

Proposal 5 Dynamic ways of working and structures to empower individuals and teams – making collaboration the norm): Comments

The APS Review invites people to “visit our [website](#), challenge our assumptions, test our thinking, and have your say.” This invitation is severely qualified by the structure of the website which channels comments into five (5) categories (Box 1),

Box 1. Screenshot < <https://www.apsreview.gov.au/>> as at 19th April 2019.

The screenshot displays the website's layout with three main columns:

- YOUR IDEAS:** A vertical list of five idea cards. Each card has a title, a quote, and an 'ENGAGE NOW' button. The titles are: 'BUILD A FLEXIBLE OPERATING MODEL', 'CULTURE, GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP MODEL', 'CULTURE, GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP MODEL', 'INVEST IN CAPABILITY AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT', and 'BUILD A FLEXIBLE OPERATING MODEL'.
- LATEST NEWS:** A central section featuring a large 'FEATURED' article titled 'PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE' with a photo of a man in glasses. Below it are four smaller news items: 'LET'S TALK ABOUT CHANGE', 'BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE', 'GAUGING THE MIND AND MOOD OF THE APS', and 'AMBITIOUS CHANGE FOR AUSTRALIA'S PUBLIC SERVICE'.
- KEY FIGURES:** A vertical column of four circular statistics: '552 comments & counting', '536 workshops attendees', '102 roundtable attendees', and '719 submissions'.

Comment on Proposal 5, APS Review *Priorities for change* by Ken Coghill & Romina Carfi

These comments will go to broader, over-arching issues which do not fit neatly into these proposals but are fundamental to ensuring that “**the Australian Public Service is fit-for-purpose in the decades ahead**”¹ and answering the three (3) questions:

- How can we strengthen each proposal?
- What are we missing?
- How do we ensure lasting change?²

Somewhat confusingly each webpage opens to a proposal with a title different from that of the webpage. Further adding to confusion is the incomplete correspondence between the four (4) Priorities listed in the text:

- ❖ **Strengthen the culture, governance and leadership model** (pp. 24-30)
- ❖ **Build a flexible APS operating model** (pp. 31-35)
- ❖ **Invest in capability and talent development** (pp. 36-42)
- ❖ **Develop stronger internal and external partnerships** (pp. 43-49)

and five (5) proposals:

- **Build a flexible operating model** (Networked enabling systems and common processes across the service)
- **Secretaries Board driving outcomes across government and APS performance** (Culture, governance and leadership model)
- **Genuine transparency and accountability for delivering outcomes for Australians** (Culture, governance and leadership model)
- **Empowered managers accountable for developing people and teams** (Invest in capability and talent development)
- **Dynamic ways of working and structures to empower individuals and teams – making collaboration the norm** (Build a flexible operating model)

These comments are submitted to each of the proposals but should be accepted as relating to broader, over-arching issues.

Comments on proposal: Dynamic ways of working and structures to empower individuals and teams – making collaboration the norm (Build a flexible operating model)

The responses in respect of the fifth Proposal are summarised in Box 2 (below) and discussed in the following narrative.

¹ Message from the chair, *Priorities for change* p. ii.

² *Priorities for change* p. 23

Box 2. Summary of responses to questions

Question	Response
How can this proposal be strengthened?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The APS should recognise, acknowledge and accept both the colonial mindset which is inherent in the APS and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mindset. • It should provide for conformity with the commitments made pursuant to membership of the Open Government Partnership. • Refer to and reflect the first and second Australian Action Plans (AP1 & AP2) adopted in accordance with membership of the Open Government Partnership, in particular relevant to “Support civic participation.”
What is missing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to Australia’s membership of the Open Government Partnership and the associated commitments by which Australia and the APS are correspondingly bound, in particular those relevant to “Support civic participation”. • Recognition of deep knowledge and understanding held in communities, which complements and supplements information held in agencies. • Public engagement in the transition to a low carbon economy and in addressing other issues is missing as a priority for the APS. • Recognition of the colonial mindset inherent in the APS and understanding of the mindsets and hence perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations.
How can lasting change be ensured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lasting change will require perseverance by APS leaders. • Funds and resources must be strategically allocated as essential investments to ensure outcomes of enhanced trust and policy outcomes. It must be noted that public participation is not cost-free even though it can enable improved social, environmental and economic outcomes.

This is explained in detail in the following text.

Overview of Dynamic ways of working and structures to empower individuals and teams – making collaboration the norm

In addressing this proposal, we are considering **Governance**, which has been described as the:

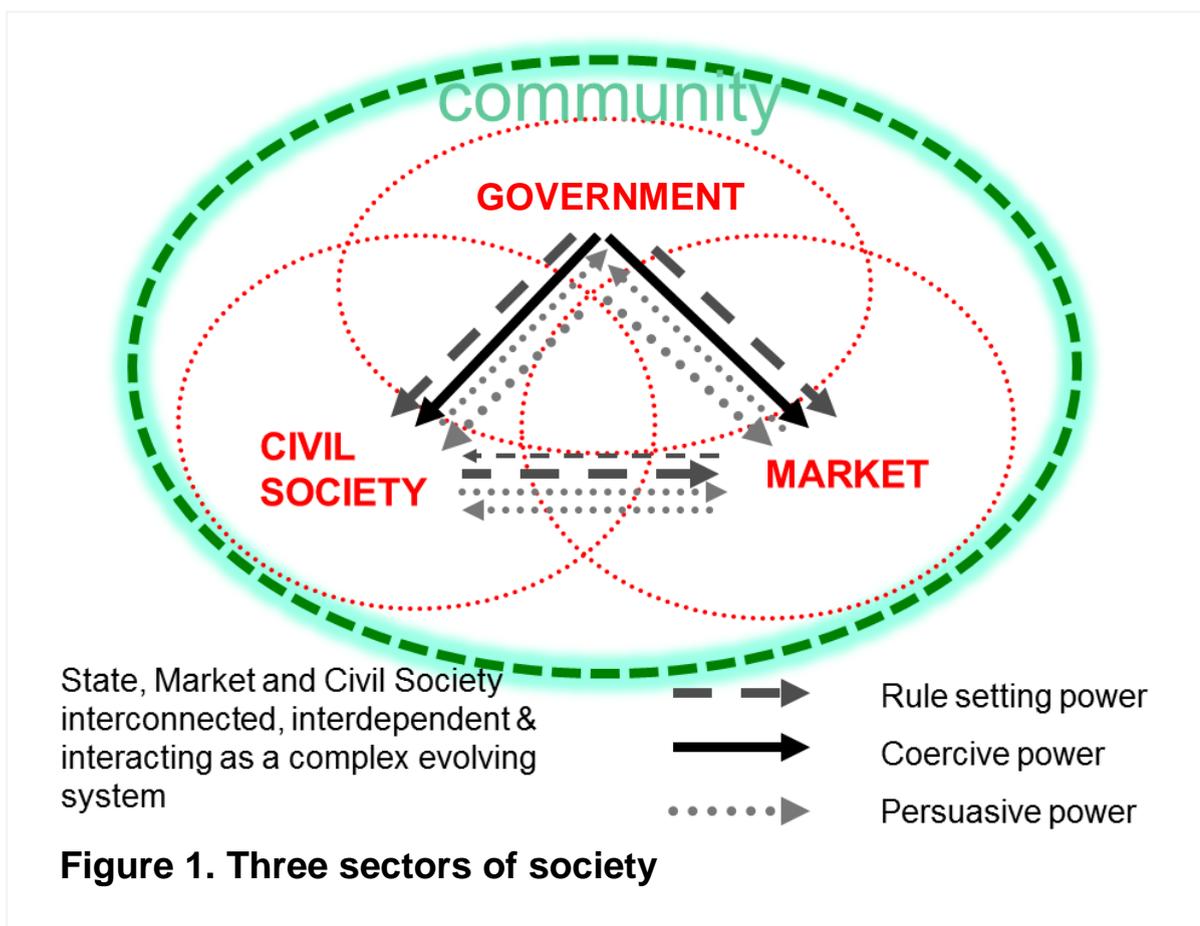
complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate

their differences.³

Governance can be explained in a simple diagram. This diagram (Figure 1) is a theoretical explanation of how almost all societies function: the community is organised as a society⁴ through

- state or government functions which make policy and enforce rules,
- market functions that produce and trade goods and services, and
- civil society functions including advocacy, spiritualism, mutualism and professional standards.

The relative size, power and influence of each function varies with time and circumstance.



³ United Nations Development Programme. (1997). *Reconceptualizing Governance for Sustainable Human Development, Discussion Paper 2*. Retrieved from <http://www.pogar.org/publications/other/undp/governance/reconceptualizing.pdf>

⁴ The distinction made here between communities and societies comes from the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy:

- a community is a population living in a territory (an area of land) and sharing a sentiment, which might be a language, loyalty to fellow members of the community or to the territory or common spiritual beliefs;
- a society is a community's social structures, which are established and maintained through rules and norms of behaviour.

Source: Nancy, J.-L. (1991). *The Inoperative Community* (translation of *La communauté désœuvrée*). In *The Inoperative Community* (translation of *La communauté désœuvrée*). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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The key to the success of governance is the relationships between the people, their organisations and the environment. For example, in the Murray Darling Basin, the environment is the physical environment of the Murray – the waters, the land and the atmosphere that produces the Murray’s climate. The relationships can extend from damaging or hostile to sustaining or cooperative.

Low levels of trust undermine governance; high levels of trust strengthen governance. This corresponds with the three aspects identified in *Priorities for change*:

1. the APS must be **trusted** – by government, the Parliament and the people of Australia. Trust is founded on integrity, transparency and reliability, and these underpin our proposed priorities for change.
2. APS priorities are driven by the need for the APS to deliver more than the sum of its parts as a **united institution**.
3. the APS must put the **interests of the Australian people** at the heart of all it does (p. 15).

Open Government Partnership

However, *Priorities for change* overlooks the necessity of the APS trusting the people of Australia, which is a key element of the Australian Government’s commitments made upon joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) i.e. recognising and tapping the deep knowledge and understanding in communities, complementing information held in agencies.

One of the strong themes running through Australia’s first and second OGP National Action Plans addresses the commitment “Support civic participation”. The corresponding commitment forms part of the Open Government Declaration to which countries subscribe as a condition of OGP membership. It provides:

Support civic participation.

We value public participation of all people, equally and without discrimination, in decision making and policy formulation. Public engagement, including the full participation of women, increases the effectiveness of governments, which benefit from people’s knowledge, ideas and ability to provide oversight. We commit to making policy formulation and decision making more transparent, creating and using channels to solicit public feedback, and deepening public participation in developing, monitoring and evaluating government activities. We commit to protecting the ability of not-for-profit and civil society organizations to operate in ways consistent with our commitment to freedom of expression, association, and opinion. We

commit to creating mechanisms to enable greater collaboration between governments and civil society organizations and businesses.⁵

This commitment aims to greatly strengthen the APS's capacity to engage with communities and civil society more generally, applying and adapting a spectrum of forms and tools for public participation (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), 2007, 2014) – see Figure 2 below. These have been shown in states, territories, local government and internationally to tap into deep knowledge and understanding in communities, complementing information held in agencies. Forms of public participation appropriate to particular public policy issues and problems have been applied successfully and have enabled governments to enhance their decision-making.

Australia has adopted reforms associated with its membership of the Open Government Partnership, in particular relevant to “Support civic participation.” The process itself involves civic participation: commitments are developed by the Open Government Forum, the current membership of which is 9 senior APS personnel (e.g. Deputy Secretaries) and 9 members drawn from civil society.

These reforms and associated actions include

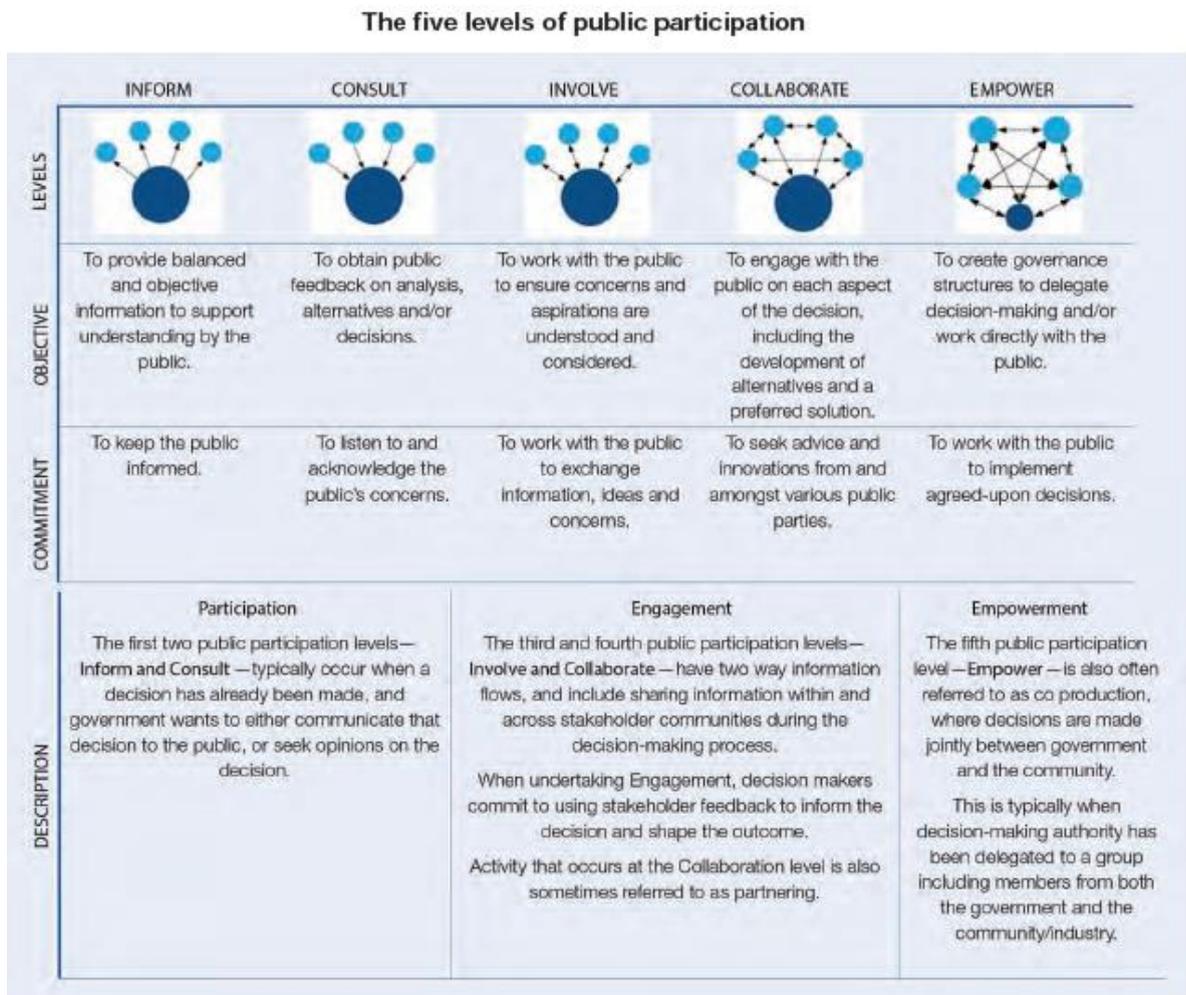
- [Enhance public participation in government decision making](#) (first national Action Plan - AP1, commitment 5.2)
- *Hidden in Plain Sight: Building an understanding of how the Australian Public Service can unlock community expertise to improve policy, programmes and service delivery.*
- [Enhance public engagement skills in the public service](#) (second national Action Plan – AP2).
- The Australian Public Service framework for engagement and participation (forthcoming)

These actions are led by the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science.

⁵ See Open Government Partnership 2011 Open Government Declaration
<<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-government-declaration>>

Figure 2 summarises levels of public participation identified by the international Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Figure 2



Source: VAGO, *Public Participation in Government Decision-making*, January 2015, adapted from IAP2.

Reforming our Democracy

[Reforming our Democracy](#) recently published by The University of Melbourne and the newDemocracy Foundation – is a succinct but comprehensive list of proposed reforms, reflecting increasing use of participatory mechanisms by parliaments and governments, in Australia (mostly local, state and territory jurisdictions) and in many other democracies to enhance decision-making and trust.

The APS must be orientated, trained and resourced to support the application of such reforms.

Public participation and Climate Empowerment

The UNFCCC highlights the valuable role that public participation can play in addressing climate change. It says:

At its core, public participation is one of the key resources in implementing the vision of Article 6 of the Convention.⁶ It can transform society by giving people a voice and showing how their individual action can make a difference.⁷

Trusting the public through engagement in the transition to a low carbon economy should be a priority for the APS.

Reconceptualising work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Priorities for change states: “Now is the time for the APS to reconceptualise how it works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (p. 17). This is discussed in Box 4 (p. 59), in which it is claimed that:

despite the efforts of those involved, this has not delivered substantively better outcomes across the board, nor genuine empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In the first 50 years of Commonwealth administration (1967 to 2017) there were at least 11 different public administration structures (with ten of these in the past 30 years).

“Despite the efforts of those involved” begs the questions of who have been “those involved” and what were their “efforts”. What is clear is that underlying the predominant efforts is a colonial mindset in which those exercising Commonwealth powers have failed to recognize the mindset of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and accordingly reflect that mindset in the manner of relations with them.^{8,9}

Note that in spear-heading stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, it is important to keep in mind avoiding a cultural binary imbedded into services of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and everyone else, as this is proving to be problematic in service delivery to other collectivist (i.e. East Asian, African nations, Mediterranean, etc) cultures as the service delivery default is through an individualistic lens (i.e. Western cultures).

Tools for Fit for Purpose

“Fit for purpose” is used imprecisely in *Priorities for Change*. The above concerns and recommended tools add substance and give effect to the rather general suggestions in *Priorities for Change* (p. 50):

- More broadly, there should be an expectation that great agencies and public servants engage meaningfully and regularly outside the service as part of core business. People at all levels must be empowered to live this approach.

⁶ United Nations Framework [Convention](#) on Climate Change

⁷ UNFCCC 2019 *Public Participation under Action for Climate Empowerment* < <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-and-outreach/workstreams/public-participation>>

⁸ For an explanation of these issues see [tebrakunna country](#) & [Emma Lee](#) (2019) ‘Reset the relationship’: decolonising government to increase Indigenous benefit, *cultural geographies* 1-20 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474019842891>

⁹ See also the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (2017) in which “We (*the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes*) invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.”

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- Embracing this approach will boost the APS's ability to design and deliver innovative, fit-for-purpose solutions, its position as a trusted adviser to successive governments, and its reputation as an organisation with the highest standards of integrity and ethics.

Our suggestions would facilitate the APS clarifying what's meant by "fit for purpose" and enabling it to perform accordingly.

Implications for Proposal: Dynamic ways of working and structures to empower individuals and teams – making collaboration the norm (Build a flexible operating model)

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How can lasting change be ensured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lasting change will require perseverance by APS leaders. • Funds and resources must be strategically allocated as essential investments to ensure outcomes of enhanced trust and policy outcomes. It must be noted that public participation is not cost-free even though it can enable improved social, environmental and economic outcomes. Accordingly, APS officials must include the necessary funds in their budget estimates.