

Questions 1. Giving the sector the voice and respect it deserves through a meaningful working partnership

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

Answer(s)

1.2 CSOs and government can streamline the sharing of information by:

- Simplifying DEX reporting requirements (eg. by paring back compulsory questions and/or providing step by step guidance from within the platform rather than through external protocols and user guides). (Please see also 3.5).
- Reducing personal information collected about clients to encourage greater participation (eg. only requiring key, unidentifiable info such as employment status, etc.). Furthermore clients in our program articulated that personal information requests felt invasive and perpetuated feelings of isolation and difference. This led to participants and their support teams refusing involvement in DEX reporting and limiting our capacity to provide a full assessment of the impact of our program.
- Allowing organisations access to back end analytics that demonstrate changes in data over time.
- Customising CSO reporting according to the specificities of the organisation with regard to structures, activities and resources. Reporting requirements are not scaled for organisation size - for grants to be accessible to a wider range of CSO's, services users and those without access to services, a scaling of reporting requirements should be employed. For example a large organisation with established administrative teams dedicated to administering and reporting to grant requirements have greater capacity to deliver the DSS grants as currently structured in comparison to smaller community-based organisations where administrative teams are smaller and less specialised. In this situation smaller organisations are disproportionately impacted by grant administration requirements, requiring greater resources and limiting resources available for project delivery. (Please see 3.4).
- Amending DEX reporting system to include non-binary gender identification as it currently excludes diverse gender identification.
- Allowing for minor updates to be made to the Activity Work Plan over time. This would better acknowledge the importance of client and community-informed iteration in program design and delivery.

1.3 Governments can ensure CSO, service users and those without access to services can have an opportunity to contribute to program design without imposing significant burdens by:

- Simplification of all communications is required for government support to be accessible. Current systems and structures have proved inaccessible, highly complex and prohibit engagement from many targeted cohorts.
- Providing greater support for grant recipients. Support for grant applications and administration is inconsistent and does not comprehensively address all elements of the application, administration and delivery of grants. Participatory design should be

undertaken in the development of adequate supports to enable a wider range of services to access these valuable resources. For example, DEX support provides purely technical explanation, and Funding Arrangement Managers are unable to provide any advice about DEX, resulting in a large gap in the use of DEX in retrieving accurate and valuable information about participant experience and growth. In the delivery of our grant we had to employ an additional staff member to manage the DEX reporting requirements. When reviewing feedback on project reporting through DEX with Funding Arrangement Managers, they were not able to articulate clearly what the required solutions were to any shortfalls in information, which led to additional administrative effort aligning the incongruent feedback received with the DEX system. DEX Information Sessions contained a large amount of assumed knowledge, and did not allow service customization options. Many participants in the DEX information sessions were regular recipients and articulated ongoing technical and logistical barriers within DEX.

- Consultation from diverse stakeholders, including participants and service organisation from a range of sizes and situations, should be pursued in the re-design of application, administration and delivery requirements of the government grants, and consultants should be paid for their service.

2. Providing grants that reflect the real cost of delivering quality services

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like? 2.2 What administrative and overhead costs are not being considered in current grant funding? 2.3 How are rising operational costs impacting the delivery of community services? 2.4 What have been your experiences with, and reflections on, the supplementation and change to indexation? 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? 2.6 How can government streamline reporting requirements, including across multiple grants, to reduce administrative burden on CSOs?

Answer(s)

2.1 Adequate and flexible funding would look like:

- Additional funding allocated to evaluation - or simplified evaluation process, that is scaled appropriately to the size of the organisation.

3. Providing longer grant agreement terms

3.1 What length grant agreements are CSOs seeking to provide certainty and stability for ongoing service delivery? 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? 3.3 What funding flexibility do CSOs require to enable service delivery and innovation? 3.4 What flexibility is required by CSOs in acquittal processes to support and encourage sector innovation? 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?

Answer(s)

3.4 More flexibility is required by organisations using DEX. DEX domains are often too general and thus are not useful for accurate measurement of outcomes. While it is possible to choose only the domains that suit the organisation and its processes, flexibility to input own questions, or choose from a wider variety of questions, would better encourage sector innovation. This flexibility would also allow for clearer links to be established between the Activity Work Plan and DEX data.

3.5 Simplification of reporting tools and requirements would improve funding systems.

Suggested improvements to DEX include:

- Streamlining the reporting process by ensuring that compulsory fields are signposted and easy to find. For example, some compulsory fields in DEX, such as referral information, are very difficult to find and cannot be accessed from one central point.
- Allowing multiple outlets to be added to a single case, such that the 'story' of a case may be more easily understood and tracked through geographical data.
- Where a client is part of multiple cases, provide the option for client scores to carry over into each case.

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

4.1 How can the government ensure opportunities are available for new and emerging organisations to access funding? 4.2 What programs, supports and information are already available for smaller CSOs to help build capacity of the organisation? Are these working? 4.3 How could larger CSOs support smaller CSOs? What are the barriers to providing this support?

Answer(s)

4.1 Fulfilling strict reporting requirements is time consuming, such that new and emerging organisations with limited resources are unlikely to be able to access funding. More flexibility on reporting is required to assist new organisations to flourish. Reporting requirements should be customised to the organisation at hand, based on a fair assessment of the organisation's size and capacity.

4.3 Larger CSOs could support smaller CSOs by providing guidance on their grant seeking, applying, reporting and acquitting processes. The main barrier to providing this support is that there are no formalised methods for finding and connecting with other grant holders. Furthermore due to confidentiality and being time-poor Funding Arrangement Managers have proved disinclined to share information about other grant recipients. The government has the capacity to facilitate a partnership model that would support the administration of grants by dedicating grant funds towards experienced/large organisations, providing administrative, evaluative or general support to new, emerging or smaller organisations. By facilitating this the government would alleviate much of the administrative burden on new/small/emerging organisations. Support could include, sharing of example evaluation systems working in-line with DEX, providing advice about interpretation of requests contained within activity work plan and financial acquittal requirements as well as general technical support navigating online systems and providing an in-person support option where a lot of current supports are provided online.

5. Partnering with trusted community organisations with strong local links

5.1 What is your experience with and reflections on place-based funding approaches? 5.2 What innovative approaches could be implemented to ensure grant funding reaches trusted community organisations with strong local links? 5.3 Which areas do you consider have duplicative funding or gaps you think need to be addressed, and what is the evidence? 5.4 Where there is a community-led change initiative, could shared accountability to community and funders (government) strengthen service delivery?

6. General questions for each focus area

6.1 If any, what are the problems or challenges you think have been overlooked? 6.2 What other solutions or changes could also be considered? 6.3 What does success look like?

Answer(s)

6.1 Overall, reporting systems don't adequately reflect the complexity and diversity of target communities. Case studies have proved the most beneficial evaluative process provided. Context is thoroughly overlooked through the use of DEX with low SCOREs reflecting poorly on the program delivery, where in actuality a client has been dealing with personal disaster or complications. Furthermore the purpose and use of DEX is not disclosed to service organisations posing an ethical concern about informed consent.

6.2 The current system perpetuates a sense of divisions between grantor and grantee. The lack of clarification or explanation available from Funding Arrangement Managers, to interpret, give context or help develop solutions where incompatibilities occur to the requirements outlined by the grantor. Thus the power imbalance and high standard for reporting invoke a distrust between the grantor and the grantee. This is further exacerbated by the extensive reporting requirements at frequent intervals. A solution to this would be reframing the appointment of grants as a partnership to address a shared area of concern. In this context, the grantee and grantor would share the responsibility of developing activity work plans, agreeing on achievable and clear outcomes and outputs, and considering where opportunities for shared resources throughout the community could be accessed. This would also garner a deeper understanding of the motivation behind such extensive reporting from the grantee, and facilitate smoother reporting processes.