

Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy Annual Report – 2018

Our vision

A democratic Canberra – where citizens can trust their elected representatives, hold them accountable, engage in decision making, and defend what sustains the public interest

A democracy is more than voting. Democracy needs three essential qualities if it is to work for everyone and can solve 21st century challenges fairly and sustainably. Those three qualities¹ are

- **Openness:** the public should be able to understand, influence and hold decision makers to account for their actions and inactions – and the resulting outcomes
- **Participation:** people should have the freedom, support and opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their lives and shape their communities and the future
- **Deliberation:** a key role of democracy is exchanging and acknowledging different perspectives, understanding conflict and finding common ground, and building a shared vision for society.

We believe there are better ways to make the decisions that affect us. How we govern ourselves can be made a lot more democratic than it presently is. Reaching this vision requires a change of mindset and culture across our political institutions and society.

We are a social movement for change!

2018 Activities – Key Action Group work - what we did and how:

This has been a very productive year with the Action Groups delivering a series of results. Topical highlights include:

- **Alliance Building** – meeting other groups and ACT government people and raising our profile, and additionally through the Citizens Juries and Urban Planning groups' work.
- **Citizens Juries & Mini-Public Evaluation** – a series of Hear the Participants events, and connections with government, academia (Canberra University Institute of Governance and Policy Analysis) through the Deliberate ACT community of practice.
- **Good Citizens Guide** – indirectly, worked with the Frank Fenner Foundation on a basic Understanding and Using Government Effectively Manual.
- **Creating the New Story** Action Group wove this thread into several other action groups' work.
- **Kitchen Table Conversations Community Dialogue Methods** Group – revised the KTC kit and published it on our website.
- **MLA Accountability / Relationship** – mapped out a plan of action, revised the 2016 candidate statements and as arranged a stall at the Southfest event to open dialogue with people about being represented.
- **Resources / Library** (good-things-to-read) – designed a topic list for our library and continued to collect useful material. This links to revamping the website to make it more accessible.

¹ The three qualities are adapted from the Involve (UK) 2017-2022 Strategy

- **Social Change Training** – activity here was immersed in the work of other action groups.
- **Urban Planning Participation** Working Group – continued informally in conversation with residents’ groups and other community organisations and our involvement in various ACT government consultations such as the Better Cities Engagement.

How would we know we’re on the right track?

- Canberrans are enthusiastic about what we are doing (ie most know about it and support in principle, many know the details and some are actively engaged)
- Elected representatives will acknowledge and respect our work
- Civil society, business, and elected representatives will want to work with us to demonstrate and learn what is possible, workable and effective for strengthening democracy

How did we go?

- We’re finding that more people have heard of us, are starting to take an interest, want to work with us, and think what we are doing is important
- Our MLAs definitely know about us and broadly support our aims
- Our “alliance” with other groups is building
- We’re confident about our vision, but definitely need more people engaged to take advantage of growing opportunities to build an essential social movement in Canberra for change.

What we will do next

We are grateful for the work the Action Groups did in 2018 and wish to honour and acknowledge their members’ energy and efforts.

Moving into 2019 the roles of various groups will merge into a narrower but deeper structure, grounded in what worked for this year.

2018 Action Groups – proposed transition to 2019

Citizens Juries & Mini-Public Evaluation	Continue
MLA Accountability -> Roles and Relationships	Continue and include 2020 Election work
Connected Socially Engaged Citizens Communication Guide	Never became very active
2020 ACT Election - Discussion	Combine with MLA Roles and Relationships
Creating the New Story	Never became active – combine with Media & Resources Sub-committee

Alliance Building – core part of several aspects of our work	Never became active – incorporate into MLA Roles and Relationships and Connected Communities Action Groups
Kitchen Table Conversations Community Dialogue Methods	2018 Action Plan successfully completed. Combine with Connected Communities Group
Resources (good-things-to-read/self directed learning journey)	Low level of activity focused on designing the topics within a Library. – > combine with Library & Resources Sub-committee
Social Change Training	Never became active. Combine with Connected Communities
Urban Planning Participation Working Group	Never became active. Combine with Connected Communities
Good Citizens Guide	Never became active – meld into Library and Resources

The main foci for action in 2019 cluster into four groups:

Genuine Citizen Participation in Government Decisions

Ongoing evaluations of the Citizen Jury / Mini-public (engagement) processes; Continuing to build the community of interest and lessons learned (with Deliberate ACT).

MLA Roles and Relationships

Unpacking the representing / being represented relationship Looking at accountability and what it means in practice Exploring ideas for co-governing.

Building connected communities ('democracy starts in your street') Work with like-minded groups to promote our narrative of wise decision-making Share our tools: website, library, Kitchen Table Conversation Kit.

Library and Resources

To collect and make available and accessible to people interested in government and in government change a wide variety of reliable information about government and how it works, what makes for good government, and how government can be improved. This will be both a *virtual* and a *physical* library.