



Strong and Resilient Communities

Key themes from consultations

In January 2017, the Department of Social Services (the Department) circulated to organisations currently funded under the Strengthening Communities Activity an information paper about the new [Strong and Resilient Communities grants](#) program (SARC). The purpose of this paper was to encourage organisations to provide input relating to SARC for the Department to consider and to inform the upcoming grants process.

DSS received valuable and comprehensive input from more than 50 organisations currently funded from a variety of Strengthening Communities Activity grants programs. Broadly speaking, the Department identified a total of nine key themes.

These key themes, together with the Department's response to each, are below.

Theme one: Collaboration

A number of organisations see opportunities to collaborate with other organisations that focus on similar areas or have similar values. Having, or being able to have, established networks within local communities was raised a number of times and many organisations thought that the creation of connections could be facilitated by the various levels of government.

Some organisations identified potential barriers to collaboration, such as a lack of available resources, conflicting organisational cultures and target groups, remoteness and lack of available organisations to collaborate with, as well as a fear of losing individual identity.

Department Response

The Grant Opportunity Guidelines will now reflect that collaboration is encouraged, but optional. Equal weighting will be applied to both types of applications.

Further, collaboration will be defined in a way that is flexible and include non-formal methods of collaboration (such as individuals being referred to and from the project, or contacting other organisations who are able to promote the project).

Theme two: Identification of specific locations

The information paper asked organisations to consider if they would be interested in the Department identifying specific geographical areas and locations of need in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. The response from organisations was mixed. A number of organisations expressed a desire for the Department to identify specific locations, but others expressed that applicants should be able to self-identify locations based on their own information and insights.

Department Response

The Department has taken these views into account. The Grant Opportunity Guidelines for Community Resilience grants will enable organisations to either self-identify locations or choose from a list of locations identified by the Department.

Theme three: Length of funding

Organisations were overwhelmingly supportive of a longer funding period than what was previously on offer under the Strengthening Communities Activity.

SARC will provide funding for up to three and a half years, from 1 January 2018 through to 30 June 2021.

Theme four: Demonstrating need

A number of organisations highlighted that mainstream quantitative data sources in isolation do not provide a full and accurate picture of community need. Many organisations have asked to be able to draw from more than one quantitative data set and also use qualitative data to reinforce the evidence base in the grant application.

Department Response

The Grant Opportunity Guidelines will provide a greater degree of flexibility for organisations to demonstrate need.

Theme five: Change in scope

A number of organisations expressed concern about the shift to “issues-based” funding. Many organisations currently funded under the Strengthening Communities Activity’s Volunteer Management Program, in particular, expressed concern that the change of focus under SARC may make it more difficult to secure funding.

Department Response

The Strengthening Communities Activity was redesigned to more closely align with Commonwealth areas of responsibility, and to be better positioned to address emerging community need.

The discrete program funding under the current Strengthening Communities Activity has been pooled under SARC to enable greater flexibility in the allocation of funding to directly address issues relating to social cohesion and community resilience for communities in need. The removal of discrete grants programs will increase funding opportunities for *all* organisations, including organisations currently funded under the Volunteer Management Program. While the Department acknowledges that grants programs are competitive in nature, there are also no restrictions regarding how many projects an organisation may wish to apply for, provided they meet the program's objectives of building social cohesion and community resilience.

Although discrete organisation-based funding programs are no longer a component under SARC, the activities performed by volunteer support services clearly align with the Government's priority to build more socially cohesive and resilient communities. Applications to fund projects that support volunteers to contribute to SARC priorities, including through volunteer management and referral activities, will continue to be eligible for funding under SARC.

Theme six: Smaller organisations

A number of self-identified 'smaller' organisations expressed concerns that competitive grants programs often result in larger and more professionally skilled organisations with grants writers being more successful than smaller organisations which may have more local, on-the-ground knowledge and experience.

Department Response

The Grant Opportunity Guidelines will incorporate an organisation's local presence and knowledge of local issues as part of the selection process.

The Department is committed to ensuring an equitable spread of project types and organisation types across a variety of geographical locations under SARC. The Department will also ensure that the application process is as streamlined and simplified as possible to reduce the amount of time it may take to submit an application.

Theme seven: Focus areas for research

The information paper asked organisations to identify some of the key issues of national significance relating to community resilience and social cohesion and what areas require further research or innovative solutions to address.

Some organisations identified prejudice, racism and a lack of cross-cultural understanding as key issues of significance. Other organisations identified volunteering and improving networks to reduce youth disempowerment. Organisations suggested a pilot project to address racial and religious tensions amongst community groups, and additional research on the value of volunteer support services and volunteering to build community resilience.

Department Response

The Department will consider this information during the development and implementation of the National Research and Projects grants program (expected late 2017).

Theme eight: What makes a community socially cohesive

Organisations provided input to the Department on some of the typical characteristics that make a community strong, resilient and socially cohesive. Feedback included acceptance of diversity, an improved sense of belonging, drive from the community for change, and opportunities to participate in the local community through paid employment or voluntary activities.

Department Response

The Department has taken this information into account and it will be reflected in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Theme nine: Barriers to applying

Some organisations identified that the typical amount of time allocated to develop and submit a grant application limited the ability of the organisation to apply, and reduced the quality of the application overall.

Department Response

The Department will ensure that the length of time allocated to potential applicants to develop and submit proposals is reasonable, and that the application process is as streamlined and simplified as possible to reduce the amount of time it may take to submit an application.

Stakeholder Input

Some organisations also identified that the typical work of some organisations will not fit within an issues and objectives-based focus.

Department Response

The nature of grants funding is to deliver one-off, time-limited projects that address Australian Government objectives. Grant funding is not intended to be ongoing, service-based funding. Commonwealth Government contributions are one source of funding for the operation of community services.

When Commonwealth Government grant opportunities become available, they will be advertised on [GrantConnect](#). This website also provides a list of forecast grant opportunities. Information about how to apply for a grant can be found on the [Community Grants Hub](#).

Other information about funding opportunities can be found through [Our Community](#) and [Philanthropy Australia](#).