Organisation name

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

A partnership between CSOs and the government requires a shared vision and goals and a relationship that recognises and leverages the expertise and contribution of both parties.

A successful partnership between CSOs and Government would see Govt leveraging the community sector's unique access to and understanding of the strengths and challenges facing communities across the country, and their ability to provide a meaningful platform to elevate the voices in communities. These voices should be informing the policies and programs that are delivered and can be accessed well through application of co-design practices and participatory evaluations using shared indicators informed collectively by govt, community and CSOs.

CSOs would be leveraging govt's access to resources, capabilities and good practice examples across the sector. This includes the ability to connect and share learnings and examples of innovation across CSOs and communities, access to technology that can drive efficiency and collaboration, access to knowledge and evidence that should be applied via shared models and frameworks and capability building of the CSO sector.

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?

Sharing of data analytics tools and better support for use of systems, as well as capability building of CSOs in order to improve data capture and reporting, including provision of insights into service needs, gaps, outcomes and trends, in addition to output reporting.

An online collaborative platform that allows for secure data exchange, feedback, consultation and collaboration across stakeholders.

Mobile applications that enable service users to access information, services and support at their convenience.

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?

Ensure a longer lead time from announcement of grant to submission to allow CSOs to consult more broadly with their service users and engage more effectively with potential collaborators within the sector.

Extend funding periods. Meaningful collaboration across organisations and co-design with community, particularly CALD communities with whom we primarily work, requires trust and trust will only be established over time.

Support organisations with workforces that are truly reflective of the communities in which they deliver services. ██████ has 250 + staff and volunteers who in the main have lived experience of the migration or refugee experience and who collectively speak 55+ languages. This is a critical attribute to being able to meaningfully engage, understand cultural nuance, and build trust and rapport with the communities in which we work.

Enable (through funding, connection to expertise etc) evaluation activity across programs so that meaningful outcome and impact measurement can be undertaken so that program learnings are guiding program design.

Ensure that reporting frameworks allow for the capture of community voice and program outcomes, rather than current focus on outputs.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Funding that covers the full costs of delivering quality services, including staff wages, overheads, infrastructure, training and evaluation.

Flexible funding that allows for adjustments to respond to changing needs, demands and circumstances of service users and providers and to be able to move/allocate the funds accordingly. This is critical if we are to embed co-design practice into our delivery as true co-design requires flexibility to support the problems and solutions identified by community, which may be different to those identified by the funder.

Adequate and flexible funding would enable CSOs to plan ahead, innovate, collaborate and achieve better outcomes for their clients and communities.

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

The increasing costs of complying with complex and inconsistent reporting, compliance and acquittal requirements across different funders.

The costs of maintaining and upgrading information technology systems, software and hardware.

The costs of recruiting, retaining and developing skilled staff. Increases to the SCHADS Award is welcome for the benefit of our employees, but means we are having to make cuts elsewhere to accommodate for some grant-funded activity.

The costs of evaluating the impact and effectiveness of services and programs. Whilst we monitor all of our programs, there is rarely budget available to ensure a rigorous evaluation of program outcomes is undertaken by individuals with the skills and experience of delivering an effective evaluation.

The costs involved in meaningful partnerships and collaborations. Collaborations are complex and require funding to support all organisations involved in the partnership to engage in as meaningful a way as possible. This may mean administrative costs need to be covered to some degree in all organisations, but will depend on each organisation's role within the collaboration.

The costs involved in co-design. Co-design requires time and an intensity of engagement with community required to build trust and rapport. This means staff time, renumeration for participants engaged in the process and general costs incurred through regular engagement.

The costs of engaging with stakeholders, partners and networks to enhance service delivery and advocacy.

The costs involved in developing and growing the organisation so it can increase its impact. I.e. Grant and tender writing, seed funding for innovation, funding for exploratory projects (pilots) etc.

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

Organisations are having to create efficiencies through leaner corporate service models, which for many includes de-centralising administrative functions. This has a knock on effect for program staff, who are having to balance frontline service delivery with admin functions including recruitment, finance, and seeking and securing new funding. With our programs operating at full and in many cases over capacity, it's becoming increasingly challenging for staff to balance their responsibilities.

Funds are constantly being sought to supplement existing funds, so that waitlists can be serviced and more staff can be employed to share the load. This then increases the reporting and compliance burden on the organisation and creates a patchwork of staff working across multiple funded projects with varied timeframes..

Medium/smaller CSO are not able to absorb the rising operational costs that larger, commercial organisations are able to due to scale. While value for money can be demonstrated at the funding level, it is rarely the case at the community and impact level, as these businesses often have little connection and history with communities and are unable to engage to the degree required.

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

The supplementation provided by the government in response to the SACS pay equity case is welcome recognition of the value of our work and a boost to our capacity to attract and retain staff. However indexation arrangements have not kept pace with increasing costs associated with program delivery, increased client numbers and staff wages.

Demand for services continues to grow. There needs to be a better way for CSOs to report on increasing demand and for funding to be made available to support this demand during a contract period.

We support calls to make more transparent the application and calculation of indexation on grants so we can better plan for its use, and we welcome updates that will see supplementation funds disbursed earlier in the year.

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?

Collectively work to improve data capture and reporting processes. Reporting is often perceived as an admin process required only to achieve compliance purposes. Reports should contain information about gaps in service delivery, where demand sits, challenges and obstacles to servicing demand etc.

Suggest improvement to how data is collected, collated and then used by the various departments to inform conversations with CSOs about gaps, demand etc so that additional funding and/or flexible arrangements can be put in place to shift service delivery toward need and or scale up activities.

The CHSP program has adhoc funding available to organisations to support innovation and/or meet unmet need where demonstration of evidence can be provided. ▮▮▮▮ has utilised these funds on several occasions to meet need and to develop a new program that otherwise wouldn't have been funded in existing arrangements. Suggest considering this model of funding more broadly.

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

Consider adopting a risk-based approach that reduces the frequency and complexity of reporting for low-risk or high-performing CSOs.

Streamline reporting requirements by establishing consistent reporting formats and standards across different funders, programs and jurisdictions. Could include high-level outcome frameworks with consistent indicators against which CSOs can report.

Use fully featured and user-friendly online platforms, an application or systems that simplify data entry, exchange and analysis.

Better represent data provided through reporting to show how it is being used and its value in driving service improvement and demonstrating impact.

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

Grant length should be determined by the extent of the outcomes the service is expected to deliver and the complexity inherent in the intervention, however a minimum of five years is recommended, with options for extension or renewal based on performance and need.

All grants should have inbuilt quality performance milestones to ensure that outcomes and impact is being demonstrated throughout the period of the delivery, with implications for non delivery on milestones.

Longer grant agreement terms can benefit both CSOs and government by:
• reducing the administrative burden and costs of frequent tendering and contracting processes
• allowing a framework that provides adequate time to establish and build rapport, a shared understanding, and trust with communities we are seeking to support
• enhancing the continuity and quality of service delivery for clients and communities
• allowing an environment in which partnerships can grow and mature
• increasing the capacity and confidence of CSOs to plan ahead, invest in staff development, collaborate with partners and innovate their practices.

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?

Final outcomes on grant variations/extensions need to be provided a minimum of six months before the current grant ceases. We have lost many skilled staff members due to extension confirmations/variations coming through at the last minute.

Ensuring there is at least six months' notice of an extension/variation allows time for CSOs to prepare for

the transition, communicate with their staff and clients, and manage any risks or issues that may arise. It will also reduce the uncertainty and anxiety that CSOs may experience when waiting for funding decisions.

Some factors that may affect the timeframes for providing final outcomes on grant variations and/or extensions may be:
• The availability and reliability of data and information on service needs, gaps, outcomes and trends.
• The level of consultation and engagement with stakeholders, including CSOs, service users and other funders.

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

Funding flexibility refers to the ability of CSOs to use their funds in ways that best suit the needs and circumstances of their clients, within the agreed outcomes and accountability framework.
Flexible funds should allow CSOs to:
• pre-position themselves and set up partnerships that are responsive
• carry over unspent funds from one financial year to the next, subject to approval and reporting requirements
• reallocate funds across different budget items or activities, within a certain percentage or limit
• pool funds from different sources or programs to deliver integrated or holistic services
• access funds in advance or in arrears, depending on the changing needs of the program
• access additional funds where compelling evidence of need can be provided.

Funding flexibility can benefit both CSOs and government by:
• Enabling CSOs to respond to changing needs, demands and opportunities in their service environment
• Encouraging CSOs to experiment with new or improved ways of delivering services and achieving outcomes
• Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation and utilisation.

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

Adopting a risk-based approach that reduces the frequency and complexity of acquittal requirements for low-risk or high-performing CSOs.

Harmonising acquittal formats and standards across different funders, programs and jurisdictions.

Providing clear guidance and feedback on acquittal expectations and performance indicators.

Using online platforms and systems that simplify data entry, exchange and analysis.

Flexibility in acquittal processes can benefit both CSOs and government by:
• Reducing the administrative burden and costs of complying with multiple and inconsistent acquittal requirements
• Enhancing the quality and relevance of data and information on service delivery and outcomes
• Supporting learning and improvement across the sector through sharing best practices and lessons learned.

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?

Develop clear and consistent criteria and processes for assessing variation requests from CSOs.

Provide timely and transparent communication with CSOs on the status and outcome of their variation requests.

Engage with CSOs in a collaborative manner to understand their needs, challenges and opportunities.

Recognise the value-for-money outcomes that CSOs deliver beyond their contractual obligations, such as social capital, community cohesion or advocacy.

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

Provide clear and accessible information about funding criteria, processes and expectations.

Simplify and streamline the application and reporting requirements for grants.

Offer flexible and responsive funding models that suit the needs and capacities of different organisations.

Support collaboration and partnership among organisations to leverage their strengths and resources.

Provide feedback and capacity building to unsuccessful or inexperienced applicants.

Fund larger organisations to build the capacity of new and emerging organisations where vision and values align.

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

Capacity building of smaller CSOs is an area for potential funding allocation and support. The Strategic Partnerships Program, funded by the state govt is a good example of a program designed to identify, engage and support small community groups and organisations who are eager to grow and deliver supports to community. These programs must have a well-articulated and understood criteria for participation in the program, and an outcome framework designed geared toward impactful interventions that are enabling and sustainable. Without these, there is a risk that smaller organisations become dependant upon larger CSOs, rather than becoming self-sustainable.

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

Larger CSOs could support smaller CSOs through collaborations where the larger CSO takes on the role of the backbone organisation, mentoring and building the admin capacity of the smaller CSOs through the process.

Engaging smaller CSOs in sector networks and CoPs so that expertise, knowledge and skills can be shared across organisations of varying sizes.

Mentoring, coaching or training smaller organisations in areas such as governance, management, service delivery or evaluation.

Providing referrals, networks or partnerships for smaller organisations to access opportunities or resources.

Advocating for the interests and needs of smaller organisations with funders, policymakers or other stakeholders.

Barriers to providing this support include the competitive nature of the grant funding process, which often results in larger organisations competing for funding against smaller organisations. Add to this limited time, resources or incentives for larger organisations to support smaller organisations and/or establish relationships of mutual benefit.

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

Place-based funding approaches are collaborative, long-term approaches to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic location. They involve partnering and shared design, stewardship and accountability for outcomes and impacts among communities, governments, service providers and investors. Place-based funding approaches recognise that local people and organisations have the best understanding of their needs and strengths, and that they should have a voice and a choice in how services are designed and delivered.

Place-based approaches can be effective in addressing complex and persistent issues that require collective action and system change, however a long-term view must be taken to ensure that the required time is committed to driving sustained change.

Place-based approaches can empower and mobilise communities to take ownership of their solutions and leverage their assets and resources. They can foster innovation and diversity in service delivery and outcomes, as well as learning and improvement across the sector.

Place-based funding approaches are complex and require a multitude of skillsets that collectively will need to address challenges such as securing adequate and flexible funding, coordinating multiple stakeholders with competing agenda, agreeing and measuring impact and scaling up successful practices.

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

Consider a cluster approach as per international development models whereby CSOs are funded to deliver one component or area of expertise within a broader collaborative service model.

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

Legal and migration services: There is a gap in funding for community legal and migration services that provide free or low-cost legal assistance to people who cannot afford private lawyers. These services face high demand from people who are experiencing issues such as domestic violence, homelessness, debt or discrimination. However, they have been subjected to federal funding cuts and ongoing funding uncertainty.

Accommodation services: There is a gap in funding for accommodation services that provide housing support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These services help people to access safe, affordable and appropriate housing options, as well as other support services such as health, education or employment. However, they are unable to meet the demand from people who are facing housing pressures due to factors such as low income, high rents, lack of supply or discrimination.

Culturally appropriate and tailored mental health and wellbeing supports for refugees: The trauma experienced by refugees fleeing from conflict and oppression is compounded by the challenges facing refugees as they establish a life in a new country. We need supports that are appropriate and safe for refugees to access, despite having limited language, and that are cognisant of stigma and are culturally sensitive.

Gaps for service users who experience additional barriers to accessing mainstream supports, i.e. CALD service users with low English proficiency require additional time, support and access to interpreting services in order to engage with supports.

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

The impact of COVID-19 on the community service sector, such as increased demand, reduced income, disrupted service delivery and increased health and safety risks.

The diversity and complexity of the community service sector, such as different types, sizes, locations, target groups and service models of organisations.

The power dynamics and relationships between the government, community and the community service sector, such as trust, respect, communication and collaboration.

Current funding mechanisms are not currently conducive to achieving sustainable and impactful outcomes that create the generational change needing to occur for people to truly feel valued and meaningfully contributing within a community.

Migrants and refugees continue to navigate a system made up of disconnected services offered by a wide range of providers competing for short-term funding from government. The current competitive tender process has significantly contributed to duplication, with multiple agencies offering similar services, making it difficult for consumers to connect with integrated supports.

Emphasis must be placed on funding mechanisms that support client-centric, integrated, longer-term, impact-orientated programming delivered collaboratively across multicultural, ethno-specific and mainstream agencies.

6.2 What other solutions or changes could also be considered?

Develop a national strategy and framework for the community service sector that articulates a shared vision, values, principles and goals.

Better collate and report back on the data and insights provided to government through CSO reporting. So much data is provided through reporting requirements of grant-funded programs, this should be informing improvements to our collective programming and service design.

Share evidence from research and examples of innovation to better inform good practice.

6.3 What does success look like?

Services and supports that address the challenges identified by individuals and communities.

Service delivery that is accountable to a quality framework informed by and that is valued by the

individuals and communities receiving the services.

A community service sector that is sustainable, resilient and responsive to changing needs and circumstances.

A community service sector that is diverse, inclusive and responsive to the needs and preferences of individuals and communities.

A community service sector that is collaborative, innovative and effective in delivering outcomes and impacts.

A community service sector that is valued, respected and supported by the government and other stakeholders.