

7 November 2023

Community Sector Public consultation  
Community Cohesion Branch  
Department of Social Services  
GPO Box 9820  
Canberra, ACT 2601

## Submission to the consultation on a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector

Dear Secretariat,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the government's election commitment for a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector.

This submission focuses on Area of Focus 3: Providing longer grant agreement terms and Area of Focus 5: Partnering with trusted community organisations with strong local links.

### About Western Sydney Women

Western Sydney Women (WSW) is a social enterprise committed to advocating for all girls and women from the Inner West, Greater West, North West and South West of Sydney to become economically independent and confident.

We provide free programs, workshops and events to develop professional skills for every stage of their career, small business, help gain financial literacy and independence, and find personal growth and confidence.

Western Sydney Women was founded in 2015 with a mission to give the women of Western Sydney a voice, and the same opportunities as the wider Sydney community.

We advocate on behalf of our women in business, media and government and regularly survey women in Western Sydney to capture their needs and concerns. We partner with local businesses and organisations who are also committed to creating positive change and empowering the Women of Western Sydney to thrive.

## Introduction

Western Sydney Women is a social enterprise operating within the community space, adjacent to community sector organisations. Many of our programs have been developed with the support of government funding and we have successfully commercialised several of our programs with the aim of continuing to bring positive change to girls and women in Western Sydney. With this in mind, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

## Area of focus 3: Providing longer grant agreement terms

### Challenges

Longer grant terms provide stability, not just for providers but also for participants and the community. As a social enterprise working adjacent to the non-profit community sector, Western Sydney Women has successfully launched numerous projects under federal and state funding. A key challenge we continually face is the uncertainty of funding renewal, delays between program completion and tendering opportunities and constantly changing tender requirements, all of which contribute to an increase in cost and time. With each round of tender, these costs are magnified.

Insufficient feedback between each round of tendering is a barrier for organisations to effectively redevelop programs in order to secure additional funding. For community organisations who wish to commercialise community activities to support the ongoing rollout of programs, there is a lack of support and access to the skills and knowledge to take on this specific challenge.

The lack of synergies across providers can also be a barrier for ongoing collaboration for the delivery of grants and tenders. As a trusted local organisation with a proven track record for delivery, we are often approached by organisations to assist in the delivery of their program, however on further discussions, there is an unwillingness to cover our costs for assisting them. Often these organisations have been awarded substantial funding and therefore could support compensation to cover our costs. Additionally, we are nominated as a delivery partner on grant tender documents without any notice or permission. This is done with no intention from the organisation to follow through on subcontracting our organisation in their tender delivery.

### Recommendations

Western Sydney Women support the following recommendations:

1. Longer grant agreement cycle.
2. Subcontracting to support locally-led delivery. We recommend including a requirement for providers to collaborate and subcontract with smaller organisations.

The above recommendations would significantly enrich the process and increase participation of smaller providers who have strong local ties to the community, and allow for increased cross-collaboration across the sector.

We recommend additional funding to support advisory services for commercial strategic assistance to the community services sector. The advisory service supports the engagement of trusted sources with a proven track record in the delivery of commercially sustainable programs. Advisory services should be provided to all organisations successful in securing grant funding.

For example, Western Sydney Women secured funding through the Australian Government Women's Development and Leadership Program and created multiple programs, one of which is our Future is Bright program. With partnership support, we have since commercialised our Future is Bright program, resulting in over 120 high school girls successfully completing the program in the year after the grant funding ended.

As part of the commercialisation of suitable projects, Western Sydney Women also suggest the implementation of specialised tenders where funding can be scaled to support the commercialisation of the program.

For example, in year one funding is 500k, in year two funding is 400k and in year three funding is 250k. This would provide organisations with the opportunity to pilot the program based on grant funding and the opportunity to secure additional sources of funding, for example, partnerships or sponsorships to support the commercialisation of the program. This would go hand-in-hand with support from advisors to ensure that the project is supported to be sustainable.

## Questions

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

- 3 years.

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?

- 6 months.

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

- CSOs require the ability to be agile to be able to divert funds and adapt programs based on what's working and what's not working. Resources for organisations to link the end of their program to the beginning of another organisation's program would be beneficial in ensuring continuity of care for participants. Additional funding could be made available to encourage long-term follow-up of participants to track program outcomes.

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

### Challenges

As an organisation that focuses on place-based activities, Western Sydney Women has strong ties to the community. As such, our programs and events are focused on the needs of women in the different areas across Western Sydney.

The challenge we've faced with traditional government programs is the lack of flexibility throughout the duration of the program to make adaptations as needed to support the local community in which the program is held.

Accessing flexible place-based funding would allow us to identify key areas of need in our community and tailor programs based on need. As an example, we know the needs of women in Parramatta are different to women in Liverpool, and again, different to women living in the Hills district.

### Recommendations

We support the implementation of place-based funding and suggest that these grants and tenders are also made available to community organisations outside of the non-profit sector.

With Western Sydney being a large geographical area, we would take the opportunity to deliver programs to specific communities with specialised needs. We have strong local ties across Western Sydney, and as a result, we have strong support from our community and high levels of engagement in our programs.

With the implementation of place-based funding, we recommend that organisations delivering these programs connect with and subcontract to local providers. We have implemented this successfully in several programs and this also provides local providers with the opportunity to implement similar programs at a micro level moving forward.

Community-led initiatives and feedback are essential for the success of place-based programs. We recommend that providers of place-based programs consider the need for regular feedback and consultation with community members. Western Sydney Women have developed a yearly research project to better understand the needs of our community, with data on specific needs by postcode to enable us to better understand the areas we work in and develop local projects.

## Questions

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

- Through our place-based programs, we connect participants to employers and providers in the area. Place-based programs support participants who have travel restrictions.

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

- Approaches that audit grant winners and their relationships with others and ensure local organisations named in grant applications are actually utilised.

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

- Organisations that purely rely on grant funding are often reluctant to collaborate with other organisations. The government could bring in advisors to encourage collaboration. We've had our programs replicated and delivered with sub-optimal results due to a lack of understanding of the work required to achieve similar outcomes, which leads to a duplication of programs that are less effective.

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

- Share accountability to community and funders would have have potential to strengthen service delivery by ensuring that promised tender outcomes are met or adapted to meet community needs.

## Conclusion

The extension of grant agreement terms is crucial to ensuring the longevity and success of programs. With that said, we recommend that longer agreements include requirements for collaboration and sub-contracting to ensure that smaller community organisations have access to opportunities.

As a community organisation with a track record of successfully creating sustainable and commercially viable programs that benefit our community, we recommend that advice and support be provided to organisations who wish to ensure their programs are viable long-term. As part of this support, we recommend that specialised programs with scaled funding be made available to allow organisations to develop programs that can be continued beyond government funding support.

We agree that place-based funding is important to better serve the needs of local communities. As an organisation that focuses on place-based activities, Western Sydney Women recognises that

even within our own area, there are specific needs within localities and suburbs. We encourage and support the need for collaboration with local providers.

We look forward to the development of a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector and the continuing discussion around developing sustainable practices in the community sector.

For enquiries please contact [admin@westernsydneywomen.com.au](mailto:admin@westernsydneywomen.com.au).



Founder

Western Sydney Women

