

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 that effectively achieves outcomes for Australians might look like the following:

- Clear Objectives and well-defined common goals that address specific social issues or challenges, such as poverty reduction, mental health support, education, or environmental conservation.
- Open, regular and transparent communication between CSOs and government agencies is crucial. This could involve meetings, working groups, and platforms for sharing information, updates, and feedback.
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each partner are essential to ensure efficient collaboration and resource allocation. CSOs bring community expertise and highlight specific needs that must be met, while the government can provide funding, policy support, and resources.
- CSOs should be actively involved in the development of policies and regulations that affect the community sector. Government agencies should engage with CSOs to gather input and insights when formulating policies.
- Collaboration on data collection, analysis, and research can provide a solid foundation for evidence-based decision-making, especially when deciding when and where funding is to be rolled out and to what value. The partnership should actively involve and engage the communities it serves.
- Flexibility and adaptability to change to the emerging need of the community without lengthy variation processes. This can take months!
- Sustainability and long-term success of the community sector should be the ultimate goal. How can the Government support CSOs build capacity or support collaboration and the sharing of best practice?

A successful partnership between CSOs and the government in the context of supporting the community sector should be built on trust, shared values, and a commitment to the well-being of Australians. It should leverage the strengths of both sectors to achieve positive outcomes for the community, addressing a range of social and welfare challenges.

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?

Suggestions to improve the streamlining of information include:

- Create a dedicated platform or portal that serves as a central hub for information sharing between CSOs and government agencies.
- Implement standardised data formats and protocols for sharing information to ensure compatibility and consistency.
- Promote interoperability between CSOs' and government agencies' systems, allowing them to exchange data seamlessly.
- Encourage open data initiatives that make non-sensitive information available to the CSOs. This promotes transparency and enables CSOs to access valuable data for analysis and advocacy.
- Utilise collaborative tools and software such as project management platforms, document sharing services, and communication tools to facilitate real-time collaboration and information sharing among stakeholders.
- Develop data dashboards that provide a visual representation of key metrics, trends, and outcomes.
- Create mobile apps that allow field workers, volunteers, and community members to collect and share data more easily.
- Implement feedback mechanisms for CSOs to provide input on data needs and usability of government systems, allowing for ongoing improvements.

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?

Suggestions to improve contribution to program design:

- Use a variety of communication channels to reach a wide audience. This may include social media, community meetings, email, and local media. Ensure that information is available in multiple languages and formats to reach diverse populations.
- Partner with local CSOs to help facilitate engagement and gather input from their members or clients.
- Create user-friendly surveys and questionnaires that can be completed online or in print. Ensure that all written materials are presented in plain language and are available in multiple languages to accommodate diverse language needs.
- Conduct focus groups and workshops with various stakeholders, including service users, to delve deeper into specific issues and gain qualitative insights into specific place-based issues.
- Ensure that the venues, materials, and methods used for engagement are accessible to people with disabilities. This includes providing sign language interpreters, accessible documents, and accessible online platforms.
- Tailor outreach efforts to specific demographic groups and communities to address their unique needs and challenges.
- Continue to fund the Community Navigators who engage directly with hard-to-reach populations, building trust and facilitating community access and participation.
- Consider offering small incentives or compensation for participants' time and efforts, especially for those

who may be facing financial or logistical barriers to participation.
Set up clear and user-friendly channels for ongoing feedback.
Implement co-design approaches where community members actively participate in program design, development, and decision-making processes. This is standard practice for ██████ when designing new services.
Keep the community informed about how their feedback is being used and the progress of programs or policies resulting from their contributions.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Funding should cover the full cost of delivering programs. Many organisations like ██████ run multiple programs and quite often the funding for those programs is insufficient to fully fund them. An example of this is ██████ has recently handed back one of our Skilling Queenslanders for Work programs, WorkSkills Traineeships, as the full cost of delivery of the program would have cost us an additional \$80+k.
Create an opportunity for providers that find savings in their delivery to keep the saved proportion of the grant to redirect to other services that may or may not be within the original grant scope. We suggest capping this at between 3 and 5%. Having an opportunity to redirect an "Efficiency Dividend" would assist countless CBOs continue to make a bigger difference on the ground and fund those services not covered by other funding streams.
Create a mechanism where grant delivery is indexed to the provider's KPI achievement with full achievement supporting a payment already incorporated into the budget as payable to CSO but does not need to be acquitted as an expense.
Outcome-Based Funding: Funding models that tie funding to outcomes and impact can be effective, as they incentivise organisations to deliver results and demonstrate accountability. This would allow CSOs to convert the standard grant arrangement into per person revenue model. EG if a provider says they will support 1000 people for \$1,000 each and they achieve this and all the associated goals, they should be able to invoice the Department for the full \$1m instead of acquitting against expenses incurred.
Long-term Commitment: Adequate funding must be provided over multiple years rather than on a short-term basis
Flexibility to move funding between line items would enable CSOs to adapt to changing circumstances. These changes can take months to process.
Including contingency funds within funding agreements allows organisations to respond to unforeseen circumstances or emergencies.

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

The biggest challenge here is the change from special purpose to general purpose accounting which has changed the way we are able to acquit our costs.

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

Not all grants are indexed the way DSS operates. For many, we estimate the cost increases we will incur through Fair work and inflation and apply these to our budget for the next year. If there is a significant variance to what we projected, then that is a cost we have to wear.

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

We have had a very positive experience with this. The fact that indexation is applied automatically is great, but we would like to see improved timing around its processing. We have just received ours 4 months into the contract, reducing the time we have to expend it.

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?

A great example of this in action is Social Shift and the Department working with the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre who assists in vetting projects that have the potential to make a real local difference.

Collaborating with organisations such as the HBNC prevents decisions about local projects being solely made from afar by people that have no knowledge of what is happening locally. The ability to apply a local lense to project approval is essential in making sure place-based projects are successful.

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

I find the reporting system we use with DSS is simple and not cumbersome. A predetermined reporting schedule is agreed at contract start and delivered twice yearly. Monthly catch ups with our Contract Manager also allow us to keep DSS informed of any deviations.

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

For a program to deliver effective outcomes and offer job security, a contract should be 3 to 5 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?

This needs to be agreed a minimum of 6 months prior to cessation.

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

If a service improvement is identified and requires additional funding to implement, this can be a barrier to realising these improvements. To combat this, it would be good to see a line item allowed in the budget that recognises this and quarantines a designated value just for innovation and such improvements. This way the provider can be actively encouraged to seek service improvements without incurring the cost of them off their bottom line.

With this in mind I would also like to see the Department set up opportunities for providers to share what they are working on and how they are doing it so others may benefit from it.

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

The biggest issue facing providers reliant on grants and tenders is that profit is not an acquittal expense. Those that work in community services do not do it for the money, we do it because we want to make a difference and support others make positive change.

We are not looking to make millions, we are looking to make enough that when the rainy day comes, which is here now, that there is enough in the bank to sustain the organisation. The current acquittal process dictates that revenue can only be recognised once it has been expensed, this leaves no option for tenderers to make money.

Please see Section 1 for our suggestion on how this process can be improved.

Providers need increased flexibility to move funding between line items whilst staying with in the agreed funding amount.

Additionally, having to move from special purpose accounting to general purpose accounting has made a massive difference (negative) in the way we are allowed to acquit expenses.

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?

The process to apply for a variation is very simple the issue lies with the timing of its execution. When we initially commenced our ██████████ program, a service area was missing from the agreement. It took 4 months to have that amended. We were not looking for extra funding but simply have another service area added. This naturally impacted on us delivering the desired outcomes to this region.

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

I believe the current tendering process is open and fair and if a new or emerging company has the better tender or idea on the day, then they deserve to win.

Other than quarantining funding specifically for organisations younger than 12 months, I do not think it would be fair to give these an uplift/ increased rating as part of the normal tender process.

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

Our experience is that the smaller ones reach out to the established ones for help and guidance and where we can, we help ...

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

As an established organisation we regularly "give back" and share our experiences and "how to" with other organisations as we firmly believe you get more by giving.

I think it would be a great idea to formalise a program that actively promotes this. As an example, ██████████ shares its tendering and grant writing techniques with many other smaller organisations and often helps

critique tenders before they are submitted.

Based on our own experiences, we have also developed a Not for Profit health check to support other organisations rate the areas of their business that need immediate attention. This has been trialled with great success with several organisations.

If this is an area the Department is keen to promote, we would very much like a seat at the table when designing this process/ project.

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

Although we can categorise need into several distinct areas (homelessness, isolation etc), we know that different regions experience this need in different levels. Organisations that are on the ground everyday providing essential supports are the ones that are best placed to advise on what supports need attention now and the ones that are emerging.

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

The project happening in the Hinkler electorate under "Social Shift" administered through the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre is an excellent example of this in practice. A known, respected, trusted and local organisation able to vet applications for that area before being submitted to the Department for approval.

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

Based on our environmental scan the areas we would like to see addressed include:

1. CSO Mental health programs to assist stabilise and support people with poor mental wellness whilst waiting for clinical support due to the increased waiting times for clinical support
2. Continuation of the Community Navigators funding – we have seen immense success in supporting community members access supports they never knew existed and where necessary provide a warm introduction.
3. CV writing – our ██████████ program is supporting hundreds of people write a CV as many clients have never needed one before or even written one.
4. NDIS application writing: There needs to be increased support to assist people understand exactly what evidence they need to collect and how it needs to be presented to submit a quality application for NDIS support.
5. Social Enterprise support: Social Enterprises are the perfect vehicle to support people with barriers to employment realise their strengths and "Workworthiness". A program to support this would not only provide a pathway to employment for disadvantaged community members, it would also help strengthen the Social Enterprise sector.
6. Social prescription has been used effectively and successfully by many countries for decades to assist with reducing isolation and improving connection to community. Given the increased reports in the levels of loneliness and its link to poor mental health outcomes, I think the Department would do well to consider funding programs that reduce isolation and improve overall mental wellness.

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

Yes, please see answer to 5.2

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

One of the areas we have struggled with is getting quality feedback on our unsuccessful submissions.

With a focus on delivering place-based solutions, there needs to be a more streamlined approach in how CSOs can present pilot ideas for funding consideration.

6.2 What other solutions or changes could also be considered?

Introduce a mechanism which extends initiatives that have achieved their outcomes. Too often CSOs develop amazing initiatives that combat disadvantage in different ways, and these just fall by the wayside once the funding ceases.

6.3 What does success look like?

Success could look like:

A system which actively supports CSOs deliver on their vision and mission which ultimately results in our clients becoming active, contributing members of society and able to live their best possible life.

A CSO sector that is thriving and not just surviving.

The ability to meet need where it is needed when it is needed.

A system which recognises that quality professional community services require the appropriate levels of funding.

A collaborative approach to need identification and codesigned solutions.