

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

Organisation

Organisation name

Queensland Youth Connections Indigenous Corporation

Position

Chair

Is your organisation....?

- An Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation

What type of service or support do you mostly provide?

- Prevention or early intervention services

What state or territory does your organisation deliver services and supports in?

- Queensland

Where does your organisation deliver most of their services and supports?

Regional area

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

QYC Submission Response

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

Queensland Youth Connections (QYC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Families and Children Activity – Review of Children, Youth and Parenting Programs Discussion Paper.

QYC is a First Nations-led service based in Townsville, operating across North Queensland. We take a connection-first approach, recognising that early intervention is the responsibility of the whole community, not just formal services. Children thrive when families, Elders, schools, sport clubs, cultural mentors, and community organisations all play a role in identifying needs early and walking alongside children and their families before crises emerge.

At the heart of community-led early intervention are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). ACCOs are the front line of First Nations community ownership, designing and delivering programs that reflect local culture, knowledge, and lived experience. When ACCOs lead, early intervention becomes a shared responsibility of the entire community, ensuring children and families are supported before challenges escalate.

Our work focuses on prevention, mentoring, family restoration, cultural identity, and connection, delivered through programs such as StrongBala, Connect4, 100 Project, and partnerships with OnCommon Country and the Youth Employment Project. These programs show that early intervention works best when it is locally led, culturally grounded, relational, and embedded in the everyday spaces where children and families live and belong.

1. Early intervention is community-owned and ACCO-led

True early intervention is not just about formal services or developmental milestones; it begins when a child or family first shows signs of challenge—disengagement from school, conflict at home, loss of cultural connection, or social isolation.

QYC's experience demonstrates that:

ACCOs and local mentors are best placed to recognise early signs and respond in culturally safe ways.

Family and kinship networks, guided by Elders and cultural leaders, are the most effective first responders.

Schools, sport clubs, and community spaces can act as natural early intervention points when connected to trusted ACCOs and community networks.

By placing ACCOs at the centre of early intervention, children and families receive support that is culturally safe, locally owned, and responsive to their lived reality.

2. First Nations families must lead early intervention

First Nations children remain overrepresented across indicators of disadvantage, yet are often excluded from designing programs that affect them. Early intervention

must:

Put local governance and cultural accountability at the centre. Families and communities, through ACCOs, should lead decisions on how support is delivered.

Fund First Nations-led programs and cultural mentors, particularly in communities with concentrated need.

Embed Elders, knowledge holders, and youth voices into program design, delivery, and reporting.

Healing, cultural connection, and family restoration are core outcomes, not optional enhancements. ACCOs and communities are best placed to recognise early signs of need and respond in culturally safe, relationship-based ways.

3. QYC's connection-first model demonstrates ACCO-led early intervention

At QYC, we focus on walking with children and families early, rather than waiting for formal referrals or crises. Programs like StrongBala show that:

Long-term mentoring with cultural and peer navigators prevents disengagement from school and family breakdown.

Place-based outreach in schools, sport clubs, skateparks, and homes allows intervention at the earliest sign of challenge.

Wraparound support sees the child in context, addressing family, kinship, cultural identity, education, and connection to Country.

Funding that bypasses ACCOs or relies solely on “direct child impact” programs fails to reflect operational reality. Children thrive when support is embedded in community ownership and guided by First Nations leadership.

4. Early intervention must be holistic and continuous

Effective early intervention is not limited to early childhood. Disengagement from school, contact with police, family stress, and loss of cultural identity are early indicators that need response throughout childhood and adolescence.

We recommend:

Funding whole-of-family programs that reflect the SEWB framework—not just “parenting programs” or “child development” silos.

Strengthening links between place-based networks, youth services, justice systems, and cultural programs.

Ensuring First Nations mentors and peer workers are officially part of funded delivery teams.

Supporting boys- and men-specific programs, which remain underfunded despite their vital role in identity development, cultural mentoring, and prevention of family violence.

Early intervention must follow children and families along their life pathway, not stop at a developmental milestone. Communities and ACCOs are best placed to provide continuity.

5. Cultural programs are central, not optional

Many “evidence-based” programs do not reflect First Nations experiences or solutions. True early intervention must recognise that culture, connection, and community engagement are primary drivers of wellbeing, not secondary add-ons. Investment should include:

Yarning circles and community-based parenting support

On-Country healing activities

Cultural identity work through art, story, and ceremony

Mentoring embedded in local relationships

Elders-led playgroups, connection circles, and rites of passage

These programs heal, strengthen protective factors, and prevent future crisis. DSS must expand its definition of evidence to include cultural knowledge, lived experience, and community validation.

6. Place-based early intervention must be community-led

Place-based work only works when:

Decision-making sits with local stakeholders—grassroots groups, Elders, and young people.

Funding includes coordination, relationship-building, and community navigation.

Committees and governance structures reflect people with lived community connection, not just service staff.

In Townsville, much place-based work is led by small First Nations and youth organisations without reliable funding. Larger providers often lack cultural embeddedness, even if well-intentioned. More funding should go to hyper-local delivery led by ACCOs, ensuring trust, continuity, and cultural safety.

7. Conclusion – A stronger, community-owned early intervention vision

QYC supports the aspirations in the new vision. We know from decades of experience that children thrive when families, culture, community, and spirit are strong.

To truly reflect what all children and families need, the vision must:

Prioritise First Nations-led policy, governance, and service delivery

Make cultural safety a baseline requirement, not an enhancement

Recognise that mentoring, schools, sport clubs, Elders, and cultural programs are core systems of care

Integrate cultural knowledge, lived experience, and community validation into evidence frameworks

Provide flexible, multi-year funding for locally grounded ACCOs and First Nations organisations

Early intervention works best when it is community-owned, ACCO-led, and culturally grounded. QYC already walks this path. We ask DSS to fund, respect,

and scale it—so that every child and family can be supported before crisis, in a way that belongs to community.

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.

QYC Submission Response

Question: Are the two main outcomes what we should be working towards for children and families?

The two proposed outcomes in the discussion paper are:

Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children

Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults

Queensland Youth Connections (QYC) welcomes the emphasis on resilience and wellbeing for children and families. These are important goals. However, from our experience working with First Nations families and vulnerable young people across North Queensland, these outcomes are necessary but insufficient to fully reflect what children, families, and communities need to thrive.

1. The importance of empowerment and support

Outcome 1, which focuses on parents and caregivers, recognises that children's wellbeing begins with the adults who care for them. Parents and caregivers play a critical role in shaping emotional, social, and cultural development. Outcome 2 highlights that children themselves must be supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults.

QYC agrees that strengthening parents and children is fundamental, but we emphasise that these outcomes must be embedded in a broader context of community and cultural connection, particularly for First Nations families. Children and parents do not exist in isolation: resilience emerges from relationships, kinship, culture, community, and connection to Country, as articulated in the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) framework.

2. What is missing from the outcomes

While the outcomes capture individual and family focus, they do not fully address the systemic and community factors that enable children and families to flourish.

a) Community as the first responder:

Early intervention is most effective when it is community-owned, led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Elders, and cultural mentors.

Parents and children benefit when schools, sport clubs, local programs, and cultural networks are engaged to identify and respond to challenges early.

Outcomes should explicitly recognise that children's resilience is strengthened when communities act collectively to support families, not just individual caregivers.

b) Cultural identity and connection:

Resilience is not just about emotional or physical health. For First Nations children, connection to culture, language, ceremony, and Country is central to identity and wellbeing.

Programs focused solely on parenting or child development without cultural context risk being insufficiently protective and may fail to prevent disengagement, family breakdown, or identity loss.

Outcomes should explicitly include cultural engagement, knowledge transfer, and intergenerational learning as part of what it means to raise resilient children and adults.

c) Trauma-awareness and healing:

Many families face historical and intergenerational trauma, systemic disadvantage, and marginalisation.

Resilience outcomes that do not acknowledge and address trauma may unintentionally reinforce inequities or place the burden solely on parents and children.

Early intervention, mentoring, and culturally safe services are essential to enable

families to heal, restore relationships, and build protective factors.

d) Continuity across life stages:

Focusing on parenting and child outcomes risks ending support too early. Vulnerable children, particularly adolescents, may face increased risk of disengagement from education, contact with justice systems, or loss of cultural connection.

Effective outcomes must span early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, recognising that resilience is built across life stages, not just in the early years.

3. How QYC's experience informs outcomes

QYC's programs—StrongBala, Connect4, 100 Project, and partnerships with OnCommon Country and the Youth Employment Project—illustrate the kinds of outcomes that truly support children and families:

a) Connection-first early intervention:

Mentoring and outreach begin before crises occur, identifying early signs of need in families and communities.

ACCOs and local cultural mentors lead interventions, ensuring they are culturally safe and trusted.

Early intervention is relationship-based, not referral-driven, which increases participation and long-term outcomes.

b) Whole-of-family and community engagement:

Resilience outcomes are achieved by working with the entire family and kinship network, not just the parent or child.

Community spaces, Elders, cultural mentors, schools, and sport clubs are engaged as co-creators of wellbeing, recognising that families thrive in supportive ecosystems.

c) Cultural and spiritual resilience:

Programs explicitly embed cultural identity, connection to Country, and intergenerational learning, which strengthens protective factors for both children and adults.

Resilience is framed not just as surviving adversity, but as belonging, identity, and empowerment through culture and community.

4. Strengthening the proposed outcomes

QYC recommends refining the outcomes to ensure they:

Recognise that early intervention is a shared community responsibility, not just the role of parents or services.

Include cultural identity, connection to Country, and intergenerational learning as core components of resilience.

Embed trauma-awareness and healing as part of both child and parent outcomes.

Extend across life stages, including adolescence and young adulthood, rather than focusing solely on early childhood.

Explicitly recognise the role of ACCOs and local leadership as central to achieving resilience outcomes.

A possible reframing of the outcomes could be:

Outcome 1 (refined): Parents, caregivers, and communities are empowered to nurture children within culturally safe, connected, and resilient families.

Outcome 2 (refined): Children and young people are supported to grow into healthy, resilient, culturally connected adults, with families and communities walking alongside them.

This framing shifts the focus from individual responsibility to shared, culturally grounded community responsibility, which aligns with both early intervention principles and First Nations perspectives.

5. Why these refinements matter

Without community ownership, cultural connection, and trauma-awareness:

Programs may fail to engage First Nations families due to fear of surveillance or misunderstanding of services.

Interventions may be reactive rather than preventive, missing early signs of need.

Protective factors in culture, family, and community may be underutilised, reducing long-term resilience.

When outcomes centre community-led early intervention, families and children are supported before crisis, cultural identity is strengthened, and resilience is embedded in everyday life.

6. Conclusion

The proposed outcomes are necessary but not sufficient. Empowering parents and supporting children are important, but resilience must also be community-owned, culturally grounded, trauma-aware, and sustained across life stages.

QYC's experience demonstrates that ACCO-led, connection-first early intervention achieves meaningful outcomes: children thrive, families are strengthened, and communities are resilient.

We recommend that the outcomes be refined to explicitly reflect community responsibility, cultural connection, and holistic, trauma-informed early intervention, ensuring that children, families, and communities have the support they need to flourish.

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

QYC Submission Response

Question: Will a single national program provide more flexibility for your organisation?

Queensland Youth Connections (QYC) recognises the potential benefits of a single national program in creating consistency, reducing duplication, and streamlining access to services. However, in practice, flexibility is essential for effective, community-led early intervention, particularly when supporting First Nations

children and families in Townsville and North Queensland.

QYC's programs—including StrongBala, Connect4, and the 100 Project—demonstrate that early intervention works best when it is locally governed, culturally grounded, and responsive to the lived experience of families. A single national program could provide greater flexibility if it allows ACCOs and local organisations to adapt delivery to their context, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model.

To achieve this, QYC strongly recommends that the Department seek advice from the Townsville First Nations Community Council (TFNCC) when designing national funding frameworks, selecting funding priorities, and evaluating programs. The TFNCC provides critical insight into local priorities, cultural safety, and community needs, ensuring that national funding decisions are relevant, responsive, and supported by local families and Elders. Without this input, even well-intentioned national programs risk centralised decision-making that does not align with the realities of local communities.

Flexibility in a national program should enable QYC to:

Respond to early indicators of need in the community: Outreach and mentoring occur where families naturally engage—schools, sport clubs, skateparks, and homes.

Prioritise ACCO-led, culturally grounded approaches: Programs should be guided by local Elders, cultural mentors, and community leaders to ensure they reflect First Nations perspectives on family, wellbeing, and resilience.

Tailor support to family and community context: Families face diverse challenges, from intergenerational trauma to educational disengagement. Flexible funding allows wraparound, holistic support for children and their families, addressing underlying issues rather than surface-level outcomes.

Pilot and scale effective local models: Programs like StrongBala demonstrate that mentoring, cultural identity work, and community navigation prevent crises. Flexibility allows QYC to adapt and expand these models while maintaining local ownership and accountability.

True flexibility also requires that the Department embed local guidance into governance, reporting, and funding structures. Seeking advice from the TFNCC

ensures that national programs are culturally safe, locally relevant, and responsive to the early intervention needs of First Nations families.

In conclusion, a single national program can provide greater flexibility, but only if the Department actively consults and partners with local First Nations governance bodies like the TFNCC. By integrating local knowledge, respecting ACCO leadership, and enabling community-led early intervention, national programs can support children, families, and communities before crises occur, in culturally grounded and sustainable ways.

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?

Queensland Youth Connections (QYC) delivers programs that focus on early intervention, family and community connection, and cultural engagement. Our services—including StrongBala, Connect4, and the 100 Project—fit across multiple funding streams, particularly those aimed at family support, child wellbeing, and community-led initiatives.

While the streams provide some alignment with our work, QYC’s experience shows that the current funding frameworks do not fully reflect the needs of First Nations children, families, and communities, either now or in the future. Funding streams are often structured around discrete programs, age groups, or outcomes that prioritise formal service delivery over community-led early intervention and culturally grounded approaches.

In practice, children and families in North Queensland need services that:

Enable early intervention through community ownership: Families benefit when ACCOs, Elders, cultural mentors, schools, and sport clubs act collectively to identify and respond to challenges before crises occur.

Support holistic wellbeing: Programs must address family, kinship, cultural, emotional, educational, and community needs, not just child-focused or parent-focused outcomes.

Embed cultural connection as a core outcome: First Nations children thrive when cultural identity, connection to Country, and intergenerational learning are part of early intervention, rather than being optional or add-on elements.

Adapt across life stages: Early intervention is not limited to 0–5 years. Families need continuity of support through childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood to prevent disengagement, trauma escalation, and loss of cultural connection.

Reflect local governance and accountability: Funding decisions should actively involve First Nations community leadership, such as the Townsville First Nations Community Council (TFNCC), to ensure programs meet real community priorities.

QYC recommends that future funding streams be designed to allow flexible, community-led, ACCO-driven approaches, recognising that early intervention is most effective when it is relational, culturally safe, and embedded in the community context. Streams that are too rigid or centrally controlled risk missing the early opportunities to support children and families, and may fail to meet emerging challenges such as intergenerational trauma, youth disengagement, and loss of cultural connection.

In conclusion, while QYC's services align broadly with the current funding streams, the streams need to be adapted to fully meet community needs now and into the future. This includes supporting ACCO-led early intervention, holistic family and community wellbeing, cultural connection, and flexible approaches that respond to local priorities and emerging challenges.

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

Queensland Youth Connections (QYC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on how the program could be strengthened to better support children, families, and communities in North Queensland, particularly First Nations communities. Our experience delivering StrongBala, Connect4, and the 100 Project highlights several ways that program design and funding could be improved to overcome current challenges.

1. Prioritise ACCO-led, community-owned early intervention

Early intervention is most effective when it is community-driven. ACCOs, Elders, and local cultural mentors understand the unique challenges faced by families and are best placed to deliver programs that are culturally safe, relational, and responsive. The program could support community-led approaches by:

Directly funding ACCOs to lead service design and delivery.

Embedding local governance structures, ensuring decisions reflect community

priorities.

Recognising the time and resources required for relationship-building, trust development, and community engagement, which are essential for early intervention but often underfunded.

2. Increase flexibility to respond to local needs

Current program structures can be too rigid, limiting organisations' ability to adapt services to local contexts. Flexibility could include:

Allowing funding to be used for place-based outreach, cultural activities, mentoring, and family navigation, rather than only standardised programs.

Supporting wraparound services that address family, kinship, cultural, and educational needs holistically.

Encouraging innovation and adaptation based on local evidence and community feedback.

3. Embed cultural safety and First Nations perspectives as core, not optional

Many families, particularly First Nations families, associate family services with surveillance or judgment. Programs could overcome this barrier by:

Ensuring cultural safety is a baseline requirement, not an optional component.

Involving Elders, knowledge holders, and community mentors in program delivery and evaluation.

Recognising cultural activities, identity work, and connection to Country as valid early intervention methods.

4. Strengthen continuity across life stages

Early intervention must extend beyond early childhood. Children, adolescents, and young people benefit from support that continues as they grow, particularly those at risk of disengagement from school or community. The program could support continuity by:

Funding programs that follow young people and families across multiple life stages.

Supporting adolescent and youth-specific initiatives, including mentoring, cultural identity work, and boys' and men's programs.

5. Integrate local advice into program governance

Finally, program design and funding decisions would benefit from formal guidance from local First Nations governance bodies, such as the Townsville First Nations Community Council (TFNCC). Local advice ensures programs are aligned with community priorities, culturally safe, and responsive to emerging needs.

Conclusion

QYC's experience demonstrates that the most effective programs are community-led, culturally grounded, and flexible. Changes that prioritise ACCO leadership, embed cultural safety, enable flexibility, support continuity across life stages, and formally integrate local advice will allow programs to overcome current challenges, engage families early, and build lasting resilience in children and communities.

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

Queensland Youth Connections (QYC) welcomes the opportunity to highlight additional priorities that the Department of Social Services (DSS) should consider to strengthen outcomes for children, families, and communities, particularly First Nations families in North Queensland.

1. Early intervention as a community responsibility

QYC recommends that DSS centre early intervention within community ownership, recognising that ACCOs and local cultural leaders are best placed to identify emerging risks and provide culturally safe, preventative support. Early intervention should be relational, place-based, and grounded in trusted community connections, rather than relying solely on centralised programs or standardised service delivery models.

2. ACCO and First Nations leadership in program design

A critical priority is ensuring decision-making power sits with local ACCOs, Elders, and community organisations. This includes:

Leading program design, governance, and evaluation.

Ensuring culturally appropriate approaches guide both policy and funding decisions.

Embedding lived experience and cultural knowledge into service delivery frameworks.

3. Culturally grounded evidence frameworks

Current evidence requirements often undervalue programs that are community-driven, culturally rich, and relational, such as mentoring, cultural identity work, and on-Country healing. DSS should recognise cultural evidence and lived experience outcomes as valid measures of program success, ensuring funding supports what actually works in communities.

4. Whole-of-family and wraparound supports

Children thrive when the entire family and kinship system is supported. DSS should prioritise funding models that:

Integrate family, cultural, education, and community supports.

Provide continuity beyond early childhood into adolescence and young adulthood.

Include boys- and men-specific programs, which are critical for identity formation and prevention of intergenerational challenges.

5. Integration of local advice

DSS should formally consult local governance bodies such as the Townsville First Nations Community Council (TFNCC) when planning, funding, and evaluating programs. This ensures initiatives align with community priorities, cultural norms, and real-world needs.

6. Building capacity and sustainability

Investments should support long-term, place-based programs rather than short-term projects. Flexible, multi-year funding enables ACCOs and local organisations to build relationships, embed cultural practice, and sustain early intervention efforts that genuinely strengthen families and communities.

Conclusion

QYC urges DSS to prioritise community-led early intervention, ACCO and First Nations leadership, culturally grounded evidence, whole-of-family supports, and local guidance. These priorities ensure that programs are effective, sustainable, and truly responsive to the needs of children and families, particularly First Nations families who are often disproportionately affected by systemic disadvantage.

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?

Yes. QYC’s service priorities align with these focus areas, as we work with families and young people at risk, including young parents, through early intervention, mentoring, and culturally grounded support. However, for these areas to be fully effective, they must be community-led, culturally safe, and embedded within whole-of-family and kinship support, which reflects how QYC operates in practice.

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

Yes. QYC recommends that the department consider engaging groups such as Elders for Change, the Townsville First Nations Community Council (TFNCC), and other local community-led organisations. These groups bring deep cultural knowledge, lived experience, and trusted community relationships, which are essential for supporting family wellbeing.

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

Beyond co-location, QYC has found that effective ways to connect and coordinate services for families include:

Community-led case coordination: Local ACCOs or cultural mentors acting as central points to guide families through multiple services.

Place-based outreach: Delivering support where families already engage—schools, sport clubs, skateparks, homes—rather than waiting for families to attend formal service sites.

Relational networks: Building long-term mentoring relationships and peer support that link families to relevant services.

Integrated planning with local governance: Involving Elders, knowledge holders, and community councils like the TFNCC in program design, decision-making, and monitoring ensures services meet real community needs.

Digital and flexible communication: Using mobile, online, or text-based systems to maintain contact and coordinate across services without requiring families to

navigate complex bureaucracies.

These approaches emphasise trust, cultural safety, and community ownership, which improve engagement and outcomes far more than just physically sharing a space.

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?

To demonstrate a service is genuinely connected to the community it serves, QYC would highlight the following in a grant application:

1. Local governance and leadership

Evidence that ACCOs, Elders, or community councils (e.g., TFNCC) are involved in decision-making, program design, and oversight.

Inclusion of lived experience advisors or local mentors in governance or advisory roles.

2. Community partnerships and networks

Collaboration with schools, sport clubs, youth groups, and cultural organisations.

Clear pathways for families to access wraparound support through trusted community hubs.

3. Place-based and relational delivery

Programs delivered where families already are, rather than expecting them to attend formal service sites.

Emphasis on long-term mentoring, cultural connection, and relational engagement.

4. Cultural grounding

Activities that incorporate First Nations cultural practices, on-Country experiences, storytelling, or Elders-led programs.

Demonstration of cultural safety as a core feature, not an add-on.

5. Evidence of trust and engagement

Participation rates, retention, and feedback from families demonstrating acceptance and trust in the service.

Examples of community-led initiatives or co-designed programs that have worked locally.

Applicants should be assessed on:

Depth of community involvement: Are local people actively shaping the program?

Cultural safety and relevance: Does the service respect and integrate cultural knowledge?

Integration with local services: Are partnerships meaningful and coordinated?

Evidence of trust and impact: Are families engaged and benefiting in ways validated by the community?

Sustainability and local ownership: Will the program continue to serve the community beyond the funding period?

Assessment should prioritise relational, culturally grounded, and community-led indicators, rather than purely quantitative or centrally prescribed metrics, as these are what truly demonstrate connection to the community.

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

Cultural context and identity

The proportion of First Nations families, language diversity, and cultural connection needs.

Community access to Elders, cultural mentors, and on-Country programs.

Intergenerational disadvantage and trauma

Historical and systemic factors impacting families, including grief, trauma, and

past involvement with child protection or justice systems.

Exposure to family violence, substance misuse, or poverty.

Community capacity and infrastructure

Presence of local ACCOs, youth services, schools, and sport or cultural programs that can support early intervention.

Local organisations' ability to deliver flexible, relational, and place-based services.

Service accessibility and participation barriers

Transport, digital connectivity, and financial or social barriers that limit families' access to services.

Trust in services, particularly for First Nations families who may fear surveillance or judgment.

Population dynamics and risk indicators

Youth disengagement from school, high unemployment, or involvement with the justice system.

Early indicators of family breakdown or child wellbeing risks.

Community-led governance and decision-making

Strength of local leadership, including Elders, community councils (e.g., TFNCC), and peer mentors, to guide program design and delivery.

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 way for organisations to demonstrate they are genuinely meeting community needs in grant applications is to show evidence of local engagement, cultural grounding, and outcomes that reflect lived experience. Key points include:

Community-led governance and partnerships

Show that ACCOs, Elders, cultural mentors, or community councils (e.g., TFNCC)

are involved in program design, decision-making, and oversight.

Evidence of partnerships with schools, sport clubs, youth groups, and other local organisations.

Co-designed and place-based delivery

Demonstrate programs are designed with community input rather than imposed externally.

Highlight services delivered where families already engage, such as homes, schools, skateparks, or local community spaces.

Culturally safe and relevant approaches

Include cultural mentoring, on-Country programs, storytelling, Elders-led activities, or other initiatives that reflect community identity.

Show that cultural safety is embedded as a core feature, not just an add-on.

Evidence of engagement and outcomes

Provide quantitative and qualitative indicators, such as participation rates, retention, and family feedback.

Include case studies or testimonials demonstrating that the program improves wellbeing, resilience, and connection to community.

Sustainability and local ownership

Demonstrate the service is long-term, locally led, and embedded in community structures, not short-term or externally dependent.

Responsive and adaptive practice

Show the organisation can adapt programs based on emerging community needs and feedback.

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

Simplify applications – Reduce paperwork and jargon so smaller ACCOs with limited administrative resources can apply.

Provide capacity-building support – Offer guidance, templates, or workshops to help ACCOs prepare strong applications.

Prioritise community-led services – Give preference to organisations that are locally run, culturally grounded, and governed by Elders or community councils.

Flexible funding – Allow ACCOs to use funds for early intervention, mentoring, cultural programs, and wraparound family support, rather than rigid service categories.

Multi-year grants – Provide longer-term funding so ACCOs can build relationships, embed programs, and show outcomes over time.

Local advice in assessment – Include input from local governance bodies like the TFNCC to ensure grants reflect community needs and cultural priorities.

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

To improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, program design should include:

Community-led decision-making – Programs should be governed and designed by ACCOs, Elders, and local cultural leaders, ensuring services reflect local needs and knowledge.

Cultural safety as a baseline – All services must embed cultural practices, identity work, and connection to Country as core elements, not optional extras.

Whole-of-family and kinship support – Programs should support parents, siblings, extended family, and community, recognising that children thrive within strong family and cultural networks.

Relational, place-based approaches – Deliver services where families already are (schools, sport clubs, homes, community hubs) and build long-term mentoring relationships.

Early intervention focus – Identify risks before crises occur, including school

disengagement, family breakdown, or cultural disconnection.

Inclusion of Elders and knowledge holders – Embed Elders, cultural mentors, and youth voices in program delivery, guidance, and evaluation.

Flexible and sustained funding – Multi-year funding supports relationship-building, program continuity, and long-term community impact.

Culturally valid evidence and evaluation – Recognise community validation, lived experience, and cultural outcomes as measures of program success alongside traditional metrics.

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

QYC would benefit from data that is relational, culturally relevant, and linked to community outcomes, rather than just numbers. Key types include:

Participation and engagement data

Attendance, retention, and continuation in programs (schools, mentoring, cultural activities).

Patterns of disengagement or barriers families face accessing services.

Family and community feedback

Qualitative insights from children, parents, Elders, and mentors about what works and what needs improvement.

Stories or case studies demonstrating cultural and social impact.

Cultural and social wellbeing indicators

Measures of connection to culture, community, family, and Country.

Engagement in mentoring, on-Country activities, or cultural programs.

Outcomes across life domains

Education participation, skill development, employment readiness, and youth

engagement.

Family functioning, resilience, and relational strength within kinship networks.

Early warning or risk indicators

Signs of school disengagement, family stress, or emerging challenges that require early intervention.

Program improvement data

Insights into which approaches are most effective for specific groups, allowing continuous adaptation.

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?

The most valuable data for QYC to share would demonstrate both measurable outcomes and lived experience impacts:

Participation and engagement metrics

Number of children, young people, and families engaged.

Retention rates in programs like StrongBala, Connect4, and the 100 Project.

Attendance at cultural, mentoring, or community activities.

Family and community feedback

Testimonials from children, parents, and Elders about improvements in wellbeing, confidence, or connection.

Stories that illustrate strengthened family relationships and cultural identity.

Wellbeing and resilience indicators

Improvements in social and emotional wellbeing, school engagement, and family functioning.

Strengthened kinship and community connections.

Cultural outcomes

Participation in on-Country activities, cultural mentoring, storytelling, or rites of passage.

Evidence of increased cultural knowledge and identity confidence among children and young people.

Early intervention impact

Reduction in risk factors such as school disengagement, contact with justice systems, or family stress indicators.

Community validation

Endorsements from local governance bodies like the TFNCC or Elders confirming that programs are trusted, culturally safe, and effective.

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

To prepare strong case studies, QYC would benefit from templates and guidance that balance structure with flexibility to capture cultural and relational impacts. Key supports include:

Structured case study templates

Sections for background, challenges, interventions, outcomes, and lessons learned.

Prompts to include cultural context, community engagement, and relational approaches.

Guidance on capturing qualitative insights

Tips for interviewing children, families, Elders, and mentors in culturally safe ways.

Guidance on incorporating yarning, storytelling, or narrative approaches that reflect lived experience.

Data integration prompts

Suggestions for including participation data, wellbeing indicators, and early intervention outcomes alongside stories.

Templates for visualising impact, e.g., timelines, relationship maps, or before-and-after comparisons.

Cultural safety guidance

Advice on gaining consent, respecting privacy, and representing First Nations families authentically.

Guidance on acknowledging Elders, mentors, and community contributions appropriately.

Tips for highlighting systemic impact

Prompts for showing how services strengthen families, support cultural identity, and build community resilience.

Examples of strong case studies

Sample case studies that balance quantitative data with rich narrative, demonstrating meaningful impact without breaching confidentiality.

This kind of guidance ensures case studies show both measurable outcomes and the relational, cultural, and community-led aspects of QYC's work, making them compelling and authentic for funders.

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

For QYC, a relational contracting approach means that contracts are partnerships, not just funding agreements. It recognises that achieving real impact with children and families depends on trust, collaboration, flexibility, and shared responsibility between the funder and the service provider.

In practice, this looks like:

Trust and collaboration

The funder works with the organisation as a partner, listening to community knowledge and expertise.

Open communication and shared problem-solving are expected, rather than a purely compliance-driven relationship.

Flexibility and adaptability

Programs can respond to emerging community needs or adjust delivery methods without bureaucratic delays.

Funding can cover unanticipated costs for cultural activities, mentoring, or relationship-building.

Community and cultural focus

Contracts recognise the importance of cultural safety, community-led design, and early intervention through trusted local networks.

Outcomes can include cultural, relational, and wellbeing indicators, not only numeric targets.

Shared accountability

Both funder and provider are accountable for outcomes, with mutual agreement on realistic targets and evaluation measures.

Success includes community impact and strengthened relationships, not just program outputs.

Long-term support

Multi-year funding to build trust, embed programs, and sustain community relationships.

Criteria to include in a relational contract:

Demonstrated community engagement and local governance involvement.

Flexibility to adapt delivery based on emerging needs.

Measures of cultural safety, relational impact, and family wellbeing.

Clear but adaptable reporting requirements that focus on outcomes rather than bureaucracy.

Recognition of wraparound and whole-of-family support as legitimate funded activities.

This approach ensures that contracts enable real, sustainable impact rather than constraining services with rigid, short-term compliance requirements.

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

The best way for the department to decide which organisations should be offered a relational contract is to prioritise community-led, culturally grounded, and locally embedded services. Key considerations include:

Community governance and leadership

Organisations with ACCO governance, Elders, cultural mentors, or local community councils (e.g., TFNCC) actively involved in decision-making.

Demonstrated community connection

Evidence of trust, engagement, and ongoing relationships with children, families, and local networks.

Strong partnerships with schools, sport clubs, youth groups, and other community services.

Culturally safe and place-based practice

Services that embed cultural knowledge, on-Country programs, and relational approaches in daily delivery.

Track record of outcomes

Organisations with a history of delivering positive outcomes for children, families,

and communities, including qualitative evidence such as family and community feedback.

Capacity and sustainability

Ability to adapt and respond to emerging needs, manage funds responsibly, and maintain long-term community relationships.

Early intervention focus

Services that prioritise preventing harm and supporting families before crises occur, reflecting a proactive, relational approach.

By using these criteria, the department can ensure relational contracts are awarded to organisations that are trusted, culturally competent, community-owned, and capable of delivering meaningful, long-term outcomes.

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

Yes, QYC is very interested in a relational contracting approach. This approach aligns with our way of working, which is community-led, culturally grounded, and relationship-focused. Relational contracting would allow us to adapt programs to emerging needs, prioritise early intervention, and work collaboratively with funders while maintaining long-term trust and meaningful impact for children, families, and communities. It recognises that outcomes are built through relationships, cultural connection, and community ownership, not just rigid outputs or short-term targets.

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

Yes. QYC would like the department to understand that a relational contracting approach only works if it genuinely values community leadership, cultural safety, and long-term relationships. Key points to consider include:

Time and trust are essential – Building meaningful relationships with families and communities takes time; contracts should allow for long-term engagement, flexibility, and ongoing relationship-building, not just short-term outputs.

Cultural and community expertise must be respected – The department should

recognise ACCOs, Elders, and local cultural mentors as experts, not just consultees, and embed their guidance in program design, delivery, and evaluation.

Flexibility in reporting and outcomes – Success for First Nations communities often includes relational, cultural, and wellbeing outcomes, which may not be captured by conventional metrics. Reporting requirements should reflect this.

Early intervention focus – Relational contracts should support services that identify and respond to risks early, not just intervene once crises occur.

Local decision-making – Including input from bodies like the Townsville First Nations Community Council ensures funding and programs are aligned with local needs, priorities, and cultural context.

In short, relational contracting should be truly collaborative, culturally grounded, and focused on long-term, community-owned outcomes, rather than a procedural or compliance-focused process.