

Local Authority Coordination Processes

INFORMATION PAPER
2016



Overview

Local authorities are the preferred forum for consultation and engagement by Northern Territory Government (NTG) agencies in remote communities. A number of new processes and arrangements have been developed by the Department of Local Government and Community Services to support the broader role of local authorities. The new processes and arrangements include:

- the establishment of a Coordination Unit to
 - coordinate requests from NTG agencies to attend local authority meetings;
 - coordinate requests from local authorities or regional councils for information or presentations from NTG agencies;
 - support a flexible, place-based transitioning of NTG community engagement with local authorities, working closely with NTG agencies and regional councils; and
- the department providing additional support to regional councils through regional offices to support and maintain local authorities.

Coordination unit and regional offices

The coordination unit oversees the new processes and arrangements that are aimed at improving the information provided to, and feedback from, remote communities about the services and issues that affect them.

For NTG agencies, the coordination unit is the best contact point to find out more about specific local authorities and regional councils and how they prefer to work, which differ across communities and regions.

For regional councils, the best contact points, in the first instance, are the regional offices of the Department of Local Government and Community Services.

The coordination unit works closely with all regional offices to coordinate processes and support across the Territory.

Contact details for the coordination unit and regional offices are provided on the final page of this document. The relevant regional councils and local authority communities are also listed.

Inter-Agency Working Group

Oversight of the new processes and arrangements is through the Inter-agency Working Group which has been operating since mid-2015. The group, convened by the Department of Local Government and Community Services, has representation from agencies with higher levels of activity in remote communities including the Departments of Housing, Health, Education, Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Infrastructure, Transport, and Children and Families. The group meets regularly to review the implementation of the new framework.

Requests for information from the NTG

One of the best ways to improve engagement with remote communities is to coordinate information flows. A process has been developed to enable the recording, tracking and follow-up of local authorities' and regional councils' requests for information from NTG agencies. The ability to request information and coordinate responses helps keep remote communities better informed and up-to-date about the services and issues that affect them.

How can a local authority or regional council make a request?

Requests from local authorities or regional councils for information or presentations from NTG agencies can be raised in two ways:

1. Department of Local Government and Community Services' regional offices can record requests during local authority or regional council meetings, with details to then be confirmed with a regional council prior to progressing the request; or
2. regional councils can raise a request with regional offices, using a request form.

What to include in a request?

Information can be requested on NTG service delivery matters where there is sustained community interest or concerns of a systemic nature. The matters raised should be collectively identified at local authority or regional council meetings and are not intended to be matters solely of an individual's interest.

The process will not resolve questions in relation to standard operational matters of an agency, which should be addressed directly with the relevant agency or service provider, in accordance with existing policies and processes that deal with such matters.

The request form outlines the information required in a request. This includes the background context to the request, any timeframes for a response, as well as preferences for how the information should be communicated back to the local authority or regional council such as a written response or presentation in person.

How will the request be progressed?

1. The Department of Local Government and Community Services **regional office** receives and registers a request for information, using the request form described above.
2. The **regional manager** determines if the request can be resolved at a regional level within the agency, or in consultation with other NTG agencies where relevant, or escalated.
3. The **coordination unit** refers escalated requests to relevant NTG agencies, tracks all requests for information, monitors timeframes and due dates and reports on progress.
4. The NTG agency designated **contact officer**, to which all agency requests are referred to, in the first instance, directs the request to the relevant area within their agency.
5. When a response to a request is available, the Department of Local Government and Community Services **regional office** is advised and, if required, can assist in communicating the information back to the regional council and local authority or arranging a presentation.

Requests to attend local authorities

Where not already a regular attendee, NTG agencies wishing to attend local authority meetings should, in the first instance, initiate a request through the coordination unit in the Department of Local Government and Community Services. This is the preferred approach of regional councils in order to:

- assist regional councils manage the volume of requests from NTG agencies; and
- encourage NTG agencies to take a coordinated approach to engagement that includes sharing resources, coordinating travel and logistics, considering the use of Aboriginal interpreters and minimising unnecessary visits.

This approach is in-line with the NTG **Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy** (available at www.localgovernment.nt.gov.au), an initiative developed to guide and inform public servants and others on the protocols and issues to consider when engaging with remote communities.

The coordination unit does not have an approving or gate-keeping function. It acts as a conduit to initiate requests to regional councils and promote across-NTG coordination. The coordination unit may also assist clarifying requests and providing additional information and advice.

How can an NTG agency make a request?

1. Contact the **coordination unit** on 08 8999 8417 to discuss your plans. You can find out more about how local authorities work in the specific communities you wish to visit, regional council preferences and, where desired, assistance to plan your engagement.
2. Complete the **Request to Attend a Local Authority Meeting Form** available on the Department's website and email to local.authorities@nt.gov.au.
3. Requests will be forwarded to the appropriate contact in the relevant **regional council(s)**. Any coinciding visits from other NTG agencies will be checked and any further details required by the regional council will be clarified.
4. Subject to existing agendas and agreement to a request, you will be contacted by either the **coordination unit or regional council** to progress your plans. If a request cannot be accommodated, alternatives will be discussed.
5. Following confirmation, the **coordination unit** may be able to connect you with other travellers or assist with local knowledge, including advice on travel and the use of interpreters.

What to include in the request?

The request form collects information required for coordination purposes. This includes what actions or recommendations you are expecting of the local authority, what communications materials you have planned, relevant timeframes, equipment requirements and number of visitors attending.

This form has been developed in close consultation with regional councils, who are responsible for managing the length of time available for presentations at local authority meetings, the number of visitors, notification timeframes for inclusion on meeting agendas and equipment requirements.

Special meetings

Where an NTG agency requires a more lengthy discussion of matters with a local authority, it may be preferable to convene a special meeting. This might also be required if the timeframes of the NTG agency doesn't fit with the timing of scheduled local authority meetings. In this instance, a regional council may require the NTG agency to meet the costs of convening the meeting including member sitting fees and other meeting costs, subject to pre-negotiation between the regional council and NTG agency. Convening a special meeting requires regional council approval.

Flexible, place-based approach

In 2015, the NTG endorsed an approach that local authorities become the preferred body for consultation and engagement in remote communities across portfolios.

Where new initiatives are proposed, or where NTG agencies don't have an existing community engagement forum, they will be encouraged to use local authorities rather than creating other forums.

A flexible, place-based approach has been developed to support this policy, underpinned by the principle of not interfering with successful engagement by NTG already underway in remote communities. What this means is on a place-based, community-by-community basis, strategies are being implemented to either replace out-of-date or non-existing forums with local authorities, schedule adjoining meetings with existing functional forums, or provide reports at local authority meetings.

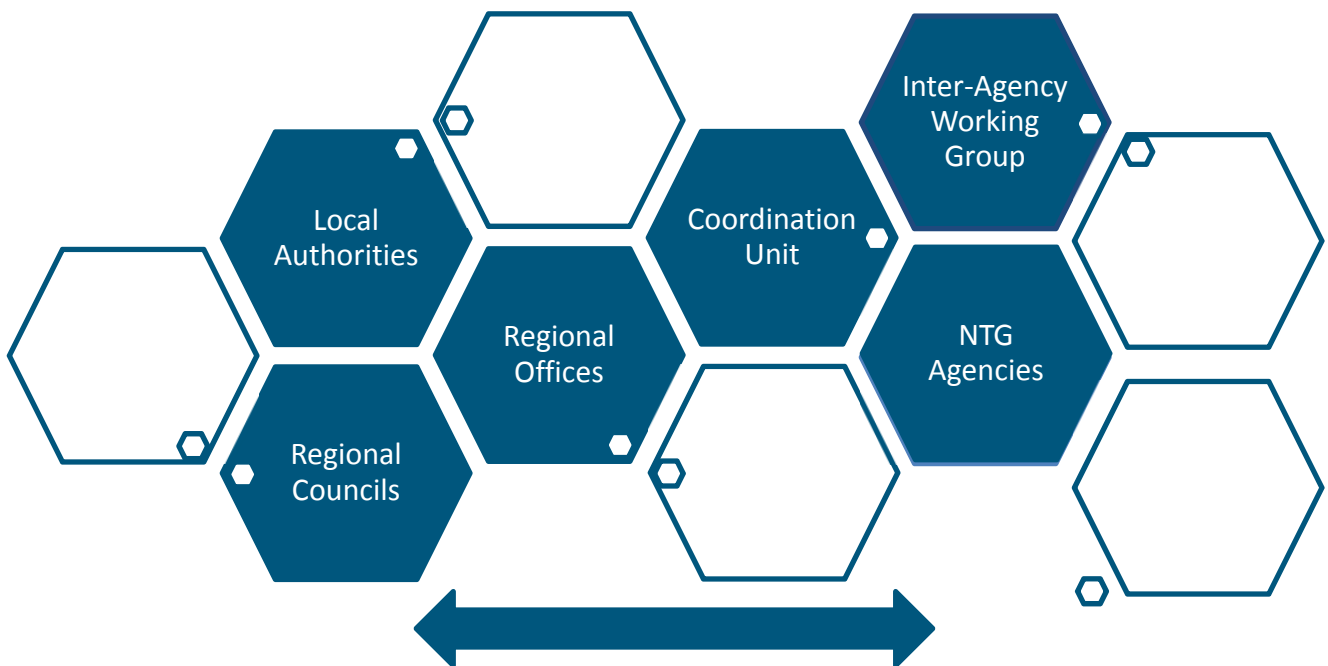
The coordination unit, through the Local Authorities Inter-agency Working Group, can support NTG agencies to develop approaches for engagement with local authorities.

Examples

Where a consultation group is already meeting regularly in one location, the focus may be to begin providing a report of the meetings of that group to the next local authority meeting. Such existing forums may include Community Safety Groups, which may meet more frequently or as required, and School Councils, which must include legislatively required members such as students' parents.

Where a new consultation group may be required, a place-based approach will be tailored with input from all stakeholders. This might involve the issues being addressed during a local authority meeting or a local authority sitting as a consultation group at the conclusion of a local authority meeting.

As noted above, where a lengthy discussion is required a special meeting of a local authority might be convened and the relevant agency would most likely be asked to meet the costs of convening the meeting.



Department support

The NT government acknowledges that broadening the role of local authorities requires additional coordination by regional councils.

The department has resources to provide additional support to councils in this area. This support is flexible and is negotiated between regional councils and regional offices.

Examples of support that can be negotiated include:

- coordinating and facilitating local authority reporting on 'other service delivery issues';
- following-up local authority requests for information from Northern Territory Government agencies and processes for new requests;
- noting and collating action items/recommendations from local authority meetings in preparation for council to consider and monitor; and
- working with council staff to develop meeting agendas and meeting preparations, if requested

Monitoring and evaluation

The coordination unit will collate information on visits by NTG agencies to local authorities and requests for information from local authorities, in order to develop a knowledge and experience base. This coordination framework will be evaluated over a 12 month period.

Lessons and data from this evaluation process will contribute to the development of the Remote Information Coordination System (RICS), an electronic system to gather and document information, capture issues and facilitate a response and support coordination within and across levels of government, other stakeholders and remote community members, currently under development within the department. RICS will ultimately become the database platform for local authority information management within the department.

Contact details

Contact details for the coordination unit and the Department of Local Government and Community Services regional offices are provided in the table on the following page. The respective regional councils and local authority communities are also listed

Local Authority Coordination Unit, Darwin Office

Email: local.authorities@nt.gov.au

Phone: 08 8999 8417 or 08 8924 3644

Regional office contacts	Council	Local authorities
<p>Regional Manager Barkly Regional Office, Tennant Creek</p> <p>Phone: 08 8962 4380 or 08 8962 4387</p>	Barkly Regional Council	Ali Curung, Alpurrurulam, Ampilatwatja, Arlparra, Elliott, Tennant Creek, Wutunugurra
<p>Regional Manager Arnhem Regional Office, Nhulunbuy</p> <p>Phone: 08 8987 0538 or 08 8987 0538</p>	East Arnhem Regional Council	Angurugu, Galiwinku, Gapuwiyak, Gunyangara, Milingimbi, Milyakburra, Ramingining, Umbakumba, Yirrkala
<p>Regional Manager Central Australia Regional Office, Alice Springs</p> <p>Phone: 08 8951 5616 or 08 8951 5600</p>	Central Desert Regional Council	Anmatjere, Atitjere, Engawala, Lajamanu, Laramba, Nyirripi, Willowra, Yuelamu, Yuendumu
	MacDonnell Regional Council	Amoonguna, Areyonga, Finke, Haasts Bluff, Imanpa, Kaltukatjara, Kintore, Mt Liebig, Ntaria, Papunya, Santa Teresa, Titjikala, Wallace Rockhole
<p>Regional Manager Big Rivers Regional Office, Katherine</p> <p>Phone: 08 8973 8410 or 08 8973 8102</p>	Roper Gulf Regional Council	Barunga, Beswick, Borroloola, Bulman, Hodgson Downs, Jilkminggan, Manyallaluk, Mataranka, Ngukurr, Numbulwar
	Victoria Daly Regional Council	Kalkarindji, Daly River, Pine Creek, Timber Creek, Yarralin
	West Daly Regional Council	Palumpa, Peppimenarti, Wadeye
<p>Regional Manager Arafura Region, based in Darwin Office</p> <p>Phone: 08 8999 8417 or 08 8999 8351</p>	Tiwi Islands Regional Council	Milikapiti, Pirlangimpi, Wurrumiyanga
	West Arnhem Regional Council	Gunbalanya, Maningrida, Minjilang, Warruwi