



AUSTRALIAN
NETWORK
ON DISABILITY

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Submission to A stronger, more diverse, and independent community sector issues paper

Australian Network on Disability strongly supports the Australian Government's efforts to support and strengthen the community sector and is grateful for the opportunity to provide input and recommendations.

Who we are

Australian Network on Disability (AND) is a national, membership-based organisation that helps organisations welcome and retain people with disability into all aspects of business.

We work with our 450 member organisations - who in combination employ around 2.2 million people or 18% of Australia's workforce - to remove barriers that limit opportunities and prevent the employment and career advancement of people with disability.

As the peak body for disability inclusion in the workplace we provide expert guidance, services and programs to employers, Government representatives and industry bodies.

Our vision is to create a disability confident Australia.

In addition to building disability confident workplaces, AND gives organisations the tools they require to become disability confident recruiters.

AND helps organisations introduce workplace adjustments, finds internships for university students with disability, connects jobseekers with disability to mentors and partners with the Australian Institute of Company Directors to provide leaders with disability with the skills and opportunities they require to join Australian boards.

To fulfil its commitment to a stronger, more diverse, and independent community sector it is critical that the Government address the many challenges currently facing the community sector in Australia.

This submission will offer recommendations to remove the barriers that are currently limiting the sector's ability to provide not only short-term benefit to those most in need, but also long-term systemic change which is necessary to substantially reduce the level of inequity in Australia.

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Recommendations

Area of focus 1: Giving the sector the voice and respect it deserves through meaningful working partnerships

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

Recommendation 1: Embed collaborative co-design principles that facilitate greater engagement between the government, community members, CSOs and advocacy groups during grant process design.

The lack of consultation between CSOs, the Government and the target audience is a current weakness of the grants process. In most cases, all the critical details of the grants, including the grant timeframes, level of funding, length of project and related costs are predetermined before grant applications are opened.

Greater input from CSOs and the community sector will ensure grants adequately reflect the needs of the community while incorporating realistic delivery costs and timeframes that will achieve short and long-term benefits.

Recommendation 2: Create a two-way portal/innovation hub for grants which capitalises on the community sector's expertise and direct relationships with those in need.

The grants portal in Australia is entirely one-way, developed and directed by the government. We recommend the creation of a two-way portal which allows CSOs to submit ideas for projects and programs as needs are identified.

Q1.2 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?

Recommendation 3: Establish Communities of Practice (CoPs) at the outset of the grant allocation which would enable grant participants and stakeholders to share and distribute information





Once the grants are awarded, there are limited processes and opportunities to allow for information sharing between grant recipients and project collaborators. Organisations end up working in siloes even if they are awardees of the same grant, working to achieve similar/comparable outcomes.

For example, AND is one of 29 organisations to secure funding under an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program - Building Employer Confidence in Disability and Inclusion (BEC) grant from the Department of Social Services to run Employing 100. The Employing 100 project is designed to build employer disability confidence and remove barriers encountered by people with disability to gain meaningful employment. Our aim is to get a total of 100 people with disability employed within four companies across high-growth sectors including the healthcare, social assistance, food and accommodation industries.

Despite the number of awardees in the ILC grant, there were no CoPs recommended and established to facilitate the sharing of information, resources or learnings. AND established a CoP through the Department of Social Services. The CoP meets every two months, with a rotating chair, which allows participants to share knowledge, information, and feedback.

Recommendation 4: Consider the creation of a technology/ innovation hub; co-designed and co-led by government and CSOs.

Building on from Recommendation #2, a two-way portal/ innovation hub would enable greater ease to make submissions for grant ideas. For example, if an organisation has an idea for a grant proposal, they can submit the proposal via the submission platform for consideration before a proposal is predetermined by government and submissions are sought.

Q1.3 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?

Recommendation 5: Engage with and leverage the contacts of peak bodies to





connect with service users.

Peak industry bodies have extensive community contacts and relationships which government can utilise to reach service users.

For example, earlier this year AND needed 6 people with communication disability to participate in our research into Communication Access and Inclusion. We asked the Australian Group Supporting Communication Inclusion (AGOSI) - a membership-based organisation that serves people who may not rely on speech alone to understand or be understood – to help recruit participants and we promptly received requests to participate from 100 individuals.

Area of focus 2: Providing grants that reflect the real cost of delivering quality services

Q 2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Recommendation 6: Collaborate with CSOs to develop a tendering process which allows CSOs to submit an estimated budget with their application

Rather than “retro-fitting” the program design to fit the budget, we recommend the government outline the program and invite applicants to collaborate with government by submitting a budget estimate for their project.

Currently, for example, if the funding allocation for a grant is \$2 million, the submitting organisation will design their project to the set budget, rather than design for the problem driven by the opinion that some money is better than none.

A program co-designed in collaboration with funders and recipients would be designed to solve the problem, rather than be designed to fit the budget.

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

Recommendation 7: Broaden funding to cover existing overheads

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Current grant programs fail to adequately cover existing overheads such as rent, despite the need for organisations to hire further staff to service their grants. Many IT personnel costs such as IT infrastructure, insurance costs (public liability and indemnity costs) and cyber security are not covered.

Additionally, our board advises on one of our grants, however we cannot cover their costs under the current funding agreement as governance expenses including audit fees of the business are not included, despite the real cost to the business.

Area of focus 3. Providing longer grant agreement terms

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

Recommendation 8: Consider the creation of longer-term grants lasting 5-10 years

Systemic and transformational change cannot be achieved within one or two years. For example, the Victorian Employer Enablement Program (VEEP), funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), was developed to engage Health and Community Services employers that had no current disability focus and no employment of people with disability, and support the increased employment of people with disability in this sector.

Four large employers in the health sector, three major public health service providers and one private health service provider, were included. Run by the Australian Network on Disability, VEEP operated between November 2017 and February 2020. In 2020 AND commissioned the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University of Technology (SUT) to undertake an evaluation utilising both secondary data (provided by AND) and primary data (collected via seven interviews with employer representatives and interns, and targeted discussion with AND personnel). Multiple interviewees from participating organisations commented on the scale of change required and the lengthy timeframe required to implement changes. Coupled with changing personnel within organisations, this suggests the need for ongoing support and mentoring, with targeted interventions at key points.





The evaluation found the short-term nature of many funded initiatives, such as VEEP (with a two-year timeframe), are inadequate to cope with the extent of activity required to achieve change outcomes.

“We need to be making a 5 or 10-year plan because we cannot solve 25-year problems with 2-year projects.” (AND online discussion interviewee.)

Q 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?

Recommendation 9: Provide 3 months minimum notice period for any grant variations or extensions

CSOs currently receive insufficient notice of grant variations or extensions to avoid disruption to the provision of grant services and business operations. For example, a CSO which used a grant to provide services to people with disability lost staff as they waited to receive confirmation of an extension to their grant.

The staff were contracted to a government grant, however staff resigned to take on new jobs as they couldn't wait to learn whether the extension was granted. In this instance, they didn't know if the grant would be extended the following week, or if the contract would end and current contracted jobs would be lost. They all provided feedback that this was a critical problem as they wanted to stay in their current roles but were leaving solely due to the uncertainty about the grant extension.

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

Recommendation 10: Build in bi-monthly (every two months) grant meetings with the relevant funding manager to review budget tracking

The setting of grant budgets happens far in advance of actual spend, meaning regular feedback and consultation would better enable CSOs to respond to emerging costs and adjust how funds are spent and recorded in grants reports (Activity Work Plans).





Q 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?

Recommendation 11: Better communication of variations which clearly outlines what change the variation is addressing.

Identifying what change a Deed of Variations is requesting of an organisation is time-consuming, onerous and divert resources from the CSO's core focus to deliver services.

For example, we received a Deed of Variation for one of our grants however we were given no details about what the variation was, so we were required to manually review and compare all the grant documents to identify what the change was, which was a lengthy process.

Area of focus 4. Ensuring grant funding flows to a greater diversity of Community Service Organisations

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

Recommendation 12: Establish Communities of Practice (CoPs) comprising large and small CSOs for knowledge-sharing and mentoring

Currently smaller CSOs possess community relationships and connections, but they may lack the relevant experience, funding, resources or know-how to apply for grants and deliver services. A CoP which formalises the sharing of experience, relationships and best practice could benefit both small and large CSOs.

Area of focus 5. Partnering with trusted community organisations with strong local links





Q5.2 What innovative approaches could be implemented to ensure grant funding reaches trusted community organisations with strong local links?

Recommendation 13: Offer longer grants that allow CSOs to expand successful programs into new markets such as rural and regional centres.

AND launched Connect50 in 2018, a new project funded by Victorian Government. Modelled on the enormous success of AND's Stepping Into internships program, which has placed over 2000 tertiary students with disability into paid internships since its inception in 2005, Connect50 saw businesses across regional Victoria offer paid internships to 50 university and TAFE students by 2020.

The project replicated the success of the Stepping Into Internships project, however it took more than a year just to develop the new relationships in regional Victoria required to successfully implement Connect50. Innovation and the development of relationships in a new regional markets takes time.

Recommendation 14: Establish an expo or virtual community forum.

This should be run by the Department of Social Services – to showcase CSOs outside local communities with trusted services to build connections and strong local links.

Q5.3 Which areas do you consider have duplicative funding or gaps you think need to be addressed, and what is the evidence?

Recommendation 15: Reduce the number of organisations assigned a grant for the same project.

AND is one of 29 organisations to secure funding under an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program - Building Employer Confidence in Disability and Inclusion (BEC) grant from the Department of Social Services. Reducing the number of funding recipients would allow the successful grant recipients to expand their budget, timeframes and deliver greater impact.

Submission summary

Australian Network on Disability has significant experience working with State and Federal governments to manage grants designed to increase the level of workforce participation of people with disability.

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In conclusion, we believe the most effective changes that would contribute to the creation a stronger, more diverse, and independent community sector includes:

- Longer grant agreements
- Broadening funding to cover existing overheads
- Co-designing grants and projects in consultation with CSOs
- Collaborating with CSOs to develop a tendering process which allows CSOs to submit an estimated budget with their application and eliminate the ‘retro-fitting’ of design to match budgets
- Establishing CoPs at the outset of projects to reduce the current ‘siloed’ structure of grant program delivery
- Clearer, detailed communication regarding Deeds of Variations
- Providing a minimum three months’ notice of grant variations and extensions

We thank the Australian Government and the Department of Social Services for the opportunity to provide feedback on the issues paper.

We welcome any further opportunities to consult on specific recommendations related to this submission.

