

Strategic Priorities 2020/24

Key Environmental Factors

Over the next four years, several key environmental factors will influence the way NT Government agencies and local government councils operate. Implementation of the Office's Strategic Priorities will frequently involve consideration of the following factors.

Transformation

The pace of change is escalating. Emerging technologies bring opportunities but also challenges. Change can be for the better but is frequently viewed with suspicion. People can be alienated by change. For example, the proliferation of social media can boost information exchange but can also distract, mislead and vilify. Expanded use of online systems can bring enormous benefits but can also raise issues about information security and privacy. The structure of society is changing: baby-boomers will age and retire, different demands will be placed on government systems and services. The nature of employment is changing.

Extraordinary times

Economic situation

The NT business community and NT Government are experiencing challenging economic circumstances. This will continue to impact on business activity, individual employment and the resources government has to provide services.

Coronavirus

This will be compounded by the challenges of responding to and recovering from the coronavirus pandemic. There will be economic challenges for government, business and individuals, as well as social impacts on the way we live and interact.

Climate change

There is increasing public focus on the need for urgent action to address climate change.

Disadvantage

A substantial proportion of the NT population endures an ongoing background of disadvantage. This is relevant to virtually all government service provision.

Aboriginal Territorians

The NT has a unique population base within Australia, with over 30% of Territorians identifying as Aboriginal. In addition, Aboriginal Territorians are substantially overrepresented in many government functions, including health, housing and the justice system. This accentuates the cultural diversity of the Territory. If not appropriately recognised in the performance of government functions, there can be apprehension about proposed government action and perceptions of contest between competing cultures.

Remote services

The Territory covers a vast land mass, with many small communities spread over enormous distances. This presents many challenges to consistent, quality service provision. Many remote communities are almost entirely made up of Aboriginal Territorians, with the large number of distinct Aboriginal languages adding to the complexity.

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Our Strategic Priorities

The following Strategic Priorities are intended to guide our approach to the performance of our statutory functions.



1. Fair and open

There is an ongoing need for government to ensure its systems are fair, relevant and accommodate the needs of the community and the individuals and businesses on which they impact. This includes maintaining clear communication about the functions, rights and responsibilities of those involved and being transparent about government decision-making.

The Office will promote the following objectives:

- Government decision-making and action builds public trust and confidence.
- People are satisfied that those who make decisions that affect them do so according to the law, fairly and in line with clear and consistent policies.
- People are satisfied that those who utilise extraordinary powers to enforce the law are subject to appropriate scrutiny, e.g., NT Police and Corrections.
- Government decision-makers are given appropriate training and guidance to make fair and reasoned decisions.
- Government systems have adequate provision for complaint and review.
- Government publishes readily accessible information relating to its functions and operations.
- Government responds to requests for information in a timely manner, taking into consideration all relevant factors.
- Government adopts best practice information management to ensure data quality and security and transparent and consistent decision making.

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2. Diversity

In the conduct of government and the provision of government services, it is essential to take account of the many and varied needs and rights of individual Territorians to ensure that each Territorian has a realistic opportunity to participate in the functioning of government and has reasonable access to government services.

Focus areas for the Office will include:

- Government policy and program development and implementation recognises the need for adaptation and flexibility to accommodate the diversity of individuals.
 - This will include addressing issues relating to differences in background and capacity, culture, language, health needs (including underlying trauma and mental health), levels of understanding and development, the social impacts of disability and domestic violence, financial hardship and the circumstances of remote living and Aboriginal community living.
- As far as practicable, Government engages with individuals and groups in the manner and language best suited to promoting their participation in government.
- Government enhances the capabilities of public sector employees, e.g., providing for professional development in addressing individual needs, recognising and addressing unconscious bias.
- Promoting respect for human rights, including privacy of personal information.

3. Prevention

Major problems facing government are often the outcome of underlying issues that have escalated over time. There can be a tendency to devote more resources to obvious and acute outcomes than to tackling first-tier issues in a way that prevents or limits the potential for escalation. It is important for government to take the initiative and address root causes. This involves planning and system design that acknowledges and incorporates risk assessment.

The Office will promote:

- A government focus on proactive approaches to addressing major issues facing the NT community to promote more effective and less costly outcomes in the long term.
 - Areas of particular relevance will be the foundational services discussed below, including preventative health, youth justice, prisoner rehabilitation and sustainable environment.
- Research, information sharing, evidence-based planning and system design as key elements of government activity.
- Complaints are encouraged and utilised as a basis for business improvement.

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4. Partnership

In a federal system, in a rapidly changing environment, with many government and non-government stakeholders able to contribute to solutions, it is imperative for government to co-operate and engage widely and to enter into partnerships with a broad range of interested parties to meet its objectives.

The Office will promote:

- All arms of government genuinely engage with each other and with non-government organisations, groups and individuals to address system-wide problems and issues of concern to the community.
- Legislative and policy development and review routinely involves community consultation and explores community involvement in providing solutions.
- Program development builds in long-term commitment of support and resourcing with ongoing evaluation to ensure initiatives are given a realistic opportunity to become well-established and effective.
- Government works with individuals and the community to address negative perceptions about involvement with government, e.g., lack of trust and concern about potential repercussions of involvement.
- Government communication strategies recognise that effective communication with stakeholders is not a 'one size fits all' approach and that individual approaches are required to accommodate diversity.

5. Foundations

Government is a key provider of services that establish strong foundations for a vibrant and cohesive community. These include health, energy and water, education, housing, justice, sustainable environment and family and community support.

The Office will promote effective and efficient government functions in all foundational services, including:

- Continuing emphasis on oversight of police conduct and correctional services.
- Ongoing oversight of housing, energy and water and education services.
- Increased focus on sustainable environment and family and community education and support (to the extent they fall within legislative powers).