Organisation name

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Email

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

Partnerships between CSOs and Government should be directly linked to real outcomes, in a Community Sector framework that itself is easy to understand and navigate by the majority of the community.

The community should to be able to access services in line to meet needs at the right time, so it is important to know what help there is and how to get it. This includes everything from 24/7 help such as helplines, shelters etc right through to detailed case or clinical management.

CSOs are traditionally set up ad hoc based on locally based needs or personal experience (eg affected by cancer, or sudden death) which make for a confusing and at times misleading architecture. Services are easily be duplicated locally as individuals consider they have an element of 'unique', but also provided by levels of government. For the community there is no clear indication of what the difference is between each and which they should approach.

Partnership is contributing resources or expertise to work symbiotically; Government has data/statistics detailed knowledge of identified needs/gaps, funds & resources, governance expertise, reporting methodologies, compliance setting and evaluation. CSOs bring experience, qualified personnel, grass roots knowledge, delivery and operational expertise to meet the identified needs or fill gaps resourced by the strengths brought by Government. The delineation should be clear on who does what and how that is measured.

A strong sector is where Government invest in the experts on the ground and provide supports in good management, governance and compliance and CSOs deliver on the objectives in a transparent and open way.

Currently there is a trend in CSO and Government for activities and expenditure to be presented as success stories but not report in a meaningful way. Annual reports have become more a glossy brochure rather than a report to members and the accountability of public monies.

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?

Sharing information is compromised by CSO's having insufficient confidence in the system (where does the data go and how is it used) and in each other.

The current competitive model of funding contributes to these well-founded attitudes. Each CSO is vying to be sustainable, sharing information is in the interests of the community sector but not necessarily individual CSOs, particularly vulnerable are small CSOs.

Making data sharing compulsory (which to some degree exists already) only means organisations will come up with creative ways to answer the question but not give away more than is absolutely necessary. This could lead to false reporting and misleading trends.

This presents a complex conflict of interest to resolve, and competition to be managed in a way that it is no longer a threat to an organisations survival.

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?

Government: Generally, it is observed that Governments use peak bodies, committees, consultative committees key advisories. How well any of these are connected to grass roots work or have raw data to rely on is varied, many rely on surveys; a rather unreliable way of gathering data across the community.

It is important that advice on systems and design include consumers as well as relevant workers; due consideration is needed on how to allow consumers to engage and for employers costs in releasing workers and cover the down time.

Service users: It is unrealistic to consider service users can contribute to a design when they don't have a full understanding of the architecture and operations of the community sector.

It is fair to say a feedback, compliments and complaints systems are already in place and can help improve design. Faith in the system is low; consumers believe complaints are just dismissed and nothing changes - an opportunity lost. The feedback systems should be improved to incorporate the feedback good or bad and communicate the actions and decisions that show accountability.

Community consultations another common method; where an understanding of the system is fundamental to engaging meaningfully and not feel foolish in making a suggestion that may not be realistic. Communicating final outcomes knowing how their input was used, making some recognition in the final documents could help future engagement. Remuneration should be considered.

Workers: As a new organisation ten years ago, it was surprising to find many workers in the sector don't understand the architecture or the actual mechanics of operations. This is key to successful co-design; a limited scope of the immediate experiences of a worker in a silo environment without seeing the bigger picture is limited in input. Support to the employer (cover costs and down time) to allow release of workers could expand the diversity of participants.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Adequate and proper funding should be proportionate to meet supply against demand. Organisations need to have adequate funding to cover all core service and operational costs with flexibility to expand to meet growing or changing needs.

There needs to be proper costing of operations (just like a business), if there is a reliance on volunteers or workers being overworked to achieve core objectives then that is not adequate funding.

There is an over reliance on volunteers for essential activities - an indicator that the funding is lacking or the organisation is overreaching. CSOs diverting activity to fundraising, donations and promotions deducts from the core activities of service delivery, this could be a measure or KPI as to the level of additional funds needed to meet objectives.

Flexible funding should not be limited to funding existing organisations to deliver in new areas that are not part of their core activities. The reality is the head contractor often scours other CSOs to deliver; losing sight of outcomes. The question of how a CSO can claim to meet all the outputs when they haven't got outsourcing agreements in place should be part of the evaluation.

All levels of government have plans and strategies across community need areas; many increasingly integrated; the next logical step is for funding to be integrated and aligned with those strategies.

All Government funding should be free from political bias, open and transparent. A discretion by the Minister should be an exception and not the rule. There should be NO donations allowed by charitable organisations that receive even a $1 in government support (financial or in-kind) to any political campaign, sitting member or candidate; nor host politicians towards an upcoming election.

Charities that do not receive Government support and do donate should be made to publish their donations immediately including the holding of an event within two months of any election.

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

Professional Development: Keeping trained staff that have contemporary knowledge is essential to be effective, in many professions constant professional development is mandatory for accreditations/registrations.
This can be a significant cost which employers no longer sponsor or fund, placing the burden on the individual worker to bear the costs. Between individual insurances and registration fees costs are in the 000's, bringing down in real terms the income of the employee. CSOs expect workers to be compliant and current so they themselves are compliant, so this is a cost that should be considered in grant funding.

Fair remuneration: Smaller or project based funds such as COVID-19 grants, allowed little to no funding for staff, overheads, facilities or operational costs; all fundamental to run any project. For organisations that are funded; using existing funds to deliver a third party project technically is misappropriation. For non funded or community groups, this places the onus on delivering the project using volunteers who pay for essentials themselves. Government objectives through a grant cannot be done without staff and overheads. If a business did the same thing and used volunteers to run essential aspects of their activities and expect them to cover costs of doing it themselves, it would be a serious breach of employment laws.

Timing of grants, where quotes or costs are taken at the time of application, the implementation following agreements may be months later – when costs have changed. This should be reviewed or indexed at the time of agreement/implementation.

Volunteer Reliance: Most CSOs are including volunteers as part of their core activities, volunteering should be by choice and to capacity; if it is essential to operations that is a remunerable role and in the budget. Volunteers in place of paid workers is essentially pushing towards wages theft and does not truly reflect sector's real cost of doing business.

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

Rising operational costs are leading to reductions in delivery; whether by reducing workforce or hours for each worker. It has an impact of looking to use more volunteers to cover essential duties.

Many CSOs are redirecting funds to marketing and promotion which in itself is not core to operations but felt to be necessary to draw donations or sponsorships.

The irony is that while CSOs promote themselves for the purpose of attracting funds, they are also advertising their services (and successes) to the community; raising perceptions of having capacity to service a greater demand.

With more people turning to community sector, most organisations have already had cut offs with no ability to extend capacity. It is misleading to have campaigns that source funds but at the same time limit client intake. Cost of living is a causal effect in this situation.

CSOs traditionally emerge from passionate and good willed people, experts in social work, however many have trained to manage funds and budgets. There are many examples of NFPs paying well over the odds for basic equipment and operational needs. Suppliers know it's government funding and will price accordingly. Not many workers consider negotiation with a supplier as they are used to grant agreements which are inflexible and have no option to negotiate. This adds to the cost of operational costs and impacts delivery.

Mid to large organisations are increasingly growing top heavy structures to be more corporate; money is diverted to higher salaries to attract corporate staff. At the same time, bottom tiers of workers are on low wages and supplemented by volunteers. The costs of corporate structures directly deducts from delivery and staff on the front line getting burnt out and leaving. Some times this leave entire programs suspended.

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

Nil response.

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?

Listen to the experts who have been advocating for years and the community members who try and tell departments or Politicians. A lack of advocacy skills should not be an impediment to being heard, ordinary people and most CSOs do not have the time or skills to lobby Government on a permanent basis.

The community only come to speak when they are in need, nobody takes the time if they don't have a need.

In a recent case it took two years to speak to a State Department on the lack of support in a critical area across two LGAs; At the first meeting the response was to basically dismiss the concerns stating in their opinion the support was considered to be sufficient.

Perhaps a hierarchy of approach pathways in departments through Local, State and Federal would be a better way to determine where funds are needed, for the community to use.

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

Develop frameworks of reporting that are meaningful and can drill down to the local level.

Reporting across the year is problematic; using a common calendar in grant agreements would be an improvement. A contract in April that don't start until August but finishes in Jan the following FY is confusing and complex across multiple FYs. It adds extra work in managing the budgets, end of year

reporting, auditing and keeping track.

Start at the FY and end at FY would be logical or even Jan - Dec as operating environments are quieter in the CSO space across end of Dec and mid Jan.

Have one reporting portal.

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

The questions in Section Three cannot be a one glove fits all. Each individual service type and model needs to have a framework that is fit for purpose.
For example COVID related grants were never going to be long term, so do not need long agreements.

Services that are ongoing such as DFV support, mental health, etc are always going to be needed and within each discipline there has to be a framework that allows for stable service delivery (long grants), targeted outcomes (mid range) and pilots (short term) and research (variable).

Within each discipline workers and CSO's need a sustainable employment pathway, development and growth as well as succession planning.

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

It would greatly assist new and emerging organisations to have a framework and templates for governance and compliance. Including items such as a policy pack setting minimum requirements for tailoring by the organisation. Reporting in portals that are easy to understand and implement, preferably only one.

Many new CSOs cannot compete as they are trying to maintain standards that existing organisations have had years to build up to. New organisations have fewer staff with multiple cross duties against larger organisations that have dedicated staff allocated for specific tasks.
This extra effort should be taken into account. Reporting, evaluation and data delivery can be new to emerging organisation particularly as technical terminology is set by the community sector, therefore training and mentoring could help the assimilation of a new CSO.

There should be more weight to expertise and grass roots knowledge, in line with how the organisation has developed organically; a program or service in response to a key need that they can fulfil – their unique perspective may well be more aligned with community needs.

Funding contracts to large organisations assuming new and emerging CSOs will be part of a collaborative is problematic. Large CSOs acquire intel and expertise of smaller or emerging organisations who are at the mercy of the funded organisation and have no recourse when their work or intellectual property is misappropriated and rebranded.

Mid to large organisations have taken over over smaller or new organisations by stealth or starving them of resources and clients. The balance of power is with the larger organisation, mergers are not real when post merger there is no mention of the small organisation, their funds reallocated and the name disappears.

Government should work directly with emerging organisations and not anticipate a mentor relationship when there is competition for funding and ownership or credit of outcomes.

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

There is little to no support to help build capacity for new or small CSOs; only after receiving funding is there any support at all. Materials that are available; mostly online and self help style actually cut into existing capacity adding to the workload.

Training is limited and can be unaffordable for limited budgets. Activities such as conferences easily price out small organisations.

For example a major conference on DFV this year is being held in Tasmania, even as a presenter and with the 10% discount the cost to send one worker is in the region of $4,500 – a significant cost in any case, however for a small CSO simply out of reach.
As such the work of small organisations cannot be presented to a wider audience as well as missing out on the capacity building. For small groups when their work is mentioned they may never know that it has

been cited without their knowledge, consent or credit.

Using small organisations to get grass roots experience, data and ideas is commonplace and could be said essential, knowing they want to grow is leveraged to maintain engagement. A means by which growth is in effect hindered and at times the engagement is more to meet outputs via the smaller organisation with credit to the head contract organisation.

It would be fair to say the current system is not working and a reason why so many people who could be a good addition to the sector are lost due to the high level of personal and financial investment needed to sustain an organisation past the initial honeymoon period where everyone is interested in what you are doing.

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

There are multiple examples of how large organisations could help, but the competitive model is prohibitive. It would be easy for large organisations to outsource in a similar way to procurement contracts, pay the the going rate and report on delivering via a third party small CSO who get the deserved recognition.

Larger organisations want to retain the credit and build their profile it all leads back into the funding model and competition for funds not only with Government but sponsors, donations and fundraising. Successes are needed to draw that sort of attention.

It would be a different scenario if the consumer were to PAYG - that would really demonstrate who is delivering and to what outcomes.

The real barrier is the funding model and how publicly raised funds are used (not enough transparency or accountability)

We now see more of stories and successes rather than a demonstration of real outcomes, those with a greater social media profile look as if they are delivering more. Look under the surface and it is often a different story.

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

Some of the areas that need to be addressed are:
Workforce
- The lack of of career progression pathways
- Succession planning; an ageing workforce hasn't a clear idea of how services will be provided at the same level or expertise.

Duty of Care
Clients are often used for marketing and publicity when many just want peace and privacy, being in need should not mean being obliged to be on someone's flyer or paraded on show. Success should be measured in what has been done, changes made that result in positive outcomes. When a person receiving the service is made to feel they need to contribute back to the organisation that helped them (to gain funds or get additional funding) then that becomes a transactional relationship. Payment of a kind for being helped by a government funded service.

Role of Regulation:
The Governance models for many organisations is flawed and unregulated. Presidents in roles for tens of years in spite of their constitution not permitting. In NSW five people can set up an organisation without even a basic check they are not all the same family (and shouldn't be).
The ACNC's role is not as clear as it could be, serious allegations are met with 'outside the remit of the organisation to investigate'. There are strong indicators that some charities are simply a front for personal gains and are essentially a business with the benefits associated with being a NFP. Others hide nefarious activity, which impacts the community and takes advantage of vulnerable people. Failure to properly regulate or take appropriate actions erodes public confidence in the sector. This includes organisations that demonstrate religion as their foundation but their activities do not marry up to the faith or the modus operandi, such fake religious organisations should be shut down.

6.2 What other solutions or changes could also be considered?

The sector could benefit from a centralised payroll, HR, Governance and compliance activities. The cost of duplication in this area is significant and at the cost of delivering services on the frontline.

A limit to the hierarchy of organisations that claim to be NFP is in the interest of value for money and responsible delivery. Mid to large organisations growing corporate roles, supporting CEOs who are

running celebrity style events at the cost of the tax payer should be limited to self funded activities and those self funding activities should not be developed with government funding. There should be clear proportional alignment with the organisation's objectives and outcomes.

6.3 What does success look like?

People getting their needs attended to in a timely manner within an appropriate and fit for purpose in a support system that delivers equally to all with respect and cultural safety.