

The Next Generation of Multicultural Victorians Conference

The Future of NGOs

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Each year Capire Consulting Group engages with 100s of Non Government Organisations (NGO) across Victoria. The engagement is used to inform public policy and to ensure the voices of diverse Victorians are heard by our State's decision makers.

To inform this panel session presentation, each of our Capire consultants answered three questions; Why are NGOs important in the development of public policy? What are some of the key challenges for NGOs observed in our work? What is your key message for the future of NGOs? A summary of the responses are provided below and formed the basis of my panel presentation.

Importance of the NGO sector in the development of public policy:

- They have an intimate knowledge of communities, and they can be a conduit and help build relationships and trust between various stakeholders and the community.
- They are not part of the government bureaucracy, therefore they can be nimble and responsive to community needs.
- Their programs and services are as much about prevention as they are reactive saving significant public money in the long run.
- A reminder for the planners and designers that the places they are creating are for people and that neighbourhoods are not solely about the built form.
- They have been using a place based model for years and are way ahead of other sectors using this approach.
- They can assist local government in community development and service delivery in a time when local government is expected to do more for less and the non-tangible things like community development are falling off the priority list.
- Because their funding has been decreasing over time they have had to get clever about how they sustain themselves. Lots of lessons to be learnt about their partnerships and the way they leverage funding and income.

Key challenges for NGOs, public policy and engagement:

- There is a perception that NGOs only respond to disadvantage.
- There is perception that they want huge amounts of floor area and infrastructure. Also sometimes that they are unrealistic or do not have a clear understanding of their needs.
- A number of times we have seen different NGOs in one area competing for funding, clients, etc. There is a lack of coordination. This has improved but historically there has been a lack of strategic planning, particularly from smaller entities.
- Lack of knowledge of the planning and public policy system and therefore not knowing how, who and when to influence.

Key messages for the future of NGOs:

- Have a collective voice, vision and plan. Planners and policy makers will not go and talk to every NGO or invite them all to have a seat at the table. Choose a representative for a region and they become the face and voice of that group.
- Be clear about how your programming and service delivery needs transfer into physical space needs
- It is okay if you do not think your specific service can commit to being in an area in 10 years' time, but you are being the voice of a service like yours that will be servicing that area in the future, so you still need to contribute.
- Learn the planning and development process 101 and be on the radar of the strategic planners in local government. It is important to speak their language and teach them yours.
- Provide real life examples of where things have worked. Demonstrate that you know what you're doing and provide evidence.