



Candidate Information Pack

ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)

Chief Executive Officer

September 2026

This report contains confidential information and has been specifically prepared for the exclusive use of you, our client and for the sole purpose of assessing this candidate for the agreed position. The use of this report should be controlled and limited to designated executives concerned with the search process and destroyed once the process has completed.

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Executive Summary

ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS is the peak body for the not-for-profit community sector, and for people experiencing disadvantage, in the ACT. Established in 1963, ACTCOSS is a member of the national COSS network, advocating for positive social change and social justice. The key policy areas include housing and homelessness, mental health, disability, health and employment, alongside the community sector workforce. ACTCOSS is a small but influential organisation, with an annual turnover of approximately \$2 million and a team of 15 staff. ACTCOSS has overseen the Gulanga Program for 15+ years. The Gulanga Program supports community sector organisations in the ACT to develop culturally appropriate practice standards and improve engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and their families. The organisation is led by their CEO, senior leadership team and an experienced Board chaired by Jeremy Halcrow.

The Context

ACTCOSS's vision is for Canberra to be a just, safe and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services. Through its recent ACT for Community election campaign, ACTCOSS secured a \$5 million annual funding boost recognising historic underfunding of the community sector, and a 26% (\$75 million) single-year increase in ACT Government funding for community services, delivered under the leadership of outgoing CEO Dr Devin Bowles.

After three and a half years leading and growing the organisation's policy influence, Dr Devin Bowles has made the decision to step down as CEO and will conclude his appointment in January 2027. His legacy is broad, and he leaves an organisation with a strengthened culture, capability and sector standing.

The Board is seeking the very best pool of candidates for this appointment. The role is based in Canberra, reports to the Board through the Chair and carries significant advocacy and government relations responsibility ahead of the ACT election in October 2028.

The CEO is responsible for the overall leadership, management and performance of ACTCOSS, accountable to the Board for implementing the organisation's strategic plan, achieving organisational objectives, leading the sector's advocacy and policy agenda, maintaining financial sustainability, supporting strong governance, and protecting and enhancing ACTCOSS's reputation. With a view towards promoting Aboriginal community control, one of many key strategic priorities for the incoming CEO will be securing the Gulanga Program's future in consultation with local community and government.

The Person

We are seeking an experienced social policy, advocacy or community sector executive with a track record leading a mission-driven membership or peak organisation. The person will demonstrate the ability to translate strategic advocacy into measurable policy and funding outcomes, ideally within the community services, human services or peak body sector. The successful candidate will bring the credibility to succeed a well-regarded CEO who has significantly strengthened ACTCOSS's policy influence and funding outcomes for the sector over the past three and a half years.

The CEO will have proven experience working effectively with a Board and membership base, sound financial and commercial acumen appropriate to a small organisation, and the ability to lead government and political stakeholder engagement across the ACT, with the credibility to build a sector-wide coalition ahead of the October 2028 ACT election.

Candidates will be sector leaders with relevant tertiary qualifications in social policy, public administration, law or a related discipline; postgraduate qualifications and AICD or equivalent governance credentials will be well regarded. Highly developed advocacy, media and government relations skills are essential, along with the judgement and integrity to act as an ambassador for ACTCOSS across government, the community sector and the media.

Experience in an ACT Government or peak/advocacy body setting will be highly regarded, though candidates need not come exclusively from these settings. A genuine affinity with, and understanding of, Aboriginal community controlled organisations will be important, given ACTCOSS's current but changing stewardship of the Gulanga Program. Above all, the CEO will demonstrate integrity, strategic thinking, courageous leadership and sound judgement, and an inclusive style consistent with ACTCOSS's values.

About ACTCOSS

What is ACTCOSS?

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) represents not-for-profit community organisations and works tirelessly for social justice in the ACT.

ACTCOSS is a not-for-profit peak body, working collaboratively with organisations and individuals to create a collective voice, advocating for positive social change, and justice and self-determination for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Our vision is for an inclusive Canberra where no one lives in poverty.

- [Annual Reports](#)
- [Strategic Plan](#)
- [Reconciliation Action Plan](#)
- [Constitution](#)

ACTCOSS Network

ACTCOSS also works closely with colleagues in the nationwide COSS Network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils of Social Service (COSS) and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).



Our History

ACTCOSS was formed in 1963 by a group of volunteers who saw the need for a Council of Social Service in the ACT.

With a grant of 10 pounds from the National Council of Women (ACT) and the driving force of a small and determined ACT Social Workers' Group led by Ethel McGuire, a provisional committee was set up to create a constitution. The inaugural ACTCOSS meeting occurred on 30 July 1963. For an annual fee of 2 pounds, community organisations and government departments could become ACTCOSS members.

The Council was established to provide a mechanism through which people in the rapidly growing city of Canberra could come together to lead local service development, promote positive social change, be part of policy debates and contribute to the national network of Councils of Social Service.

Growing from a volunteer committee to a funded peak body, we remember our humble beginnings, pay tribute to the many citizens who led and nurtured ACTCOSS, and honour our commitment to advocating for social justice and effective service delivery for the Canberra community.



Corporate Partners

ACTCOSS corporate partners provide financial and in-kind support for our work in advocacy and capability development.



Government Support

ACTCOSS receives funding from the ACT Government.



ACTCOSS Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029

Our vision

A thriving ACT, free from exclusion, hardship and poverty.

Our purpose

We build a strong and sustainable community sector to challenge the systems, policies and structures that cause poverty and marginalisation.



Our Values



COURAGE

We listen to diverse voices and stand up for what is right even when it is not easy. We lead with bravery and challenge power to represent the people we serve.



COLLABORATION

We create trusted partnerships, inclusive of a diversity of voices, advocating for social and system change.



INTEGRITY

Our work is grounded in human rights principles, informed by a strong evidence base and guided by our commitment to transparency and honesty.



CULTURAL HUMILITY

We support and take positions that directly contribute to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We listen and take guidance from community and community-controlled organisations.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective one: Delivering policy priorities through purposeful advocacy and influence

Influencing policy, amplifying lived experience and driving social justice outcomes through advocacy and strategic positioning. Focusing on the most pressing areas to improve equity, particularly by applying an intersectional lens to address overlapping forms of marginalisation.

Objective two: Empowering and uniting the community sector

Emphasising sector development, member empowerment and collective capability.

Objective three: Building impactful partnerships and sector thought leadership

Driving a culture that lives the organisation's values. Strengthening external relationships and positioning the organisation as a trusted leader and influencer to drive positive social impact in the ACT.

ACTCOSS Board

ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) Board comprises twelve Board Members.



Jeremy Halcrow
Chair



Lisa Kelly
Vice Chair



Blessy Pascual
Treasurer



Amanda Tobler
Ordinary Director



Melissa Bell
Ordinary Director



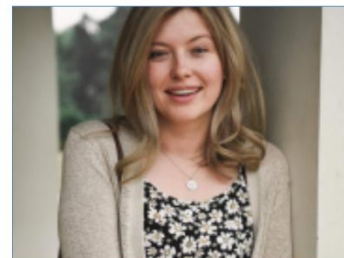
Sue Webeck
Ordinary Director



Tracey Hall
Ordinary Director



Lucy Hohnen
Ordinary Director



Lauren Anthes
Ordinary Director



Dr Madhumita Iyengar
Ordinary Director



Maurice Walker
Ordinary Director



Jessi Claudianos
Ordinary Director



POSITION DESCRIPTION

Chief Executive Officer

ACT Council of Social Service Inc
Justice | Equity | Social Inclusion | Reconciliation



Chief Executive Officer

Position Description

Organisational Context

Formed in 1963 the ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) represents not-for-profit community organisations and advocates for social justice in the ACT.

As a not-for-profit peak body, it works collaboratively with organisations and individuals who support its vision and goals for positive social change.

Advocating to government on social policy, encourage individuals and groups to take action, and providing capacity building services and resources to community organisations. Delivering this with support and input from our membership.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide Council of Social Services (COSS) network, made up of each state and territory COSS and a national body, the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).

Our Vision

A thriving ACT, free from exclusion, hardship and poverty.

Our Purpose

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Objective two: Empowering and uniting the community sector

Emphasising sector development, member empowerment and collective capability.

Objective three: Building impactful partnerships and sector thought leadership

Driving a culture that lives the organisation's values. Strengthening external relationships and positioning the organisation as a trusted leader and influencer to drive positive social impact in the ACT.

Our Values

- **Courage** – We listen to diverse voices and stand up for what is right even when it is not easy. We lead with bravery and challenge power to represent the people we serve.
- **Collaboration** - We create trusted partnerships, inclusive of a diversity of voices, advocating for social and system change.
- **Integrity** – Our work is grounded in human rights principles, informed by a strong evidence base and guided by our commitment to transparency and honesty.
- **Cultural humility** – We support and take positions that directly contribute to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We listen and take guidance from community and community-controlled organisations.

Position Overview

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible to the Board of Directors in delivering on its defined strategic direction and reporting directly to the ACTCOSS Board Chair and Board Members. As Chief Executive Officer you will be responsible for managing the strategic and business requirements of ACTCOSS including representation of the interests of the organisation, its members and publicly through the media, the development and coordination of policy, collaborating and building relationships across the community

sector and other peak bodies as well as have overall responsibility for the management of day-to-day operations.

The CEO will carry out these responsibilities in accordance with the directions and policies established by the Board of Directors, as well as being committed to the objectives and ambitions of the ACTCOSS.

Key Accountabilities

Strategic Leadership & Advocacy

- In conjunction with the Board, develop and implement the strategic plan of the ACTCOSS to achieve its goals in relation to its advocacy, sector capacity building and delivery of services in the ACT, ensuring representation of the interests of the social and community services sector and people living with disadvantage and inequity in the ACT.
- Oversee the development, management and interpretation of ACTCOSS policy positions, actively engaging members and other key stakeholders in the policy development process in line with ACTCOSS's agreed objectives and ambitions. This includes proactively engaging on issues with stakeholders to remain current on the key policy issues in the human service arena and balancing an understanding of the demands of government policy implementation with values-based advocacy goals.
- Positively contribute to the broader social and community services sector, in collaboration with other stakeholders. Reinforce the ACTCOSS values and interests with the core goal of assisting and supporting organisations to build their capacity so that they can provide services that best meet the needs of people experiencing disadvantage in the ACT. This includes working to develop initiatives that develop workforce capability across the sector.
- Act as an effective official spokesperson for the organisation, raising the profile of the issues impacting on the social and community services sector and people living with disadvantage and inequity through representing ACTCOSS on internal and external committees, working parties and other bodies. This includes representing ACTCOSS through public speaking engagements, the media and other forums.
- Lead advocacy initiatives on behalf of the ACTCOSS, ensuring that the COSS maintains a public voice on matters impacting the ACT community sector and relevant to the needs of people experiencing disadvantage in the ACT.

Stakeholder Relationships

- Develop and enhance partnerships with all stakeholders to achieve strategic goals.

- Engage and collaborate with other community peak agencies/organisations in the ACT through leadership of the “Peaks Forum” and other relevant forums to achieve common advocacy goals and develop sector capacity.
- Foster positive relationships and strong links with member organisations. Advocate on behalf of the organisation and its members in relation to programs, funding and other key initiatives.
- Develop and maintain respectful and positive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community partners.
- Develop the ACTCOSS membership base, ensuring membership of ACTCOSS continues to represent value for members.
- Actively participate in the refresh of the “Social Compact”.
- Work collaboratively with other state/territory COSS’s and ACOSS on common issues/strategic initiatives.

Organisational Management

- Oversee the effective management of finances, assets and work to maintain the financial sustainability of the organisation.
- Develop and deliver ongoing revenue/fundraising streams that support future organisational growth including the negotiation of agreements and contracts. This includes growing and maintaining income streams and managing financial resources to enable the continued delivery of its recognised services to the community.
- Ensure services, programs and projects are developed, delivered and evaluated in accordance with funding agreements/budgets including the preparation of appropriate risk management plans.
- Lead and develop an effective and capable staff team, who together have a sufficiently broad understanding of the sector’s policy and advocacy needs.
- Lead and promotes a workforce culture that embeds the values of courage, collaboration, integrity and cultural humility and attracts, rewards and retains high calibre staff.
- Implement a performance management framework to ensure the delivery of quality services and outcomes in alignment with strategic priorities.
- Be responsible for recruitment, orientation, training and management of staff.
- Develop and maintain best practice human resource policies including, including policies, procedures and systems to enable workplace wellbeing, health & safety. Ensure that appropriate and robust processes are in place to support all employees, including implementation of systems to promote cultural safety for Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people employed by the ACTCOSS.
- Facilitate and foster effective internal and external communications.

- Monitor and evaluate the quality of the work of the organisation and seek to continually improve processes and outcomes.
- Develop and implement required policies, procedures and practices.

Governance

- Develop and maintain strong, professional and effective working relationships with the Board.
- Support the ACTCOSS Chair and Board to implement effective contemporary governance practices to fulfil corporate, regulatory and fiduciary accountabilities.
- In conjunction with the Board prepare an annual strategy performance report and business plan.
- Keep Directors informed on the position of services, finances, management issues and all matters having real or potential risk to the organisation through comprehensive reporting and accountability systems.
- Ensure processes are in place to fulfil ACTCOSS's statutory compliance obligations.
- Provide administrative support to the Board of Directors and its committees.

Key Competencies

Vision and strategic agility: The Chief Executive Officer will create and communicate a compelling sense of purpose and vision for the ACTCOSS. They will have demonstrated experience in an executive leadership role within a multifaceted dynamic environment, with a proven ability to innovate and execute strategic initiatives.

Business acumen: The Chief Executive Officer will be knowledgeable about industry trends, practices, and policies relevant to the governance of the organisation. They will demonstrate their expertise in developing and delivering ongoing revenue streams that support future organisational growth and sustainability. They will also have demonstrated experience within a business operation delivering sound financial management and operational excellence.

Team Leadership: The Chief Executive Officer will effectively lead teams and integrate new people into the organisation whilst driving commitment to organisational goals. They will support employees to take responsibility for their own work and provide appropriate levels of supervision and constructive feedback. They will work in collaboration with the ACTCOSS leadership team to provide a challenging and goal-oriented environment allowing employees to develop and grow their skills and professional expertise.

The Chief Executive Officer will promote a collaborative environment that draws on the strengths and expertise of members and supporters, enabling their contribution to continue to promote the values and purpose of the ACTCOSS.

Stakeholder Focus: The Chief Executive Officer will show a clear understanding of community needs, interests and concerns.

Cultural Humility and Awareness: As the leader of a non-indigenous organisation, the Chief Executive Officer must work to promote cultural awareness, safety and respect in all aspects of the work of the COSS. This includes promoting self-determination and the role of Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations in the ACT community sector. The CEO will have demonstrated experience in working effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community partners.

Communication: The Chief Executive Officer will relate well to all kinds of people, building constructive and sustainable relationships. They will be reflective and sensitive to their impact on others, while demonstrating an ability to be persuasive and influential in pursuit of strategic goals. The role requires expertise in high level stakeholder and community engagement, with responsibility for representing the organisation through active brand management, public speaking and media appearances.

Continuous learning: The Chief Executive Officer will be future focussed with the ability to analyse initiatives and programs and learn from experience, demonstrating a high level of self-awareness, emotional intelligence and confidence. The CEO will build and maintain an ACTCOSS leadership team that actively seeks and promotes opportunities for individual and team development.

Community Sector Knowledge & Experience: Demonstrated leadership experience in, or a solid understanding of the social and community services sector, would be highly regarded. The ACTCOSS CEO must have knowledge of the operations of the ACT community sector and be able to clearly identify how disadvantage and inequity/inequality directly impact people living in the ACT. You will also understand or be able to quickly understand the policy agenda and initiatives both locally and nationally that create or may create disadvantage, inequity and/or inequality in the community. Related Tertiary qualifications would also be desirable.

Additional Information and Useful Links

For additional information about the organisation, please see links below:

- <https://actcoss.org.au/news/announcement-actcoss-ceo-will-step-down-in-january/>
- <https://actcoss.org.au/>
- <https://actcoss.org.au/about/what-is-actcoss/>
- <https://actcoss.org.au/about/board/>
- <https://actcoss.org.au/about/staff/>
- <https://actcoss.org.au/about/careers/>
- <https://actcoss.org.au/contact/>



The Application and Selection Process



Rob Macmillan – Partner Health and Human Services, Derwent is leading the delivery team for this search process, contributing to candidate sourcing, interviewing and overall assignment facilitation with ACTCOSS.

Rob is based in Sydney and is a Partner in the Derwent Health and Human Services practice and works with public, not for profit and private hospital, health, aged care, disability, and associated organisations in the sourcing of their executive leadership talent. Rob has developed extensive networks, both nationally and internationally, and works closely with his clients to deeply understand their requirements; he then works with his team to engage with and attract the very best talent. Rob graduated from Warwick University in the UK with a BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations.

Candidate Care

We are committed to ensuring that potential applicants and candidates are treated respectfully and fairly. The Derwent team is available to manage inquiries and ensure that applicants are informed about developments as they become available. Candidates who are shortlisted and complete assessments - including interviews, will be offered a feedback session to discuss their experience and the assessment results.

Salary Package and Location

A competitive salary package will be offered for the successful candidate. The role will be based at the ACTCOSS office in Canberra.

How to apply

Please submit your CV and a brief cover letter addressing the following 3 areas:

- Your interest in the role?
- What you bring to the role and to ACTCOSS?
- Your vision for the role?

For further information

If you have any questions about this opportunity, please contact Rob Macmillan, Partner Health, Derwent Search on 0421 593 535 or healthservices@derwentsearch.com.au

Timeline

- Interviews with Derwent will take place in October / early November.
- Interviews with ACTCOSS will take place in November / early December.
- Offer and acceptance anticipated mid December.

Reference checks, pre-employment verification and background checks

For candidates in final consideration, at least two referees will be contacted with permission before a formal written offer is made. Any written references provided will also be checked and additional referees may be sought to further understand a candidate's merits for the role. Any offer will be subject to some or all of the following checks: Academic Qualification Check; Professional Membership Check; Criminal History and Working with Children Checks.

Thank you for your interest in ACTCOSS.