



**PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS SERIES**

**NON – GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS**

**WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
HOW ADVOCACY CAN ASSIST**

**Background**

PHAIWA is committed to working with all levels of non-government and government, including local government and recognise the important contributions that local government can make to creating healthy local communities.

A survey of local governments in Western Australia was recently conducted to identify opportunities for working together, to assess if specific training is required and to generally assess expectations about a range of organisations including non-government agencies. The response rate of 53% represented a total of 75 local governments completing the survey.

**What did we find out about Local Government's relationships with NGOs?**

It is recognised that NGOs help produce an active and vibrant democracy. They provide community based and professional services, education, advocacy, often represent marginalised members of the community and support services offered by the government. NGO advocacy informs debate and challenges government by demanding accountability and changes in public policy.

Advocacy is widely accepted as a fundamental component of effective health promotion, and if based on a careful analysis of the potential contribution of other sectors, is clearly a precondition of healthy public policy and good practice (Milio, 1991). Yet, the survey results identified that operationalising this concept is a challenge. Figure 1 highlights the NGOs working with local government, as nominated by respondents.

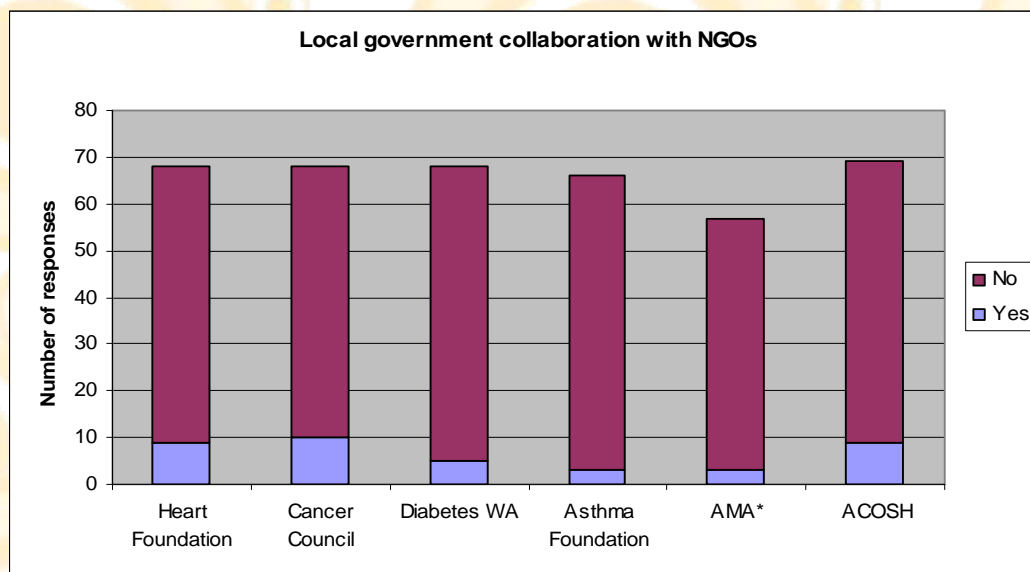


Figure 1 – The NGOs that local government work with

Figure 2 indicates that of the 75 local governments surveyed, only fifteen (22%) used NGOs to assist with their business.

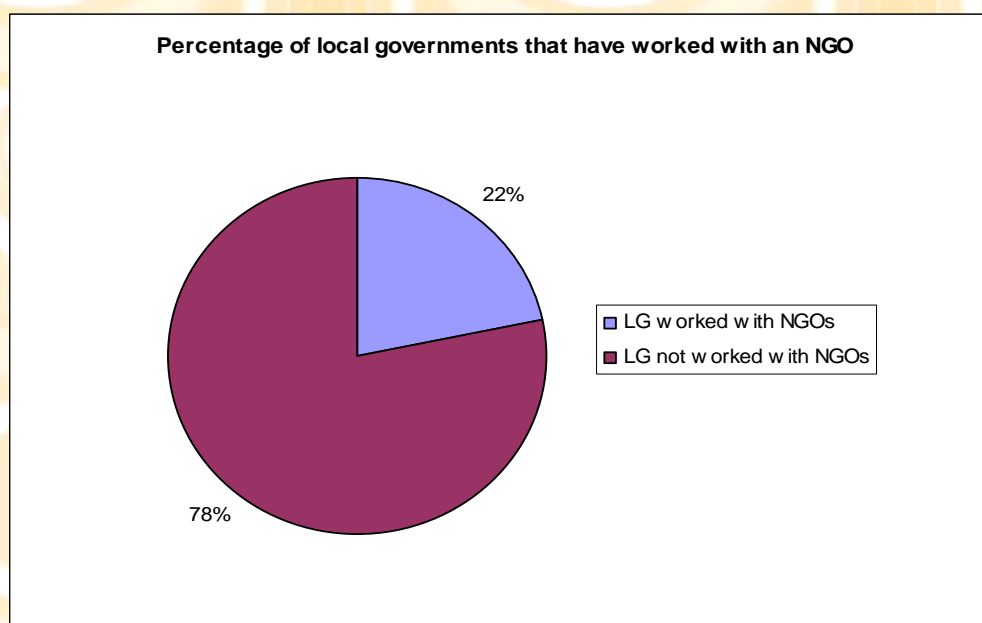


Figure 2 – The total number of local governments working with the NGO sector

Research by Stoneham (2001) identified that willingness and interest of NGOs to participate and support processes within local government stemmed, in part, from the perception of community ownership generated by the local governments. Representatives from NGOs who were involved in local government business were motivated to assist and driven by the opportunity to be perceived as providers of a particular service, thus enhancing their own involvement and personal efficacy.

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\*It is acknowledged that the AMA is a professional body rather than a service provider



The research also identified that the local governments that did include NGOs reaped rewards for such action. Some examples of these rewards included external funding to support the policy implementation, new partnerships and the development of a collaborative resource base for the policy development.

## What else did the survey highlight?

Other interesting data from the survey relevant to NGOs included:

- When asked, 84.8% of local governments advised if they were approached in the future by any NGO with a request to work on an issue that was both a local concern and aligned with your local government business, they would pro-actively pursue this opportunity.
- 79.4% of local governments advised they spend no or less than 10% of their time on health promotion, and only 3.2% of respondents invested over 50% of their time on health promoting activities or services.

## How Can Advocacy Address this Gap?

Local governments have scarce resources and competing priorities. One method of promoting, ensuring and developing advocacy to support the development of healthy communities may be to encourage collaboration between local governments and NGOs, with the intent of sharing resources, and in particular funds.

It is clear that local governments are not fully aware of the benefits of working with NGOs, or the processes of establishing these types of partnerships. The following tips may provide some assistance to increase the NGO profile with local governments.

**Be aware:** Every local government is different. The diversity of our state means that the way local governments do business varies from region to region. Local governments are autonomous and although governed by the *Local Government Act 1995*, are primarily responsible for their own strategic direction. In terms of funding, local governments are primarily funded through the collection of property rates and the allocation of government grants, so resources are generally limited.

**Be patient:** Local governments are vital and multi-functional organisations within local communities. As such, they are responsible for a diverse range of issues, some of which are defined under statutory requirements. It may take some time to ensure that your issue is seen as a priority in local government. It is also important to understand that local government business units differ between councils, and it may take some time and a number of requests before you speak to the right Officer.

**Be known:** Local governments, both large and small, must be aware of your NGO, its role, areas of expertise and avenues for support. Strategies to disseminate this information to local governments include through WALGA, the peak body for local government in WA, through individual correspondence, through professional associations, through links with the Health Department and through publications.

## References

Milio N (1991) Making healthy public policy: developing the science by learning the art: an ecological framework for policy studies. In Bandura B & Kickbusch I (1991) Health Promotion Research – towards a new social epidemiology. WHO, Copenhagen.

Stoneham M (2002) Healthy Public Policy in Local Government Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors: Shade Creation as a Case Study. PhD Thesis, QUT Brisbane