



**Australian Government**

# **Ways of Working Statement**

**An activity under the Community Sector  
Grants Engagement Framework**



# Ways of Working Statement

## Purpose

The Ways of Working Statement is a commitment from the Australian Government (the government) to work effectively with the community services sector (the sector) to support delivery of high-quality services through grant programs that benefit the health, wellbeing and safety of Australian communities. This commitment is about placing the needs of individuals, families and communities at the centre of policy design, service delivery and interactions involving government and the sector. It acknowledges that delivering services that meet the needs of individuals, families and communities is a joint responsibility which also requires the sector to work effectively with the government.

The Ways of Working Statement forms part of the Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework (the Framework), to drive administrative and cultural change across the Australian Public Service (APS), to deliver grants that:

- better serve the sustainability of the sector; and
- ensure better outcomes for communities are achieved in delivering government policy.

Together, the Ways of Working Statement and the Framework will improve the governments support to Australian individuals, families and communities, while contributing to broader government initiatives and reforms such as the Charter of Partnerships and Engagement as part of the APS Reform.

Both the Ways of Working Statement and the Framework will be reviewed as part of the Framework review processes to ensure they are meeting their intended purpose.

## Context

The government is committed to improving the health, wellbeing and safety of Australian individuals, families and vulnerable members of communities. The sector provides critical services to support Australian communities and is a major contributor to Australia's social and economic wellbeing.

The sector is experiencing significant challenges including workforce shortages and a reduction in volunteers, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and disasters, and additional compliance and administration requirements. These challenges are being compounded by greater costs of delivering services due to inflation pressures, greater demand on services, and increasing complexity of supports required.

These challenges continue to impact the capacity of the sector to provide high quality services and support to Australian individuals, families and communities.

## Development of the Ways of Working Statement

The Ways of Working Statement has been drafted in consultation with the Community Services Advisory Group (CSAG) and an Interdepartmental Committee on a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector. It has been developed as a living document with the potential to broaden its scope and application in the future.

It is informed by 237 submissions received in response to public consultation on how to build a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector, conducted by the Department of Social Services in late 2023.<sup>1</sup> Additional validation of findings from the public consultation was achieved through a series of targeted workshops with community sector organisations (CSOs) in June 2024, which focused on key issues raised in consultation.

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<sup>1</sup> DSS (Department of Social Services) (2023) [A stronger, more diverse and independent community sector- consultation](#), DSS website, accessed 17 February 2025.



## Scope and Application

There are many different definitions of the sector, which can be broadly defined as delivering services that ‘provide support and assistance to individuals, families, and groups to maximise their potential and enhance community wellbeing’.<sup>2</sup> The Ways of Working Statement acknowledges the sector consists of a range of organisations, including charities, not-for-profits and for profits, and the sector relies heavily on funding arrangements with all levels of government for the purpose of delivering services to people in need.

While the Ways of Working Statement is relevant to all parts of the sector, given the sector’s breadth, the scope and application of this statement will be particularly focussed on organisations that are charities and not-for-profits, and that have or seek to have a funding relationship with the government.

In terms of the government, the Ways of Working Statement is relevant to all government agencies that have a funding relationship with the sector. Increasingly, government agencies have been moving towards facilitating stronger relationships with the sector, while recognising the real and perceived power imbalance which may exist due to government agencies roles in grant administration.

This scope aligns with the Framework. This scope and application are important to enable the measurement of progress against the Ways of Working Statement and the Framework.

## Vision

The health, wellbeing and safety of individuals, families and communities are supported, and their unique needs are met through a vibrant and sustainable community services sector supported by the government.

## Principles of engagement

The principles of engagement have been developed to put the goals and aspirations of individuals, families and communities at the forefront of all engagement between the government and the sector.

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission (2024) [Report on Government Services 2024 – F Community Services](#), Productivity Commission website, accessed 3 January 2025.

The government will aim to work with the sector to support Australian communities in ways that are:

## 1. Collaborative

- Build trusted, professional and respectful relationships with the sector and communities, valuing the unique perspectives and expertise each stakeholder can contribute.
- Be clear on expectations, roles, responsibilities, and limitations, including what can be collaborated on where there are shared interests, and what outcomes are sought.
- Identify and engage through existing mechanisms and look for cross portfolio collaboration opportunities to enable consistent approaches.

### **Example that demonstrates this principle:**

The National Coordination Group (NCG) utilises the expertise of community organisations to provide advice to the Minister for Social Services on Emergency Relief, Food Relief and Financial Counselling funding in response to cost-of-living pressures and natural disasters.

## 2. Open and transparent

- Plan and undertake engagement activities to identify the needs and views of individuals, families and communities including through co-design and shared decision-making processes, where appropriate, and avoiding duplication of consultation, where possible.
- Clear and timely communication with impacted individuals, families and communities, ensuring diverse groups are engaged in culturally appropriate ways, including accessible information for people with disability and in-language for First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, where appropriate.
- Ensure there are mechanisms to receive feedback and share how the perspectives of the sector, individuals, families and communities have contributed to decision-making.

### **Example that demonstrates this principle:**

[The Improving Multidisciplinary Responses \(IMR\) program](#) – A measure of the 2021 Closing the Gap Implementation Plan and a Safe and Supported action, to address Target 12 (reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care). It is a national, multi-jurisdictional initiative, which aims to enhance and support holistic responses to First Nations families with multiple and complex needs in culturally, geographically and socially diverse contexts. Examples of shared decision-making spanned the design, implementation and evaluation phases, including:

- co-developing Grant Opportunity Guidelines with the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group
- engaging First Nations providers to undertake community consultations in two locations
- engaging with community to promote the grant opportunity
- partnering with jurisdictions and First Nations representatives to co-select grant recipients
- evaluation approaches to be co-designed with local community.

### 3. Innovative

- Identify barriers and explore opportunities for change to further improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.
- Pursue opportunities for trialling and testing different approaches, including for early intervention and prevention, to meet the unique needs of communities.
- Actively engage to listen, understand and share learnings from trials of new approaches.

#### **Example that demonstrates this principle:**

[Stronger Places, Stronger People](#) – A community-led, collective impact initiative designed to improve the lives of children and their families, overseen by the government in partnership with state and territory governments and 10 communities across Australia. Additional funding has been provided over 6 years from 2028–29 to continue and enhance this initiative. Funding is provided to community-led initiatives through a 5-year maturity model, to support the sustained progression of communities in building the capabilities required to work in partnership, developing and implementing a local agenda for change and sharing decision-making.

### 4. Outcomes focused

- Collect data and evidence to build a stronger understanding of individuals, families and communities, including their unique challenges and service needs, by strengthening relationships with relevant subject matter experts.
- Focus more on measuring outcomes rather than outputs.
- Use the evidence base to develop and implement sustainable and enduring policy and program solutions.

#### **Example that demonstrates this principle:**

[Outcomes Fund](#) – The government committed \$100 million over 10 years to establish an Outcomes Fund as part of the 2023-24 Budget. It will draw on the learnings from the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) Trials and seeks to scale outcomes-based contracting. The fund will make payments to states, territories and service providers for projects that deliver agreed, measurable, positive outcomes for people experiencing entrenched disadvantage. There are 3 focus areas, supporting families and children, overcoming barriers to employment and supporting people facing homelessness. Following an expression of interest process, 3 projects were successfully announced in December 2024.

# The Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework

This statement will support the Framework which will drive change through actions organised around 5 pillars:

1. Build and maintain engagement
2. Greater certainty and sufficiency of funding
3. Reduced administrative burden
4. Encourage diversity and flexibility
5. Develop capability and promote innovation.

## Monitoring progress

An Outcomes Measurement Plan will monitor and publicly report on the progress of actions undertaken under the Framework and the Ways of Working Statement. The Outcomes Measurement Plan will encourage adherence to the Ways of Working Statement by the government including publication of case studies to showcase good practice.

CSOs are invited to adopt the engagement principles outlined within the Ways of Working Statement, recognising the critical role they play working together with government in achieving outcomes for Australian communities.



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