



VOTE

ACTIVATING DEMOCRACY

VOICES OF THE TOP END
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Voices of the Top End community volunteers often work on Kulumbirigin, the land of the Larrakia people.. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging, and to all First Nations people of the Top End, and Australia. We acknowledge that First Nations' sovereignty over

their lands and waters has not been ceded.

In our work, we are practising listening, and in this way we aim to contribute to the general Top End community's understanding of First Nations' knowledge, wisdom, history and viewpoints.

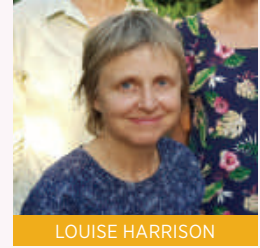


CONTENTS

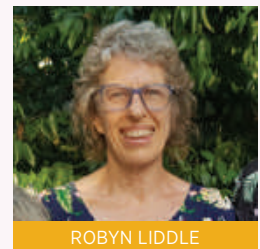
- 04 Who we are
- 05 How we engaged with the community
- 06 What are the best things about living in the Top End?
- 07 What makes a strong community?
- 08 Representation
- 09 The Issues & ideas to address the issues
- 10 Thriving communities, valuing First Nations people and a healthy environment
- 11 A sustainable and prosperous economy
- 12 A holistic approach to a safe and just society
- 13 An effective, trustworthy, accountable representatives that listen
- 14 A community active in government decision making
- 15 Ready for change
- 16 Acknowledgement and limitations, and what's next for VoTE



JACQUI TAYLOR



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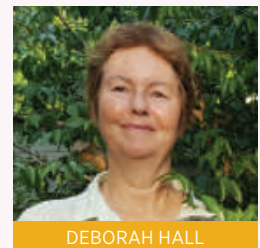
ROBYN LIDDLE



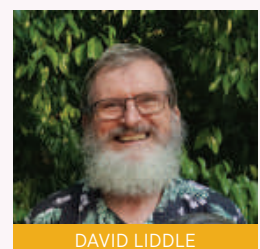
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WHO WE ARE

Voices of the Top End (VoTE) is a small, all-volunteer, grassroots community group, founded in Darwin in 2022 to engage and empower local people to participate in our democracy.

OUR GOALS

- To create opportunities for community participation in democracy
- To encourage and listen to a diversity of views
- To foster respectful and constructive engagement in the democratic process
- To hold political representatives accountable to the people.

OUR VALUES

Integrity	Accountability
Respect	Positivity
Transparency	Honesty
Diversity	Kindness
Inclusivity	Curiosity

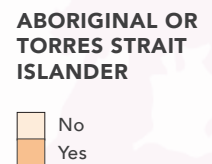
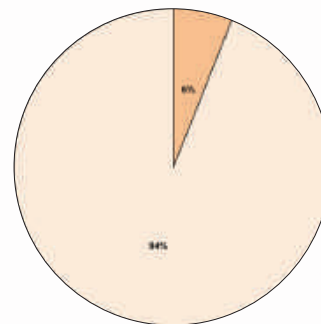
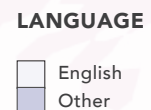
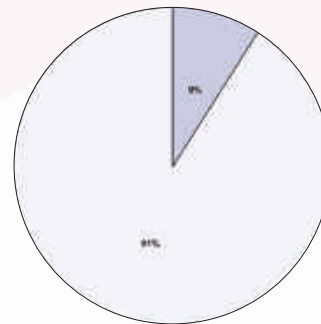
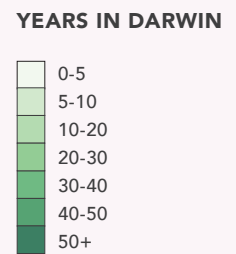
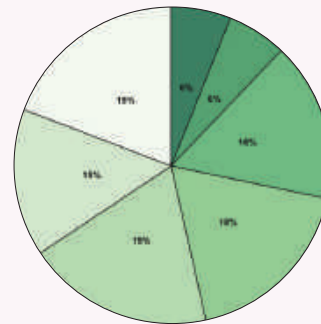
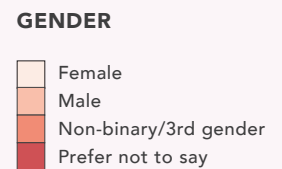
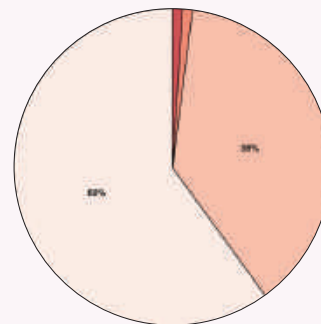
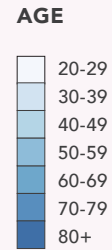
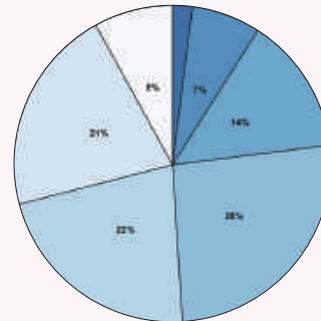
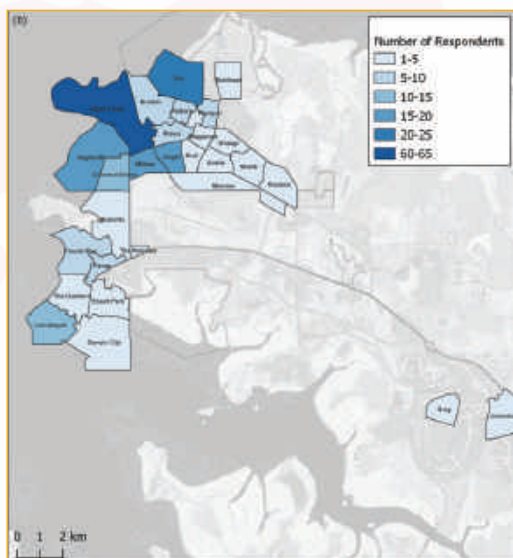
We have been inspired by the success of other Voices groups across the country in fostering community ownership of their democratic processes. VoTE is a non-partisan community group and not aligned to any political party, individual election candidate or representative.

HOW WE ENGAGED WITH THE COMMUNITY

Voices of the Top End has engaged directly with 249 local people via Kitchen Table Conversations. A Kitchen Table Conversation (KTC) is a group of around 4 to 9 people sitting down together to talk about issues that are important to them, with a Voices of the Top End representative facilitating the conversation and another person scribing the conversation.

Every KTC is run the same way, using the same set of open questions to start the discussions. KTCs are a dynamic opportunity for small groups of family, friends, neighbours or strangers to come together and share their passions, concerns and priorities for our community and the world. This is the report of what we heard at Kitchen Table Conversations. This report presents the huge amount of information that participants shared with us.

We sorted people's responses by topic and counted the frequency each issue was mentioned. We then analysed the transcripts from the KTCs using reflexive thematic analysis methodology and applying an intersectionality-based policy analysis framework in order to capture the powerful patterns and themes that emerged as important to people living in the Top End.



WHAT ARE THE BEST THINGS ABOUT LIVING IN THE TOP END

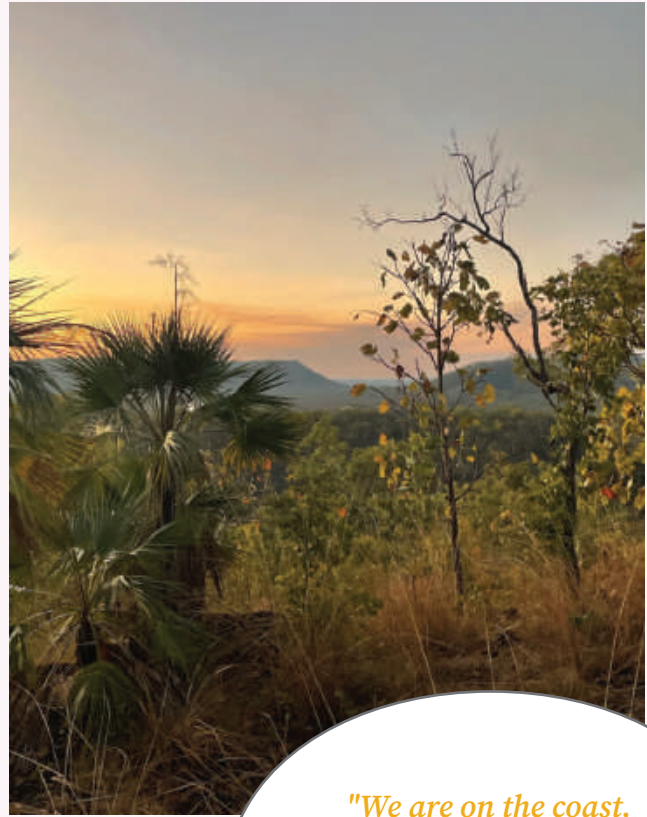
In every Kitchen Table Conversation, participants recognized the beautiful, diverse, and healthy Top End **natural environment** and landscapes, and the presence of nature in everyday life.

They love the friendly, inclusive, active, creative, diverse, and deeply connected **community**. They love the relaxed, family-friendly, outdoor lifestyle, the dramatic seasons, and small, liveable city.

People value our **cultural diversity**, particularly the rich First Nations culture, and are grateful to have the opportunity to learn from First Nations peoples.

Participants have a strong sense of this place and community. They value accessible services, public spaces, events and activities, and opportunities, including the opportunities to do fulfilling work.

We heard that people treasure the unique flavour of the Top End, and the authentic, unconventional, unpretentious, and can-do attitude



"We have access to so much natural and cultural heritage. We are rich here for what we are connected to."

"We are on the coast, multicultural, big enough to be rich in experiences and small enough to feel and be connected to community"

First Nations culture
Cultural diversity
Community
Opportunities
Public spaces
Proximity to Asia
Small town
Wet-dry climate
Family friendly
Unique people and place
Community Events
Public services
Outdoors lifestyle
Natural environment

WHAT MAKES A STRONG COMMUNITY?

People told us about their neighbourhoods, their schools and their streets. They talked about celebrations, markets and events of all sizes, from having a cup of tea with a neighbour to big cultural festivals.

Strong communities were described as ones where there are shared values and goals, diversity is respected, there is equity, and people in need are supported.

“Connection to each other, a shared sense of belonging to place, a shared purpose, trust, fun, and tradition.”

“Shared values, empathy and tolerance.”

Shared values and goals

Respect
Belonging
Openness
Small population
Reciprocity
Active engagement
Adaptive to change
Strong leadership
Safety
Face-to-face relationships
Equity
Empathy
Acceptance
Good public services
Helping each other
Community events
Shared public spaces
Diversity
Sharing



REPRESENTATION

PEOPLE WANT A REPRESENTATIVE WHO LISTENS TO AND REPRESENTS THE COMMUNITY, AND PUTS THE COMMUNITY FIRST

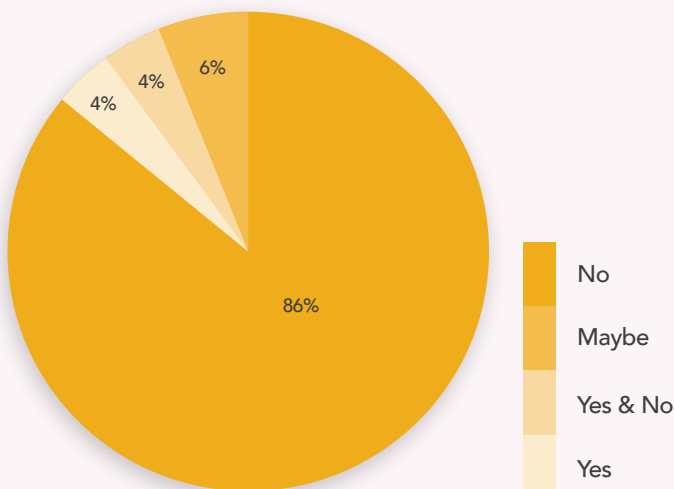
In our Kitchen Table Conversations, we asked people what they considered to be the most important and desired attributes of a political representative.

The key qualities participants wanted to see in their elected representatives were listening to, working with and representing the community; and honesty and integrity.



VOTERS DON'T FEEL REPRESENTED

We asked whether people felt their voice was adequately represented in parliament by their Federal or local representative.



86% of participants said "No".

THE COMMUNITY VIEWS ARE NOT BEING HEARD OR REPRESENTED

We asked those who said 'no' to tell us why they did not feel represented.

People felt that industry had more influence than the community and that their views did not matter. They felt that representatives were beholden to their political party, and followed party lines. People have lost trust in party politics.



ISSUES PEOPLE FEEL MOST STRONGLY ABOUT

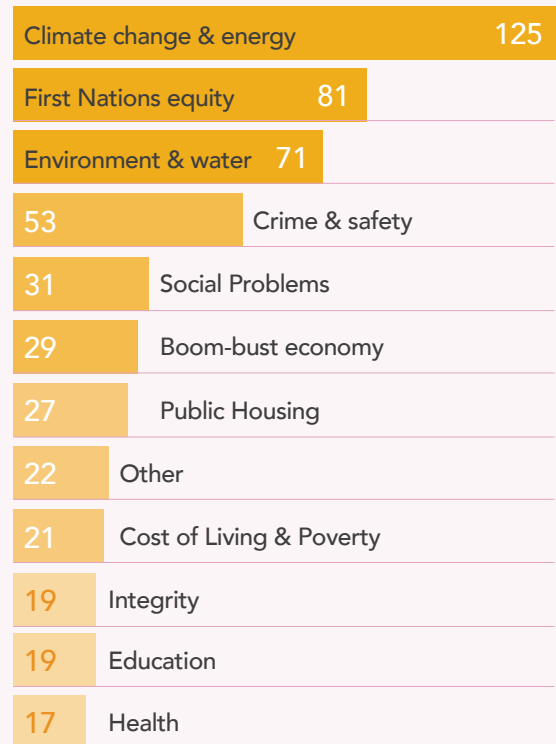
PRIORITISING COMMUNITY INTERESTS OVER INDUSTRY OR PARTY POLITICS WILL IMPROVE TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

We asked people what would make a stronger relationship between people and their elected representatives. People want to be heard by their representatives and for them to respond to the community's needs and concerns. Integrity, honesty, transparency, and accountability all rated highly as building blocks for a stronger relationship between representatives and the people who elect them.



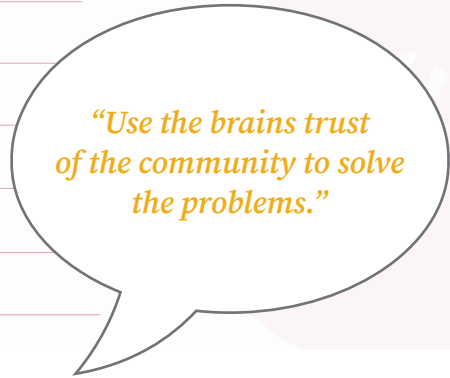
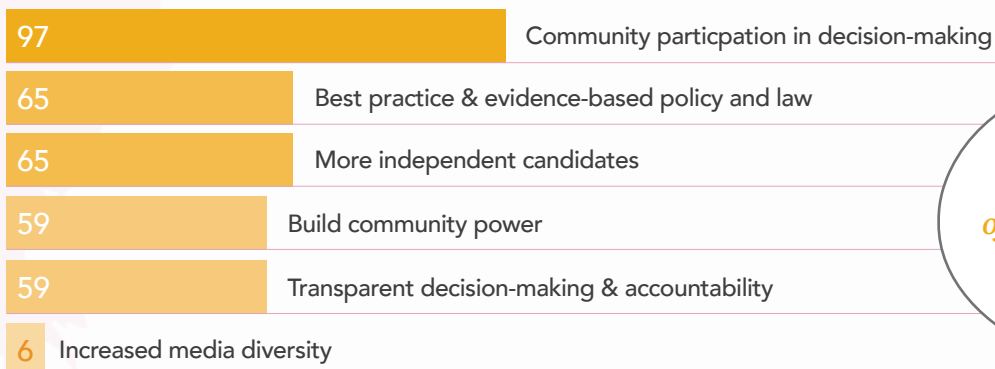
MOST FREQUENTLY RAISED ISSUES

When asked about the issues they feel strongly about, participants raised many issues. The pursuit of a gas-based economy and lack of action on climate change was the number one concern. First Nations equity was another major concern.



THE COMMUNITY'S IDEAS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES RAISED

When asked about potential solutions to these issues, KTC participants contributed hundreds of ideas. The community wants to be part of the decision-making and wants evidence-based policy and law to guide these solutions.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES, VALUING FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE & A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Participants understand that everything is connected, and that communities are strong when we have common goals. Participants love living in the Top End because they have gained so much from the cultural diversity and feel a real sense of connection to place and nature.

Participants want greater value placed on First Nations peoples' way of knowing and being and recognise the need for healthy ecosystems and a safe climate in order for communities to be able to thrive.



"[Indigenous] land is still being destroyed, their connection is seen as expendable, impacting on their health."

"Aboriginal people and culture are much more visible here, this has drawn me to Darwin and is keeping me here."

"We are pouring money into prisons instead of looking at causes – [we need] a more holistic approach to societal issues – proactive, preventive approaches – focus on the family - redirect the funds to the beginning not the end (of the issue)."



"The diversity of people is special, there are different Aboriginal groups and people from other countries, everyone has a place. We all benefit from the diversity."

A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY THAT NOURISHES PEOPLE

Participants want a prospering economy that benefits and is able to fund the needs of the community. People want a long-term vision from the government, plans and action beyond the election cycles.

We recorded a desire for a sustainable economy that is not destructive and exploitative towards the environment, climate and people, and is not disproportionately influenced by vested interests from private or government sectors outside the Top End.

“The loss of the environment - this should be a strong hold of Aboriginal culture - especially in the health setting. Bad health is a direct impact of colonisation”



“We need a conversation about alternative economic motivations, it can't be to make money at all costs.”

“Trying to isolate individual issues is moronic, it is all connected.”



“Funding must be based on evidence.”

“Accountable to the community and part of the community, [we need] stronger accountability and care.”

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO A SAFE & JUST SOCIETY

Participants want to live in a safe and healthy community, where they, their families and businesses can prosper. Many participants are worried about crime in their neighbourhoods and the generational disengagement of young people in the Territory.

Participants identified the need for adequate housing, education, food security and the

compounding impact of climate change in the Top End. Participants raised concerns for the need for quality healthcare including mental health care, and want to address inequities in our society.

“Strengthen communities, help for families, a lot of trauma in community is not addressed, mental health issues that move into multi-generational issues.”

“The basic tenet of a good society is that it cares about all people and about making people's lives better.”



EFFECTIVE, TRUSTWORTHY, ACCOUNTABLE REPRESENTATIVES THAT LISTEN

Participants want representatives that make policy decisions based on evidence. They want government programs that support the community to thrive.

Participants want elected representatives that are transparent, and are not beholden to corporate interests

“Representatives need to do a lot to demonstrate that people can trust them.”

“Representatives need to listen to science, research and listen to people.”



“Use citizen assemblies... people are really good at coming up with solutions to problems they share and [that] affect them.”



“Top down and bottom up – both sides taking responsibility to make changes required.”

“I don’t feel represented by a two-party system and there’s not enough pressure put on politicians to actually listen to people. They can get away with doing very little.”

A COMMUNITY ACTIVE IN GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING

Participants want more community power, more opportunities for participation in the democratic process, more transparent decision-making and accountability. They also want politicians with a range of vocational backgrounds who know and understand the Territory. Participants want more diversity in parliament and independent candidates that represent community interests.

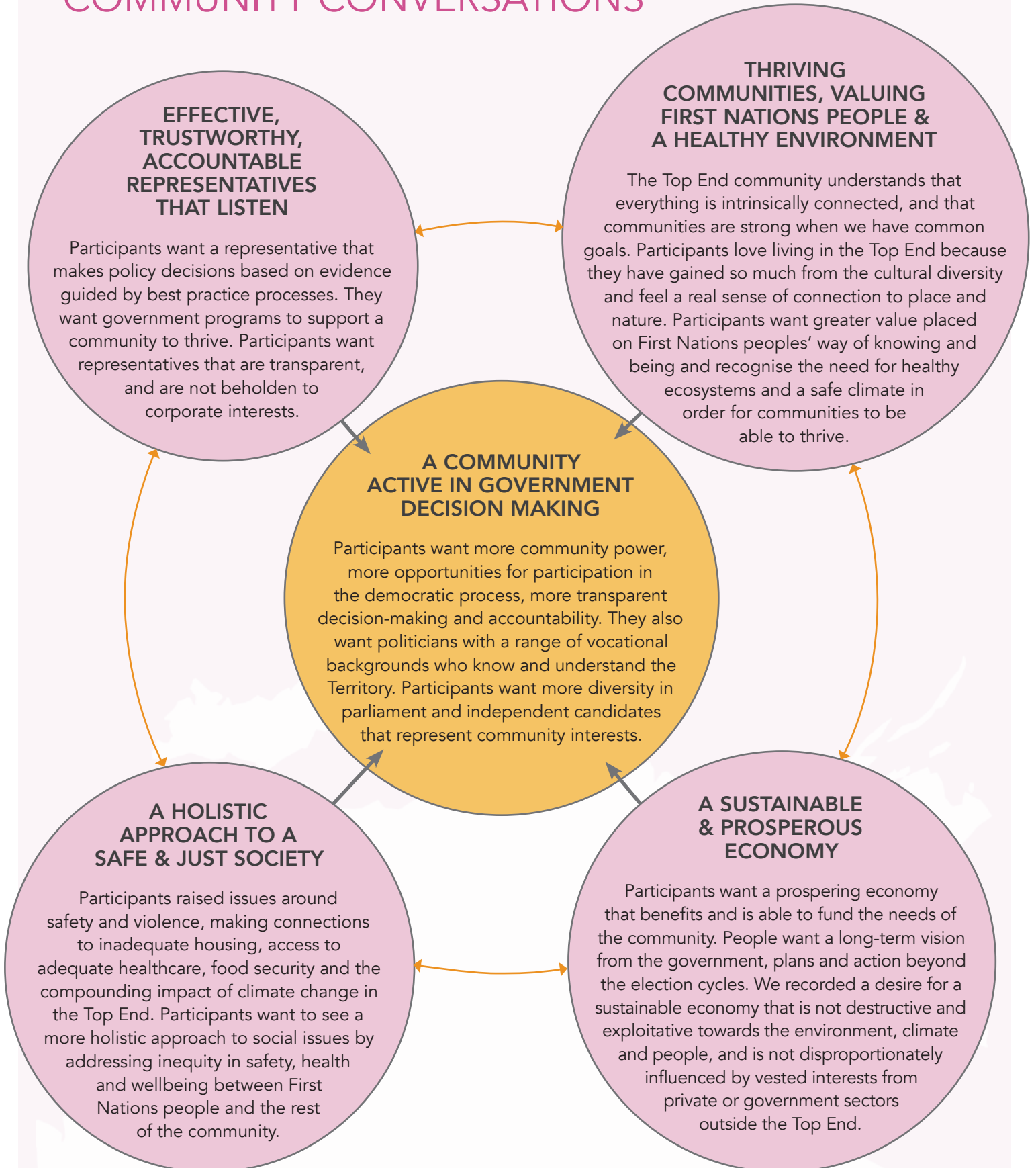


“Use citizen assemblies... people are really good at coming up with solutions to problems they share and [that] affect them.”

“Identify potential Independent candidates with local and personal knowledge.”



READY FOR CHANGE – SUMMING UP THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & LIMITATIONS

Thank you to everyone who participated in one of our Kitchen Table Conversations. A huge thank you to all the community members who believe in VoTEs' vision and who donated their time, energy, skills and other resources in order to make this report possible.

Voices of the Top End acknowledge the positionality of our committee members and the majority of our data analysts as being non-Indigenous, white, middle class, cis-gendered, able-bodied, Western members of society. We acknowledge the privilege and the social and cultural capital that this affords us, along with the limitations this creates within our analysis and organisational structures and procedures.

We encourage you to consider the question 'How are the issues raised in these Kitchen Table Conversations experienced by people with different positions to my own?'

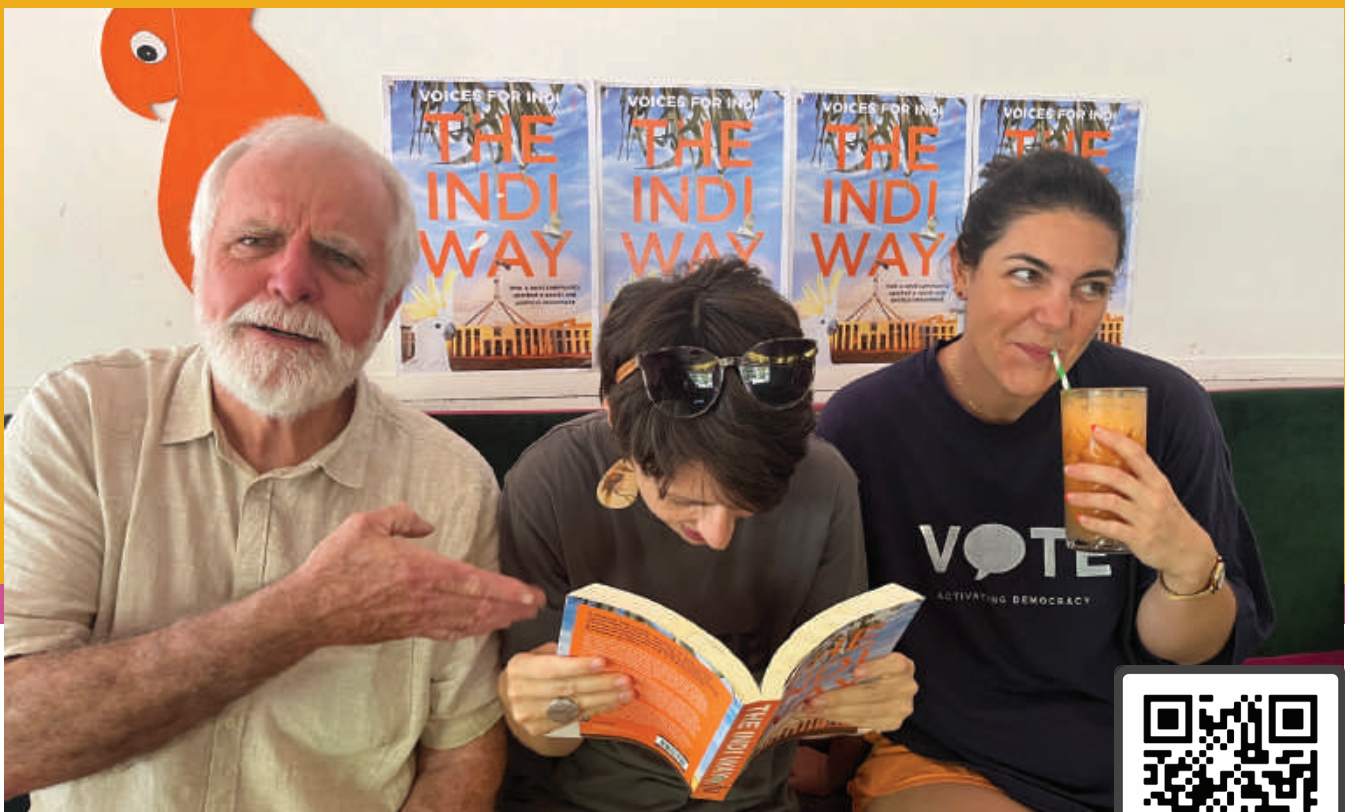
Voices of the Top End acknowledges the time constraints and selection bias associated with this report. While we sought the participation of a larger sample and a broader cross-section of the community, our organisation is completely volunteer run and what we have managed to achieve was on top of our pre-existing full time lives, jobs and other commitments.

WHAT NEXT FOR VoTE?

VoTE is a volunteer-run, member-based community organisation. We intend to continue our work activating democracy across the Top End.

We encourage community and government to participate in and promote future KTCs, innovate and invest in participatory democracy processes.

Authorised by Jacqui Taylor 12/296 Casuarina Drive



For more information
WWW.VOICESOFTHETOPEND.COM

