

I am making a submission as an:

Individual

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

Long term funding, 7-10 year funding cycles, with autonomy to deliver the agreed outcomes. Often grants are so rigid and strict requiring adherence to forecasted budgets and timelines that once a project has started, there are a number of learnings that should be able to be flexibly administered without frequent time consuming emails, phone calls, logins and uploads, while still delivering the agreed outcomes.

Consistent communication and expectations. Each department administers grants differently and has different communication levels and expectations, and reporting expectations, consistency would make it easier for small nfp community organisations where it's often one person wearing many hats that the arduous work falls to. Which can take them away from delivering the project and driving the outcomes.

Shared learning of past projects funded by government. Part of the final report should include a section that should be made public that includes outcomes sought, what they did, how did it (within reason), was the program successful or not, what did they learn, what would they do differently if they could do the program over, what would they recommend for future similar programs, the option to include their contact details if someone wanted to roll out a similar program in their region and wanted more information.

Even when programs haven't gone to plan, much can be learned from them, and this should be shared to truly ensure the opportunity for progress.

Encourage collaboration and not competition for grants.

Prioritise local community organisations to deliver for their local cohorts. Ensure local CSO's are selected over a CSO that is not based locally. Too often we see larger CSO's setup an office, deliver a program, then pack up and go back to their head office in the city or interstate taking money, jobs and learnings with them.

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?

Links to past successful projects or similar. Or a database of previously funded projects that grant applicants can look up when grants open.

Ensure sufficient lead in time prior from notification of grant success, to delivery start date, and ensure program officers are aware of past programs/projects and can discuss with successful recipients prior to implementation.

Program officers are often administering a number of grants simultaneously and I'm sure they would have valuable insights into what is working for current grantees and what struggles or barriers or challenges they're experiencing so they can link grantees together to talk/discuss. Sometimes this would be great to get another experienced lens on how they would approach a project.

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?

Prioritise CSO's who work under the collective impact model, who directly liaise and incorporate co-design into their delivery.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Long term funding agreements with agreed outcomes. We often over estimate costs as we're scared we'll be caught short and not be able to deliver or the flip side, we get a program underway and realise we under quoted/projected the hours required.

Most of the costs for outcome driven CSO's regionally are around staffing, recruiting, and maintaining appropriately qualified staff at the right ratio's for successful delivery and to maintain those talented staff right up until the end of a program. It's challenging with short term funding, staff are caught between delivering and having to ensure financial security for their families.

Maintain some level (reduced) of funding for services that are delivering the agreed outcomes and are improving communities long term, beyond the grant term. This means CSO's focus on outcomes, long term outcomes, building sustainable partnerships to achieve, building connections rather than transactions, can

focus on sustainability; rather than meeting the t&c's of the grant and moving on to the next grant with specified task, and long term outcomes fall to the wayside out of necessity and survival.

I.e.

Apply for grant

Successful grant recipient notified - a few meetings with program officer who can discuss prev grants/programs/projects, learnings (it doesn't mean CSO's have to change, it's the opportunity to fine tune their project)

Agree on outcome measures and what success looks like

Start grant - 5 year funding full grant amount

3/4 funding year 6

1/2 funding year 7

1/4 funding year 8

Fund evaluation only in year 9

Annual report on progress as per agreed measures - publicly available

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

CSO's are often underfunded in admin areas - adequate management, supervision, HR, financial, auditors, recruitment etc.

It's often a few staff scrounging around for consultants or trying to manage multiple roles which takes them away from driving delivery.

And very little consideration for future growth or sustainability. 15-20% admin fee should be standard depending on the size of the organisation and grant.

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

Reduces the number of staff you can employ or the level you can pay, meaning under qualified or under experienced staff fill the roles, making the outcomes take longer due to needing additional training and support from management to bring them up to speed.

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

Rushed.

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?

Allow CSO's more autonomy. If they're delivering the agreed outcomes, why does it matter if they needed to divert originally forecasted equipment funds to staffing etc.

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

Consistency across grants. Each grants means having to learn processes and expectations of that department or online system or that program officers preferences, it can be time consuming,

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

7-10 years when expecting long term impacts. It's difficult to recruit and retain staff and deliver on time when the focus is on maintaining a work force, when your workforce are just trying to keep a roof over their head and maintain financial security.

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?

3 months prior as a minimum. It's stressful not knowing and feeling in limbo as a CSO. It also puts pressure on staff who may leave to find security, then an extensions granted and you're back at the recruitment and training stage.

It's also stressful when you find out you were successful with a grant that was written for 2 years and you now have 16 months to recruit and deliver.

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

Flexibility and autonomy. The strict guidelines can restrict long term sustainability and outcomes for local communities.

There should be an opportunity to explore funding alterations that aren't strictly in the grant guidelines if there's an obvious benefit to the community and the community are backing the CSO's case.

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

Ability to publicly share learnings. A conference opportunity to share learnings?

The unsuccessful projects have just as much to share as successful, I'd like to hear why things did or did not work for their community but did in another so we can collectively discuss improvements or consider different approaches as an experienced collective.

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?

It can be hard to prove value for money for much of the community service industry unless they're funded long term (more than 2 years).

For example, work with a 12 year old, more likely to show you what impact we've had when they're 19 vs 14.

Give CSO's an opportunity to build their case for a variation that may sit slightly outside the grant t&c's, to demonstrate community need and community support, matched with the successes they're having, as sometimes when a program starts the CSO learns they may need to think differently or come up with an innovative approach for their cohort/outcomes that's better than originally planned and forecast, if they're not exceeding the grant total and able to achieve or exceed outcome expectations, shouldn't this be supported?!

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

Prioritise local organisations over pop up CSO's with a head office located outside the region.

Prioritise supporting CSO's to become sustainable.

Incentivise corporate give backs to CSO's.

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

I'm not aware of any.

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

Share learnings. Share connections. Not create arms/pop ups in communities with existing services and attempt to compete with them or poach staff (often offering more \$\$ than smaller CSO).

Barriers:

Competitiveness for grants.

Greed.

IP.

Political connections.

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

Should be strongly supported and prioritised. Allow proven, established, trusted local CSO's first dibs on funding opportunities. You already know they'll share their learnings, collaborate, build partnerships and drive long term outcomes because they're invested in their communities.

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

Ensure promoting funding opportunities to local networks, consult with the community directly about the needs, not just trust the representative politician will pass these along. It's disappointing when it seems as though their friends or party contributors are funded and other better placed organisations that are busy driving outcomes are not in the know.

Also ask the community about possible funding opportunities that may be coming up as often the grants are

driven and restricted by stats, however local knowledge shines a different light on the issue or why there's an issue and gets restricted in thinking to meet grant t&c's.

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

Recovery funds - duplicated en masse. Creates competition instead of innovation and collaboration.

Gaps - Connectors. Eg youth, there are plenty of services out there for youth however youth most at risk or in need either don't know about them, are scared to approach without a trusted support, or the service is stigmatised. Having valuable trusted stigma free CSO's who act as a front door for youth ensures service uptake and greater outcomes across the board.

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

Yes. Making learnings public drives accountability. I also think it should be tied to ongoing funding opportunities. Which incentivises actual outcomes, not short term tick the box exercises.

6.1 If any, what are the problems or challenges you think have been overlooked?

Short term funding

Competitiveness

Staffing costs

Traditional working hours not consistent with modern time values - people want to live. We live to work rather than working to live, younger generations are pushing back against this trend and this will impact roles, industries, outcomes into the future.

Assuming all CSO's will collaborate and deliver similarly

6.2 What other solutions or changes could also be considered?

Incentivise ongoing funding opportunities

Support CSO's to market their wins

Create learning & sharing conferences for CSO's who want to work with government to drive long lasting, sustainable change for country, our people and our environment.

6.3 What does success look like?

Collaborative efforts, funded with long term vision and outcomes in mind, with opportunities for ongoing funding streams/government brokered partnerships (ie corporates/energy sectors).