Democracy in Action Conversation 3 – What are we going to ask Candidates?

Key points from Conversations 1 and 2.

- **We asked Canberrans to tell us**:
    - what qualities they want to see in their MLAs,
    - how MLAs can involve the community more effectively in decision-making and policy,
    - how can voters tell which candidates have the qualities they want to see,
    - how do we expect MLAs to balance Party / personal agendas with community needs, and
    - how can we know if MLAs are delivering what the community needs.

- **Qualities and attributes we expect are**: high levels of personal integrity and positive values set; acts in good faith, in accordance with due consideration and good judgement; free from undue influence such as financial vested interest; courage; facilitates community participation; supports integrity and accountability in 'government'; engaged with, listens to and reports back to their community (*A 'voice and ear of the … community'*); balances competing interests AND puts community above personal and party interests; intelligent, open and flexible; displays leadership.

- **We can see if candidates have demonstrated these quantities by**:
    - asking them directly at a public meeting or face to face to share the evidence of having done the things listed in their past activities or profile,
    - asking them what are their: 1. Qualifications; 2. Leadership experience; 3. Community Prosperity and Wellbeing indicators; 4. Personal environmental impact; 5 Climate policy; 6. Population policy; 7. How's life?
    - Survey them,
    - Have the community complete an assessment of what they have seen as evidence from this candidate,
    - Candidates should have statements and information publicly available.

- **We know if they are working for the community because**:
    - They tell us (emails, newsletters, social media),
    - We monitor them and this information is shared into the community,
    - We are involved (they involve us) personally and, more importantly, as a community.

- **We expect representatives to demonstrate how their platforms have been developed** from open, reliable, public participatory processes that collected evidence of what the whole community needs.

- **We expect representatives to prioritise community need** above allegiance to party or group ideology.

Focus questions for Democracy in Action! Conversation 3

Remembering that the context is: how do we choose among the candidates offering themselves for selection, representatives who will govern well for and with us for the public good?

What we want to know is summarised in the **Key Points** on the first page.

Specifically, from Conversation 2, we said:

Where do we find out the information we want to know about candidates?

Ask the candidates directly (individually and in public meet ups, public meetings, community meet and greet events):
- What are your: 1. Qualifications; 2. Leadership experience; 3. Community Prosperity and Wellbeing indicators; 4. Personal environmental impact; 5 Climate policy; 6. Population policy; 7. How's life?
- ***By sending them questions*** and asking for specific answers on what they will do (e.g on health, education, environment, climate change, defence, foreign relations, etc.)

Candidates should have statements and information:
- ***on the Vote Easy website***
- personal, party / group websites
- at stalls – being open to more personal information
- various mainstream, alternative and social media outlets

What are the questions we want to ask all the candidates at the Know your candidate forums?

How many questions is reasonable?

Summary of the combined outputs

What is a representative?

Key themes (from Collective Statements)
- *Represents the needs/concerns of constituents*
- *Someone who acts in good faith, in accordance with due consideration and good judgement, free from undue influence such as financial vested interest*
- *A 'voice and ear of the group or community'*

Summary:

- An elected member of the Legislative Assembly who can represent the interests, needs and concerns of the wider community in good faith during processes of policymaking
- A person who forms, implements, administers and advocates for government policy and considers how it tracks through time
- The representative may alternate between being a political delegate, advocate and trustee of the community, depending on which role is needed at any given time

Additional points: not all representatives are in government; there are MLAs in opposition. MLAs' role also involves debating and voting on legislation, and Committee work. Their representative role is to the community not individuals.

What qualities are we seeking in our MLAs?

Key themes (from Collective Statements)
- *Genuine interest in community and people*
- *Courage*
- *Facilitator of community participation*
- *Intelligent, clear-thinking*
- *'A rare beast – 'honest, transparent, independent, available, intellectually competent*
- *Experienced in leadership*

Summary:

- Integrity, honesty, transparency and accountability. This includes things like putting the community first, not being factionally aligned, being resistant to undue influence from vested interests, declaring any conflicts of interest, being transparent about funding sources and spending and supporting accountability processes and public scrutiny.
- Genuine respect and understanding for the members of their community, especially those in disadvantaged groups
- Genuinely consultative and a facilitator of community participation – someone who is an excellent listener, who regularly seeks input from the community, and who then provides feedback to them on issues discussed
- A strong moral compass and evident goodwill
- A strong leader who is courageous (someone who doesn't shy away from conflict) and is hardworking
- A strong and engaging communicator and negotiator with influence

- Intelligent and clear-thinking. This includes demonstrating knowledge of portfolios, sound judgment based on evidence, an ability to discern the true essence of issues and prioritise them accordingly, and an ability to understand and explain diversity of views.
- Collaborative and effective in policy development and implementation
- Someone who is open to new solutions and ways of thinking that can address faulty policy systems
- Flexibility and focus – being open to new information but also maintaining long term policy agenda
- A representative places the community need above ideology, party interests or other vested interests in their policy platform
- A representative stays in close contact with constituents and has an in-depth understanding of their community and the issues that affect them
- A representative is collaborative with the community and negotiates closely with them on policy issues, canvassing and promoting new ideas with them in relation to planned actions and legislation
- A representative discerns the majority view so they can provide consensus views within the Assembly, but is also aware of and acknowledges dissenting views
- A representative actively supports accountability in government
- The MLA is prepared to be challenged on their views and actions and open to reviewing their policy position (they can also reasonably defend their position if it differs to community view)

See also attached documents from parallel conversations which reflect these opinions.

How can we know confidently that candidates have demonstrated these qualities in their previous practice?

Ask them directly at a public meeting or face to face to share the evidence of having done the things listed in their past activities or profile.

Have the community complete an assessment of what they have seen as evidence from this candidate
- Looking at candidates' previous work and community involvements
- Checking if their online representation actually matches their claims
- Via easily accessed forms of communication – online, different media, dedicated websites (e.g. one general website – see voteeasy below)
- Hansard and candidates' websites
- ABC Media – trusted and balanced
- Relevant interested parties
- From their opposition

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How can we know our MLAs are working for the community?

Key themes (from Collective Statements)
- ***They create and publish a highly visible scorecard on their progress and what they said they would achieve***
- ***The representative communicates regularly and clearly via easily accessible means***
- ***They are prepared to be challenged and to review their positions, openly and convincingly***
- ***Genuine consultation and degree of quality engagement with community***
- ***They hold deliberative forums and participatory community events***
- ***By sensing the changes in the community, good quality of life***
- ***The budget is balanced***

Summary:

- When there is ongoing and meaningful consultation with constituents to ensure the representative is aware of issues they need to raise in the Assembly or to other appropriate bodies, and the community is aware of and engaged in upcoming policy processes such as bills and legislation formation
- In-person interaction with constituents that may occur through town halls, citizen assemblies, deliberative forums and community events
- Responding to constituent correspondence meaningfully and consistently
- Ongoing communication through emails, newsletters, social media, surveys etc.
- The community may also be engaged as volunteers if they choose
- When the MLA supports civil society in a variety of ways, ensuring the general community can obtain verbal information/advice to enable them to hold the representative to account
- When the MLA is genuinely responsive to community needs (considering root cause and effect), advocating strongly for them in the Assembly, and reporting back on outcomes and progress
- Adherence (or not) to expert opinion and evidence (e.g. cost benefit analyses)
- When there is full transparency of the MLA's voting records and speeches in the Assembly (e.g. accessible voting scorecards, policy dashboards and Hansard extracts), and this voting history and advocacy is aligned with community consensus, community need and agreed policy deliverables
- Demonstrating progress or achievement in multiple policy domains
- Through unbiased media reports on the MLA's work, as well as interactive media, infographics and community dashboards that demonstrate the MLA's effectiveness
- Through measuring things like speeches (quantity, content, thematic qualitative analysis of how speech relates to community input and ideas received through deliberative forums)
- Through measuring the number of deliberative and input-seeking forums
- When the MLA can provide reasons, clear information, and data for their assembly voting results and other activities in their role
- When the MLA has demonstrated integrity by standing up to those with vested interests
- The MLA divulges any conflicts of interest they may have or other impediments to honesty
- They have limits to personal wealth gathering and don't immediately attain jobs related to portfolios after leaving their political roles
- When the budget is balanced
- When there is strong service provision, visible improved quality of life and positive improvements in the community

- Harmony and inclusivity in the community – lack of serious disagreement between community with policies and nobody feels overlooked

Key highlights: These can be arranged in three domains in ascending level of engagement:

They tell us
Emails, newsletters, social media;

We monitor them and this information is shared into the community
Voting history and advocacy is aligned with community consensus, community need and agreed policy deliverables; adherence (or not) to expert opinion and evidence; speeches (quantity, content, thematic qualitative analysis of how speech relates to community input; media reports on the MLA's work; interactive media, infographics and community dashboards; behaviour matches promised standards;

We are involved (they involve us) personally and, more importantly, as a community
Interpersonal interactions; surveys; consultations with community; volunteering with/for MLAs; measuring the number of deliberative and input-seeking forums; interactive report back to community forums; strong service provision, visible improved quality of life and positive improvements;

How do we expect candidates to balance their responsibilities to their party or group with their responsibilities to their electorate community?

Candidates need good, reliable participatory processes to be confident they know their whole community's views on highly charged issues
- By listening and responding to constituents honestly and promptly.
- Through honest communications clearly setting out the party commitments and what they will do for constituents.
- By taking a stand during party discussions on matters their constituents think are important but may not be consistent with party policies (it needs to be displayed publicly when they take a stand in this manner)

The candidate should be independent, beholden to the community over the party
- Candidates should challenge their party on issues they know their community wants addressed and they should cross the floor when they can strongly justify their conviction
- We need parties to base policies on the latest evidence not their ideology, and where these conflict we expect evidence to be used.

How can we find out if the party/group/personal platforms and promises are consistent with community needs and are prioritised for the community's benefit?

Parties/ groups/ independents should demonstrate how their platforms have been developed from open, public participatory processes that collected evidence of what the community needs. Supporting this:
- Community needs access to evidence based information to monitor that candidates, if elected, are meeting our needs.
- Candidates need to be open that there will be winners and losers and that all community wants will not be necessarily satisfied.