

Compendium of Frameworks guiding a sustainable relationship between ACT Government & NGOs delivering human services December 2024

Abstract

This Compendium collates publicly released ACT Government legislative, regulatory and policy objectives that support a sustainable relationship between ACT Government and NGOs delivering human services

Contents

Purpose	3
ACT Government policies and plans guiding human services delivery.....	3
The Wellbeing Framework.....	3
The Social Compact	4
ACT Government/NGO partnership objectives	5
Commissioning	6
Allocating and Managing Funding	6
Relationship Management.....	7
Evaluation	8
Transitions.....	9

Purpose

This Compendium provides in a single location, the publicly released policies and commitments of the ACT Government that establish the framework for a sustainable relationship model between the ACT Government and NGOs that deliver ACT Government human services. It is intended to be a resource for stakeholders inside and outside government for sharing consistent and transparent information and guidance about the policy settings that impact the partnership between government and NGOs to deliver better outcomes for people in the Canberra community. A separate Compendium provides information and guidance on legislation, regulations, policies and guidelines that govern the resourcing relationship between ACT Government and NGOs funded by ACT Government Programs to deliver human services.

ACT Government policies and plans guiding human services delivery

The Wellbeing Framework

The ACT Government is using the **Wellbeing Framework** and the information it provides to inform Government priorities, policies and funding decisions – including through Budget and Cabinet processes.

The ACT Wellbeing Framework defines wellbeing as:

“Wellbeing is about how we are doing, as individuals, as a community, and as a place to live. It’s about having the opportunity and ability to lead lives of personal and community value – with qualities such as good health, time to enjoy the things in life that matter, in an environment that promotes personal growth and is sustainable. Measuring wellbeing is about having a sense of our progress around the things that matter to our quality of life and help us to live our lives well...

...An individual’s overall wellbeing is connected to the communities they identify with, and the interaction and weight given to certain wellbeing domains by those communities, as a result of their lived experience. To gain a realistic picture of the wellbeing of all Canberrans, we need to look beyond the averages to understand the diversity of wellbeing across the community.”

The Wellbeing Framework identifies **Priority Population Groups** who are at risk of lower than average wellbeing: children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, LGBTIQ+ people, people with a disability, older Canberrans, carers; and women. NGOs and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are recognised by the ACT Government for their expertise in working with priority population groups, and the trusted relationships they have with groups in the community who experience lower than average wellbeing across social, economic, human capital and/or environmental outcomes.

The Social Compact

This Compendium supports implementation of the [ACT Social Compact 2011](#), a statement of understanding between the ACT Government and the community sector, outlining principles of good communication and partnership. The Social Compact sets out undertakings that each sector has committed to in working together for the public good. This includes:

- Undertakings by the ACT Government to ensure fairness and transparency in funding, to seek the sector's views, respect its right to challenge government policy, and to publicly acknowledge the value, autonomy and contribution of the sector.
- The community sector undertakes to communicate openly and constructively with government, to maintain a central focus on consumer and community needs, and to engage in quality improvement, planning and policy development.

The Social Compact outlines principles of good communication and partnership for the benefit of all people and communities in the ACT and is intended to promote mutual understanding and guide community sector and Government representatives to adopt processes and behaviours that value the role, contribution and expertise of both the Government and community sector.

The Social Compact is intended to be used in four main ways:

- to build and sustain strong working relationships
- improve engagement in planning and policy and service design
- continue to improve service quality, innovation and sustainability
- as a basis for reviewing and improving how the relationship is working.

MONITORING EVALUATION AND LEARNING

The Social Compact is a living document, maintaining relevance as relationships develop and evolve, and able to adapt to changing environments. It describes both the network of relationships across the ACT Government and the local community, as represented by special interest groups and communities, and the direct relationship between the Government and the ACT community sector. (Compact p 3). The ACT Government has announced an intention to refresh the social compact by 2027.

ACT Government/NGO partnership objectives

The ACT Government has said the **funding arrangements with Non Government Organisations (NGOs) to deliver human services** should support development and ongoing delivery of a diverse, vibrant and sustainable community sector:

“We know how valuable a strong, diverse and responsive non-government sector is to the wellbeing of Canberrans, and we want to ensure the ACT has a resilient, well-funded and resourced sector now and into the future.

“The Government is committed to supporting the essential services provided by the community sector, providing \$200 million each year to support social infrastructure and services that meet the diverse needs of Canberrans.

“More than 140 non-government organisations employing more than 17,000 people in the ACT will benefit from the Government’s commitment to sustainable funding through improved job security, workforce stability and increased wellbeing for the community.”¹

The ACT Government has adopted a broad definition of human services:

“Human services investment encompasses support for a safe, healthy, inclusive community and in maintaining and promoting its quality of life. That support spans NGOs funded to deliver services across many sectors including safety, emergency and material aid, physical and mental health, housing, child and family, legal, employment, transit, education, recreation and culture. Human services contribute to daily living, to enable individuals, families and other groups in the community to develop, cope, function and contribute.” (p 10 [Counting-the-Costs-Sustainable-Funding-for-the-ACT-community-services-sector-report](#))

In February 2023 the ACT Government announced it would implement a **Sector Sustainability Program**:

- “Commissioning a Sector Sustainability Program is the next step in moving to a sustainable resourcing and relationship model with the community sector in the ACT.”²
- “The Sector Sustainability Program is a new program and the first in a series of steps the ACT Government will take on moving to a sustainable resourcing and relationship model with the community sector in the ACT.
- Commissioning the Sector Sustainability Program is our opportunity – both government and the sector - to understand how and where the funding needs to be directed for a more sustainable sector.”

source: [Sector Sustainability Program - Commissioning \(act.gov.au\)](#)

¹ Source: Ministerial Media Release February 2023 [Working in partnership for a strong and sustainable community sector - Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate \(act.gov.au\) 08/02/2023](#)

² Ministerial Media Release February 2023 [Working in partnership for a strong and sustainable community sector - Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate \(act.gov.au\) 08/02/2023](#)

Commissioning

In 2020 the ACT government proposed to shift the purchasing of human services to a commissioning approach. Through engagement with the NGO sector, it developed an ACT Commissioning Framework which was released in 2021 and has continued to iterate based on experience and feedback through a series of Commissioning Roadmaps.

Attachment A provides a visual guide to the 2022-24 Commissioning Framework.

The [Commissioning Roadmap 2024 Practice Guide](#) outlined the **outcomes expected from ACT Government/NGO partnerships to deliver Human Services Programs**. The link between Commissioning for Outcomes and the ACT Wellbeing Framework was described as:

“The shared vision for commissioning mirrors the aspiration of the ACT Wellbeing Framework ... For vulnerable Canberrans who need support to thrive in the community, commissioning is a critical enabler to ensure the supports are meeting the needs of Canberrans and driving wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable Canberrans.”

The five **Human Service System** outcomes are:

- 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.
- Human Services Programs commissioned by ACT Government influence multiple Wellbeing domains, contributing to improved wellbeing outcomes both directly and indirectly.

Allocating and Managing Funding

The [Commissioning Roadmap 2024 Practice Guide](#) states: “Commissioning ultimately results in investment. There are a **range of ways government invests in the human services** system:

- A direct grant – government will approach specific providers for specialist services for which there is not a competitive market
- A select grant or tender – government will approach a small set of providers for specialist services for which there is not a competitive market
- An open grant or tender – government will provide a public market opportunity for providers seeking to deliver the specified services.”

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The partnership between ACT Government and NGOs to deliver human services share responsibility for ensuring:

- public monies are used effectively and are properly accounted for
- all parties meet their obligations to deliver the objectives of the Program as specified in the funding instrument
- risks to the sustainability of the partnership between ACT Government and NGOs are identified and addressed

Relationship Management

All parties are responsible for establishing and maintaining a healthy and productive relationship. Good relationship management requires Territory Funding Managers to:

- make regular, focused contact with the other party to facilitate the flow of information;
- document communication to ensure there is a record of what has been discussed;
- provide a timely and detailed response to funding reports;
- minimise duplication and red tape
- demonstrate a partnership approach to:
 - setting and managing expectations;
 - clarifying funding program requirements and priorities; and
 - ensure a 'no surprises' approach to the monitoring of the funding Agreement lifecycle.

An effective professional working relationship between funders and funded organisations can be established by:

- establishing shared understanding of the contract (a contract start up meeting/workshop is helpful here)
- having clear funding instrument management processes and applying these consistently
- ensuring that key people have good skill and relevant experience to develop and maintain a professional relationship with your NGO partners
- having clear performance standards, review processes and undergoing corrective actions consistently and promptly when needed.
- Avoiding adversarial behaviour.
- Funders and funded organisations might need to strengthen their relationship if they experience issues such as:
 - poor response times to requests
 - lack of a shared understanding about key funding relationship issues
 - limited willingness to respond to requests for information or updates on progress
 - other dissatisfaction about the helpfulness of the other party

Evaluation

Evaluation should be agreed at the beginning of the funding arrangement. Evaluation is a core component of a sustainable relationship model because:

“The community sector and Government cannot achieve their individual goals without constructive relations built on mutual understanding, respect and cooperation. Despite their distinct roles and accountabilities, there is a strong interface between the community sector and Government...

... The ACT community sector and Government share a commitment to improve life for all Canberrans through participation in cultural, social, humanitarian, environmental and economic activities. To achieve this, the two sectors need to plan, learn and work together, building on existing strengths, encouraging innovation and making sound decisions informed by evidence.”³

The ACT Government [ACT-Performance-and-Accountability-Framework-FEB-2020.pdf](#) states:

“Agencies should take a continued and long-term approach to evaluation by:

- fostering a culture of evaluation;
- building evaluation capability – the expertise, systems and structures to conduct evaluations internally;
- planning to evaluate by embedding evaluation into policies and programs, and co-ordinating evaluation activity;
- evaluating strategically by prioritising and scaling evaluation activity, based on an assessment of the size, risk and complexity associated with a program;
- conducting evaluations to a high standard and from an overall perspective of sustainability i.e. social, economic and environmental; and
- making evaluation count – by communicating results and acting on recommendations.”

The [ACT Government Evaluation Policy and Guidelines](#) provides detailed **guidance on creating a culture of evaluation, developing evaluation plans and conducting evaluations.**

“evaluation should be considered and planned early in the policy development cycle and embedded into all policies. At the very least, this should involve:

- ensuring policies have clearly specified performance objectives, targets, milestones and program logic to provide the baseline for future monitoring and evaluation;
- developing indicators to measure performance against these objectives and simple systems to capture relevant information; and
- identifying a preliminary evaluation strategy that is appropriate for the size, risk and priority of the policy...

... Agencies need to take a strategic approach to evaluation that prioritises and focuses evaluation effort on those programs that are new, large or potentially involve a high level of risk. Key factors that prioritisation should take into account include:

- materiality or the size of the program;
- risk to clients, stakeholders and the agency;

³ pp 3-4 [The-Social-Compact_web-version2.pdf](#)

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- alignment with agency and government priorities;
- complexity of delivery or uncertainty about program outcomes;
- evaluation options and their expected benefits and costs;
- external requirements for review;
- past evaluation findings; and
- Sensitivities.”

Evaluation of commissioning outcomes should include assessment of:

- Whether and how the funded service delivered on Program outputs, outcomes and impact requirements as specified in the Program Guidelines
- Whether and how the Program has contributed to achievement of the five Human Services System Outcomes
- Whether and how the Program has contributed to improvements in any of the twelve social, economic, environmental and human domains in the ACT Wellbeing Framework, particularly for Priority Groups

Frameworks and tools from the ACT Government Performance, Accountability and Evaluation guidance materials are provided at [Attachment B](#).

Transitions

In March 2024 the ACT Government published a [policy to guide transitions in funding arrangements](#) between ACT Government and NGOs: [Managing Transitions Policy - Commissioning \(act.gov.au\)](#). This policy guides decision making and expectation management within existing system, program and/or service partnerships and during the formation of new partnerships between government and non-government organisations.

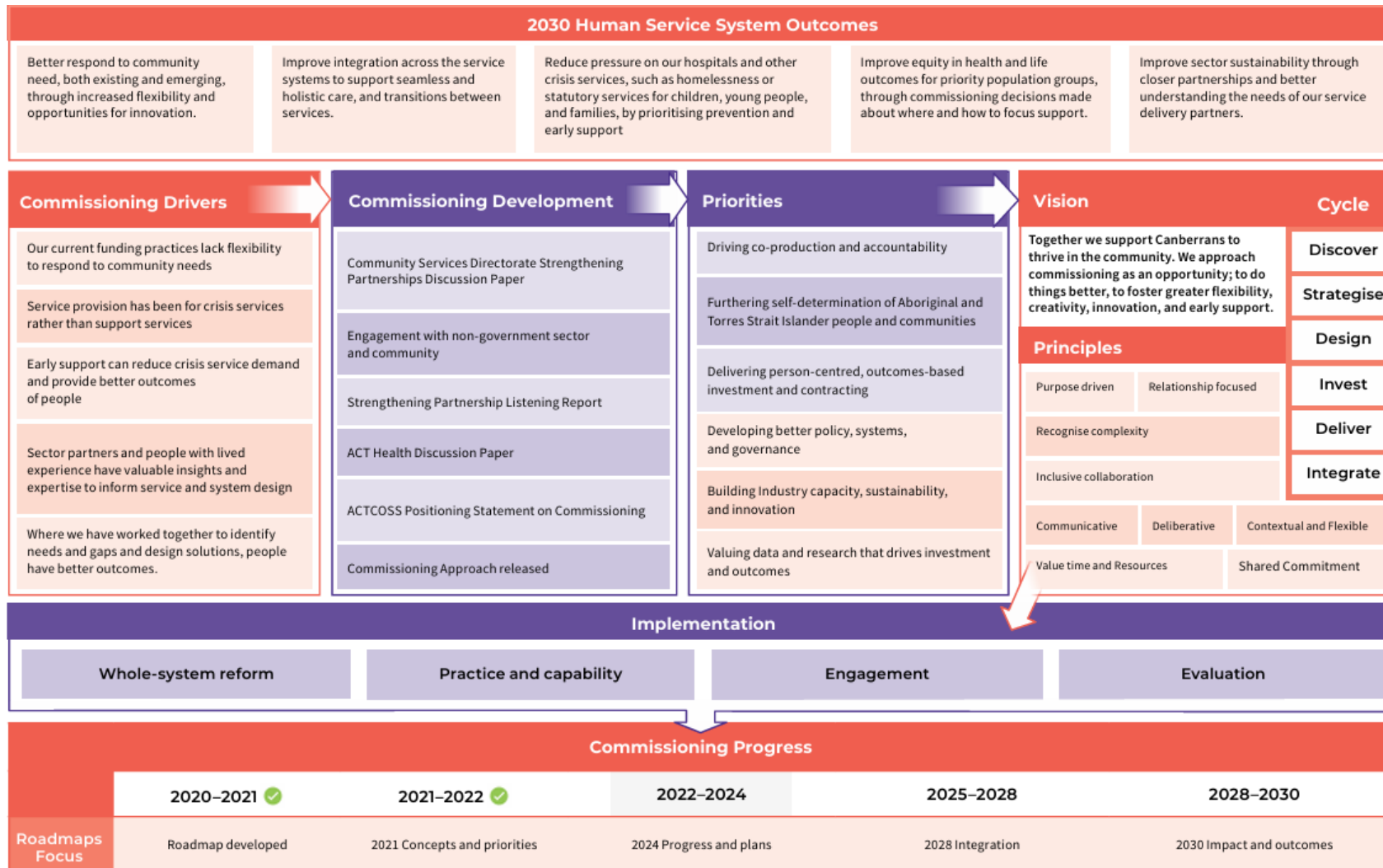


Figure 7.1: Evaluation across government

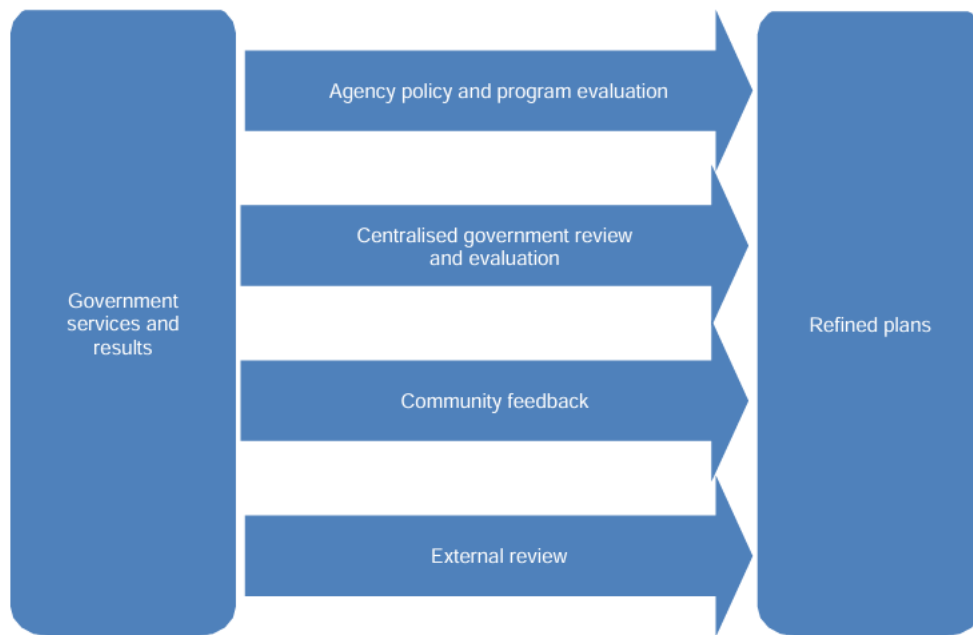


Table 4 Scaling of evaluation

Scaling of evaluation		
Characteristics of policy or program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low risk • Limited resource requirements • Similar to previous successful and favourably reviewed projects • Not widely publicised • Low strategic priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and untried project • Not recently reviewed • Requires resources for testing, research and external stakeholder involvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High risk • Resource intensive • Controversial project • High public profile and expectations • Politically significant 	
Likely characteristics of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal process • Limited data requirement, analysis of issues and reporting • Low resource allocation • Less evaluations required of fewer aspects of policy or program • Can be completed internally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater level of data collection and analysis • Frequent throughout development and implementation • Regular progress reporting • Can be undertaken by practitioners during development and implementation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal process • Detailed • High resource allocation • Comprehensive reporting and wide public release and involvement • May involve external evaluators or central agencies 	

p13
Program Logic

<i>Within agency control</i>						<i>Agency can influence</i>	
<i>Objective</i>	<i>Resource inputs</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Outputs</i>	<i>Beneficiaries and target groups</i>	<i>Performance measures</i>	<i>Short-term outcomes</i>	<i>Long-term outcomes</i>

p27