

Community and Voluntary Sector

HIGHLIGHTS

Labour will:

- Work with the sector to establish long-term funding cycles and transparent processes so that sector organisations have some certainty in their planning and delivery of services
- Ensure that community and voluntary organisations can engage in advocacy without fear of losing government contracts or their charitable status
- Recognise and honour the vital role of volunteers in building a resilient community and nation.

Introduction

The community and voluntary sector is an important part of our democracy. It is a place where ordinary citizens can develop the organisations that create our rich and diverse civil society. For over 100 years voluntary sector organisations have worked beside government to respond to social need in New Zealand by developing their own organisations and their own, often highly innovative, social services. Our history and small size has meant that the organisations have often been dependent on government funding. This dependency worked because government saw that it had a role to play in supporting the development of civil society..

Context - A sector in crisis

Since the introduction of the State Sector Act and the Public Finance Act, the relationship between government and the sector has changed. Government has become more directive and business-like with competition replacing co-operative values. A one-sided accountability process has come to rely heavily on financial and metric measures which often bear little relationship to the social development process. Labour's Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party in 2000 consulted widely with the sector and exposed the impact of these changes, particularly the loss of independence and loss of voice that has occurred.

Since 2008, National has developed a form of "social investment" policy, which relies heavily on delivery of services by non-government organisations. National's approach seems to aim to identify and often blame vulnerable and struggling families and individuals and target delivery of social services almost only to them. This ignores and tends to perpetuate underlying social economic inequalities, barriers and injustices. They contract for these services using market models, which make no distinction between community and voluntary organisations and businesses. Contracted organisations are expected to operate as businesses despite having different values and operating practices, and increasingly they are expected to bear the risks involved in the social development activity driven by government.

National has sought to involve the Community and Voluntary Sector in experimental market-led policies such as Social Bonds, which seek business investment in social programmes and offer high returns, in return for the transfer of the risk of failure from government to the investing organisation. National has been attempting to force contracted organisations to gather individualised personal information on clients for government, risking client confidentiality, privacy and human rights. Organisations which refuse to do this are at risk of being denied funding.

Strengthening Relationships

The Fifth Labour Government made a commitment to a new way of working with communities based on partnership in social development. In Government, Labour signed the Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship in 2001. From this accord, Pathways to Partnership evolved which brought new longer term funding to government contracting. The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector was established under Labour, to support the work on the relationship agreement.

Under National, the statement was transformed into the Kia Tutahi relationship accord. This accord should be the basis of National's commitment to civil society participation in government. However, under National, the Office for Community and Voluntary Sector was integrated into the Department of Internal Affairs, disestablished, and turned into the Community, Voluntary and Sector Policy Team with a substantially reduced staff. Yet National cite The Kia Tutahi Accord as one of the four pillars of government's contribution to the Open Government Partnership, an international forum of countries working to ensure that member governments are more open, accountable and responsive to citizens.

While new relationships and a deeper understanding of government and community roles did emerge from Labour's partnership approach, overall the partnerships didn't achieve the kinds of potential or produce the results they might have. Too often government, with all its resources, meets a poorly resourced and heavily stretched community and voluntary sector.

At the same time, a significant barrier to the relationship between government and the Community & Voluntary Sector has been the culture of government. This is particularly so where the State Sector Act and Public Finance Act have created a managerial environment where policy decisions are delivered through devolved processes and in silos. Often high level intentions for better relationships can be undermined by organisational imperatives both across government departments and lower down government agency hierarchies. Development of consistently improved relationships requires a review of the impact of both these Acts, and culture changes within government which must be explicit, organised and monitored.

Labour will:

- Review the effectiveness of past efforts to develop relationship accords and identify how to progress more meaningful processes and/or agreements in the future, which can facilitate whole of government engagement with the community and voluntary sector and clarify the rights and obligations of both
- Review the impact and content of the State Sector Act and the Public Finance Act on Community and Voluntary Sector funding with a view to creating mechanisms which are more suited to the culture and working methods of the Sector, and which would enable community development and client-determined mixes of services

- Evaluate the role and effectiveness of the disestablished Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector and determine the best mechanism for strengthening the relationship between government and the Community and Voluntary Sector.

Strengthening the Sector, and Valuing Advocacy

Recognising that there is always a power imbalance between the sector and government is another step in tackling an improved approach to partnership. To achieve a better dialogue and improved input from the community sector, Labour recognises the need for strengthening the sector and, while government must play a role in funding this work, the sector itself must be the driver of strengthening processes if they are to be sustainable and build effective capacity.

Labour values the sector and the conclusions and views it draws from its face-to-face work. Our relationship with them is based on genuine partnership and having rights and responsibilities to each other. We recognise and value their right to speak out and to seek policy and regulatory change where they believe and have evidence that policies are causing harm or could be substantially improved for the benefit of their clients and society overall.

Networking and Umbrella Organisations form the glue that binds the wider sector together. They form strong links and connections, help identify common issues and how to tackle them, and they link their member organisations with government departments. They are the key to development of improved relationships between the sector and government. They are also best placed to develop sector capacity. However they are largely under-resourced and struggle to provide the leadership role required of them.

Labour recognises the potential for umbrella organisations to strengthen their members and the need for government to provide more adequate resourcing for them. Their independent voice on community issues makes government more accountable to the community, and enhances our society.

Local Government is also an important local connection for community and voluntary sector organisations throughout New Zealand. In some parts of the country this connection has been weakened by National's removal of the four well-beings from the Local Government Act. While some Councils have voluntarily retained these roles and goals, many have not. These well-beings provided local support for community activity and Labour wants to see them restored to help ensure resilient communities throughout New Zealand.

Labour will:

- Work with the C&V sector to identify the resourcing required to fund stronger networking organisations able to build sector capacity and provide an independent voice
- Remove gagging clauses from government contracts and work with the sector to improve communication between sector organisations and government
- Strengthen civil society participation in government aspects of the Open government partnership and ensure the State Services Commission develops a plan of action by government departments to meet the obligations of this accord

- Ensure that community organisations are able to engage in advocacy without becoming disqualified from charitable status, or fear loss of government funding and support
- Continue to support the independence of community sector advocacy
- Reinstigate the four well-beings in the Local Government Act and investigate how they can become a greater focus in the work of the sector at central government level.

Whanau Ora models

National's approach to the sector is in stark contrast to the Whānau Ora approach which has been developed in Maori Communities. Where funding is devolved to whanau communities who decide how best to bring services together to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Under this model decision-making is locally led and services are integrated through trusted community networks that have been built up over years. This allows for the innovative ideas, diverse ways of working and cooperation which are the essence of community activity.

In Whanau Ora, community-based child and whānau service providers play an important role to make sure that children get the best start in life. They are the people who know what their community needs, where the gaps are, and what can be done to make sure the best models of care are available. They are also the people who are the first point of contact for the most vulnerable whānau in our communities.

Labour will:

- Work with the community and voluntary sector to establish long-term funding cycles and transparent decision-making processes and criteria and so that the sector has more certainty around planning and delivering its programmes
- Commit to investing in long term relationships with community and voluntary sector organisations to support the development of resilient communities looking for locally responsive solutions
- Evaluate the Whanau Ora model focusing on four key components; leadership; flexibility of funding to get results; workforce development; and better information sharing to determine whether the model has been able to deliver identifiable benefits to the community
- Explore aspects of Whanau Ora which can be transferred into the community and voluntary sector.

Charities Commission

Labour established the Charities Commission after over a decade of discussion with the sector and a detailed Select Committee process. Labour believes the Charities Commission played a vital and autonomous role in the sector. It not only provided valuable understanding of charity in New Zealand but it played a role in strengthening the charitable role of organisations.

Under National, the Charities Commission was disestablished and its core functions were integrated into the Department of Internal Affairs. The voluntary and community sector strongly communicated their concerns about this proposal, to no avail. In the disestablishment process,

the unique role the Commission had, in providing educational material and encouraging good governance and management practices across the sector, was lost.

One of the original tasks of the Charities Commission, and one which has not been addressed by National was the review of the Charities Act, particularly the review of charitable purposes and the role of advocacy.

Labour will:

- Consult with the community and voluntary sector on whether the disestablishment of the Charities Commission and transfer of functions back to the Department of Internal Affairs has resulted in effectiveness and improved services and information for the sector
- Prioritise the long-promised review of the Charities Act that National abandoned, beginning with a first principles review of the legislation, including examining, updating and widening rather than narrowing the definition of charitable purposes.

Supporting Volunteering

Volunteering has an important role to play in developing resilient communities. They play a vital role in our community through their dedication and work and generosity of spirit, which brings huge social, cultural and economic benefits to New Zealand society.

The community and voluntary sector has a role to play in the development and training of volunteers so we can encourage individuals (especially young people) to be involved in society and provide them with skills that will assist their transitions into paid employment.

Supporting people who are new to volunteering and providing mentoring and training, requires significant resourcing. Community and voluntary sector organisations that are willing to do this work are often under-resourced, and this can lead to poor realisation of the potential of this approach.

Labour will:

- Support and encourage the culture of volunteering by honouring them including through NZ Honours, highlighting and communicating effective and inspirational volunteer people and projects
- Examine ways of setting up community cadetships which will expose a trainee to a range of workplaces across the sector
- Ensure MSD provide support funding to organisations willing to train or mentor job-seekers

