

## Are you an individual or making a submission on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

## Organisation name

Metro Assist and CABL Ltd

## Position

Financial Inclusion Service Manager

## Is your organisation....?

- None of the above

## Please specify

Not For Profit Community Services

## 1. Does the new vision reflect what we all want for children and families?

Metro Assist supports the intent of the proposed vision and its emphasis on children being safe, supported, and able to thrive within strong families. However, to truly reflect the diversity of Australian communities, the vision should explicitly recognise diversity (including cultural and linguistic diversity), equity, and inclusion as central to children's wellbeing.

For example, across our work in South West Sydney and the Inner West, many families we support experience additional stressors linked to migration, language barriers, and systemic disadvantage. For CALD, migrants and refugee families, the ability to "thrive" is deeply connected to whether they can access culturally safe, language-appropriate, and non-judgemental services that understand their cultural values, family dynamics, and settlement experiences.

A vision limited to "all families" without explicitly naming diversity risks overlooking those most at risk of exclusion. Embedding cultural responsiveness ensures that families who often face stigma or misunderstanding within mainstream systems feel safe to seek help early.

We recommend that the vision be expanded to state:

"All children and families, regardless of culture, language, gender preferences, or any other background, are safe, connected, and thriving within inclusive and culturally responsive communities."

This refinement strengthens alignment with national frameworks such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and the NSW Human

Services Outcomes Framework, and it reflects the lived experience of the families Metro Assist and many providers delivering programs to children and family daily. A clear and inclusive vision would set the foundation for practice that genuinely recognises Australia's diversity, reduces barriers to engagement, and promotes equitable access to opportunities for every child and family.

**2. Are the two main outcomes what we should be working towards for children and families? Why/Why not? - Outcome 1: Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children - Outcome 2: Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults.**

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**3. Will a single national program provide more flexibility for your organisation?**

As one of the state funded Family Support Program Providers, Metro Assist supports the concept of a single national program as it has the potential to simplify funding arrangements, reduce duplication, and allow providers to respond more flexibly to community needs. A unified framework could enable organisations to deliver a continuum of supports from universal prevention to intensive family preservation without being constrained by separate contracts or inconsistent reporting requirements.

However, flexibility will only be achieved if the program is underpinned by place-based decision-making and trust-based contracting. Local communities experience vulnerability in different ways; the needs of families in metropolitan South-West Sydney differ greatly from those in regional or remote areas. Service providers that are deeply embedded in their communities, particularly those working with CALD and newly arrived families, must retain discretion to adapt activities, staffing, and partnerships as circumstances evolve.

To achieve genuine flexibility, Metro Assist recommends:

- Allowing providers to shift resources between prevention and intensive support streams as client risks change.
- Reducing administrative burden by consolidating KPIs and aligning reporting with DEX and state frameworks.
- Embedding interpreter, translation, and bilingual workforce costs within base funding rather than as optional extras.
- Enabling innovation through local trials and co-design with community partners.

A single national program will be most effective if it empowers community-based organisations to make real-time decisions in response to emerging family, cultural, and economic pressures. Flexibility should not mean one-size-fits-all but rather a model that values local knowledge, cultural responsiveness, and sustained relationships with families.

#### **4. Does the service or activity you deliver fit within one of the three funding streams? Do these streams reflect what children and families in your community need now – and what they might need in the future?**

Metro Assist's integrated service model aligns strongly with the proposed three streams and demonstrates how prevention, early intervention, and intensive supports can operate seamlessly together to meet families' evolving needs.

Under Stream 1 (Information and Awareness), we deliver community education, parenting resources, and multilingual information sessions in partnership with schools, councils, and community organisations. These activities promote early help-seeking and increase families' understanding of Australian child and family systems.

Within Stream 2 (Prevention and Early Intervention), programs such as Community

and Family Support (CAFS funded by the NSW DJC) focus on parenting capacity, family relationships, and community connection through culturally responsive group work, outreach, and case coordination.

Stream 3 (Intensive and Targeted Support) is reflected through Families Together and Family Preservation, which provide wrap-around case management for families facing domestic violence, housing stress, financial distress, and settlement challenges.

While the three streams capture the service continuum, the framework should recognise the complementary role of other DSS-funded programs such as Financial Wellbeing & Capability (FWC), NILS, and Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS). These services stabilise families financially and socially, enabling meaningful participation in parenting and child wellbeing supports. Strengthening coordination, referral pathways, and shared outcomes between these programs will avoid duplication and ensure a holistic response to family needs.

#### **5. Are there other changes we could make to the program to help your organisation or community overcome current challenges?**

Metro Assist supports the three-stream model but recommends refinements to address practical barriers and strengthen collaboration across the DSS service system.

To improve outcomes, the Department allow for:

- Allow flexibility between streams so resources can shift as client risks change.
- Embed cultural safety infrastructure interpreters, bilingual staff, and brokerage funds as core costed components.
- Simplify reporting through outcomes-based indicators aligned with DEX and state frameworks.
- Fund place-based partnerships with health, education, and DV services to encourage co-location and shared case planning.

Crucially, the program should embed mechanisms that link it with complementary DSS programs such as Financial Wellbeing and Capacity, SETS, and Emergency Relief. These address the underlying causes of family stress financial hardship, migration adjustment, housing and, when integrated, help prevent escalation to child-protection risk. Shared outcomes, coordinated referral pathways, and flexible partnership funding will deliver a unified, person-centred service system.

#### **6. Do you agree that the four priorities listed on Page 4 are right areas for investment to improve outcomes for children and families?**

While Metro Assist's work aligns broadly with the proposed streams, several critical supports fall outside their boundaries but are essential complements to family

wellbeing.

Our Financial Counselling, NILS (funded by NSW OFT), and SETS programs funded separately by DSS directly enhance stability for families engaged in family support services. Rather than inclusion within this program, they should be recognised as complementary supports that underpin parenting capacity, safety, and resilience. We also deliver bicultural workforce initiatives, interpreter coordination, and community education that empower parents to navigate Australian systems and strengthen peer networks. These prevention activities reduce risk well before crisis. To maximise impact, DSS should formalise integration across these complementary programs through shared referral processes, cross-program data capture mechanism, and local partnership funding. Recognising this interdependence will ensure families experience a connected, holistic service system that addresses both the social and economic drivers of vulnerability.

## **7. Are there any other priorities or issues you think the department should be focusing on?**

Metro Assist agrees the four proposed priorities early investment, integrated services, community-informed design, and stronger outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are essential foundations for a national program. However, to ensure equity across Australia's diverse population, additional priorities must explicitly address cultural safety, access, and inclusion for CALD, refugee, and newly arrived families.

Cultural responsiveness is not simply an implementation strategy; it is a precondition for achieving every other outcome. Without targeted investment in bilingual staff, interpreters, and culturally tailored engagement, many families remain disengaged until risk escalates. Embedding cultural safety as a fifth core priority would strengthen alignment with the National Settlement Framework and the Human Services Outcomes Framework.

Further priorities should include:

- Place-based collaboration funding flexible partnerships between community organisations, health, education, and DV services that respond to local needs rather than prescriptive models.
- Workforce wellbeing and capability sustained investment in training, supervision, and secondary consultation for staff managing complex trauma in multicultural contexts.
- Digital and service accessibility ensuring families with limited English or technology access can still participate meaningfully.

By embedding these additional priorities, the national program will better reflect the lived realities of families we support in South West Sydney and the Inner West families (most culturally diverse service areas) whose resilience grows when

cultural identity, financial stability, and belonging are recognised as integral to wellbeing.

#### **8. Do the proposed focus areas – like supporting families at risk of child protection involvement and young parents match the needs or priorities of your service?**

Metro Assist strongly supports a relational contracting model built on trust, transparency, and shared accountability rather than compliance-driven oversight. For this approach to succeed, the contract must create a genuine partnership between DSS and service providers that values community knowledge, flexibility, and long-term collaboration.

We would like to see:

- Mutual respect and trust: recognising the professional expertise and lived experience and community relationships of providers, particularly those embedded within CALD communities.
- Flexibility and adaptability: allowing resources to shift between activities as community needs and risks evolve, without lengthy contract variation processes.
- Joint planning and review: regular, outcomes-focused discussions centred on family wellbeing data, not administrative reporting.
- Transparent communication and timely decision-making: clear escalation pathways, early notice of policy changes, and fair consultation before implementation.
- Workforce sustainability: acknowledging real costs such as supervision, training, interpreters, and bilingual staffing.
- Shared risk management: proportionate accountability that does not penalise smaller community organisations for external factors beyond their control.

A relational contract should also include performance measures co-designed with providers, reflecting qualitative outcomes trust, engagement, stability rather than just quantitative targets.

Ultimately, a successful relational contract relies on collaboration, predictability, and respect. It should enable service providers to innovate, build lasting community relationships, and invest in the local workforce that delivers genuine change for children and families.

#### **9. Are there other groups in your community, or different approaches, that you think the department should consider to better support family wellbeing?**

Relational contracts should be offered to organisations that demonstrate proven community trust, local partnerships, and cultural responsiveness, not just to the providers which has scalable administrative and financial capacity. Metro Assist believes that the most effective family support outcomes come from providers that

are embedded within their communities and have maintained long-standing, face-to-face relationships with families.

While large organisations often appear well-resourced “on paper,” smaller and medium community-based services deliver deeper, more sustained engagement through local networks, bilingual staff, staff with lived or living cultural experience, and genuine cultural understanding. These attributes are critical for all families along with families from CALD, refugee, and newly arrived backgrounds, who rely on trusted service providers to seek help early.

Key factors should therefore include:

- Demonstrated local impact and trust: evidence of measurable outcomes and collaboration with community leaders, schools, and grassroots groups.
- Cultural competence: employment of bilingual staff, access to interpreters, and culturally safe practice frameworks.
- Collaborative track record: ability to partner effectively with complementary DSS and state programs (FWC, SETS, CAFS, DV, and health).
- Governance and accountability: transparent management, data integrity, and continuous improvement systems.
- Commitment to workforce wellbeing: support for staff supervision, training, and retention.

The Department should adopt a balanced approach that ensures smaller community providers are not overshadowed by larger organisations with stronger brand visibility and marketing capacity but limited sustained local presence. The place based local service providers are often the first to identify risk and respond with agility. Being locally rooted, these service providers retain local community knowledge and insights for longer period of time and have already established networks. Whereas larger organisations with funding/service contract based local presence often need time and resources to build the knowledge, community trust and networks in reality.

Prioritising relational contracts for trusted, locally embedded place-based organisations will ensure funding remains close to communities, relationships are sustained, and outcomes for children and families are both authentic and lasting.

#### **10. What are other effective ways, beyond co-location, that you’ve seen work well to connect and coordinate services for families?**

A strong outcomes framework should move beyond compliance reporting and focus on measuring real change in family wellbeing, community connection, and system access. Metro Assist supports an outcomes framework that values both quantitative and qualitative indicators, recognising the complexity of family experiences particularly within culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.



Key features should include:

- Client-centred measures: outcomes defined around family safety, stability, and empowerment rather than program outputs or service volumes.
- Cultural responsiveness and inclusion: indicators that measure equitable access, cultural safety, and the quality of engagement for CALD and refugee families, including interpreter use and family feedback.
- Holistic domains: measures across financial wellbeing, housing stability, mental health, parenting capacity, and community connection, acknowledging that resilience is multidimensional.
- Shared accountability: co-designed outcomes between DSS and providers, with flexibility for local tailoring based on community context.
- Longitudinal tracking: recognising incremental progress and sustained stability rather than short-term changes.
- Aligned reporting systems: integration with DEX and state-based frameworks (e.g., DCJ NSW) to reduce duplication and administrative burden.

A good framework should also incorporate story-based and relational indicators that capture trust, belonging, and confidence—key signs of empowerment often missed in numeric data. Regular reflective learning between DSS and providers should replace punitive performance reviews, supporting continuous improvement. Ultimately, a well-designed outcomes framework should reflect what matters to families themselves: being safe, supported, financially secure, and connected to community. It must measure the quality of relationships and the sustainability of change, not just the quantity of services delivered.

#### **11. What would you highlight in a grant application to demonstrate a service is connected to the community it serves? What should applicants be assessed on?**

A successful transition to a single national program requires careful, staged implementation that prioritises continuity of service, clear communication, and co-design with providers and communities. Metro Assist strongly recommends that the Department take a collaborative, transparent approach that recognises the diverse operational realities of community organisations.

Key actions include:

- Early and ongoing engagement: involve providers, peak bodies, and client representatives in transition planning to ensure practical insights inform design and timelines.
- Clear guidance and timelines: provide sufficient notice of new contractual, reporting, and IT requirements to minimise service disruption and workforce uncertainty.
- Change management support: fund transition activities such as staff training, systems adaptation, and data migration to DEX or other platforms.



- Funding continuity: ensure no service gaps or loss of frontline staff by maintaining interim funding and transitional contracts during implementation.
- Capacity building for smaller organisations: offer technical assistance, governance training, and simplified reporting to ensure grassroots and CALD-focused providers remain active participants.
- Communication with clients: develop accessible, multilingual information so families understand service continuity and new referral pathways.

We strongly recommend that the Department implement a phased rollout, beginning with pilot regions that include a mix of large and medium community providers to test the model's flexibility and integration. Regular review points and provider feedback loops will ensure lessons are captured and adjustments made before full implementation.

A well-supported, inclusive transition will protect service continuity for vulnerable families and uphold community confidence. The process should model the same relational and collaborative principles that the new program seeks to embed.

## **12. Beyond locational disadvantage, what other factors should the department consider to make sure funding reflects the needs of communities?**

Success will mean that every child and family regardless of culture, language, or background can access the right support at the right time, from services they trust. A successful national program will deliver integrated, culturally safe, and sustainable support systems that strengthen families, prevent crisis, and reduce long-term disadvantage.

From Metro Assist's perspective, success will be evident when:

- Families are safe, stable, and empowered, with improved relationships, housing security, and financial wellbeing.
- Children thrive, demonstrating positive developmental, educational, and social outcomes.
- CALD and refugee families experience equitable access through interpreter use, bilingual staff, and culturally responsive practice.
- Community-based organisations are valued partners, not subcontractors by larger organisation who won the contract. Valued partners are trusted to innovate and respond to local need as they are the grass root of the program.
- Funding and reporting systems are streamlined, enabling more time for client engagement and less administrative duplication.
- Data and evaluation frameworks reflect qualitative outcomes such as belonging, confidence, and trust, alongside quantitative indicators.

True success will also be measured by a strengthened service ecosystem where prevention and early intervention are properly resourced, families can move fluidly between support levels, and collaboration between Commonwealth and State

programs is seamless.

Ultimately, the new program should enable children and families to build lasting resilience within inclusive communities. It will succeed when frontline workers feel supported, when families describe their experience as respectful and empowering, and when policy, funding, and practice work together to deliver sustained outcomes across generations.

### **13. What's the best way for organisations to show in grant applications, that their service is genuinely meeting the needs of the community?**

The best evidence comes from demonstrated local connection, co-design, and measurable outcomes, not marketing language.

Organisations should show that their programs are built with communities, not just delivered to them.

Metro Assist recommends that applications demonstrate this through:

- Community-led consultation and feedback: minutes from focus groups, surveys, or advisory panels showing how client voices shaped program design and delivery.
- Partnership evidence: memoranda of understanding or referral data confirming collaboration with schools, councils, and local faith or cultural organisations.
- Demographic alignment: clear data showing that the client profile matches local population need, including CALD representation, income levels, and emerging migration trends.
- Outcome reporting: local case studies, DEX data, and client stories that highlight measurable change in wellbeing, stability, or inclusion.
- Bilingual and culturally responsive practice: examples of interpreter use, translated materials, and bicultural workforce engagement demonstrating equitable access.
- Continuous improvement systems: evidence that feedback informs adaptation program logic updates, evaluation findings, or service redesigns.

A strong application should also articulate how the organisation's presence and relationships extend beyond funded outputs for example, participation in community networks, advocacy, or informal support that builds trust.

Ultimately, a genuine community service is proven not by size or branding, but by embeddedness, responsiveness, and lived community trust. Grant assessments should value organisations that can show consistent, local engagement and outcomes achieved with communities rather than services that simply claim capacity on paper.

### **14. How could the grant process be designed to support and increase the number of ACCOs delivering services to children and families?**

To increase the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) delivering services, the grant process must be intentionally designed to recognise the unique cultural authority, strengths, and community leadership of ACCOs. This requires shifting from competitive tendering models which often favour large, well-resourced organisations to processes that actively remove barriers and support Aboriginal-led service delivery.

The grant process could include:

- Dedicated ACCO funding streams with ring-fenced allocations to ensure Aboriginal organisations are not competing directly with larger providers.
- Simplified, culturally appropriate application processes with reduced administrative burden and longer lead times so ACCOs can prepare high-quality submissions.
- Capacity-building grants to support governance, workforce development, evaluation systems, and infrastructure areas often underfunded in mainstream processes.
- Co-design with ACCOs to shape service models, outcomes, and reporting frameworks that reflect Aboriginal worldviews, kinship systems, healing practices, and community priorities.
- Longer contract terms (5–7 years) to support workforce stability and long-term relationships with families and communities.
- Assessment panels including Aboriginal leaders, ensuring cultural legitimacy and lived experience inform decision-making.
- Weighted selection criteria that value cultural authority, community trust, and connection to Country just as highly as organisational scale or administrative capacity.
- Partnership-based pathways, where mainstream organisations demonstrate genuine, respectful partnerships with ACCOs, including shared governance, resources, and decision-making authority.

Supporting more ACCOs to deliver services strengthens cultural safety, improves engagement, and leads to better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. A redesigned grant process must recognise that ACCOs are not just service providers they are community anchors, cultural knowledge holders, and leaders in healing and self-determination.

#### **15. What else should be built into the program design to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?**

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children requires a program design grounded in self-determination and cultural authority. The program should prioritise ACCO leadership, ensuring Aboriginal organisations are funded to design and deliver supports, with mainstream services working in genuine

partnership and under Aboriginal governance where appropriate.

Key elements include:

Culturally safe practice frameworks, supported by ongoing training in cultural humility, trauma-aware approaches, and local Aboriginal history.

Stable, multi-year funding to strengthen workforce retention and build long-term relationships with families.

Local decision-making so that services reflect the needs, cultures, and strengths of each community.

Holistic, culturally informed models that embed healing, kinship structures, and connection to culture and Country.

Data sovereignty, ensuring Aboriginal communities guide how data is collected and used.

Clear access pathways that reduce barriers, particularly for families with past negative experiences in mainstream services.

Embedding these elements will ensure children grow up safe, strong, and culturally connected, supported by systems that honour Aboriginal knowledge, identity, and leadership.

## **16. What types of data would help your organisation better understand its impact and continuously improve its services?**

Metro Assist would benefit from a mix of quantitative and qualitative data that captures both measurable change and the lived experience of families, particularly those from CALD, refugee, and newly arrived backgrounds.

Key data types include:

Longitudinal outcomes data showing changes in family safety, stability, financial wellbeing, parenting confidence, and child development over time.

Client experience and engagement data, including culturally disaggregated feedback, interpreter usage, and measures of trust, cultural safety, and service accessibility.

Cross-program referral and pathway data to understand how families move between DSS streams (e.g., Children and Families, FWC, SETS) and where handovers can be improved.

Community-level data on emerging needs, settlement trends, housing stress, and cost-of-living pressures to support agile, place-based responses.

Workforce capability data, including caseloads, training needs, and vicarious trauma indicators, to maintain quality and staff wellbeing.

Collaboration data showing the effectiveness of partnerships with schools, health, DV, and multicultural organisations.

Collectively, this data would strengthen evaluation, support continuous improvement, and ensure services remain culturally responsive and aligned to local community needs.

**17. What kinds of data or information would be most valuable for you to share, to show how your service is positively impacting children and families?**

Metro Assist can provide a range of data that demonstrates both measurable outcomes and meaningful changes in family wellbeing, particularly for CALD and newly arrived communities.

The most valuable information includes:

Outcome data showing improvements in family safety, stability, financial security, parenting capacity, school engagement, and child development.

Client voice and experience measures, including feedback on cultural safety, trust, accessibility, and the effectiveness of bilingual or interpreter-supported engagement.

Case studies and narrative evidence that illustrate how relational practice, early intervention, and culturally responsive support lead to sustained change.

Referral and pathway data showing how families move across complementary programs (Children and Families, FWC, SETS), demonstrating integrated, wrap-around support.

Place-based insights, such as emerging community needs, settlement trends, and risk factors impacting local families.

Workforce indicators, including training, supervision, and staff retention, which reflect service quality and stability.

This mix of quantitative and qualitative data provides a holistic picture of impact and clearly demonstrates how families grow safer, more resilient, and better connected as a result of service engagement.

**18. If your organisation currently reports in the Data Exchange (DEX), what SCORE Circumstances domain is most relevant to the service you deliver?**

The most relevant SCORE Circumstances domains for Metro Assist's work are:

Family functioning – reflecting improvements in relationships, communication, parenting capacity, and household stability through Families Together, Family Preservation, and CAFS.

Community participation and networks – capturing increased connection to schools, cultural groups, local services, and community supports, particularly for CALD and newly arrived families.

Material wellbeing – essential for our Financial Counselling, NILS, and settlement-informed casework, showing changes in financial stability, debt levels, and access to essential resources.

Personal and family safety – relevant for families experiencing domestic and family violence, risk of homelessness, or complex vulnerabilities.

Housing/environment – reflecting the stabilising impact of tenancy advocacy, emergency referrals, and broader wrap-around supports.

These domains best represent the holistic outcomes Metro Assist works to achieve: stronger family relationships, improved safety, increased community connection, and greater financial and social stability.

**19. What kinds of templates or guidance would help you prepare strong case studies that show the impact of your service?**

Metro Assist would benefit from templates that clearly outline the key elements DSS is seeking, while still allowing flexibility to reflect culturally diverse family experiences. Helpful guidance would include:

A simple, structured template covering presenting issues, risks, interventions, outcomes, and family voice.

Prompts for cultural context, including language needs, use of interpreters, cultural dynamics, and barriers faced by CALD or newly arrived families.

Clear definitions of “impact”, with examples of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes relevant to early intervention and family preservation.

Guidance on confidentiality and de-identification, ensuring case studies protect privacy while still showing meaningful detail.

Examples of high-quality case studies, illustrating how narrative, data, and client quotes can be combined to show change.

Optional fields for complementary program input, such as Financial Counselling or SETS involvement, to highlight integrated support.

Templates that balance narrative and measurable outcomes would help ensure case studies consistently demonstrate how services improve safety, stability, and resilience for children and families.

## **20. What does a relational contracting approach mean to you in practice? What criteria would you like to see included in a relational contract?**

To Metro Assist, a relational contracting approach represents a genuine partnership model where the relationship between DSS and service providers is built on trust, transparency, and shared accountability rather than compliance-driven oversight. It recognises that sustainable outcomes for children and families depend on strong, long-term relationships between providers, communities, and government.

In practice, relational contracting means:

- Mutual trust and respect: valuing the expertise, cultural knowledge, and local relationships that community organisations bring, particularly those embedded in CALD and newly arrived communities.
- Open, transparent communication: clear expectations, early notice of changes, and accessible channels for problem-solving.
- Flexibility to respond to emerging needs: enabling providers to adjust activities,



staffing, and intensity of support without complex contract variations, especially when responding to changes in family risk or community circumstances.

- Shared learning and continuous improvement: regular joint reviews that focus on outcomes, client experience, and quality, rather than purely numeric targets.
- Long-term, stable funding: multi-year commitments that allow organisations to maintain a skilled workforce, build trusted relationships, and invest in service quality.
- Recognition of real delivery costs: including interpreters, bilingual staff, cultural brokerage, workforce wellbeing, and trauma-informed practice—essential for equitable access.
- Commitment to collaboration: encouraging partnerships across DSS programs (Children & Families, FWC, SETS), state systems (CAFS, DV, health), and local networks.

Criteria we would like to see included:

1. Evidence of local connection and trust – long-term presence, collaboration with community groups, schools, faith organisations, and CALD communities.
2. Cultural competence and safety – demonstrated ability to engage diverse families respectfully, with appropriate language support.
3. Governance and accountability – transparent financial systems, data integrity, ethical practice, and strong supervision frameworks.
4. Flexibility and innovation – capacity to adapt programs based on local need, evidence, or emerging risk.
5. Workforce sustainability – commitment to staff training, wellbeing, and retention.
6. Proven outcomes and pathways – measured improvements in family functioning, safety, participation, and stability.
7. Operational scale matched to community need – ensuring relational contracts are awarded to organisations with meaningful local footprint, not just those with the largest administrative capacity.
8. Equitable partnership expectations – ensuring small and medium community organisations are not disadvantaged by larger providers who can “look good on paper” but lack local engagement.

Overall, relational contracting should strengthen the partnership between DSS and organisations that deeply understand their communities, enabling more tailored, culturally responsive, and effective services for children and families.

## **21. What’s the best way for the department to decide which organisations should be offered a relational contract?**

To ensure relational contracts genuinely strengthen outcomes for children and families, the Department must prioritise community-embedded organisations with demonstrated local impact, rather than large providers whose success in grant

processes is often driven by scale, marketing capacity, and internal resourcing.

Many small and medium community organisations deliver deeper, more trusted, more culturally responsive work but are routinely disadvantaged in competitive grant processes because larger organisations have the administrative infrastructure to produce stronger-looking applications. A relational contract model should correct this imbalance—not reinforce it.

The Department should assess suitability based on evidence of meaningful relationships, not organisational size. Key determinants should include:

Community trust and connection: a proven track record of engagement with local families, schools, community leaders, cultural groups, and grassroots networks.

Cultural responsiveness: bilingual staffing, interpreter capacity, and demonstrated experience supporting CALD, refugee, and newly arrived communities.

Consistency of frontline outcomes: measurable improvements in family safety, wellbeing, and connection—not just high-level KPI compliance.

Local presence and accessibility: visibility in the community, outreach capacity, and culturally safe spaces where families feel comfortable seeking help.

Collaboration, not competition: history of genuine partnerships with ACCOs, multicultural organisations, DV services, and complementary DSS programs (FWC, SETS).

Workforce stability and quality: investment in supervision, training, and staff wellbeing.

Large organisations should not automatically be advantaged due to their ability to produce polished grant applications. The Department should adopt a relational assessment that prioritises organisations able to demonstrate deep relational practice, not just administrative strength.

Relational contracts should be awarded to organisations that families already trust—those with authentic local presence, cultural understanding, and longstanding community impact.

## **22. Is your organisation interested in a relational contracting approach? Why/why not?**

Yes. Metro Assist is strongly interested in a relational contracting approach because it aligns with the way we already work with long-term relationships, trust, and culturally responsive engagement at the centre of service delivery. A relational contract would allow us to focus more on quality, continuity, and meaningful outcomes rather than administrative burden or rigid activity outputs.

For medium-sized, community-embedded organisations like Metro Assist, relational contracting offers several important advantages:

- **Stability and long-term planning:** Multi-year, trust-based agreements allow us to invest in workforce development, bilingual staffing, and cultural capability critical for supporting CALD and newly arrived families.
- **Flexibility to respond to need:** Families' circumstances change quickly; relational contracting allows organisations to shift effort across prevention, early intervention and intensive support without unnecessary contract variations.
- **Recognition of local expertise:** Metro Assist has deep, longstanding connections across South-West Sydney and the Inner West. A relational model values this community trust and local knowledge, rather than privileging large organisations with administrative scale.
- **Better client outcomes:** Relational contracts focus on the real indicators of safety, stability, and empowerment not just high-volume service targets.
- **Collaborative practice:** A relational approach strengthens partnerships with ACCOs, multicultural organisations, health, schools and DV services creating a more integrated support system for families.

Metro Assist supports relational contracting because it creates a level playing field, ensuring smaller and medium organisations with strong community impact are not disadvantaged by larger providers who can produce polished applications but do not offer the same depth of engagement.

In short, a relational contract aligns with our values and would enable us to deliver more stable, responsive, culturally safe services with stronger long-term outcomes for children and families.

## **23. Is there anything else you think the department should understand or consider about this proposed approach?**

The Department should recognise that service outcomes for children and families are strongest when delivered by organisations that have deep, longstanding relationships within their communities. In moving toward a relational contracting model, it is essential to understand that meaningful early intervention, engagement and trust cannot be scaled or replicated simply through large organisational

infrastructure.

Small and medium community-based organisations like Metro Assist often work with families who will not engage with larger providers due to stigma, fear, language barriers, or lack of cultural safety. These organisations offer continuity, local presence, bilingual staff, and genuine cultural understanding. This relational capital is what keeps vulnerable families connected to support.

The Department should also consider:

- Avoiding administrative or procurement settings that unintentionally favour large providers, whose polished applications and resourcing capacity do not necessarily translate into community connection or quality outcomes.
- Ensuring equity of access to relational contracting, so grassroots organisations with proven impact can participate without being overshadowed by scale-based advantages.
- Supporting stronger integration across DSS programs, ensuring families experience a joined-up system between Children and Families, FWC, SETS, and Emergency Relief.
- Investing in workforce wellbeing, recognising that high-quality relational work requires time, reflective practice, and appropriate caseloads.
- Emphasising cultural safety and inclusion as core pillars of the contracting model, particularly for CALD, refugee, newly arrived, and Aboriginal families.

Ultimately, the Department should consider that real relational practice begins with the provider–community relationship, not only the provider–government relationship. The contracting approach must therefore uplift organisations that hold that trust and deliver the quiet, consistent, high-quality work that truly changes the lives of children and families.