



ACT
Government



2023 Listening Report and Improvement Action Plan

Feedback and experiences of
commissioning participants

Annual evaluation and actions to improve delivery of the ACT 2030
Human Service System Reform through commissioning – report #2.

Community Services Directorate

ACT Health Directorate

ACT Council of Social Service

This report was prepared by:

Commissioning is delivered in partnership between the ACT Government and the non-government sector. Thus the 2023 Listening Report and Improvement Action Plan is developed in collaboration between the ACT Government specifically, the Community Services Directorate Business Improvement Branch, Strategic Commissioning Teams of the Community Services Directorate and ACT Health Directorate; and the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS).

© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra, April 2024

This work is copyright. Apart from fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism, or review as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission.

Enquiries regarding this report may be directed to the:

C/o Industry Development Team, Community Services Directorate, ACT Government, GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601. Website <http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/commissioning>

Suggested Citation

ACT Government and ACT Council of Social Service. 2023 Listening Report: feedback and experiences of commissioning partners. Annual monitoring and evaluation for the ACT 2030 Human Service System Reform.

Disclaimer:

The 2023 Listening Report was produced using the methodology and questions developed by the ACT Government and community and health sector partners in 2021-22. Further information on the monitoring and evaluation framework for the ACT 2023 Human Service Reform is available at www.communityservices.act.gov.au/commissioning

It is not necessarily a comprehensive evaluation of all indicators relating to the experience of commissioning. It was current at the time of production (but not necessarily at the time of publication). It is reproduced for general information and third parties rely upon it at their own risk.

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events, and venues as accessible as possible. If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, such as large print, please phone Access Canberra on 13 22 81 or email the Community Services Directorate at CSDCommissioning@act.gov.au.

If English is not your first language and you require a translating and interpreting service, please phone 13 14 50. If you are deaf, or have a speech or hearing impairment, and need the teletypewriter service, please phone 13 36 77 and ask for Access Canberra on 13 22 81. For speak and listen users, please phone 1300 555 727 and ask for Access Canberra on 13 22 81. For information on these services visit www.relayservice.com.au

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region.

Executive Summary

The 2023 Listening Report and Improvement Action Plan (the 2023 Report) reflects what we have heard about commissioning practice and experience from both the government and non-government sector (the sector). The 2023 Report provides practical actions to address challenges and continuously improve commissioning practice and experiences.

This 2023 Report, the second commissioning listening report and improvement action plan, was drafted by a working group from government (Community Services and ACT Health Directorates) and the peak body for the community sector, the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS). The group analysed data from several sources: the 2023 annual commissioning survey, post-activity surveys, formal and informal engagements with key stakeholders and 2022 baseline data.

ACTCOSS welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively and in partnership with ACT Government colleagues in the development of the 2023 Report. The joint analysis ensured a more comprehensive process to identify both challenges and opportunities for meeting the ambition of the Government's reform agenda set out in the Commissioning Roadmap.

In 2023, we have more commissioning cycles underway than ever before. Naturally this brings a greater opportunity to collectively learn and improve. We have always taken an action-based learning approach to commissioning, adapting in response to insights and learnings from the first commissioning cycles.

Feedback from across government and the sector indicates there is still work to be done to improve commissioning practice to make it more aligned to the commissioning principles. To do this effectively, the sector has called for further investment in commissioning capability and capacity. Directorates are committed to exploring, monitoring, and considering ways to implement commissioning within existing resources while making the case for further investment where evidence indicates capability and capacity gaps.

ACTCOSS recognises the constraints of the annual Budget process and the limitations this places on the recommendations in the 2023 Report. ACTCOSS has identified recommendations which are reliant on additional funding that are outside the scope of the actions in this Report. For example, funding for non-government organisations to participate in commissioning or investment for government to drive commissioning more effectively. ACTCOSS will continue to strongly advocate for this additional funding, especially for the community sector.

We continue to deliver commissioning and commissioning improvements within existing resources and goodwill. The 2023 Report highlights the need to monitor resourcing closely to ensure we have the right mix, depth and balance within Directorates and across the sector to deliver effective commissioning and drive reform. We will continue to work together to understand and articulate the resourcing needs of commissioning for the future.

2024 Priorities

The 2023 Report and analysis was also reviewed by the Commissioning Senior Officers Group (CSOG) which prompted the recalibration of the improvement actions to ensure they have a strong focus on the capability uplift for the next wave of reform. This direction, informed by the insights of the 2023 Report, pitches the improvement actions to benefit future commissioning activity not just retrospectively. Capability development will focus on:

- Greater commissioning, grant and procurement clarity for commissioners, procurement experts and the sector to ensure funding arrangements support commissioning intentions through delivery.
- Streamlining the investment process experience for the sector to reduce the administrative burden.
- Outcomes reporting and data gathering that aligns to the ACT Wellbeing domains.
- Drive commissioning practice during delivery to continuous improvement of service delivery as well as ongoing between peaks, providers, and partners.
- Greater service integration across sub-sectors to streamline the next commissioning cycles and reduce the participation burden.

Key themes

This analysis identified 4 key themes which form the basis of this report and against which improvement actions are identified.

1. Commissioning in principle v practice

We heard that commissioning practice and experience has varied between different ACT Government Directorates or different parts of Directorates. Limiting time to collaborate impacts the quality of deliberation which in turn influences optimism for outcomes. In 2023, community and health sector (the sector) organisations began moving into the *Invest* phase of commissioning. Early *Invest* phase experiences have increased anxiety and uncertainty for the sector and are providing lessons for government.

The lessons learnt in 2023 have influenced current commissioning cycles and informed the [Draft Human Services Transitions Framework](#).

Actions

- Monitor supports required to grow Directorates' capacity to deliver more effective commissioning practices and experiences. (Collaboration)
- Revise evaluation tools and approaches to gather more effective feedback. (Relationship health)

2. Relationships and collaboration

We know that strong, respectful relationships are key to ensuring commissioning cycles are effective as we strategise and design, choose investment pathways, and deliver human services for all Canberrans. The community and health sector has a long history of delivering programs and providing policy advice to government. We heard that the relationship between government and the community sector is being strained through commissioning.

Where there has been early collaboration with peak bodies to strategise and design commissioning activities, data suggests that these cycles have been better implemented than others. However, not all organisations have peak bodies and commissioning requires peak bodies to be involved in several commissioning cycles concurrently. We have heard that it is exhausting, burdensome and time consuming when peak bodies and their members are involved in multiple commissioning cycles.

To maintain a respectful, collaborative partnership, these challenges will be addressed in actions identified for 2024, including better articulated co-design practices to plan new cycles before they commence.

Actions

- Government and peaks to work more closely on new cycles to identify issues, data needs, lesson learnt as part of ongoing co-design activities. (Trust)
- Government and peaks regularly meet to assess commissioners and sector partners alignment on commissioning approaches. (Optimism for outcomes/Trust)

3. Transparency and communication

We know that transparency and communication has not been optimal for certain commissioning cycles in 2023. Where communication was delayed without explanation, the community and health sector felt frustrated by what was considered opaque government processes and trust in commissioning was eroded. Similarly, respondents felt that the government was not taking commissioning seriously or was not adequately incorporating their views and opinions throughout the cycle, nor evidencing how input was being used to inform service changes.

Some respondents specified that their government contacts lacked the authority to provide much needed information or certainty when timelines shifted, however some respondents claimed that communication is improving.

More can and will be done to be more transparent by communicating timeframes and decisions, and generally communicating in a timely manner with the sector.

Actions

- Feedback to sector post engagement provided within five weeks. (Trust)
- Reasons for delays and new timings to be provided every eight weeks in Commissioning Conversations and update forums. (Trust)

4. Funding, resources, and capability

Feedback in 2023 highlighted the impact of perceived underfunding for sector organisations to undertake commissioning collaboration activities while remaining responsive to service delivery needs. Many people felt commissioning was burdensome and overly bureaucratic, with organisations (particularly smaller ones) under resourced to participate. Additionally, there is uneven capacity across both government and the sector to lead, manage and engage with commissioning.

To ensure government can lead and the sector can contribute to commissioning in the most effective way, we need to closely monitor, understand, and clearly articulate the resourcing needs of commissioning for the future.

Actions

- Explore opportunities for future support to build capacity for outcomes reporting. (Optimism for outcomes)
- Continue work under the Sector Sustainability Project to inform funding investment where commissioning activities produce evidence of need and demand. (Optimism for outcomes)
- Monitor supports required to grow Directorates' capacity to deliver more effective commissioning practices and experiences. (Collaboration)
- For sector and government to consider innovative ways to participate (especially smaller organisations) in commissioning activities (Time)

2023 Insights and continuous improvement actions

This table provides a summary of the continuous improvement actions undertaken so far and new actions identified in 2023.










EVALUATION FOCUS AREAS				
TRUST	RELATIONSHIP HEALTH	OPTIMISM FOR OUTCOMES	COLLABORATION	TIME
Our expectations that the commissioning process will/does align with the shared priorities and principles agreed in the commissioning approach.	How we perceive the strength of the relationship between government and non-government organisations.	Our confidence in the process to make a positive difference for the lives of Canberrans.	How well we collaborate and ensure that the voices of a diverse range of people (including lived experience) play a key role in the development of solutions.	How we perceive whether adequate time was afforded to participants, the processes, and the activities for effective collaboration.
2023 FEEDBACK INSIGHTS				
Poor communication by Directorates is impacting trust in the commissioning process and reform.	For sector, the multiple commissioning cycles and activities can be burdensome and time consuming.	Design activities stall and anxiety increases where there is no clear commitment to increasing funding even when commissioning identifies evidence of community need.	Early engagement with consumer groups and peak bodies to plan commissioning cycles and activities can improve collaboration, participation, and time investment.	Changing timeframes without explanations impacts participants' availability to engage and by extension the inclusiveness and effectiveness of collaboration.
The commissioning experience varies when delivered by different ACT Government Directorates or different parts of Directorates.	For government, constrained staffing resources routinely impact communication effectiveness and management of time within the sector.	We need to ensure meaningful evaluation data is available to improve commissioning, this includes actively increasing survey response rates.	Capacity and capability of ACT Government commissioning teams influences the commissioning experience and effectiveness	Limiting time to collaborate also limits the quality of deliberation which influences relationship health and optimism for outcomes.
CSOG: We need to ensure we retain the commissioning intents and practices through procurement and delivery arrangements. This report cannot commit government to additional resources for commissioning, but it can highlight where there may be resource need.	CSOG: We need to anticipate the needs and opportunities of the next operating environment for reform and what ambitious activities are needed, to continue the whole of system reform momentum and develop the right capability.	CSOG: We are undertaking Sector Sustainability Project which has a focus on address funding and investment within the sector.	CSOG: We need to be specific about the capability focus areas that will deliver the right improvements and abilities for the next part of human service reform.	CSOG: We need to focus on streamlining by fostering greater service integration across sub-sectors and reducing the procurement and administrative burden on the sector.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS									
TRUST		RELATIONSHIP HEALTH		OPTIMISM FOR OUTCOMES		COLLABORATION		TIME	
Our expectations that the commissioning process will/does align with the shared priorities and principles agreed in the commissioning approach.		How we perceive the strength of the relationship between government and non-government organisations.		Our confidence in the process to make a positive difference for the lives of Canberrans.		How well we collaborate and ensure that the voices of a diverse range of people (including lived experience) play a key role in the development of solutions.		How we perceive whether adequate time was afforded to participants, the processes, and the activities for effective collaboration.	
2024 CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES									
+	Focus capability development on greater commissioning, grant and procurement clarity for commissioners, procurement experts and the sector to ensure funding arrangements support commissioning intentions through delivery.	+	Focus capability development on streamlining the investment process experience for the sector to reduce the administrative burden.	+	Focus capability development on outcomes reporting and data gathering that aligns to the ACT Wellbeing domains.	+	Drive commissioning practice during delivery to continuous improvement of service delivery as well as ongoing collaboration between peaks, providers, and partners.	+	Focus capability development on the greater service integration across sub-sectors to streamline the next commissioning cycles and reduce the participation burden.
+ NEW GENERAL OR SUPPORTING ACTIONS									
+	Reasons for delays and new timings to be provided every eight weeks in Commissioning Conversations and update forums.	+	Revise evaluation tools and approaches to gather more effective feedback on commissioning experiences.	+	Government and peaks regularly meet to assess commissioners' and sector partners' alignment on commissioning approaches.	+	Monitor supports required to grow Directorates' capacity to deliver more effective commissioning practices and experiences.	+	Government and peaks work more closely on new cycles to identify issues, data needs, lesson learnt and to plan stakeholder engagement and timeframes.
+	Government and peaks work more closely on new cycles to identify issues, data needs, and lessons learnt as part of ongoing co-design activities.			+	Continue work under the Sector Sustainability Project to inform funding investment where commissioning activities produce evidence of need and demand.			+	For sector and government to consider innovative ways to participate (especially smaller organisations) in commissioning activities
+	Feedback to sector post engagement provided within five weeks.			+	Explore opportunities for future support to build capacity for outcomes reporting.				
→ ONGOING ACTIONS									



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS

TRUST		RELATIONSHIP HEALTH		OPTIMISM FOR OUTCOMES		COLLABORATION		TIME	
→	Commissioners continue to be accessible and transparent to sector.	→	Do more effective discoveries to surface what we already know.	→	Work with the ACT Wellbeing Framework team to develop effective and meaningful data collection streams and methods for the human service system.	→	Work with Commissioners to develop lived experience approaches as part of commissioning engagement planning.	→	Continue to co-design engagement approaches by sub-sector that integrate multiple programs.
→	Continue co-developing resources, templates, guides, and induction materials to support commissioning practice.	→	Continue co-designing commissioning phases and activities with government and non-government organisations.	→	Encourage Commissioners to develop and publish data sources as part of the discovery/strategise phase.	→	Provide resources, templates, guides, and induction materials to support commissioning practice.	→	Continue to co-design with a view to efficient use of participant time.
→	Every Commissioning Conversations provide a 10-week forecast of upcoming activities.	→		→		→	Government and non-government organisations to co-design engagement activities.	→	Provide resources to improve engagement planning.
→	Greater use of the commissioning calendar in a timely way.	→		→		→	→	→	Do more effective discoveries to surface what we already know and limit repetition.

 COMPLETED ACTIONS

	Make the post-activity survey 'always open'.		Develop, streamline, and make consistent service level agreement across Directorates, where possible.		Update advice on how commissioning intersects with the ACT Wellbeing Framework.		Develop a commissioning with lived experience guide.		
	Establish calendar with indicative dates and windows of activity.		Develop a new relationship management framework and supporting resources.		Establish Sector Sustainability Program to address sector capability challenges.		Establish a commissioning lived experience engagement advisory panel.		
			Include two new phases into the commissioning approach – discovery and integration.						

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS

TRUST	RELATIONSHIP HEALTH		OPTIMISM FOR OUTCOMES	COLLABORATION	TIME
		Provision of consistent investment questions and answers.		Deliver monitoring and evaluation training for non-government organisations and government.	

DRAFT

Contents

2023 Listening Report and Improvement Action Plan	1
Executive Summary	3
2023 Insights and continuous improvement actions	1
Background and context.....	6
Detailed analysis.....	8
2023 Monitoring and evaluation approach.....	31
Glossary	34

DRAFT

Background and context

This section provides the evaluation background and context for this Report.

The potential of commissioning, as set out in the [Commissioning Roadmap 2022-24](#), is to reform the human services system within the ACT to ensure our systems, services and programs are meeting the needs of our community. Commissioning is the method through which the government and sector drive reform together.

Human service system reform

Every commissioning cycle can contribute to transforming our partnership dynamic and to delivering the outcomes of human service reform by 2030.

[2030 Human Service Reform Outcomes](#)

Better respond to community need, both existing and emerging, through increased flexibility and opportunities for innovation.

Improve integration across the service systems to support seamless and holistic care, and transitions between services.

Reduce pressure on our hospitals and other crisis services, such as homelessness or statutory services for children, young people, and families by prioritising prevention and early support.

Improve equity in health and life outcomes for priority population groups, through commissioning decisions made about where and how to focus support.

Improve sector sustainability through closer partnerships and better understanding the needs of our service delivery partners.

Continuous improvement

This 2023 Report is second commissioning listening report and improvement action plan, with annual improvement plans released for the life of the 10-year human service reform through to 2030 as outlined in the [Commissioning Evaluation Framework](#). (The Framework). The Framework provides 5 focus areas to monitor and evaluate the commissioning experience and practice.

Evaluation Focus Areas	
Trust	Our expectations that the commissioning process will/does align with the shared priorities and principles agreed in the commissioning approach.
Relationship health	How we perceive the strength of the relationship between government and non-government organisations.
Optimism for outcomes	Our confidence in the process to make a positive difference for the lives of Canberrans.
Collaboration	How well we collaborate and ensure that the voices of a diverse range of people (including lived experience) play a key role in the development of solutions.
Time	How we perceive whether adequate time was afforded to participants, the processes, and the activities for effective collaboration.

Participants and respondents

Understanding participation versus response rates is important for effective evaluation. People participating in commissioning and reform activities are invited to provide formal and informal feedback.

Commissioning involves more than 140 non-government organisations and approximately 300 ACT Government staff.

This includes senior executives, policy officers, contract managers, program directors, advocates and frontline staff from the ACT Government and from health and community sector non-government organisations.

Many commissioning participants are involved in multiple commissioning activities.

Detailed analysis

This section draws together analysis from quantitative data sources.

In the 2023 Annual Survey, there was a significant reduction in survey participation despite efforts to encourage participation. The 2023 Annual Survey was widely promoted and open for two months. This drop has affected the representativeness of the data collected. It is not clear what caused such a decline in respondents choosing to complete the survey. Respondents who answered quantitative questions negatively were twice as likely to leave comments than those who responded positively or neutrally.

The **annual survey quantitative data** comparisons from 2022-23 reflect that trust in the commissioning process aligning with the shared priorities and principles has declined in 2023, however, many respondents also rated their trust in the process in the neutral range. Optimism for outcomes making a positive difference for the lives of Canberrans has significantly decreased in 2023. Relationship health remains relatively stable, being rated as good to very good between, with, and within government as well as with and within the sector.

Overall, the qualitative comments suggested there is a **clear discrepancy between support for commissioning in principle vs in practice**, with both sector and government respondents asserting that commissioning in principle promised more benefits and less disruption than has occurred in practice. Non-government participants cited inconsistencies in the commissioning approach, processes, and the application of principles across different commissioning sectors as causing challenges. Some respondents, however, may hold entrenched negative views about commissioning, and this impacts optimism towards its future benefits.

The timing of commissioning's implementation coinciding with the COVID 19 Pandemic and its subsequent resource impacts was criticised. A significant proportion of respondents felt that commissioning was burdensome, overly complicated, and bureaucratic. Many non-government organisations asserted that they are not adequately resourced to participate in commissioning, particularly small organisations.

Although the quantitative data signified that many respondents rated the health of relationships with and within Government and the Sector as good to very good, the qualitative responses reflected a mixed result, with many leaving negative comments that commissioning had strained relationships.

Respondents provided mixed responses regarding the theme of transparency and communication with many citing communications as lacking and felt process delays were left unexplained by government.

The **post activity survey quantitative** data demonstrated very positive results and comments. The post activity survey is available online and always open, as well as being provided in hard copy at the end of activities. Respondents were encouraged to complete the survey but were not required to answer or provide a comment to every question. A large proportion of respondents rated their trust as being high or very high after participating in the activity. Confidence in their levels of Optimism remained high and most respondents felt collaborative design was used. This reflects that when the Sector and Commissioners come together in a workshop, the overall feeling towards commissioning more generally is positive and optimistic.

Given these reflections, and lessons learnt from the 2022-23 commissioning processes, ACTCOSS and the Strategic Commissioners jointly developed new actions for the 2023-24 (and beyond) commissioning cycles, detailed above.

DRAFT

Annual Survey

This section summarises responses from the 2023 Annual Survey of ACT Government commissioners and non-government community and health sector partners.

Info	2022 Baseline	2023
Capture Date	01.07.2021-30.06.2022	01.07.2022 – 30.06.2023
Total Participants	196	85
<i>Government</i>	<i>61 (31% of total)</i>	<i>41 (48% of total)</i>
<i>Non-Government</i>	<i>125 (63% of total)</i>	<i>41 (48% of total)</i>
<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>10 (5% of total)</i>	<i>3 (3.5% of total)</i>
Quantitative Analysis	YES	YES
Qualitative Analysis	NO	YES

The annual survey uses 10 statements focused on trust, relationship health and optimism for outcomes.

This year, participants had the opportunity to complete the annual survey online and anonymously from 21 April to 23 June 2023.

In the 2023 Annual Survey, there was a significant reduction in government and non-government responses compared to the baseline in 2022. Government participation decreased by one third with non-government responses decreasing by almost two thirds. Lower response rates impact how representative the feedback is, given more than 140 non-government organisations and approximately 300 government staff are currently participating in commissioning activities. Motivations for responding to the annual survey are unclear.

(See 2023 Report Section ‘2023 Monitoring and evaluation approach’)

DRAFT

Quantative analysis

The 2023 annual survey results were also compared to the 2022 baseline to understand shifts in participant responses.

Trust

From the 2023 quantitative annual survey data, 20% had high to very high trust that commissioning principles were being upheld, while 30% had a neutral response.

Measurement

Our expectations that the commissioning process will/does align with the shared priorities and principles agreed in the commissioning approach.

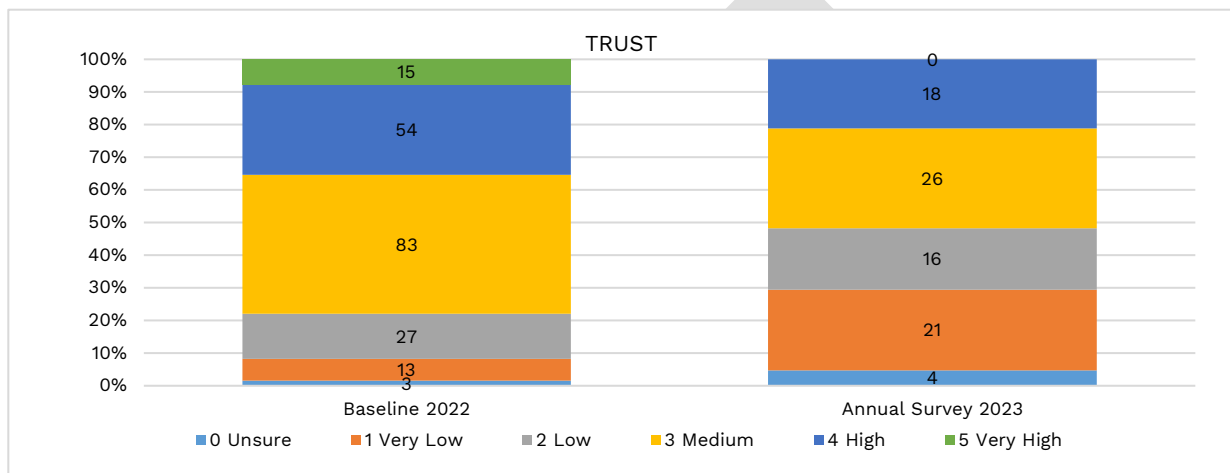


Figure 1 - Trust that the commissioning process aligns with the shared priorities and principles decreased.

Positive responses decreased from 35% (baseline) to 20% (2023).

Relationship health

From the 2023 quantitative annual survey data, 55% of respondents indicated the health of the relationships with and within Government as being good to very good, with 30% scoring a neutral response.

Relationships with and within the Sector were also positive with 70% answering that relationships were good to very good.

Measurement

How we perceive the strength of the relationship between government and non-government organisations.

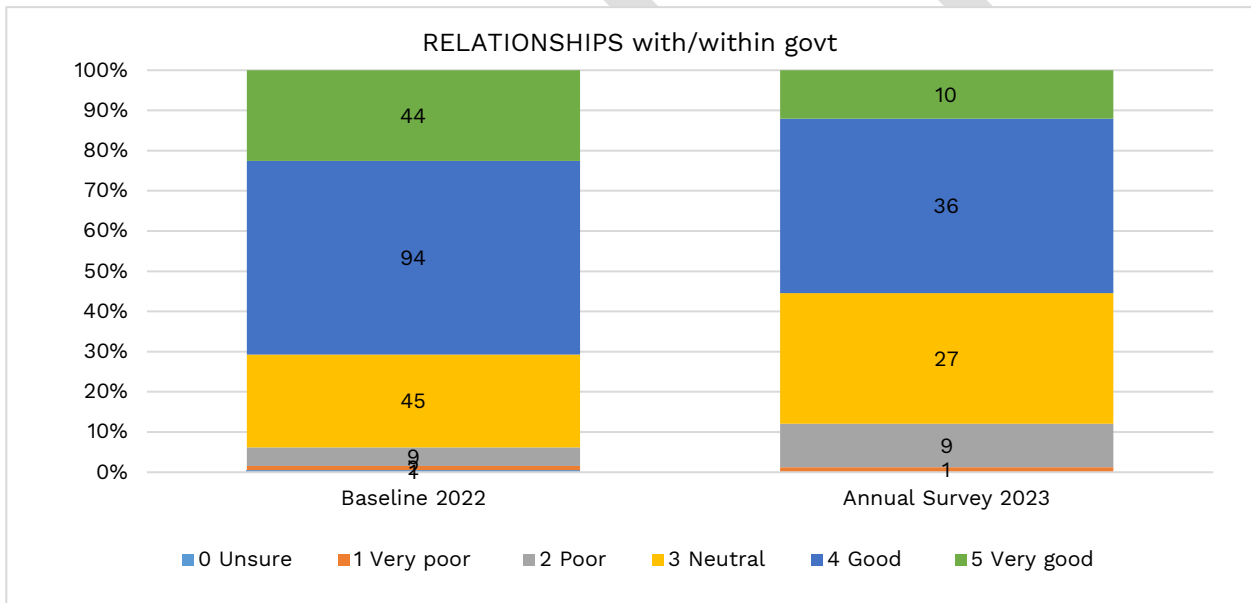


Figure 2 – The perceived health of the relationships with and within Government decreased. Positive responses decreased from 70% (baseline) to 55% (2023).

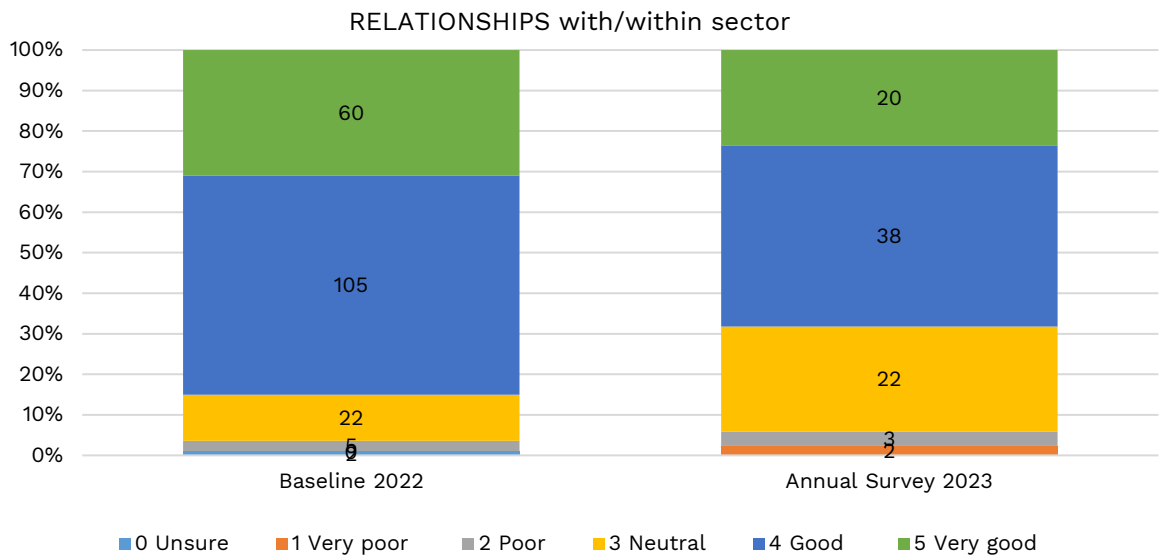


Figure 3 – The perceived health of the relationships with and within the sector decreased. Positive responses decreased from 70% (baseline) to 55% (2023).

DRAFT

Optimism for outcomes

From the 2023 quantitative annual survey data, 20% of respondents indicated they felt somewhat confident to very confident that the process would make a positive difference to the lives of Canberrans, with 30% respondents responses indicating a neutral position towards their levels of confidence.

Measurement

Our confidence in the process to make a positive difference for the lives of Canberrans.

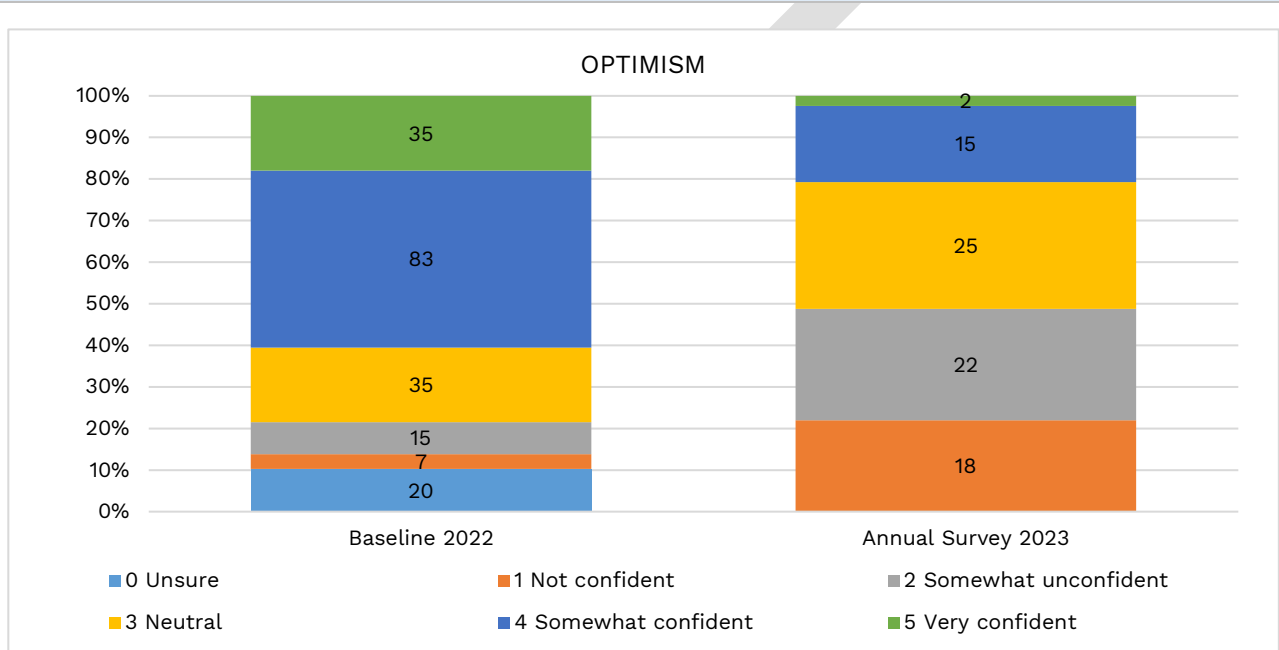


Figure 4 – Confidence in the process to make a positive difference to the lives of Canberrans decreased significantly.

Positive responses decreased from 60% (baseline) to 20% (2023).

Qualitative analysis

In addition to the 2023 Annual Survey quantitative data, a total of 124 comments were made: 49 respondents left relevant comments that could be used for analysis: comprising 15 government, 31 non-government, and 3 unspecified.

Respondents who answered quantitative questions negatively were twice as likely to leave comments than those who responded positively or neutrally. The qualitative analysis provides a valuable insight into the views of negative respondents but is not representative of the attitudes of respondents overall.

To ensure integrity, and non-biased analysis of the data, an independent ACT Government unit, with no prior involvement in commissioning, undertook the comment analysis.

These comments underwent 3 levels of qualitative coding by

- Level-1 qualitative coding from comments into statement codes.
- Level-2 qualitative coding from statement codes into themes.
- Level-3 summarising from themes into theme groups (major themes).

These tallies, the coding and themes underwent review by commissioning staff and ACTCOSS, and were slightly amended to correct any term or context misinterpretations.

The themes that emerged from the analysis were naturally developed from the comments statements and were not pre-determined.

The results of these level-3 major themes are summarised in this report alongside key quotes which articulate an identified theme.

Commissioning in principle vs practice

“If Government can genuinely recognise a commissioning approach as a cyclical process, not just NGO contract renewals with a fancy new title, and scale ambition to what is realistic and necessary in each cycle, this might be salvaged.” **Sector response**

Respondents held mostly negative views on commissioning as currently practised. Many respondents, however, asserted their support for commissioning in principle.

Respondents cited inconsistencies in the commissioning approach, processes and the

application of principles across different commissioning sectors. However, several respondents felt that the application of principles was improving and viewed the commissioning approach as being generally positive.

Qualitative themes

- Commissioning in principle vs practice
- Transparency and communication
- Funding resources and capability
- Relationships and collaboration

Insight -The commissioning experience varies when delivered by different ACT Government Directorates or different parts of Directorates.

"I don't see data driving decisions, I don't see co-production or person-centred focus, I don't see the principles being consistently applied or driving process or decision."

Not specified response

Many non-government organisations felt that commissioning was designed at a very strategic or theoretical level and did not adequately consult with front-line staff or service recipients before being

implemented.

Respondents felt that commissioning was poorly timed, especially considering the COVID-19 Pandemic. Both Government and non-government respondents described an increase in stress and anxiety for staff, in addition to the exacerbated resource burden caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Some respondents also felt that commissioning was poorly scoped, though they disagreed on whether the approach was too ambitious, or not ambitious enough.

There remains a significant level of distrust for commissioning, with many respondents claiming that commissioning promised benefits which have not yet been realised.

Similarly, many respondents felt that the design did not provide evidence for how commissioning would address community need. Some respondents went on to clarify that a data-baseline was not adequately established within commissioning cycles.

"I am optimistic about commissioning leading to better outcomes for community members but am worried that the community sector could be an obstacle to the whole process as some stakeholders seem to be still stuck in the past or don't really understand what we are trying to achieve." **Sector response**

"I think the amount of strategic factors for the Commissioning Approach is far too much to systematically apply in a practical way. There is the Vision (x1), Aims (x4), principles (x9), principles for implementation (x4), priorities (x6), intended outcomes (x5), as well as keeping in mind the drivers and foundations of the Commissioning Approach. (...) Overall the Commissioning Approach has been too strategy heavy and not practical enough for it to be particularly useful."

Government response

Overall, there is a clear discrepancy between support for commissioning in principle vs in practice, with both sector and Government respondents asserting that commissioning in principle promised more benefits and less disruption than has occurred in practice. Some respondents, however, hold a long-term view on commissioning, and remain optimistic of its future benefits.

Transparency and communication

Respondents held mixed, but mostly negative views on transparency and communication regarding commissioning.

Many respondents stated that poor government communication undermined the success of commissioning. This was especially felt when approach discrepancies and process delays were left unexplained by government.

“The slippage of timelines and the inability of government to provide specific information about revised timelines [is a] transfer of risk to services who need to continue operating, retain workforce and continue to invest in organisation development [even] when ongoing funding arrangements [are] not known.”

Sector response

Insight - Changing timeframes without explanations impacts participants' availability to engage and by extension the inclusiveness and effectiveness of collaboration.

Similarly, respondents felt that the government was not taking commissioning seriously or was not adequately incorporating their views and opinions throughout the process. Some respondents specified that their government contacts lacked the authority to provide much needed information or certainty when timelines shifted.

However, despite initial poor communication for some commissioning processes, some respondents claimed that communication is improving.

Insight - Poor communication by Directorates is impacting trust in the commissioning process and reform.

Funding resources and capability

Respondents held solely negative views on funding and resources regarding commissioning.

A significant proportion of respondents felt that commissioning was burdensome, with many stating commissioning was overly complicated, bureaucratic, or a lengthy process that requires participation to be effective. Many respondents asserted that they are not adequately resourced to participate in commissioning, particularly small organisations.

“When services are operating in a context of severe funding scarcity and growing unmet community need, it is extremely frustrating when so much energy and resources are diverted into processes that, to date, appear to be achieving little (...). The fundamental problem is not the community or NGO sector, nor in our view is it with particular individuals or teams (...) the key shortcomings with commissioning to date relate to the funding.”

Sector response

Insight - For the sector, the multiple commissioning cycles and activities can be burdensome and time consuming.

Part of this burden may be due to the transition from previous and familiar processes to more collaborative commissioning activity; with some respondents explicitly stating they find it difficult or costly to collaborate as part of commissioning (either with sector or government).

Similarly, many Government respondents, and some non-government respondents, claimed that Government lacked the necessary resources to effectively implement the commissioning approach and uphold its principles.

Insight - Capacity and capability of ACT Government commissioning teams influences the commissioning experiences and effectiveness.

Some government respondents felt that non-government organisations were not adequately supported during the implementation of commissioning.

Many non-government respondents questioned whether commissioning implementation had diverted funding that could have otherwise been spent on community services. Other non-government organisations understood that commissioning did not divert available funds, and instead suggested that more funding should be allocated to community services as compensation for participating in commissioning.

Insight - Design activities can stall and anxiety increases where there is no clear commitment to increasing funding even when commissioning identified evidence of community need.

Insight -For Directorates, constrained staffing resources routinely impact communication effectiveness, and management of time within the sector.

Relationships and collaboration

Respondents held mixed, but mostly negative views on relationships regarding commissioning.

Both government and non-government respondents acknowledged the strain new processes have put on relationships. Some respondents also felt that some commissioning activities were not adequately co-produced or that government did not adequately collaborate with sector during design.

Respondents felt that some aspects of the approach within some commissioning cycles worked to reinforce or create silos, divisions, or antagonisms and that this negatively affected their ability to collaborate on commissioning or achieve human-centered service delivery.

Some respondents stated that where investment was to be competitive and/or use a market-testing approach, this influenced their ability to collaborate with sector colleagues effectively.

Some non-government organisations raised frustrations at the high turnover of government staff, which further impacted the capacity for non-government organisations to be adequately supported throughout commissioning processes.

However, other non-government organisations highlighted that commissioning had sustained or improved government and sector relationships. These respondents went on to praise commissioning staff as trusted, attentive, and adaptable.

Insight -Early engagement with consumer groups and peaks bodies to plan commissioning cycles and activities can improve collaboration, participation, and time investment.

DRAFT

Post Activity Survey

This section summarises responses from participant surveys conducted post commissioning engagement activities which include ACT Government commissioners and non-government organisations.

Everyone participating in a commissioning activity can complete an optional, but highly recommended, post-activity survey. The post-activity survey focuses on shared principles and priorities of commissioning.

This approach provides insights into trust, relationship health and optimism for outcomes while gathering evidence on collaboration methods, use of time and active listening.

Info	Post Activity Survey
Capture Date	15.01.2022 - 30.06.2023
Active cycles	30+
Total Respondents	323
Quantitative Analysis	YES
Qualitative Analysis	PARTIAL

The post-activity data analysed for this report has been gathered over 18 months and across multiple commissioning cycles involving multiple collaborative activities undertaken by the Community Services Directorate (CSD) and ACT Health (ACTHD).

Of the active commissioning cycles, just 11 utilised the post-activity survey – with data collected online through the ‘always open’ survey or via paper response sheets after face-to-face activities.

The post-activity survey is available for completion online or via hardcopy where face to face activities have occurred. This requires manual consolidation of the feedback into a single dataset which is an ongoing process. This analysis looked at 323 responses compiled by 30 June 2023.

Respondents were encouraged to complete the survey but were not required to answer or provide a comment to every question. The total respondents for each question may not represent the total number of surveys received (323) and each chart indicates the response rate.

Influences and impacts on data collection

Results provide a 'point in time' assessment of commissioning as a practice and provide both quantitative and qualitative data.

The immediacy of the feedback can provide high response rates and greater optimism for outcomes.

There is a distinction in the commissioning experience, where respondents collaborated face to face versus whether they collaborated online.

Feedback suggests, face to face experience provides richer and deeper connection with and between government and non-government participants. Similarly, feedback indicates a frustration with navigating virtual activities and their facilitation, and the inability to connect with others.

Quantitative analysis

The post activity results were measured using two (2) of the annual survey quantitative themes of trust and optimism; and four (4) areas reflective of the commissioning principles and which focus on key aspects of the participant experience in the recent commissioning activity.

Shared Principles

Purpose driven – we are guided by shared outcomes, with a focus on problem solving and solutions, ensuring this work provides value to all stakeholders.

Relationship focused – we have just relationships which are based on commitment to respect, trust, care, concern, and dignity.

Recognising complexity – we develop understanding and solutions that respond to the dynamic and interconnected nature of complex problems and systems.

Inclusive collaboration – we effectively engage diverse participants in genuinely inclusive process.

Communicative and transparent – we engage in real dialogue. Our communication is grounded in genuinely listening and responding to the voices of all stakeholders.

Deliberative – we move away from traditional power imbalances towards shared decision-making processes informed by evidence as well as other Territory strategies and plans.

Contextual and flexible – there is no single way to go about commissioning. Each interaction will respond to complexity, cultural practices, safety context, and the breadth of issues at hand.

Value time and resources – we are respectful of competing priorities and the need to use time and resources wisely.

Shared commitment – we commit to meaningful change and learning through experience.

Trust

Our expectations that the commissioning process will/does align with the shared priorities and principles agreed in the commissioning approach.

Question - We stayed true to the shared principles of commissioning during this activity.

Agreement scale - not true to very true

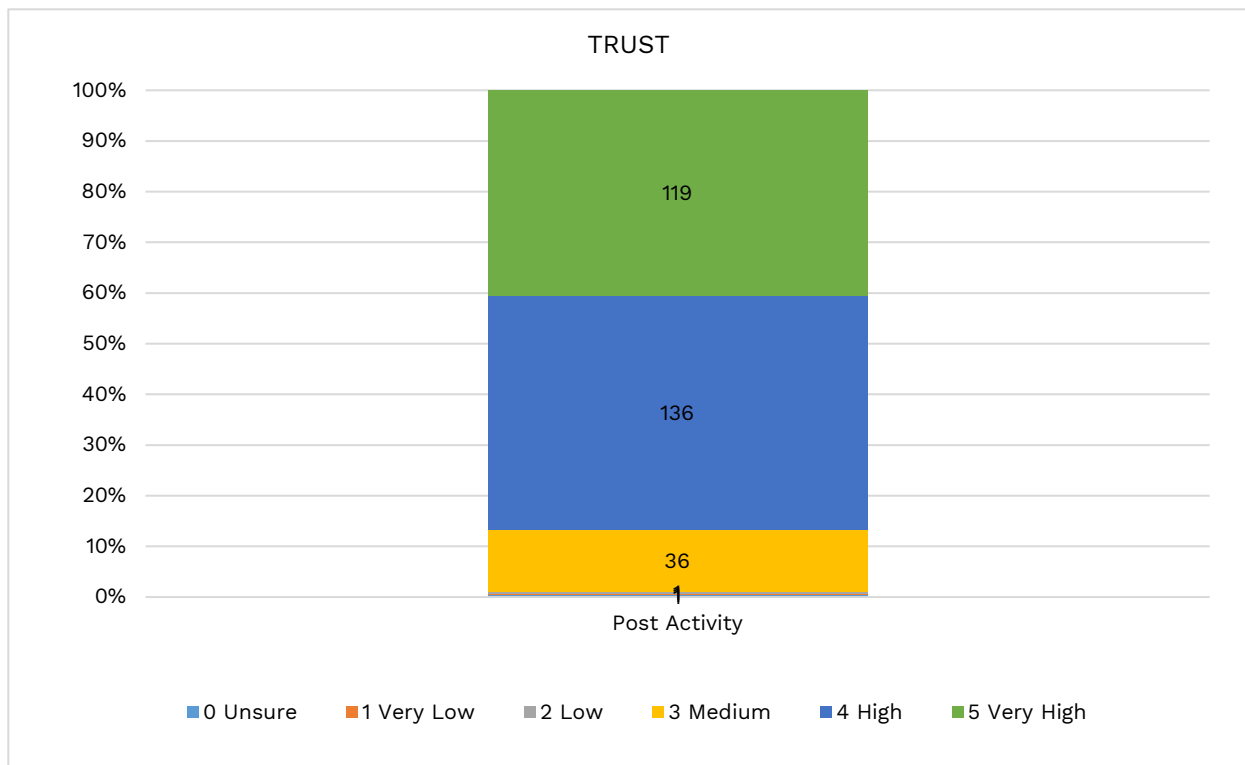


Figure 5 – 85% respondents rated their trust as high or very high after participating in an activity.

294 of 323 respondents completed this question.

Optimism for outcomes

Our confidence in the process to make a positive difference for the lives of Canberrans.

Question - How confident are you that we can improve the wellbeing of Canberrans?

Agreement scale – not confident to fully confident

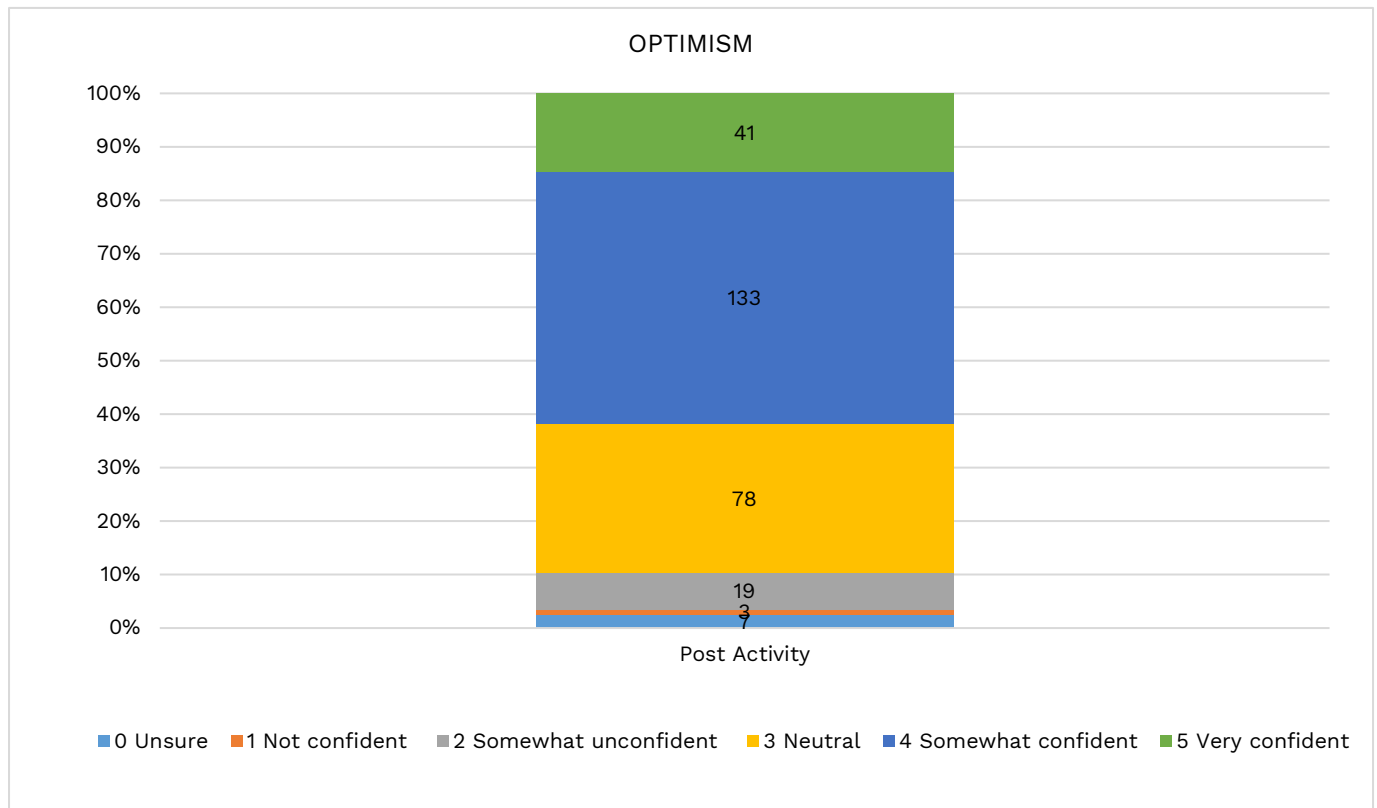


Figure 6 – 60% respondents had high or very high optimism after participating in an activity.

281 of 323 respondents completed this question.

Collaborative design

Question - We were collaborative during this activity.

Agreement scale - not true to very true

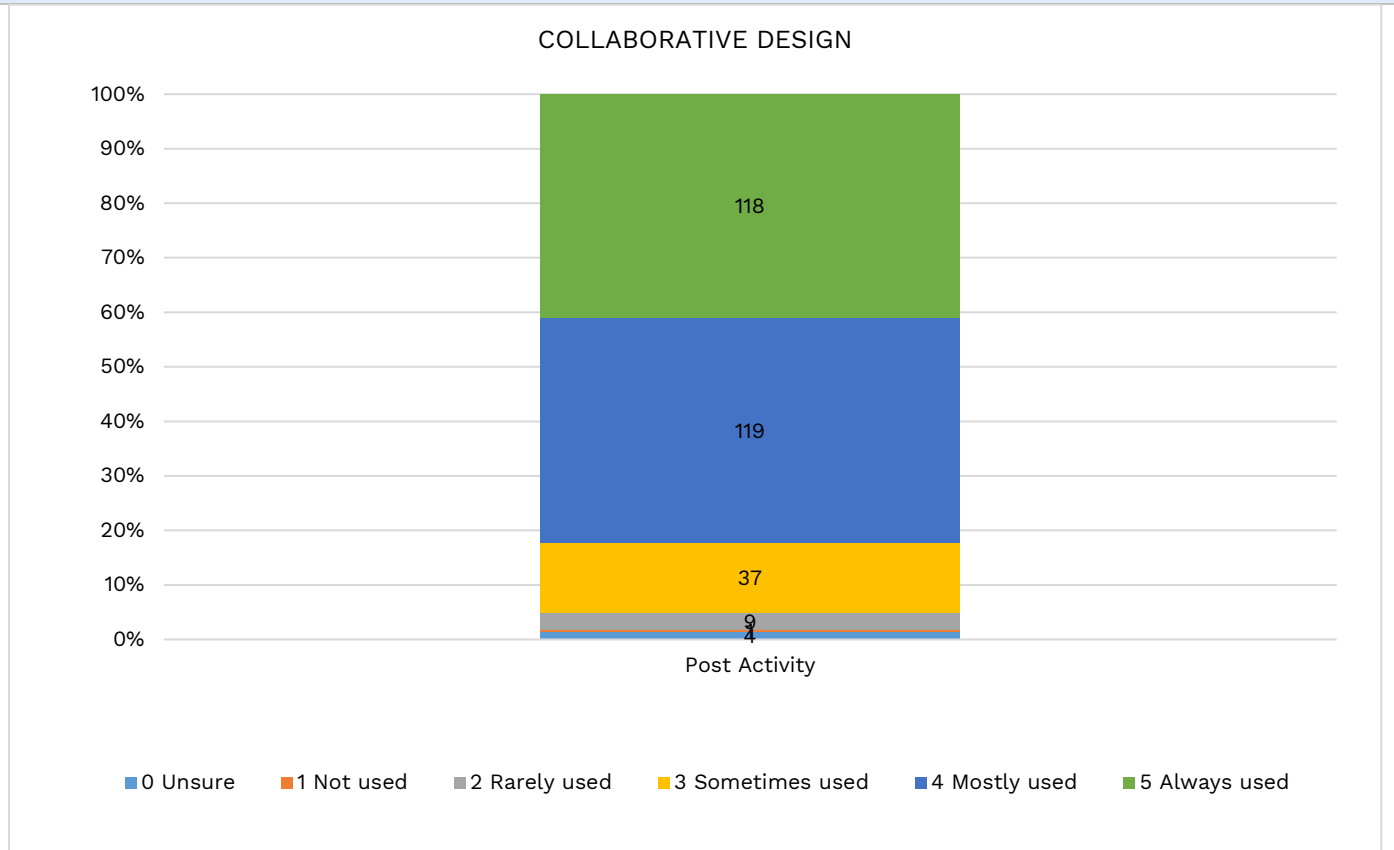


Figure 7 – Over 80% of respondents indicated that collaborative design was mostly or always used during the activity.

288 of 323 respondents completed this question.

Listening

Question - I was listened to.

Agreement scale - not true to very true

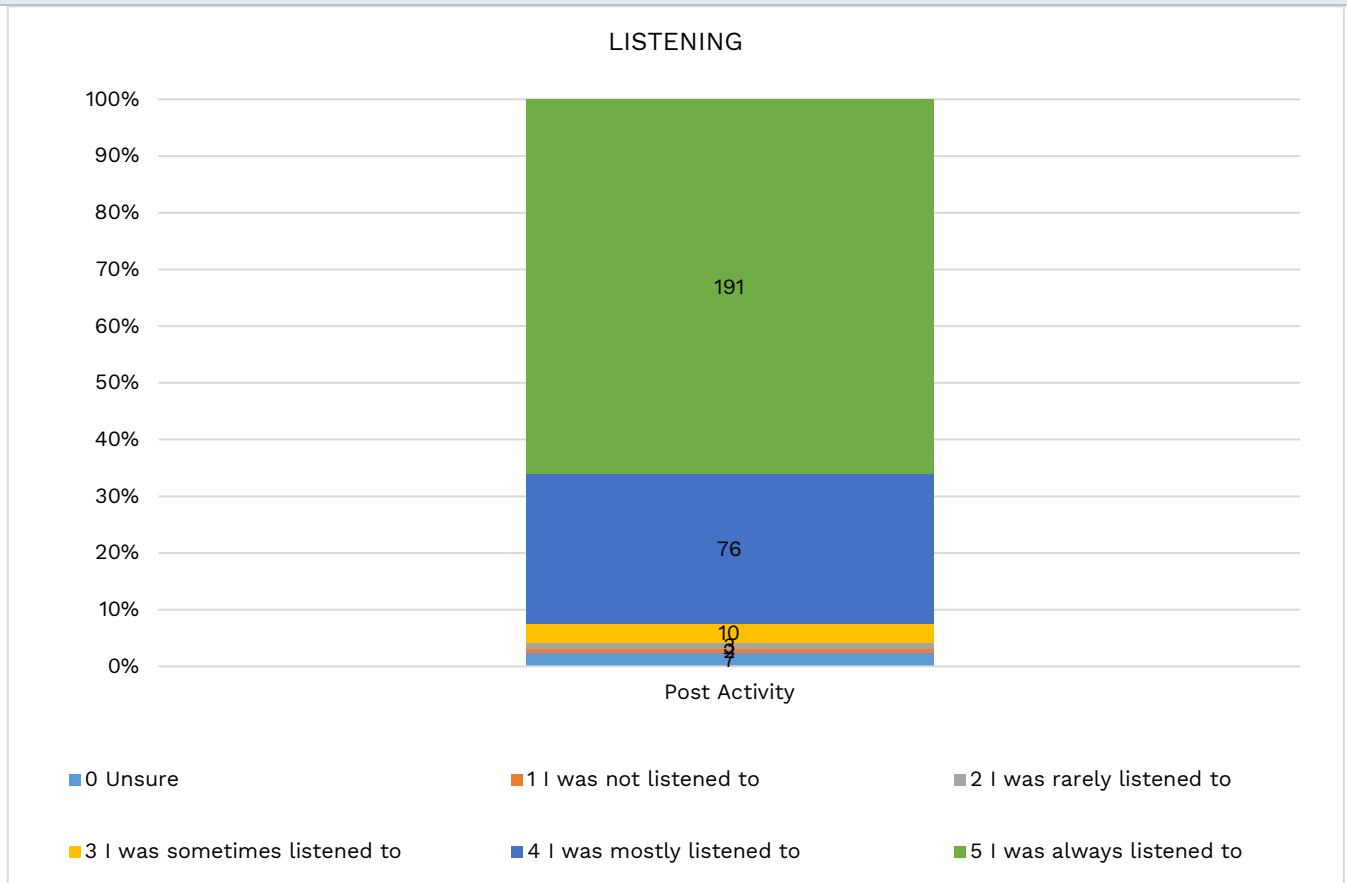


Figure 8 – Over 90% of respondents indicated that they were mostly or always listened to during the activity.

289 of 323 respondents completed this question.

Engagement method

Question - The activities supported my participation.

Agreement scale - not true to very true

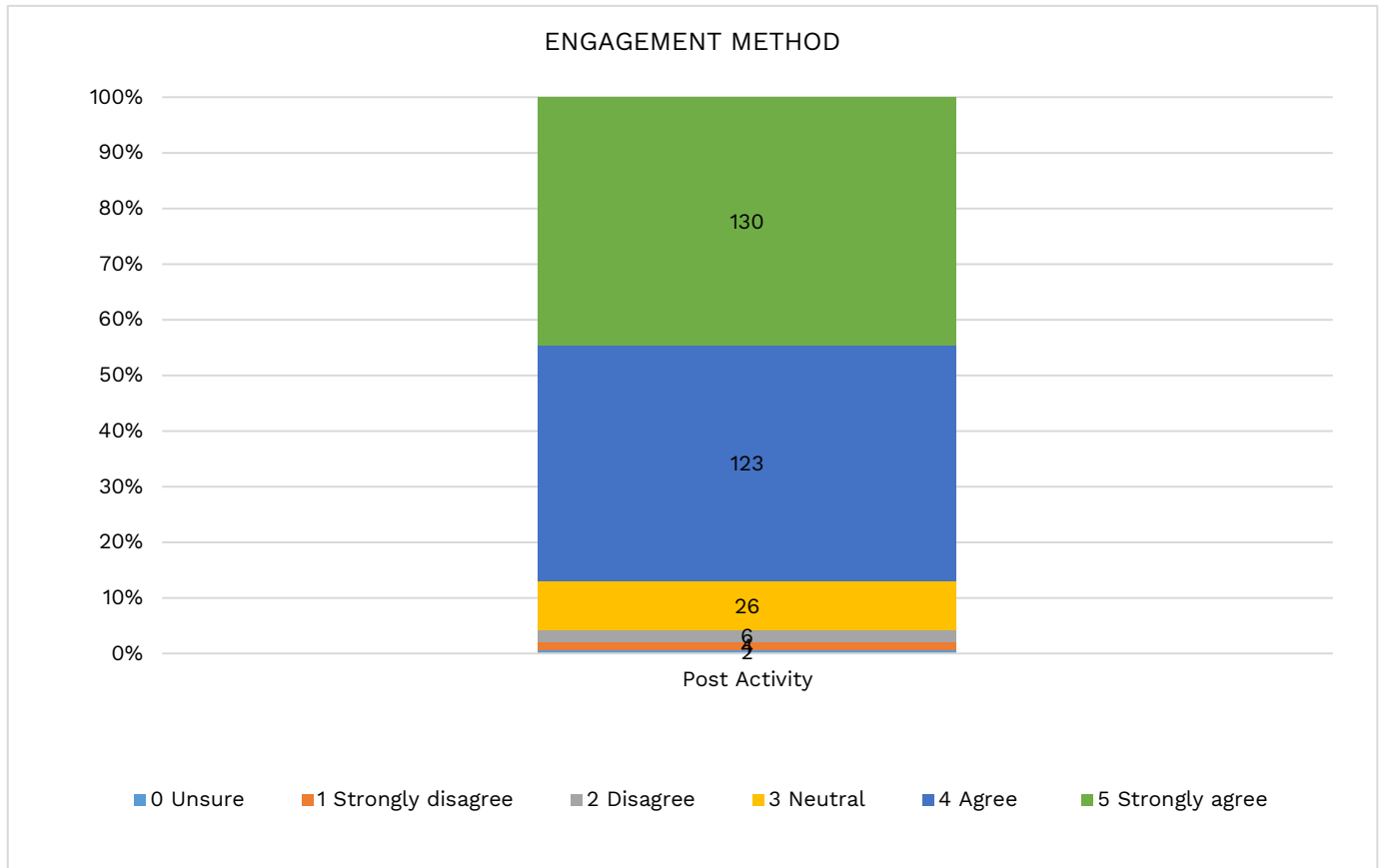


Figure 8 – Over 85% of respondents indicated that the engagement method or activities used supported or strongly supported their participation.

291 of 323 respondents completed this question.

Time

Question - There was enough time to explore the main issues.

Agreement scale - not true to very true

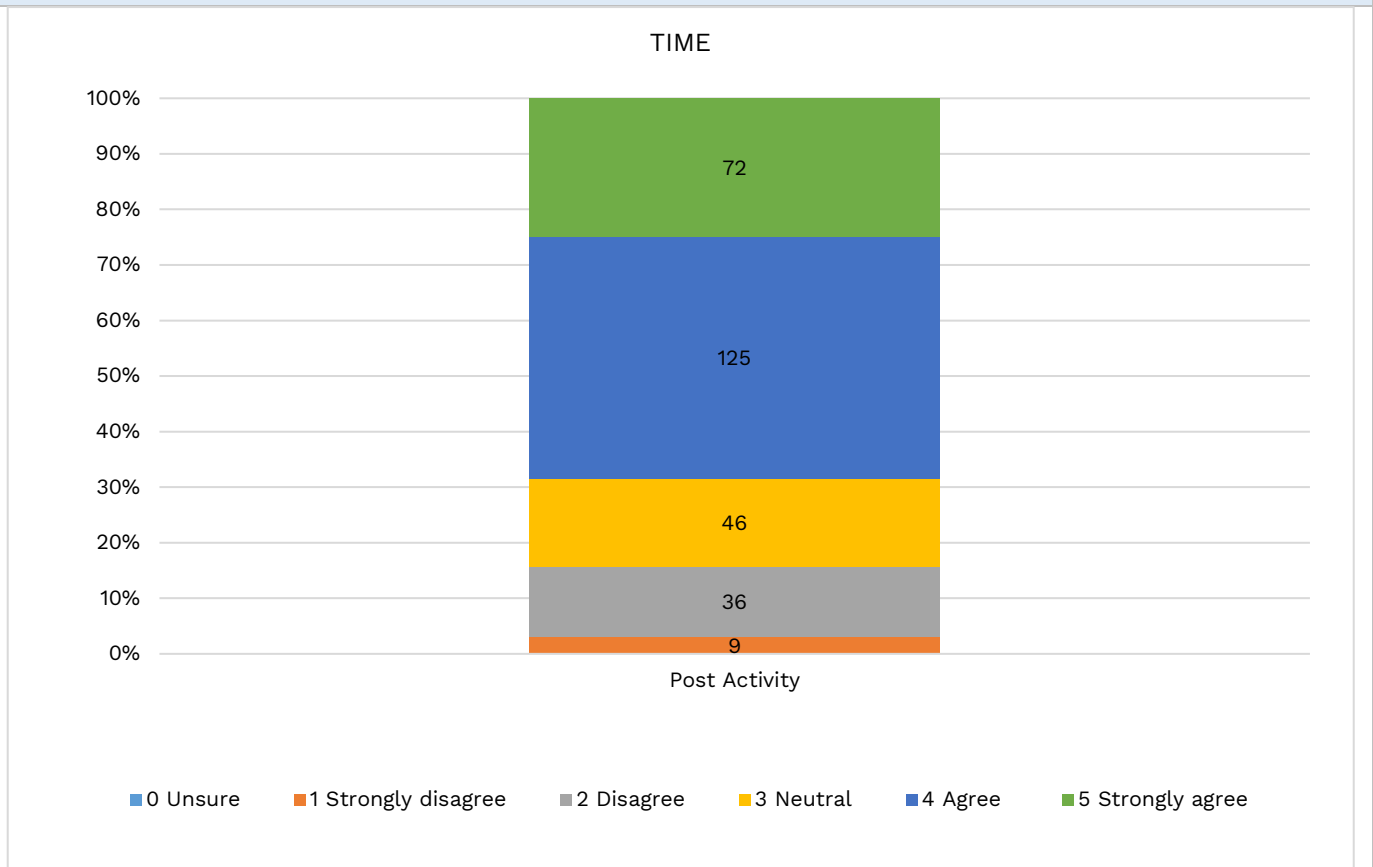


Figure 9 – 68% of respondents indicated that there was sufficient time for the activity.

288 of 323 respondents completed this question.

Insight -Limiting time to collaborate also limits the quality of deliberation which influences relationship health and optimism for outcomes.

Qualitative analysis

Most comments derived from the Post Activity Survey were positive, mirroring the largely positive results from the quantitative analysis.

However, only a small number of the comments contained significant detail to warrant a qualitative investigation and or possible subsequent theming. Of the 200 online respondents, 150 provided at least 1 comment, with only 21 (10.5%) providing detailed comments (300 characters or more).

These detailed comments often discussed elements of the workshop and its facilitation, rather than commissioning itself.

Instead of conducting a full qualitative investigation, detailed comments were reviewed individually, and used to inform the design of commissioning enhancement actions described in the 2023 Report.

A selection of four such quotes, two from Government and two from sector, are displayed below:

<p><i>“As our process was conducted over a few meetings, in order to demonstrate that the communication was grounded and responded to the voices [...] of all stakeholders, a summary [...] after each meeting would have been best practice to note that all was captured correctly.”</i></p> <p>Sector response</p>	<p><i>“I find we are still back at basics and starting point with some [non-government organisations / sectors]. There is a lot of anxiety and we need to acknowledge these processes take longer than we anticipate. Messaging clear (even if indicative) time frames and processes is very important.”</i></p> <p>Government response</p>
<p><i>“Excellent facilitation by all our gov’t colleagues. It was a pleasure to spend time with people who understood their brief + seem to genuinely be interested in hearing + working together. [... I’ve been] involved in a couple of commissioning activities- best I’ve attended.</i></p> <p>Sector response</p>	<p><i>“Facilitation; very good & clear, liked the material sent out prior. [... I] liked collaboration as [a] good foundation for [the] future state of [the] program. Thank you.”</i></p> <p>Government response</p>

Engagement Activities

This section quantifies other ways in which feedback on the practice, experience and impact of commissioning is received.

Commissioning experience and feedback is sought through a variety of platforms including sector update forums, emails and formal correspondence, one on one discussions with non-government organisations and advocates, working groups or sounding boards, Ministerial Advisory Councils and, when invited, to listen and observe during sector forums.

Sector input was also sourced from ACTCOSS' monthly drop-in sessions, individual conversations with sector representatives and forum discussions such as through the Peaks CEOs network meetings.

These engagements reflect and reinforce the key themes that have emerged from the annual and post-activity survey responses. The engagements also provide nuance and greater insights into commissioning experiences for both government and the sector.

Regular feedback loops between government and the sector over the last year have meant important messages and priority concerns or challenges are shared in a frank and fearless manner, and inform successive commissioning processes in an iterative way.

Info	Activity occurrence
Capture Date	1.7.2022 - 30.06.2023
Commissioning Conversations	8
Commissioning Induction participants	47
One on one meetings	59+
Sector update forums	
Lived experience working group and panel meetings	37
Commissioning Roadmap Sounding Board meetings	
Health Leadership Group	5
ACT Budget Submission review	70
ACT Budget Roundtables	4
ACTCOSS monthly drop-in sessions	8

2023 Monitoring and evaluation approach

Feedback and data gathered for the Listening Report is guided by the [Commissioning Evaluation Framework](#). In 2022 we established a baseline for monitoring the commissioning experience. 2023 is the first year we could benchmark or compare the commissioning experience with the baseline.

Step 1 Data gathering and analysis

A range of data gathering activities are used and undertake analysis of the inputs and indicators.

	Frequency	Inputs or responses	Quantative data	Qualitative data
Baseline survey 2022	2022	196	✓	✓
Government		61 (31% of total)		
Non-government		125 (63% of total)		
Unspecified		10 (5% of total)		
Annual survey 2023	Annual	85	✓	✓
Government		41 (48% of total)		
Non-government		41 (48% of total)		
Unspecified		3 (3.5% of total)		
Post activity survey 2022-2023	Ongoing	323	✓	✓
Engagements	Ongoing	238 (approx.)		✓

Quantitative

Two quantitative surveys are used to evaluate the experience and practice of commissioning – the annual survey and the post-activity survey.

Annual survey

The annual survey uses 10 statements focused on trust, relationship health and optimism for outcomes. Participants provide responses using a scale to indicate the level of agreement with each statement. Responses can be measured against the 2022 baseline responses. Participants had the opportunity to complete the annual survey online and anonymously from 21 April to 23 June 2023.

Post-activity survey

The post-activity survey focuses on shared principles and priorities of commissioning. This approach provides insights into trust, relationship health and optimism for outcomes while gathering evidence on collaboration methods, use of time and active listening.

Available immediately following a commissioning activity such as a workshop, participants use a scale to indicate their level of agreement with various statements.

Participants have had the opportunity to complete the post-activity survey since January 2022.

Qualitative

The annual survey and the post-activity survey also provide space for comments and general feedback on commissioning or participant experiences.

Engagement

Relevant qualitative feedback is also received by the ACT Government through regular sector update forums, emails and formal correspondence, one on one discussions with non-government organisations and advocates, working groups or sounding boards, Ministerial Advisory Councils and when invited to listen and observe during sector forums.

Sector input has been sourced from ACTCOSS' monthly drop-in sessions, individual conversations with community sector representatives, and discussions with senior representatives such as through the Peaks CEOs network meetings.

Step 2 Determine themes and insights

Using the analysis, we form insights that tell us what is working and what needs improvement.

Step 3 Identify impacts and opportunities

With the insights, we assess, discuss, and determine where we need to action against the 5 evaluation focus areas – trust, relationship health, optimism for outcomes, collaboration and time.

Step 4 Improvement actions

With a clear picture of where we need to improve the commissioning experience, we collaborate – government and the sector peaks – to identify the actions we can take together to improve the experience and effectiveness of commissioning.

Participants and respondents

Response rates vary despite efforts to encourage participation. 2023 annual survey was widely promoted and open for 8 weeks. The post activity survey is available online and always open, as well as being provided in hard copy at the end of activities.

This response rate is calling into question two assumptions in the Commissioning Evaluation Framework:

- That we will be able to obtain a strong enough response to obtain meaningful data.
- That the results of subjective surveys will provide the desired information to enable evaluators to better understand the perceptions and impact of commissioning.

Insight - We need to ensure meaningful evaluation data is available to improve commissioning, this includes actively increasing survey response rates.

Glossary

This section provides definition for key terminology used throughout the 2023 Listening Report.

Term	Definition
Commissioning	A way of ‘authorising a person or organisation to do or produce something.’ We commission services within a system to meet the needs of the Canberra community.
Benchmark	A standard or point of reference against which things may be compared.
Benchmarking	The process of comparing performance against a benchmark to help drive continuous improvement.
Commissioning Cycle or Cycle	Commissioning is a cycle through which we examine community needs together with more rigour; we collaborate across the sector and government to address service delivery gaps; and we explore opportunities to provide services in new ways. The cycle is adaptable and involves several phases – discover, strategise, design, invest, deliver, integrate and evaluation.
Data collection methods	Techniques used to identify information sources and, collect information, during an evaluation.
Evaluation	Evaluation is the systematic, objective assessment of appropriateness, effectiveness and/or efficiency of a policy. Evaluation is performed to gain a more complete understanding of social programming, and its expected benefits and outcomes. Evaluation seeks to measure quality, value and merit. Involves a systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of an initiative, often compared against a program logic model.
Monitoring	A continuous and systematic process of collecting and analysing information about the implementation and impacts of an initiative
Findings	A finding uses evidence from one or more evaluations to allow for a factual statement.

Term	Definition
Qualitative data	Narratives drawn from data that can be collected and analysed using appropriate qualitative approaches. Provides a rich picture of people's experience
Quantitative data	Information that can be counted or expressed numerically. This type of data can be statistically analysed and is often represented visually in graphs and charts in evaluation reports alongside a discussion of the findings and their implications. Typically represents the number of respondents.

DRAFT