

CAPaD Annual Report – 2017

What a year! Things are hotting up and now we need you more than ever!

Our vision

A democratic Canberra – where citizens 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 shape their communities and influence the decisions that affect their lives 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.

Reaching that vision requires a change of mindset and culture across our political institutions and society. **We are a social movement for change!**

2017 Activities – what we did and how:

- Encouraged the government to trial citizens juries and other participatory democracy mechanisms
 - Developed and publicized a set of criteria/principles for evaluating whether these processes were valid from the communities point of view (working with ACTCOSS)
 - worked with civil society groups and academics (ACTCOSS, ACT Carers Association, UC Institute of Governance and Policy Analysis,) to hold the government to account for valid trials
 - built widespread interest and support for strong and effective citizen participation within the community
- Met with every MLA who responded to our invitation (18) to discuss their roles, how they represent and interact with the community and how they think our democracy could be strengthened.
- Worked with Community Councils, local residents groups and others to identify and address the “democratic deficit” that makes it hard for community members to engage on neighbourhood and urban planning issues. Developed a shared set of “asks” to work towards in 2018.
- Made submissions to ACT Assembly Inquiries on the 2016 Election (and gave evidence at the public hearing) and an Independent Corruption Commission

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

- Developed an accountability framework for the CAPaD 2016 Election “candidate statements”
- Gave a perspective on participatory democracy to the ACT Law Reform Advisory Council work on Canberra as a Restorative City
- Met with ACTCOSS and the Environment Council to explore what training in social change for our members
- Maintained our website, Facebook page, Twitter presence and kept an active media profile through interviews, opinion pieces and letters to the Editor

We decided early on that we would know we’re **on the right track if**

- 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 are the opportunities ahead?

2018 offers many opportunities for action, including to

- extend our alliances in Canberra and build “communities of practice”
- take up good ideas from elsewhere – in terms of both what and how we can better implement our vision. eg Engage UK, NewDemocracy Foundation
- inform/educate, demonstrate and learn what works to strengthen our local democracy
- advocate for and defend democratic systems and processes
- develop and try methods to hold our representatives accountable to their constituents

What we will do next

1. Create and communicate a new story of wise governance for the common good
2. Develop and support citizen and civil society engagement in government decisions
3. Create opportunities for citizen input to government deliberations
4. Develop capacity to help parliamentarians better to represent us