

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

## Principles to guide effective, collaborative governance in the Northern Territory

### Introduction

The Northern Territory Government and Local Governments exist for the benefit of Northern Territory communities (urban, regional and remote); and through positive working relationships and a collaborative approach, are well-placed to pursue new social and economic growth opportunities as well as confront shared challenges in meeting needs and providing essential services and infrastructure.

Local government councils are the level of government closest to the community and are the most visible and accessible advocates for their community. However, citizens as a whole don't distinguish between spheres of government. They expect governments to work together.

These principles express the clear intent of Local Government and the Northern Territory Government to continue to work in genuine partnership to deliver outcomes and improve the quality of life for all Territorians. It is acknowledged that the collaboration between the NT Government and the Local Government sector, which is the focus of this set of principles, does not occur in isolation. Local Government Councils, and NT Government, individually and together, collaborate with a range of stakeholders across all spheres of government, Land Councils, community and service providers, industry and business, with a focus on achieving the best outcomes for their regions and communities

The parties further acknowledge that the Australian Government and traditional governance are crucial to the achievement of community outcomes; and commit to building on this initial work to encompass their perspectives and encourage their involvement.

### Objectives

The Guiding Principles establish the foundation for a positive relationship between the Northern Territory Government and the Local Government sector to:

- Build and maintain positive and cooperative relations between the two spheres of Government to promote effective collaboration, good governance, shared accountability and transparency.
- Encourage innovation and continuous improvement.
- Strengthen capacity to deliver outcomes.
- Deliver optimal infrastructure and services for the benefit of Northern Territory communities and their residents.

## Joint commitment

The partnership approach between the two spheres of government of the Northern Territory, and the implementation of the Guiding Principles are underpinned by:

- ✓ mutual respect and trust;
- ✓ open and honest communication;
- ✓ a high standard of ethics and integrity; and
- ✓ flexibility and responsiveness.

## Guiding Principles

The following principles guide effective, collaborative governance in the Northern Territory, enabling Local Government and Northern Territory Government to work together for the benefit of their communities. The principles will be applied by the parties wherever applicable and possible in their joint work.

### Shared Vision

Identify common interests and objectives of NTG and LG, commit to a joint purpose, collaborate on development, communicate goals and pathways and recognise and respect roles. Both spheres of government will work together towards common goals to achieve better outcomes for communities.

We will:

- Take the time needed to establish a shared vision and common goals when collaborating on projects, programs and policy.
- Work together to establish a common understanding of issues and a collaborative approach to solving these through agreed actions at a local, regional and Territory wide level.
- Ensure that our actions reflect our commitment to a shared vision.
- Work together to improve the alignment of local, regional and Territory-wide plans and strategies across the spheres of government.
- Implement strategies to improve the understanding and recognition of each other's roles and mandates.
- Build a shared and accessible language, terminology and meaning when collaborating on projects.
- Identify opportunities to support the sharing of skills and expertise across both spheres of government.
- Recognise that both spheres of Government have a shared responsibility to ensure Local Governments are sustainable.

### Collaborative Decision-Making

Identify opportunities to work together. Engage early and appropriately and build on combined strengths, capacity and skills to support joint programs and projects based around shared input, participation and decision-making where possible.

We will:

- Actively seek opportunities to work together as partners for the benefit of our communities.
- Look to each other for direct advice and support in developing policy, strategies and solutions.
- Acknowledge and respect each other's authorising environment and decision-making processes.
- Ensure that representatives at the appropriate levels from both spheres of government are actively engaged in decision-making processes.
- Work together as equals and be willing to compromise to achieve the best outcome for communities.
- Commit to informed decision-making, recognising financial and other implications for either sphere of government.
- Encourage and support innovation and continuous improvement in how we collaborate.

## Improving the Wellbeing of all Northern Territory Residents

Both spheres of Government exist for the benefit of communities and are together focused on the common objective of improving the wellbeing of all Northern Territory residents.

We will:

- Always seek to make decisions in the best interest of communities.
- Acknowledge the diversity which exists across NT communities and ensure that place-based engagement includes the participation of local communities themselves in developing local solutions.
- Be flexible and open to new ways of working and different options
- Ensure responsible and efficient allocation of public funds to support community priorities and commit to agreed accountabilities, where appropriate.
- Undertake joint review and evaluation of programs and services where appropriate and identify lessons learned and any areas for improvement.
- Seek opportunities to partner and work co-operatively, including joint planning, policy development and the joint delivery of programs and services.
- Work together on matters raised by the Australian Government and traditional governance, which impact on Local Government and Northern Territory communities.

## Shared Information, Knowledge and Data

Support planning and decision making through sharing relevant information, knowledge and data. Establish and build an open and transparent, evidence-based community investment approach to support improved community outcomes.

We will:

- Identify opportunities to improve collaboration and evidence-based decision-making across the spheres of government through the availability and accessibility to relevant information, knowledge and data.
- Establish clear guidelines and processes for sharing information in a way that maintains openness, privacy, confidence, and trust.
- Commit to the principles of open data to enable the community to better understand the foundations for decision making.
- Implement clear and jointly developed measures to assist in assessing our progress toward achieving shared goals.
- Share relevant research and work together to understand the data and emerging social and economic trends.
- Expand our information networks.

## Meaningful and Accessible Community Engagement

All communities have an important role to play in the decisions made about their future and should be actively engaged in a genuine, appropriate, timely and meaningful way.

We will:

- Implement best-practice engagement principles (such as the Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy and the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standards and other related NT strategy/policy).
- Work with community leaders to utilise existing community and cultural governance arrangements (including Local Government governance arrangements) where possible and appropriate.
- Ensure that adequate time is allocated for appropriate consultation and community feedback prior to the finalisation of decisions likely to impact on a community.
- Prepare information for communities in a format that can be understood by the intended target audience and in a way that supports cultural security (including utilising interpreters).
- Work with Traditional Owners, Community and Cultural Leaders and Aboriginal organisations to share engagement learnings and enhance cultural awareness and cultural competencies of personnel from both spheres of Government living and working in remote Aboriginal communities.
- Ensure adequate prior planning and communication of community engagement activities is undertaken in consultation with communities to ensure suitable timing, availability of community representatives, communication of intended purpose of the engagement and any boundaries or limitations.
- Ensure engagement and consultation is targeted and necessary; so as to avoid over consultation and meeting fatigue.

## Appropriate Timelines

Timelines for joint work are negotiated and agreed where possible to enable early planning, inclusive and authentic community engagement and opportunity for evaluation and reflection.

We will:

- Work together across both spheres of government to ensure adequate and realistic timeframes are developed and agreed as part of early project planning processes.
- Minimize the impact of, while maximizing opportunities associated with, political cycles on the timeframes for delivery of community programs and infrastructure projects.
- Acknowledge the need for government to work at the pace of communities.
- Allow sufficient time in planning phases to engage decision makers from both spheres of government, engage meaningfully with communities, and strategically align project planning, procurement and delivery to maximise available local participation opportunities.
- Be responsive to tight timeframes where possible, to maximise shared opportunities for the benefit of communities.
- Where appropriate strategically schedule and coordinate grant and funding opportunities, including announcements and outcomes.

## Agreed Communication and Engagement Protocols

Communication channels and protocols will be clearly defined to support the Guiding Principles and effective collaboration.

We will:

- Identify and agree to communication protocols and points of contact for working through current and emerging issues.
- Maintain agreed schedules for regular engagement to assist in building ongoing relationships and our understanding of community issues and opportunities.
- Be respectful of cultural conventions and utilise language interpreters and provide information in culturally appropriate formats to improve the effectiveness of our communications and engagement with Aboriginal communities and elected members.
- Ensure that communication is undertaken by representatives at appropriate levels.
- Commit to timely responses, proactive communication, and constructive negotiation in cases of disagreement.

# Implementing the Guiding Principles

The following strategies have been proposed to support the implementation of the Guiding Principles.

## Raising Awareness and Understanding

An agreed process will be planned and executed to introduce the Guiding Principles and raise awareness of stakeholder responsibilities.

We will:

- Develop a Communications Plan to describe the strategy and approach for raising awareness and supporting the implementation of the Guiding Principles.
- Consider options for establishing publicly accessible materials to support the Guiding Principles, including a central location for electronic copies of the Guiding Principles, communication materials such as fact sheets and FAQs, training materials / presentations and case studies showcasing implementation.
- Promote awareness of the Guiding Principles across all Local Governments and NT Government departments ensuring whole of government commitment to the agreed principles.
- Identify opportunities to elevate the profile of the Guiding Principles through senior leader and sector forums such as Chief Executive Coord, Regional Coord, LG2030 Steering Group, LGANT Annual Conference, LGANT Executive.
- Utilise the principles to initiate a similar process with the Commonwealth Government.

## Embedding the Guiding Principles

An agreed process will be planned, executed and monitored to embed the Guiding Principles into how the two spheres of government work together.

- Conduct an official launch the Guiding Principles, including a signing ceremony for senior representatives of both spheres of Government.
- Develop and deliver a series of workshops, information sessions and/or training to build a deeper understanding of the application of the Guiding Principles and how to integrate these across existing Local Government initiatives, including involving key stakeholders and community governance.
- Identify senior leaders from across the spheres of government to champion the implementation of the Guiding Principles.
- Identify an appropriate forum with NT Government and Local Government representation to meet on a regular basis to monitor the implementation of the Guiding Principles and other LG2030 activities.
- Ensure the implementation of the Guiding Principles (including annual review and evaluation) is adequately resourced and supported by LGANT and CM&C.

## Evaluation and Review

Both spheres of government will work cooperatively to review the implementation of the Guiding Principles annually. Changes may be made to the Guiding Principles by mutual agreement.

The Chief Minister and the Minister for Local Government will meet with the LGANT Executive annually or as required to discuss the implementation of the Guiding Principles and other agreed focus areas for both spheres of government.