

# NEIGHBOURHOOD DEMOCRACY

## INTRODUCTION

The ACT Greens share the community's desire for a deeper, more participatory democracy.

**That's why the Greens are proud to announce our Neighbourhood Democracy package, to give the community the power to decide what its neighbourhood needs.**

We know that when people come together to discuss their vision for the place they call home, great things emerge.

We want to create a government that listens, respects and trusts the community voice, and has the skills and desire to turn this voice into tangible changes that people see in their neighbourhoods.

Instead, the government too often approaches local issues with an 'I know best' attitude, undertaking tokenistic consultation, ignoring community desires and knowledge.

This stems from a fundamental power imbalance; government ultimately decides when to listen to the community, whose voice to listen to and when to ignore it.

Too often, it's property developers or those with the loudest voices that have the biggest say, leading to decisions that benefit a handful of people, not the whole community.

This means that people in Canberra rarely get the opportunity to express their vision for their neighbourhood, and when they do, often see their ideas ignored.

The ACT Government's Better Suburbs program, initiated as a result of Caroline Le Couteur's Greens crossbench motion calling for participatory budgeting for city services was a huge success, and highlighted the community desires for more control over their neighbourhood.

**This neighbourhood fund will allow the members of every suburb to come together to determine how to spend an average annual budget of \$100,000.**

Our plan will provide facilitators to run workshops and offer other support as required to develop local plans for capital works or other projects that the community collectively decides to fund. This could be park upgrades, new playground equipment, tree planting, employing people to work on a particular project, or community-building activities and events.

## INTRODUCING PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN EACH SUBURB

Participatory budgeting is a valuable and proven method for encouraging greater community involvement in decision making. It has been successfully adopted in several Australian cities and towns:

- Brisbane City Council is currently implementing [community voting on public infrastructure spending](#) in the Gabba Ward.
- In 2013-14 the City of Greater Geraldton in Western Australia established a [deliberative community panel](#) for allocating \$86 million in capital works funding.
- In 2014 the City of Darebin adopted a [Deliberative Citizen's Jury](#) to allocate \$2 million of infrastructure spending over two years.
- In 2014 the City of Melbourne introduced a [Deliberative Community Panel](#) to allocate \$5.9 billion for infrastructure and service delivery.

The ACT's 2018 [Better Suburbs program](#) was the first such trial in the ACT. It used a deliberative democracy process to work with Canberrans to understand this community's priorities for the delivery of city services, including trialling participatory budgeting.

The result is that the Government now better understands community priorities for investment across Canberra including for waterways, trees, waste and recycling, road, public spaces and sports facilities.

Building on the learnings from this process, **the Neighbourhood Budgeting program will deliver a comprehensive, long-term approach to embed deliberative democracy into the delivery of city services.**

## WHY IS NEIGHBOURHOOD DEMOCRACY IMPORTANT?

Adopting a participatory approach provides an opportunity for people to connect with others in their community and gives them a voice in deciding the future of their suburb. It helps to build community cohesion and develops important skills in the community and government in working together to arrive at community-led decisions. The ongoing nature of the program means that skills and relationships are built over time, delivering many benefits to the community such as greater local community connection and resilience, improved skills and knowledge and an engaged community that's willing to participate and contribute to their neighbourhood.

## HOW WILL THE PROCESS WORK?

The project will run as a series of facilitated workshops in each suburb. All interested residents will register to attend the workshops and participate throughout the process. Trained facilitators will support participants to identify, consider and prioritise options for their community. Each suburb will create a priority list which the ACT Government will then implement. There will be dedicated administration, promotion and facilitation support throughout the project.

Ensuring accessibility of the program will be a priority. Online options will be available, and outreach to parts of the community whose voices are rarely heard is central to the success of the program - including older people, younger people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people from a diversity of socioeconomic groups, and people with a disability.

**The program will be piloted in 10 suburbs in the first year, then will be gradually scaled up to all Canberra suburbs.** Each suburb will participate annually once they are included in the program. The lessons from the pilot suburbs will inform the implementation of the program in following years.

Key stages in the process will include:

1. Broad outreach including letterboxing, posters, stalls at local shops to raise awareness of the program and the upcoming workshops.
2. Facilitate the first community workshop.
3. The project facilitators take the ideas from the workshop and compile any additional information that is needed, such as costs and maintenance requirements.
4. Facilitate the second workshop to consider the additional information and collaborate to prioritise options.
5. Community prepares their priority list of projects.
6. The project team works with the Government and the community to facilitate implementation.
7. Annual reporting on the projects delivered and funds expended.