



## ACOSS Member Engagement Framework

Approved by the ACOSS Board, May 2015

### Background to the ACOSS Member Engagement Framework

ACOSS is the national peak body for the Australian community sector and a voice for the needs of people affected by poverty. ACOSS members are a national network of state and territory Councils of Social Service (COSS), national peak organisations (NMOs) of consumers and service providers, religious and secular welfare agencies, low income consumer groups, Associate and Affiliate members and individual supporters.

ACOSS is committed to regular, meaningful engagement with our members and other key stakeholders. This commitment is reflected in ACOSS' 2014-17 Strategic Plan, with engagement strategies central to the achievement of our goal to 'develop evidence and experience based solutions'. The Strategic Plan outlines two high level engagement strategies:

- (a) Develop effective mechanisms to hear, understand and reflect the lived experience of people affected by poverty or disadvantage and facilitate their ability to participate in the development of policy and advocacy.
- (b) Ensure that our mechanisms for engagement with members and other key stakeholders are robust, inclusive and respectful.

ACOSS initiates engagement with our members in the following ways:

- In regular and ad hoc member-specific communications: e-news, policy updates, teleconferences, member briefings, policy networks and specific roundtables.
- At and around ACOSS events (e.g. National Conference, Federal Budget & policy forums)
- Through specific contact to gather input to particular papers or projects (e.g. reports or submissions) or in the development of new policy or advocacy strategy.

ACOSS also embraces engagement opportunities provided by others: members and stakeholders; government (e.g. consultations, inquiries) and other sectors like business, unions and industry.

The *ACOSS Member Engagement Framework* is to set out for ACOSS members the key ways in which members, specifically, can be supported by ACOSS, and participate in the policy and advocacy activities of the ACOSS network.



## Objectives of the ACOSS Member Engagement Framework

There are some important objectives that ACOSS aims to meet through its range of engagements with its members.

### **1. Inform ACOSS policy and advocacy and foster participation and coordination**

- Facilitate the voices of people experiencing poverty and inequality to provide input into ACOSS policy development and advocacy and to be heard directly in public policy debates;
- Be informed by the views of members and stakeholders on key issues through robust, inclusive and respectful consultation, so that we are able to fulfill our representative role;
- Apply rigour to the process of policy development through input from diverse and varied perspectives;
- Provide appropriate mechanisms and forums for important debates within the community sector to be conducted;
- Coordinate policy development, engagement and advocacy by our members on key issues;
- Provide a community voice and perspective where this would otherwise be absent.

### **2. Provide members with accurate resources and information on key policy issues and advocacy activities**

- Support the capacity of our members and other stakeholders to understand policy developments
- Support members to effectively advocate for issues affecting people experiencing poverty by informing them of relevant policy developments, information and research
- Ensure members are kept up to date with key developments

### **3. Foster collaborative community development practices across the community sector**

- Promote community development approaches amongst our members
- Provide core resources and training support, particularly in partnership with State and Territory Councils of Social Service



# Australian Council of Social Service

## Member-focussed Engagement Opportunities

**Informing ACOSS policy and advocacy and foster participation and coordination**, through

- Regular **ACOSS member teleconferences**: opportunity to brief and seek input (COSS and NMOs)
- Informal **member catch- ups**: face to face meetings with senior staff in capitals (COSS and NMOs)
- **Annual Australian Community Sector Survey**: members are invited to provide information about service delivery and client issues (All members)
- **ACOSS Policy and Advocacy Networks**: established mechanism for national members to be involved in the development of ACOSS policy and advocacy strategy in priority areas (COSS and NMOs):
  - Community Sector
  - Health
  - Housing and homelessness
  - Income support and employment
  - Tax

This engagement complements the important role played by **ACOSS Policy Advisers**, who are individual experts appointed by the Board to provide advice to the ACOSS national office

**Providing members with accurate resources and information on key policy issues and advocacy activities**, through

- **ACOSS@Work**: monthly update on ACOSS activities (All members)
- **Policy Snapshots**: electronic briefs on current policy issues (All members)
- **Media releases**: communicate issues and ACOSS position to media, sector and public
- **Daily media bulletin**: keeps National Member Organisations up to date with current policy developments (All members)

**Fostering collaborative community development practices across the community sector**, through

ACOSS is also endeavouring to help foster collaborative community development practices across the community sector. This approach is highlighted in ACOSS' Project based work. As at 2015, examples of this work include:

- **Principles for a Partnership-centred approach for NGOs** working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.
- The **Give Grid**, **Emergency Resilience (National Emergency Management Project)** and **Digital Business Kit** projects all include engagement opportunities with our members and other sector stakeholders in the development of free tools and resources and in the dissemination of information for the sector.