

Community use of school facilities – guidelines

This document should be read in conjunction with Community use of school facilities policy.

Introduction

The primary function of Northern Territory Government schools is to provide educational services for young people, yet there are many hours when school buildings and grounds are not in use. It is during these hours that schools can support the community by sharing school facilities and providing an opportunity for schools and their communities to strengthen relationships.

Schools are encouraged to promote the use of their facilities and for this information to be available on the school's website.

Guidelines

Management of community use

The following activities should be given priority for use:

- educational purposes such as adult literacy and numeracy programs or tutoring for students
- professional teaching association activities
- local sporting organisations for use of basketball courts or ovals
- not for profit organisations.

Consideration should be given to the availability of similar services by existing private providers. Where there is already an appropriate standard of facility within the community, the school may not wish to approve uses that may compete and impact on the long term profitability of these providers, such as the local council hall.

Public Shelters

The use of school facilities as public shelters during disasters, such as cyclones or floods, should be in accordance with the Emergency management – Public shelter responsibilities policy and the All hazards emergency management action list.

User agreements are not necessary for public shelter use.

Reasonable access

The school must agree to provide access to libraries and multipurpose halls funded under the former Building the Education Revolution at no, or minimal, cost to the community.

This must include reasonable access by any community or not for profit groups in the local community. Schools shall charge a fee to cover utility and operational costs.

Determining the cost of use

A schedule of fees should be determined in consultation with the School representative body (SRB) for the use of facilities. Fees comprise the following:

- bond – where required
- utilities fee – a non-refundable fee to cover utility and operational costs such as power
- hire fee – an additional fee may be charged to groups to assist with SRB fundraising activities.

All fees must be paid in advance.

In consultation with the SRB, principals have the discretion to waive or reduce fees in accordance with this policy. Any waiver or reduction should be applied consistently and fairly across comparable users and should only be applied to utilities fees in exceptional circumstances.

Principals and SRBs must ensure that the Department of Education (the department) funds provided to an SRB for the provision of an educational program are not used to subsidise community use of school facilities.

School representative bodies may approve the use of school facilities to commercial operators at market rates. Fees should not be waived for commercial operators.

Bond

Schools can request an upfront bond payment from users as a way of encouraging users to take care of school facilities and to provide funds to cover replacement or repair of any damage caused by the user. The bond should be non-refundable if the conditions of the agreement are not met. As a general rule of thumb a bond should be 5% of the value of the agreement.

Insurance

Users must produce evidence of their public liability insurance which provides appropriate coverage for the user of at least \$10 million. In addition, if the user has employees, evidence of workers compensation insurance for the user's workers must also be produced.

If a user does not have public liability insurance and is of a non-commercial nature and the SRB is satisfied that the use is of a low risk nature, discretion may be exercised in deciding whether to permit use of the school's facilities. This discretion should be exercised with great caution and only in rare circumstances. The basic requirement is for the community user to have public liability insurance. Activities involving physical activity, such as sports or dancing, must be covered by insurance. If the requirement to have public liability insurance is waived, the user is required to indemnify the Northern Territory Government for any loss or damage to person or property as a consequence of using the school's facilities. Note clause 9 of the Community use agreement.

Use of school facilities for polling purposes

The department has entered into an Agreement with the Australian Electoral Commission and has a Memorandum of Understanding NT Electoral Commission which eliminates the need for schools to put in place user agreements when schools are being used as polling places.

Schools will negotiate operational details such as fees, availability and suitability of school facilities directly with the Electoral Commissions.

It would be reasonable to expect that political candidates are able to set up signs and notices on school grounds at the conclusion of the school day on the Friday before election day. For some schools this would not be until after school care finishes or when all or most students have vacated the premises. Principals must clearly define with political parties and candidates where promotional material can be erected or displayed and when it is to be removed. This is to avoid the possibility of star pickets damaging underground services and communication lines.

Principals who have any doubts as to whether an activity is allowed should contact their Director School Operations for advice.

Community use agreement template

A community use of school facilities agreement and schedule has been developed for schools to use to appropriately manage the above processes.

Related policy and documents

Policy

- Emergency management – public shelter responsibilities policy – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/school-operations#public-emergency-shelter>

Documents

- The following can be located on the Community use of school facilities page - https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/resource-management#community_use
 - Community use of school facilities agreement and schedule
 - Community use of school facilities guidelines
 - Community use of school facilities school holiday user group registration form

Acronyms	Full form
SRB	School representative body

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3	April 2023	Quality Standards and Regulation – Operational Policy	Administrative amendments to align roles and responsibilities to the structural alignment in effect from 1 July 2022, including NTG template and minor formatting