

Organisation name

Welcoming Australia

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?

A partnership between CSOs and the government that effectively achieves outcomes for Australians supported by the community sector would be characterised by a collaborative and transparent approach. This partnership would involve regular meetings where both parties feel comfortable sharing successes and challenges. Such open communication allows for early course correction when necessary, ensuring that resources and efforts are directed towards achieving positive outcomes for the community.

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?

- **Establish a Paid Advisory Committee:** Creating a paid advisory committee with diverse community representation is pivotal. By compensating community members for their expertise, experiences, and time, the government demonstrates its commitment to valuing their contributions and makes active participation accessible.
- **Value Lived Experience:** Recognise the immense value of lived experiences within the community. Fair compensation not only underscores the importance of these perspectives but also removes financial barriers to participation.
- **Departmental Staff Outreach:** Deploy government staff for community outreach. Their interactions can include town hall meetings, focus groups, and surveys, ensuring a wider cross-section of the community is heard. Proper training in community engagement and cultural sensitivity is essential for effective engagement.
- **Leverage Online Platforms:** Develop user-friendly online platforms for remote participation. Utilize websites, social media, and online surveys to facilitate input from a broader range of stakeholders, including those unable to attend in person.
- **Support for Participation:** Offer practical support for those facing barriers, such as transportation or childcare issues.
- **Translation and Interpretation Services:** To overcome language and cultural barriers, provide translation and interpretation services to ensure inclusivity and equitable involvement.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Adequate and flexible funding for community sector organisations should ideally prioritise outcome-based funding, enabling organisations to budget according to the anticipated impact and quality of their work. It should also allow room for cost adjustments that incorporate inflation and wage indexation increases. Consistency in building these considerations into funding models is crucial to sustain effective community sector operations and address evolving needs while minimising administrative burdens and fostering long-term sustainability and accountability. Additionally, fostering transparency, engagement with stakeholders, and adaptability to changing community requirements are key components of an ideal funding framework.

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

Rising operational costs are significantly impacting the delivery of community services. Service providers are often compelled to reduce staffing levels to manage costs, which, in turn, compromises the quality of services and contributes to burnout among sector workers. This budgetary constraint underscores the critical need for sustainable funding solutions in the community service sector to ensure continued quality and effectiveness of services.

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?

Collaboration between CSOs and the department is essential to determine where funds are needed most for equitable and responsive distribution. Co-designing program delivery and incorporating community voices are key strategies to ensure that support and funding are directed where they are most needed, thereby enhancing the effective and responsive allocation of resources. This approach promotes

inclusivity, responsiveness, and a more equitable distribution of funds to address the pressing needs within the community.

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

To streamline reporting requirements and alleviate administrative burdens on CSOs, the government can consider implementing a unified reporting system across various government programs. The significant administrative burden that comes from the utilisation of different reporting templates and systems across programs and funding bodies often requires data to be processed in multiple ways. A potential solution lies in co-designing data reporting systems with CSOs, creating a collaborative approach that ensures efficiency, consistency, and reduced administrative workload, ultimately benefiting both government agencies and the organisations they fund.

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?

To ensure effective management of 3-year grants, the government should target a minimum notification period of 6 months before the grant's expiration date for final outcomes on grant variations or extensions. In the case of shorter-term grants, like 1-year grants, the government should provide final decisions on grant variations or extensions with a minimum lead time of 1 to 2 months before the grant concludes.

Providing ample notice of grant variations or extensions ensures that organisations have the opportunity to retain essential staff. Losing key personnel due to uncertain funding can disrupt project continuity and hinder successful outcomes.

Continuing funding while awaiting the evaluation report and business case for further funding prevents project interruptions and contributes to program stability.

Grant administrators should rely on ongoing project monitoring, conducted throughout the grant period, to inform decisions regarding variations/extensions. This data provides valuable insights into the project's success, allowing for informed, timely grant-related decisions.

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

CSOs require funding flexibility to enhance service delivery and foster innovation. This includes increasing the operational costs within grants to 20%, minimising administrative burden and allowing responsive program design. Moreover, fostering trust between governments and CSOs will empower these organisations to navigate service delivery and innovation with confidence and sustainability.

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

To ensure opportunities for new and emerging organisations to access funding while maintaining a balanced dynamic, it is essential to promote collaborative relationships with larger organisations that respect each other's unique strengths. Smaller, community-based organisations excel in grassroots recruitment and community engagement, while larger organisations bring governance expertise and resources. Encouraging partnerships where smaller organisations take the lead in grant applications and delivery, supported by larger organisations, can rebalance power dynamics and provide new organisations with the necessary resources and mentorship, fostering an environment of collaboration rather than gatekeeping.

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

Larger CSOs can support smaller CSOs through mentorship, resource sharing, networking, and advocacy efforts. It's crucial to avoid acting as gatekeepers and recognise that empowering smaller organisations is vital. In the context of competitive grant applications and sector power dynamics, equitable partnerships can be fostered by allowing smaller CSOs to take the lead in grant applications. Barriers to this support include concerns about power imbalances, competition for limited resources, potential dependency, resource constraints, and the need to build trust between organisations. Overcoming these barriers necessitates transparent and inclusive collaboration, respecting the autonomy of smaller CSOs, and continually reassessing support mechanisms to align with their needs and aspirations.

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

Place-based funding approaches are effective in providing smaller CSOs with opportunities to address localised challenges. These funding models allocate resources to organisations best positioned to tackle specific issues within a particular area. However, it's essential to recognise that place-based funding may not be suitable for addressing nationwide or broader issues.

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

A decade of suspicion and top-down approaches should be replaced with a philosophy of assuming the best in people and fostering collaboration. To achieve this, the focus should move away from a 'bigger is better' policy to one that prioritises community engagement and agency. The emphasis should be on building consortiums that incorporate local organisations and voices representing diverse stakeholders and experiences. This shift toward inclusivity and genuine understanding of community needs can lead to more effective and responsive grant funding allocation, ultimately strengthening the connections between trusted community organisations and the communities they serve.