



POSITION PAPER

CONTENTS

Keeping Community Organisations on the Political Agenda

Background: Some Community Sector Responses

Value for Government

Our Ask

Conclusion

References

Keeping Community Organisations on the Political Agenda

Recent governments have clearly privileged investment in economic growth above investment in social and environmental outcomes (Dale, 2015). This paper is specifically about social outcomes. The last two to three years has seen public and community sector workforce and funding dramatically reduced, putting all community services under significant pressure in the name of efficiency, and leaving many people without support. This has impacted families and communities across the demographic spectrum. Despite the consultations for the Queensland Plan and subsequent report, no additional resources during that time were allocated to strengthening communities, addressing social inclusion and enhancing social cohesion.

In Queensland, Labor built its recent election campaign on listening to community and the Premier has indicated that Labor will continue to listen. If this means that Labor will take community concerns seriously and create the conditions for community to influence direction, then it may well continue to win community support and arrest the political pendulum swing at the next election.

The organisations responsible for this position paper are not politically aligned, but are looking for governments which value and acknowledge communities and recognise and invest in community infrastructure.

Communities speak in a number of ways, through the ballot box being one of them. Beyond politics however, communities have historically developed community organisations so that they can have a public presence, a voice and a structure through which they can organise for themselves and address local issues locally (Lenette and Ingamells, 2015).

In this way community organisations (i.e. those organisations which developed in their community and are community-managed and community-responsive) are quite distinct from the larger national and international NGOs. They may provide some services to the most disadvantaged of their communities, but they also are the vehicle through which communities are mobilised, are able to progress their agendas, work on their own concerns, contribute to local and regional planning and participate in local and regional collaborations (Harwood, 2014).

Their survival has required increasing layers of professionalisation, managerialism and corporate behaviour, but they remain the most relevant organisations to the communities they serve. However, if contemporary funding trends continue, their future will be highly circumscribed.

Background: Some Community Sector Responses

Over the past few years community organisations have begun to collaborate to ensure that they make best use of the resources they do have access to, and to extend the reach, scale, range, variety and quality of their activities through their combined efforts. The following are some examples of community oriented collaborative efforts:

- The Coalition of Community Boards has been linking boards of local community-oriented agencies across Queensland for dialogue about their strategic readiness for the challenges of the changing funding environment.
- Volunteering Queensland has launched 'Community Commons Project' and 'Together With' to foster and support those community organisations across Queensland which have volunteer boards and which often rely on significant proportions of voluntary labour.
- Volunteering Queensland and the Coalition of Community Boards have been working together with funding provided by Queensland Community Foundation to assist collaborating organisations.
- The Whitsunday, Isaac and Mackay Coalition of Community Boards is fully engaged in strengthening governance, collaboration, strategy and achieving optimal outcomes for and with community across the 3 LGAs of this region.
- A group of community organisations in Logan have formed the Logan Community Group Alliance, which has brought Boards together to map and better utilise their assets, optimise community outcomes, strengthen governance and community practice and establish the ways in which their contribution is critical to the broader Logan Together process.
- On the Sunshine Coast a number of community organisations are exploring ways to optimise their effectiveness.

These are just some local and regional collaborations occurring across Queensland.

Asset Mapping is underway in a number of collaborative initiatives. These will be reported in due course. An early snapshot of one region indicates that seven collaborating organisations deliver 185 programs to residents of over 41 suburbs in Logan City and Brisbane South, deploying 267 volunteers, with support from 26.62 full time equivalent paid staff. These seven community based organisations have been operating for between 5 and 39 years, with operating budgets between \$8,000 and \$1.292 Million, of which 45.4% is self-generated.

These centres are a significant soft-entry point for a range of disadvantaged people to access support, information and specialist government programs. Through their boards, volunteering and annual events, they also attract high levels of wider community engagement and input.





**A REGIONAL POINT
OF CONTACT WHICH
IS GENUINELY
REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE AGENCIES IN THE
REGION**

Value for Government

Through their combined efforts these groups are moving to the point where they will be able to offer government a regional point of contact which is genuinely representative of the agencies in the region and which can draw on local and regional knowledge to ensure funds are directed where they will have the most impact.

The combined efforts of these groups mean they retain and multiply the efficiency and flexibility which small local organisations have been known for, but without the need for government to directly deal with multiple organisations.

This will retain local knowledge of how to mobilise community supports to enable those people who do not readily respond to standard services to find ways to meet their needs.

These organisations already provide hundreds of voluntary hours of operational and governance work.

They mobilise hundreds of volunteers, and are on hand to coordinate volunteer efforts at times of crisis and disaster.

Like small business they are the backbone of the industry and employ a very significant number of people.

They pick up local issues and mobilise their communities before the issues reach crisis point.

They assist communities to celebrate, acknowledge local culture, and retain community pride and sense of belonging.

Our Ask:

We ask for a commitment to the proper resourcing of, and engagement with, local and regional communities, through a whole of government community development policy and investment framework (the Queensland Plan could be the impetus for this).

We ask that government publicly acknowledge the strengths and potential of existing community organisations, which, like small business, are vital to regional wellbeing and act to arrest the decline of local and regional community infrastructure. We ask that government acknowledge that this is a particular part of the Not for Profit sector.

Where representative regional or sub regional representative bodies exist or are emerging, we ask that government work with them rather than imposing a layer of external agency across them.

Where there is no internal momentum to collaboration, and government feels impelled to award contracts to agencies beyond the area, we ask that funders write into those contracts that local collaboration is required.

We ask that government provide resourcing to evaluate and properly assess the value of those local and regional collaborations which are providing genuine alternatives to facilitate government engagement;

We ask that there be a voice at the policy-table that small organisations see as representing their interests;

We ask for devolution of planning and resources to appropriately representative regional bodies;

We ask that Government champion community owned infrastructure.

**WE ASK THAT
GOVERNMENT
PUBLICLY
ACKNOWLEDGE THE
STRENGTHS &
POTENTIAL OF
EXISTING
COMMUNITY
ORGANISATIONS**



Innovate Symposium 2015

Conclusion

We live in a democracy, in which education and engagement are valued. Communities will not settle for spin, they seek to influence government through genuine processes. They do not naively expect to have it all their own way, they know governments have the tough job of balancing the needs of diverse regions, interests and domains, however, they want to be heard and understood and want to see that their contributions are considered. They may not object to some services being delivered through large external agencies with multi site contracts so long as this is not at the cost of local community infrastructure and capacity. The consequences of continuing to privilege the Queensland economy by imposing harsh efficiency measures across social initiatives is untenable, and will continue to produce political instability. The road spelt out here is not easy, and nor should it be approached quickly – but it is the long slow road to economic as well as social, environmental and political strength and stability.



The **Coalition of Community Boards** is a network of board members from small and medium community organisations from different regions around Queensland working to promote collaborative and sustainable communities. They believe in a better way of working and existing in the changing policy environment.



Volunteering Queensland advances the interests and capacity of community, through effective and innovative volunteering, social participation and civic engagement. The role of small to medium organisations in local communities is a critical form of effective participation. Involvement with community-led organisations nurtures inclusivity and resilience within communities; often in more practical, innovative and sustainable ways.

Together with a diverse group of stakeholders

References

- Coalition of Community Boards, Our Aim, <http://cocb.org.au/about/aim/>
- Dale, A. (2015) Jobs Versus the Environment: the debate Queensland can end. <https://theconversation.com/jobs-versus-the-environment-the-debate-queensland-can-end-37760>
- Harwood, R. C. (2014) Putting Community into Collective Impact. Collective Impact Forum, Harwood Centre for Public Innovation and FSG. http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/putting_community_in_collective_impact
- Lenette, C & Ingamells, A. (2015) Mind the Gap! The growing chasm between funding-driven agencies and social and community knowledge and practice. Community Development Journal 50:1 pp88-103.
- Logan Together (2014) http://www.logan.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/312391/Logan_Together_Prospectus_October_2014-v1.pdf
- Volunteering Queensland, Community Commons Project, <http://volunteeringqld.org.au/communitycommons>
- Whitsunday & Mackay (WHAM) Regional Plan (2006) <http://www.dsdiqld.gov.au/resources/plan/wham/wham-regional-plan.pdf>