Foreword

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This volume of essays brings together leading academics and practitioners from Australia, New Zealand and beyond to express current developments and explore future directions in citizen-focused government. Drawing on their varied research and experience on the ground, experts in the field — often with international backgrounds — use their contributions to explore actual experiences and applications.

Since the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) series began in 2005 it has focused on providing thought-provoking, relevant and practical content and pushing agendas pursued by governments both here and overseas. The 2011 edition is no exception. Several major themes underpin this volume of essays; themes introduced by Professor Evert Lindquist. But, from my perspective, citizen engagement is one of the most confronting, demanding and exciting challenges to which governments have committed themselves. It suggests that we need to develop new cultures; that we must operate not in the traditional ‘business as usual’ mode; that we must relax our preoccupation with command and control approaches. It also implies that we must invest more time and effort to achieve results and be prepared for the long haul — achieving engagement is a long-distance commitment, not a sprint, and the necessary attributes are those of Australia’s 2011 Tour de France champion Cadel Evans, rather than Jamaica’s sprint sensation Usain Bolt.

So, we at ANZSOG aim to cover a number of related themes in this volume — which build on each other and develop the various agendas we need to marshal. We will examine how policy actors (designers and implementers) can:

• work across departments and across levels of government to better meet citizen and community needs
• assemble and better utilise citizen feedback and incorporate citizen satisfaction into improved service delivery
• engage with citizens to improve policy design and implementation, entrusting them with input into policy initiation and formulation
• customise services to ensure citizen and community needs are met, allow more choice and personalised tailoring.

We live in an era where governments cannot act in isolation, where community disaffection with government is, arguably, prevalent and where new communities are increasingly forming and evolving online. Governments do not know all
the answers — and the community does not believe they do. Consequently, questions about how to involve citizens and share learning become ever more pertinent. Recent policy experiences (such as with the Northern Territory Intervention or the planning for the Murray Darling Basin) have highlighted the importance of community-centric and locally generated solutions rather than top-down, universally prescribed approaches. Governments and community face an equally steep learning curve in addressing this issue.

But, once we start down this track and heighten community expectations about being listened to, other significant issues will emerge. For instance:

• What does citizen-centric really mean? And who gets to define or shape it over time?
• Is citizen engagement merely code for governments thinking about improving the alignment between what they wish to achieve and what the community will accept; or does it entail a more radical set of approaches where the community actively drives policy designs and policy processes?
• What are we engaging about? Are we creating *options* and looking for *innovations*, consulting on *applicability* and delivery standards, *marketing* solutions to problems, or *empowering* communities in a sense to take their fates into their own hands?
• Even if governments want to fully engage citizens, are citizens able and prepared to undertake these roles and responsibilities? Can they exercise a greater stake in decision-making? And how do we address the ‘silent majority’, how do we avoid capturing the views of the usual ‘strong voices’ and how do we look to future needs (the latent voices of the citizens of tomorrow)?
• Engagement can be costly; government is not a bottomless pit of resources to be expended in addressing whatever problems present themselves. How do we balance the desire for more personalised, tailored services against relentless demands for greater cost efficiency?
• Governments may not have the right skills, or be good at delivering services. Is it possible, then, that governments should *not* take on some community ‘problems’ but instead find ways to enable others to address them, facilitate community activism, reward initiatives and incentivise others with community and social goals.

Our contributors have grappled with these dilemmas and challenges, and with many more operational issues. Their job is to provide insight, open debate and awaken our sensibilities.

This volume is of particular relevance to public servants and others involved in policy design, implementation and delivery. For them we have brought together
central players, agency deliverers, multiple jurisdictions, third sector providers, and the community of volunteers and public-spirited providers of community assistance.

ANZSOG is thrilled to be offering another challenging volume of essays; we trust you will come away with an abundance of valuable insights with immediate real-world applications. I would like to thank ANU E Press for its continued support over the ANZSOG publication series, and Justin Pritchard for assistance with the preparation of the final manuscript.

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