Joint Community Government Reference Group.



Mediation of differences under The Social Compact

A critical part of taking The Social Compact forward is providing a clear avenue for resolving disagreements between parties and addressing failure to meet expectations. A failure to meet expectations would normally mean a government agency or part of the community sector is operating in a way that is clearly inconsistent with the principles of The Social Compact or falls short of the undertakings set out in the document. The goal should always be to resolve these differences in a way that enhances the ongoing relationships and improves processes at a systemic or policy level.

As far as possible, disagreements arising from a failure to meet the expectations of The Social Compact should be resolved between the two parties concerned.

Both the community sector and the government should have access to a constructive, non-adversarial mediation process, not requiring legal representation.

Photo courtesy of the ACT Planning and Land Authority



Acknowledgements

Many people from ACT Government agencies and community organisations and groups contributed to the development of The Social Compact. The strength of the document is a tribute to their ideas and contributions.

Joint Community Government Reference Group (as at May 2004)

Jim Purcell (Chair)
Council on the Ageing ACT

Ara Cresswell
ACTCOSS

Meredith Hunter
Youth Coalition of the ACT

Mary Porter
Volunteering ACT

Andrea Simmons
ACROD ACT

Annette Wade
ACT Shelter

Killion Banda
Migrant Resource Centre

Margo Mitchell
Belconnen Community Service

Trish Harrup
Conservation Council of the SE Region and
Canberra

Russell McGowan
Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT

Maurice Walker
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Consultative Council

Christina Ryan
Ministerial Advisory Council on Women

Lucy Bitmead
Strategic Implementation Group,
Chief Minister's Department

Nic Manikis
Multicultural and Community Affairs Group,
Chief Minister's Department

Kathryn Maxwell
Community Engagement Unit,
Chief Minister's Department

Catherine Hudson
Policy Group, Chief Minister's Department

Karen Greenland
Urban Services

Brett Phillips
Justice and Community Safety

Ian Thompson
ACT Health

Maureen Sheehan
Disability, Housing and Community Services

Megan Smithies
Treasury

Roslyn Chivers
ACT Planning and Land Authority

Julie McKinnon
Education, Youth and Family Services

