



Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism

REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

INTRODUCTION

The *Multiculturalism Act 2023* was passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly and notified on 15 February 2023. The legislation supports the Territory's continuous growth and improvement as an inclusive city, celebrating our multiculturalism and diversity.

The Act enshrines a new Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism in law. The Council will advise the Minister for Multicultural Affairs on issues of importance for culturally and linguistically diverse communities and actively engage with community to identify needs and priorities. The Council will be a statutory body with reporting requirements. It will also assess the ACT Government's progress in implementing the *Multiculturalism Act 2023*.

The function, membership numbers and appointment process for the Council were agreed to reflect feedback from community consultations held in 2021 and 2022 and consistent with other advisory councils in the ACT. The Council will have a total of 11 members, including Chair and Deputy Chair. Members will represent different cultures, genders, ages, residency and immigration status as well as generations of migrants. Members will be appointed by the Minister for a term of no longer than 3 years per term and can serve a maximum of 2 terms.

During the 2021-2022 consultations on the Multiculturalism Act, the community requested further consultation on the Terms of Reference for the Council.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ON THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Summary of key findings from consultation

This Listening Report documents what we heard in detail during community consultation on the Terms of Reference for the Council, which are summarised as:

1. The Council should consist of a diverse range of representatives of the multicultural community in the ACT.
2. Council members should be well connected to their community and endorsed by community.
3. Council members should have a broad understanding of multiculturalism and shared challenges **and** be committed to promoting inclusion.
4. Engagement needs to occur beyond community leaders.
5. There needs to be broad promotion of the Council including clarification of its roles, functions and how the community can engage with it.
6. The Council should be supported with resourcing to ensure it can undertake its activities effectively.

We held online and face-to-face consultations with stakeholders from 27 February to 10 April 2023.



To support the community's consideration of key issues, the ACT Government released a Discussion Paper translated into 5 community languages to accompany the draft Terms of Reference. Over 1,200 people visited the consultation page on YourSay Conversations with at least 50 people or organisations engaging directly with us on this online platform.

Canberrans were invited to make submissions by email or through a YourSay webpage. The community also had the option to complete a short survey on what should be included in the Terms of Reference or request a consultation. One open access face-to-face community consultation was held on 9 March 2023 and one open access online consultation was held on 15 March 2023. Two additional consultations were requested by community members including by a group of international students from the ANU and by a group of professionals representing part of the Asian community. The 4 community consultations were attended by 25 community members.

Views were sought on the draft Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism in 3 key areas to ensure they reflected the expectations of multicultural communities:

- Membership and representation
- Community engagement
- Accountability and transparency

WHO WE ENGAGED

Multicultural community organisations, peak bodies, international students' organisations, and members of the community contributed to the consultations.

Respondent	Number of Submissions
Peak bodies	4
Multicultural community organisations	3
Faith based organisations	1
Individuals	3
Total	11

We also received 39 responses to the online survey. Of the survey respondents, 21 identified as female, 17 as male and 1 as non-binary. The largest number of responses were from people aged 35 to 44 years of age. Twenty-five respondents had lived, worked or studied in Canberra for over 10 years. Sixteen of the 29 survey respondents did not know about the Ministerial Council for Multiculturalism prior to this round of consultation. Of the survey respondents, 4 described their cultural background as Australian, 16 as Asian, 3 as African, 2 Latin American, and 8 as European. Others described their cultural background as Karen (1), Muslim (2), Anglo (1), Middle Eastern (1), and French Canadian (1).



Key insights from the community

It was clear during consultations, in submissions and in survey responses, the community strongly supports a Ministerial Council which is diverse, representative and accountable. What we heard during this round of consultation confirmed and reinforced much of what we had already learned from previous consultations on the Multiculturalism Bill. The proposed Terms of Reference were largely welcomed and agreed upon.

More specific responses under the 3 main areas of discussions – Membership and Representation, Community Engagement, Transparency and Accountability – are discussed below.

1. Membership and Representation

Most consultation participants agreed it was essential for all Council members to have strong community links and be endorsed by community as this would facilitate a better understanding of community priorities, challenges and barriers. Community connections would also enable relevant information from the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the ACT Government and Council achievements to be shared more readily.

While a diverse Council membership was considered important by most consultation participants, some felt specific quotas were necessary to ensure marginalised groups were represented, including people from new and emerging communities, asylum seekers and refugees, women, young people, people with disability, carers, LGBTIQ+ Canberrans and second (and later) generation migrants. Some respondents suggested allocating membership seats in proportion to the population share. Others considered it sufficient for Council members to have knowledge and community links to represent minority groups.

Similarly, there were suggestions the Council include people with research backgrounds to ensure priorities and decisions were evidence based and data driven. Strong links to community and with peak organisations, settlement services, research institutions and others working with specific community groups can serve as specific mechanisms to ensure marginalised groups, including new and emerging communities have a voice on the Council. Processes to support participation by representatives from marginalised, and new and emerging communities were also recommended.

Most respondents emphasised the need for Council members to demonstrate broader cultural knowledge and understanding, including skills in cross-cultural negotiation and conflict resolution and an appreciation of the needs, priorities, challenges and barriers for different groups within the multicultural community. Members should not only represent their own community but should demonstrate a commitment and ability to advocate for the interests of all communities. This ensures holistic advice is provided to government. Additionally, an understanding of intersectionality was considered important.

Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity (such as gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, age, mental health) shape their life experiences. The intersection of these identities creates unique dynamics and intersectional experiences which present a range of privileges for some, and discrimination and exclusion for others. Attitudes, systems and structures within communities and organisations also interact to impact people's life experiences.



The ability to advance multiculturalism by promoting and embodying the principles of equality, harmony, inclusion and respect for all regardless of background was also considered as vital for Council members.

The need to regularly refresh Council membership and allow representation by new voices was considered important for transparency during the selection process. Further, easily accessible selection criteria written in plain English was also considered essential for encouraging people who were active in the community to apply, particularly for those with limited board experience. Some community members also suggested training for Council members in governance and facilitation skills once appointed.

Some suggested an understanding of government processes would be necessary to serve on the Council.

2. Community Engagement

Genuine engagement and demonstrated ability to conduct community consultations were considered essential skills for Council members to understand community needs and priorities. Consultation participants noted the importance of meeting with community elders and leaders. Consultation participants also indicated engagement should extend to other community members, cross-cultural workers or bilingual facilitators, services working directly with communities, established community networks, organisations, peak bodies and business. This is particularly important when trying to reach marginalised groups, and new and emerging communities.

To actively build community relationships and make the Council more accessible, more frequent and multiple forms of engagement were recommended. Suggestions included:

- 'Town Halls' in various locations throughout the ACT as people in different regions experience different challenges.
- Face-to-face and online community consultations.
- 'Meet and greet' gatherings as well as roundtables and one-on-one sessions.
- Surveys to identify community priorities.
- A Council website which is easy to access and navigate. Include an email and phone contact as well as well as provision for online queries accompanied by clear guidelines on what can be requested.
- Facebook, WhatsApp and WeChat groups.
- Partnering with peak organisations and student associations.
- Smaller community meetings to ensure messages reach the whole community and focus groups for community groups who may not feel comfortable joining larger forums.
- Ask communities about their preferred method of engagement and follow their processes for communicating and consulting.
- Issues based engagement.
- Activities to attract young people.
- Speaking engagements at Navitas, CIT, MARSS, Red Cross and universities.
- Attend places of worship, sporting events, embassy open days, university open days, gatherings of community leaders, and the Suburban Land Agency's Mingle Program.
- Ensure procedures and processes are in place to support engagement and consider less formal mechanisms for approaching the Council.



- Providing information in plain English and in different languages. Undertake consultations using interpreters and publish surveys and reports in different languages, where possible.
- Use feedback from engagement sessions to identify priorities and co-design action plans.

3. Transparency and Accountability

Most consultation participants agreed with the reporting requirements proposed in the Terms of Reference including preparing a community engagement plan, a communications plan, an annual plan of its proposed activities and an annual report. Some community members wanted Council minutes available online while others suggested shorter summaries of Council meetings in plain English would be sufficient to give community members an idea of what has been discussed and what actions were required.

Generally, regular communication from the Council to community, in plain English, and translated into several languages was considered important to build trust and accountability with community.

It was suggested Council members be tasked with specific responsibilities to address specific issues and ensure identified priority activities were completed.

Several survey responses and consultation discussions noted the importance of Council members being apolitical, neutral and to declare conflicts of interest. This was important when representing of common challenges for all communities. Suggestions to achieve greater transparency were to publicly share outcomes of meeting discussions, actions and decisions made.

The need to promote the Council its roles, objectives, and members, and the Multiculturalism Act to increase community awareness and engagement was a strong focus in all responses. There was a broad consensus there is limited knowledge about the Council in the community. Many in the community are not aware of the Council or its members, do not understand its roles and responsibilities, or what they can expect from the Council. It was suggested the Council invest time in promoting their role and engaging with communities, particularly early in their term, to ensure community members get to know about the Council and the Multiculturalism Act.

Suggestions of promotion mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability included:

- Newsletters including Multicultural E-news, Our Canberra, Community Partners Update, Community Councils.
- Publishing meeting summaries online.
- Sharing feedback with community following consultations and being open about decision-making and actions taken.
- Using multiple formats to share information, including social media, community radio, online methods, written/paper form, visual and story-based methods, and verbal updates.
- Distributing plain English and translated information about the Council in multiple public venues and at community events, including ACT Libraries, Child and Family Centres, Community Centres, local shops, language schools, post offices, universities, health centres, the Information Hub in the City Centre, and transit points including the airport and Jolimont Centre.



- Presentations and 'meet and greet' sessions with community groups, individuals, universities and cultural clubs. These can be delivered jointly with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.
- Updates at community sector forums.
- 'Speed dating' sessions for council members with emerging communities.

Feedback also recommended ongoing review of issues and priorities and for the Council to focus on a small number of relevant issues based on evidence and community consensus rather than personal preference. Forums to share progress and Council activities were also suggested.

Finally, many of the community members consulted during this process noted the need for additional resources and support to ensure the Council can actively engage with the community.



Key Findings

We are grateful for the feedback received during the consultation process on the Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism. While it was impossible to include all feedback in this report, it will be considered when updating the Terms of Reference and developing the selection criteria for the Council membership.

Based on the feedback we received, 6 main themes emerged:

1. The Council should consist of a diverse range of representatives of the multicultural community in the ACT.
2. Council members should be well connected to their community and endorsed by community.
3. Council members should have a broad understanding of multiculturalism and shared challenges and be committed to promoting inclusion.
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5. There needs to be broad promotion of the Council including clarification of its roles, functions and how the community can engage with it.
6. The Council should be supported with resourcing to ensure it can undertake its activities effectively.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The ACT Government will consider all feedback received to update the Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism, and when developing the selection criteria for members.

Key Timings

9 May 2023 – Listening Report published

9 May 2023 – Nominations for the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism open

28 May 2023 – Nominations close

1 September 2023 – new Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism commences term



THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

1,206

People visited the YourSay page

1,500

Number of email addresses (individuals and organisations) directly sent information about the consultation

1,793

Number of times the information paper was downloaded from YourSay

763

Number of times translated material was downloaded from YourSay

39

People completed the online survey through YourSay

11

Written submissions were received

2

Open community consultations were held

2

Community consultations were requested and held