

Name or Pseudonym

[REDACTED]

Email

[REDACTED]

1.1 What would a partnership between CSOs and the government that achieves outcomes for Australians being supported by the community sector look like?

The East Gippsland Community Foundation was formed after the 2019-20 Fires. A good contact for you is [REDACTED].

It was determined by those affected by fires found it difficult to negotiate the process for grant applications. I'm sure [REDACTED] will provide very valuable information to you.

Funding often has to be expended within a twelve month period which is reduced if the acknowledgement of a successful project is some months after an application is submitted. Funding \$30K over 3 years is better than \$10K each year as it allows the grantee to budget and use the funds more effectively. State Govt (as do some politicians & Local Councils) provide by a free subscription to any registered NOT FOR PROFITS so that emails are received to appropriate addresses with identified criteria /interests for funding.

The Community sector eg Neighbourhood Houses should be funded as they are an important part of any community. Omeo Community Hub isn't funded for a coordinator and totally reliant upon volunteers writing grants, managing other volunteers, developing policies, organising programs etc. Volunteer burnout will occur and it become very reliant upon predominantly retirees who have administration experience (and hard to find in small communities).

1.2 How can CSOs and government streamline the sharing of information, particularly through utilising technology to effectively engage, distribute, share, influence and inform in a timely and efficient manner?

As mentioned in the previous response, technology makes it so much easier to share opportunities. Acquittals should also be easier to complete. Notifications of unsuccessful applications should be sent to applicants in a more timely manner.

1.3 How can government ensure the community sector, including service users, and those not able to access services, have an opportunity to contribute to program design without imposing significant burdens?

Because each philanthropic group operates independently of each other there are lots of occasions that grants roll out, suitable for the project you are endeavouring to fund, over many dates within a single month. So the applicant ends up applying for various grants for the same project.

Not sure how this can be streamlined as each philanthropic group is endeavouring to maintain their status to attract donors.

FRRR seem to get a few government funded opportunities to be assessed and this works quite well when this happens.

Most grants make paying wages in eligible for funding due to the fear of being expected to fund this for following years. Sometimes minimal funding to establish a project or program will have very positive outcomes because it relieves the pressure on volunteers in the early stages of development.

Funding for scoping or feasibility is also sometimes difficult to find. In our area we don't have access to the skill set to put together a business plan etc & does require a consultant to pull together the project into a succinct document that can be presented for funding.

After the 2019-20 Fires the Community Reference Groups (CRC) across East Gippsland identified Grant Writing Assistance as the most needed skill set wanted.

Having just completed the ACRE (Australian Centre for Regional Entrepreneurship) facilitator course in Beechworth ([REDACTED]) which was funded by Emergency Response Victoria, fantastic course guidelines were taught and put into practise. [REDACTED] would be able to assist you with further details of the program. It was presented by two professors from the USA and this program is used over the world.

Great opportunity to enhance concept ideas.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Often grants are applied for and by the time you get notification of success, order the equipment etc the cost of the project has escalated and cannot be fully funded therefore incurring other costs to the community group or another grant applications for 'top up funds' This has happened to three of the projects I've been involved in since the 2019-2020 fires. I now allow a contingency of 8% in all applications for overruns.

Real quality services over a 12 month period requires extra commitment if the program is being driven by volunteers due to the skillset required.
To provide the services each group requires the employment of a coordinator to drive programs, ensure policies are up to date, data collation of participation, ensuring volunteers are appropriately accredited (WWCC etc), financial and secretarial administration and many other tasks. Certainly it's not expected to have full time employment for a community facility but 10-15hours per week would be greatly appreciated.

2.2 What administrative and overhead costs are not being considered in current grant funding?

As noted previously - all administration costs for a project are required. We are fortunate to be supported by East Gippsland Shire Council with a minimal overhead of rent & utilities. This shows the support EGSC has for our endeavours. Public Liability insurance is an increasing cost that needs to be addressed & required to be provided to EGSC.

To summarise overheads:

- * wages
- * rent
- * utilities - power, water, gas
- * cleaning costs - especially during the pandemic

Many groups exclude some of the above items from the eligible category.

2.3 How are rising operational costs impacting the delivery of community services?

For the Omeo Community Centre - we are extremely fortunate to be under the roof of EGSC and supported with heating, cooling & power with a minimal annual rental. We are in the former Parks Victoria offices & EGSC has taken a loss of income to commit to our project. PV decided to vacate.
All costs have to be covered so programs are reduced because of increasing costs especially for the aged population who don't have excess funds to contribute to programs.

2.4 What have been your experiences with and reflections on the supplementation and change to indexation?

Indexation hasn't been evident in the grants I've received for various community groups. As I stated previously I add a 8% contingency in all grants to cover costs. Living in a rural remote Victorian town means that costs are already elevated due to transport costs for delivery of goods etc.
As the Community Hub is located in the centre of town, we've made a conscious decision to not install an oven in the facility so that any food purchases / catering for programs is sourced from local cafes/suppliers.
Projects out of Omeo have incurred elevated costs due to increasing transport costs.

2.5 How can CSOs and the department work together to determine where funds are needed most to ensure equitable and responsive distribution of funds?

I think there should be greater capacity to discuss with CSOs the opportunities that are available - technology has assisted with this. More groups seem to be offering online zoom or teams sessions /webinars to help community groups to develop their grant applications.
Connection to a local CSO eg East Gippsland Community Foundation is a perfect example. Their staff is stable, helpful & mobile to site to offer assistance.
Working with the Victorian Fire Appeal group was a little more difficult as it initially required you to partner with a DGR. Eventually when the fund was undersubscribed and was being closed we were provided with the funds without a DGR. However the project had gone on for many many months and costs had escalated, requiring funding from East Gippsland Community Foundation to enable to project to be completed. EGCF received a substantial amount of the funds from Enterprise Foundation (Bendigo Bank Philanthropic sector) who were holding the Appeal funding.

I personally enjoy writing grant applications and find them interesting but many people believe they do not have the skillset - computer knowledge, financial management, acquittal processes, sufficient English skills to write a succinct application in correct grammar. It really relies on the capacity of your local community to ensure a grant application is written correctly and referenced to the criteria.

2.6 How can government streamline reporting requirements, including across multiple grants, to reduce administrative burden on CSOs?

For the establishment of the Omeo Community Hub, I managed an Excel spreadsheet that identified each of the grants received and how they were utilised. I submitted this spreadsheet for each acquittal and haven't received negative comments or rejections from any of the funding bodies. Each items purchase was identified and allocated (sometimes proportionally) to each funding body.

3.1 What length grants are CSOs seeking to provide certainty and stability for ongoing service delivery?

I should have read all the questions before commencing.....
Longer terms for expenditure to be provided - not all spent in one 12 month period.

East Gippsland Shire has given us a 3 year contract for occupancy, which I think is reasonable and then a review will be undertaken. We've offered to take on some services for the Shire as well - Place of Assembly in times of Emergency, which will also be a place where DEECA/FFM, CFA & EGSC can distribute documentation re emergencies be it fire, flood, landslips & road closures. We have internet access with Starlink which will still be functional when Telstra goes down. Power outages will be offset by solar backup systems by EGSC & MONDO/AusNet whereby community members can charge devices within the Hub. Ongoing service delivery needs to look outside the square and make yourself important to your community so that you are an asset to them.

3.2 What timeframes should the government aim for, at a minimum, to provide final outcomes on grant variations/extensions before the current grant ceases?

I think 6 weeks from submission to response is reasonable, given that sometimes there are thousands of applications sometimes to one grant program.
Extensions of funding times for a further 6 months should be easy to negotiate given that sometimes a project cannot be completed within the anticipated timeframe, especially if it's outside of the community group's control.

3.3 What funding flexibility do CSOs require to enable service delivery and innovation?

Some flexibility is currently available if you've established a repour with the granter.
However if it's a new funding body to your community grant you have to 'sell' your reasons convincingly. Innovative ideas are often not viewed as being either possible or sustainable. Entrepreneurship needs to be supported.

3.4 What flexibility is required by CSOs in acquittal processes to support and encourage sector innovation?

Make the acquittal process easy - receipts, outcomes that have addressed the criteria for the funder & photos /social media etc as proof.

Innovative ideas should show that their community is supportive of the project and that the community understands the intention of the proposer.

3.5 How can government improve the variation process, with consideration that CSOs must demonstrate alignment with the grant agreement and provide evidence of value for money outcomes?

To be seen in good light by the funding body you need to be very clear on what you've achieved with the funds provided before you request a variation or further funds to complete the project.
Grant agreements should identify the variation process and the expectations of the funding body. Proof of media releases will need to be included and ensure that the funder is able to use appropriate photos on their web pages - ensure you get permission for photos to be used from participants before the activity etc is undertaken.

4.1 How can the government ensure opportunities are available for new and emerging organisations to access funding?

Inclusion, community connectedness, education opportunities (sharing of or gaining knowledge eg cancer council), social interaction for all not just specific groups.

All funding should be directed to all groups unless their is a reason that participation will be reduced if specifics are not identified. eg some programs may need to have funding to hold special sessions for those affected by crowds for example.

In general funding should be directed to all equally unless there is a very much identified need.

4.2 What programs, supports and information are already available for smaller CSOs to help build capacity of the organisation? Are these working?

Utilisation of online programs such as Be Connected, Inclusive are one way to reach out to larger cohorts but only if someone is available to assist those who are not computer literate or feel threatened with being online.

Some of these work. But those with disabilities may be unable to join in due to their disability.

4.3 How could larger CSOs support smaller CSOs? What are the barriers to providing this support?

The use of a agency's DGR may make donations to smaller groups more likely. The onus on pouring through the legalities and tax issues makes it too difficult for smaller groups.

What is a CSO community organization?

Non-State, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere that are separate from the State and the market. CSOs represent a wide range of interests and ties. They can include community-based organizations as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Larger CSOs will be focussed on their own business and fundraising efforts.

Independent assistance is required for smaller groups to contact to gain greater knowledge of processes.

5.1 What is your experience with and reflections on place-based funding approaches?

Partnering with local entities can raise your profile as long as the partnered cohort has similar goals and values.

However it puts the partnered group at risk is something out of their control occurs within the smaller organisation. Whether it is OH&S or WWCC failures, as examples, it reflects back upon the partnered cohort.

5.2 What innovative approaches could be implemented to ensure the grant funding reaches trusted community organisations with strong local links?

All applicants for grants should be incorporated (or under their parent body Inc), hold public liability insurance and have an agreement with any other group that they affiliate or partner with. Checks with local Councils, larger entities in the local area, prove a need for the service or project, submit letters of support from local entities that reflect the values that are similar to the body requesting the funding.

Many ways to ensure that groups can be checked but the larger the population in the town the more difficult it will become.

Whether it be State or Philanthropic groups providing the funding, there should be an agreement with the larger entity eg Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, CWA, Rotary, Lions etc. They will all have processes in place that determine to whom and how they fund programs within their communities. Using the larger entity could make grant allocation easier.

5.3 Which areas do you consider have duplicative funding or gaps you think need to be addressed, and what is the evidence?

FRRR - many grant opportunities overlap & you have to write the grant to fit the criteria. Square pegs don't go in round holes but there are ways to change emphasis within the application.

Sustainability of programs is a huge area that has been proven after the 2019-20 Fires. Funds are allocated via grant applications but they don't ensure sustainability over a longer period due to funding issues. Establishment is often easy but keeping the internet on or replacing equipment based on depreciation is often difficult to achieve. Insurance for replacement is also a major impost on groups who own infrastructure.

Solar installation is an easy one to identify - get assistance funding from Government, get the rest from a philanthropic group but after 10 years who is going to fund the replacement? Who is responsible for annual checks & cleaning of the solar panels? Eventually without servicing the equipment becomes less effective and may fail, incurring further costs to a group.

5.4 Where there is a community-led change initiative, could shared accountability to community and funders (government) strengthen service delivery?

Annual reports to community members are necessary. They are the best auditors for programs and projects as they will tell it like it is. Good or bad.

An independent audit from a local could occur but they generally will be likely to have positive comments. Larger organisations eg CFA, AV are funded to provide independent assessments of programs & services by qualified consultants. Small groups can't afford this kind of auditing and large entities are stretched to provide community services to other CSOs.

Unless they are mandated to provide such service to their community.

6.2 What other solutions or changes could also be considered?

Ensure community led programs are funded.

6.3 What does success look like?

Opening the doors, achieving goals and meeting values /criteria, operating within working guidelines & policies (many local groups won't see the need to have these documents - she'll be right!), providing feedback to the community, having community anonymously complete surveys of your project/program, working within annual budgeted plans, presentation of financial documents to the community - not just to the committee of management. Be honest, be transparent.

Allow new ideas - whether anonymously or verbal - to be applauded.

I hope this survey doesn't sit on a shelf. I hope it hasn't just ticked a box as having given opportunity to the public. It needs to be acted upon. Volunteers are important and should be more appreciated by Governments at all levels.