

Agency Sector Forum

Terms of Reference

Background

The Department of Health and Human Services currently allocates approximately 10% of budget to service provision by community sector organisations. This allocation is expected to grow in future years, with significant reforms occurring in human services, particularly disability, child and family, and alcohol and drug services.

Over 240 individual community sector organisations hold funding Agreements with the Agency. Each is an entity with its own history, purpose and strategic direction.

Because the output is a service to people rather than a product, the provision of health and human services requires as much alignment as possible between organisations on mission, vision and strategy.

Purpose

The Agency Sector Forum aims to establish a partnership forum that allows for the exchange of information and advice on a consistent and timely basis and to develop new partnerships while continuing to foster existing ones between the Agency and all community sector organisations delivering services through Funding Agreements is managed.

The detail of the forum will be shaped by the issues which will change over time as services respond to the changing needs of clients. The Agency Sector Forum provides overarching governance for a relationship which is based on agreed values and processes. It is a relationship aimed at maximising the partnership opportunities that will improve the lives, health and well being of all Tasmanians, particularly the most disadvantaged and marginalised.

Community sector organisations have a legitimate role in advocacy and it is recognised that from time to time some issues will not be resolved in the Agency Sector Forum or through other consultative arrangements within the Agency. At these times the sector will pursue those issues at Departmental Executive, Ministerial or Cabinet level, as appropriate.

Below are the agreed values that the Agency Sector Forum will operate within.

Values

- **Clients first** - Achieving outcomes that improve the health and well being of disadvantaged Tasmanians is at the centre of everything we do.
- **Trust and respect** - All participants bring unique and valued expertise and have distinct and complementary roles.
- **Innovation and quality improvement** - Recognising that we can always find better ways to do things in both community and government processes, planning and service delivery.

- **Communication** - The activity of the Forum and associated processes must always be inclusive, open and transparent.
- **Diversity** - The strength of the sector is its capacity to represent the full spectrum of the community and acknowledging individual and organisational difference is at the foundation of this.

Role and Function

Organisations that interact with the Agency participate in a spectrum of activities depending on organisational preference and circumstances which will vary over time and on different issues. The table below¹ summarises the range of participation that will be facilitated through the Agency Sector Forum and associated activities:

Extent of participation	Description	Example
Acting Together	Different interests decide together what is best and how best to carry it out	Substantial participation on mutual objectives (eg workforce strategy)
Deciding Together	An organisation encourages others to provide ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward	Substantial consultation regarding new strategies, initiatives and reforms being introduced by Government (eg, reforms to disability services)
Consultation	The organisations offers a number of options and listens to the feedback they get	Consultation regarding the ongoing process of government (eg, the budget process)
Information Sharing	The organisation tells people what is planned or in the process of being planned	Information and discussion forums regarding services (eg, regional information forums delivered by several DHHS operational units)

The framework above will enable the following functions:

- Where agreed, commission joint projects or commission sub committees to progress matters of mutual interest (Acting Together)
- Consider issues referred by the community sector from DHHS community forums or from DHHS to the community sector (Deciding Together)
- Consider issues referred to the forum by the Minister (Deciding Together)
- In relation to the business of the community sector and DHHS, provide a forum to address strategic issues of mutual interest such as the development, implementation and evaluation of planning frameworks and approaches; policy direction; service performance; service delivery and gaps; and broad funding priorities (Deciding Together and Consultation)
- Discuss Government policy affecting the sector (Deciding Together and Consultation)
- Consider issues arising from cross divisional programs and service delivery (Consultation)
- At an appropriate time in the budgetary cycle, discuss strategic issues relating to the funding priorities and funding of community sector organisations (Consultation)

¹ Wilcox D 2004, Partnerships Online <http://www.parnerships.org.uk/guide/frame>

- Provide an opportunity for the Department of Health and Human Services and the sector to share and exchange information about relevant issues, including progressing consultation where appropriate (Information)

The Agency Sector Forum will not:

- Discuss issues regarding individuals or individual organisations, their funding, viability and/or performance.
- Consider any program issues where there are other specific forums for the purpose.
- Discuss funding issues relating to the community sector when they are the subject of Cabinet or budgetary processes.

Communication

The importance of good governance in relation to managing service delivery across government and community sectors cannot be understated.

A central element of governance is communication. The aim of communication is to achieve a framework in which all information is available to stakeholders so that the forum operates in a way that maximises the achievement of agreed values (outlined above).

A model communication framework that enables participation at all levels is attached (attachment one). Under this model:

- **Information sharing** is maximised through Regional Community Forums, which are open to all stakeholders to attend.
- Feedback from **Consultation** on topical issues is gathered at Community Forums and fed into the Agency Sector Forum either directly, or through peaks representing the Agency or the community sector.
- Community Sector organisations and the Department of Health and Human Services use the Agency Sector Forum as the mechanism for **Deciding Together** and **Acting Together**, based on feedback, information and consultation gathered through community forums and other communication mechanisms.

All members of the Agency Sector Forum have a responsibility for promoting good communication into and from the Forum. This will be done through:

- The collection and presentation of the results of communication activities conducted at Community Forums and other communication structures.
- Broad circulation of the Agency Sector Forum Agenda, Meeting Minutes, and associated papers.
- Production of an Agency Sector Forum Communiqué with agreed key messages from each meeting.

Membership

Chair: David Roberts, Secretary

Membership: **DHHS members:**
 Alison Jacob, Deputy Secretary Human Services
 Catherine Katz, Deputy Secretary Strategy, Planning and Performance
 Mary Bent, Deputy Secretary, Statewide System Development
 Penny Egan, Chief Financial Officer

Community Sector Members:

Nine community members to be selected (see process below)

Executive Officer: Associate Professor Des Graham, Director, Office for the Community Sector

Additional members can be invited to participate as required.

Community Sector Membership

Community Sector membership will be determined through the following process:

- 1 Publicly advertise in all three regions of Tasmania for expressions of interest for nine community sector members (four south, three north, two north west)
- 2 Committee comprising Executive Officer of Agency Sector Forum, Chair of Peaks Network, and Chair of TasCOSS to recommend shortlisted applicants to the Chair
- 3 Shortlist to be based on an assessed capacity for potential members to contribute to the successful functioning of the Agency Sector Forum, based on the Terms of Reference.
- 4 List of all applicants and shortlisted applicants to be tabled in confidence at Agency Sector Forum

Member Roles

All members of the Agency Sector Forum are required to:

- Foster cooperation.
- At a strategic level, ensure that the Agency Sector Forum establishes clear goals, an appropriate workplan, and gets things done.
- Enhance the capacity of the Agency Sector Forum to foster a network approach to improving partnerships.
- Identify opportunities and resources consistent with the agreed goals and workplan of the Forum.
- Conduct all Agency Sector Forum activity in a manner consistent with the Values of the Forum.

Meeting Times

- The Agency Sector Forum will meet quarterly.
- Meetings will be synchronised with Regional Community Forums so that communication can flow freely to and from both Forums.

Meeting Protocols

- The quorum for the meeting will be three Departmental representatives and five community representatives.
- Proxies are permitted, but should be the exception.
- The Agenda will be developed through input from: the Regional Community Forums; Community Sector Representatives; and DHHS Representatives.
- The Agenda will be distributed with meeting papers at least one week prior to the meeting. The Agenda, and where possible meeting papers, will be published on *communityExpress* - the portal for community sector information and communication.

- An Agency Sector Forum communiqué will be distributed within a week of meetings. The key messages in the communiqué will be developed in the Forum, and draft communiqué agreed out of session by Forum members.
- Minutes will be circulated within a week of the Forum, and endorsed at the subsequent meeting.
- All decisions will be through agreement and consensus.

Review of Terms of Reference

The Draft Terms of Reference will be published for comment by the Department of Health and Human Services, and a revised draft presented to the first Agency Sector Forum with membership convened under these Terms of Reference (June 2009) for endorsement.

Attachment one: Communication Framework - ASF

