Australian Government

Department of Social Services

Families and Communities Program

Strengthening Communities Guidelines Overview

October 2016

Preface

The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) has a suite of Program Guidelines which provides information about each Program that provides grants funding, and the suite of Activities that contribute to that Program. They provide the key starting point for parties considering whether to participate in a Program and form the basis for the business relationship between DSS and the grant recipient.

DSS recognises and supports the work of civil society organisations. The DSS approach to working with civil society is based on reducing red tape, providing greater flexibility and respecting the independence of the sector. This approach recognises that civil society organisations should be supported to self-manage the delivery of support to our communities rather than being burdened with unnecessary government requirements.

Program Guidelines are provided to applicants for each grant funding round. The approach to grants funding described in the Guidelines aims to foster collaboration and innovation in the community across civil society freeing up resources to improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

The Program Guidelines for each grant funding round include:

- a Program Guidelines Overview document (this document) that provides an overview of how funding rounds may be conducted for each Activity (PBS administered line item) that contribute to the overall Program outcome, and
- an Application Pack - a suite of documents with information specific to each grant funding round conducted within the Activity.

The simplified Program arrangements establish the framework for the Department to move towards a single grant agreement per provider, implement new and improved financial reporting systems, reduce reporting and regulation, consolidate funding rounds and support greater service delivery innovation to meet the needs of clients.

DSS reserves the right to amend these documents from time to time by whatever means it may determine in its absolute discretion and will provide reasonable notice of these amendments.

Version Control

DOCUMENT VERSION #	DATE	DESCRIPTION
V1.0	June 2014	Department of Finance approved
V2.0	November 2014	N/A
V3.0	October 2016	Applicant eligibility update

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1 Program Overview – Families and Communities

1.1 Program outcomes

The Department of Social Services (DSS) funds organisations to develop and maintain a cohesive Australian community and improved independence and self-sufficiency recognising that government contributions are only one source of funding for the operation of community services.

The Families and Communities Program aims to support families, improve children's wellbeing and increase participation of vulnerable people in community life to enhance family and community functioning.

The following seven Activities make up the Program and support the Commonwealth Government's priorities and responsibilities:

- Financial Wellbeing and Capability
- Families and Children
- Strengthening Communities
- Settlement Services
- Civil Society
- Families and Communities Service Improvement
- National Initiatives

1.2 Program objectives

The Program aims to strengthen relationships, support families, improve children's wellbeing and increase the participation in community life to strengthen family and community functioning, and reduce the costs of family breakdown. The Program will provide a range of services, focussed strengthening relationships, and building parenting and financial management skills, providing support for better community connections, as well as services to help newly arrived migrants to in their transition to life in Australia.

The Program also aims to provide a foundation for integrated, community led program delivery that understands and meets local needs and promotes innovation and collaboration. This will include the establishment of a platform for continued improvement in the way DSS does its business, clarifying and strengthening Commonwealth and State/Territory government responsibilities and fostering stronger relationships with civil society and partnering with service providers.

The Program will provide a range of services, predominantly focussed on early intervention, prevention, and support, including assistance for relationship breakdown.

These services will be provided to families, children, young people, volunteers, multicultural communities, humanitarian entrants, migrants and individuals with particular circumstances.

2 Activity Overview – Strengthening Communities

The Strengthening Communities (SC) Activity combines Sub-Activities that have a strong focus on the broader community and participation within it.

The Strengthening Communities Activity consists of three Sub-Activities:

- Community Development and Participation (refer 2.2.1)
- Volunteering (refer 2.2.2), and
- Multicultural Affairs (refer 2.2.3).

2.1 Aims and objectives

To support communities to become more socially cohesive and resilient, by building their capacity to meet local community needs.

The Strengthening Communities Activity aims to strengthen communities and promote inclusion and participation of disadvantaged people in community life. The Strengthening Communities Activity provides funding to organisations to develop solutions and deliver responsive and integrated services that meet local community needs.

The three Sub-Activities of the Strengthening Communities aim to build the capacity of communities and organisations to be able to identify and address local community needs, facilitate partnerships that result in better services and service integration, assist volunteers and encourage volunteering, develop strategies to increase awareness of access to services, and support organisations in the delivery of services to individuals and organisations.

2.2 Sub-Activities

2.2.1 Community Development and Participation

Grants are to support the delivery of services or one-off projects, activities or events that respond to local community needs and make a positive contribution to community life. The purpose of these grants are to:

- increase community participation in community activities
- increase the participation of vulnerable people in community life
- improve the responsiveness and integration of local community services
- facilitate access to services and service networks to improve capacity and sustainability
- increase the participation of people who are disadvantaged or marginalised in community life, including approaches to improve engagement with disadvantaged people
- build skills and opportunities to make communities more self-reliant and sustainable, including the development of partnerships with the corporate/business sector or the development of social enterprises
- support local service networks to improve capacity and sustainability
- carry out community advocacy for service system improvements (systemic)
- use place-based approaches to service integration
- use early intervention or prevention approaches to servicing
- increase the capacity and ability of seniors Australians to connect with their families, friends and communities by participating online, and
- support the effective operation of organisations which provide training to seniors in using digital technology.

2.2.2 Volunteering

Grants are to support the ongoing delivery of services or one-off projects and activities to encourage, support and increase participation in volunteering.

The purpose of the grants is to:

- provide support and recognition for volunteers
- maximise and promote volunteering participation, including opportunities to increase the diversity of volunteers and the ways in which people volunteer
- maximise opportunities for volunteering to provide pathways to other forms of social and economic participation
- support the development of a volunteering sector that is responsive to emerging trends and issues
- encourage/maximise leadership, mentoring and volunteering activity
- provide on-the-ground support and information for volunteers and volunteer-using organisations in locations where there is identified need
- provide access to the resources and support volunteers and volunteer using organisations need to operate effectively and efficiently, and
- build effective volunteering practices and opportunities within organisations and communities.

2.2.3 Multicultural Affairs

These grants are aimed at building socially cohesive Australian communities. They do so by supporting projects that build the long-term capacities of higher need and at-risk communities, including through the promotion of stronger community relations and the development of sustainable community partnerships.

Higher need communities include communities with high levels of cultural diversity and low levels of social cohesion. At-risk communities include communities at risk of negative outcomes, such as those experiencing high levels of unemployment, low education outcomes and low English language proficiency. Consideration may also be given to factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and disability when identifying these communities.

The two main aims of the grants are to:

- develop the community capacity of specific communities under significant pressure due to their cultural, religious or ethnic diversity, focussing primarily on supporting specific communities with the purpose of building their social cohesion capacity and/or to promote their positive contribution to Australia. For example:
  - o increasing connection to, awareness and understanding of government and non-government support mechanisms to build and/or support community capacity
  - o building capability to have a voice and leadership skills, including for young people, women and new and emerging communities
  - o increasing opportunities for participation in social, economic and community life, including volunteering, social, cultural and sporting activities
  - o raising cross-cultural awareness of specific communities' needs to facilitate increased participation in social, economic and community life
  - o enabling faith and community leaders to better represent their community in Australia
  - o facilitating targeted information awareness initiatives and activities to build better understanding of Australia's cultural diversity
  - o promoting the unifying value of citizenship, and
  - o addressing involuntary social isolation of specific communities where this adversely impacts social cohesion and harmony.

- promote respect, fairness and a sense of belonging for Australians of every race, culture and religion, focusing on the promotion of inter-community harmony and understanding, for example:
  - o promoting the importance of mutual respect, understanding and fair treatment of all, regardless of peoples' cultural, racial or religious differences
  - o promoting harmony between groups of people from different cultural, racial and religious backgrounds
  - o promoting the understanding of Australia's democratic principles, rights and obligations
  - o providing as feasible, practical and effective means of addressing systemic issues of racism and discrimination
  - o raising awareness of all Australians to build greater respect and understanding of diversity;
  - o promoting the benefits of living in a culturally diverse society, including through participation in Harmony Day or other similar activities, and
  - o providing opportunities for Australians of all backgrounds to come together and experience different cultural traditions, including through multicultural arts and festival projects.

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) receives special purpose funding to develop and maintain collaborative and effective links with governments and other key organisations; to advocate, lobby and promote issues to government, business and the broader community on behalf of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure their needs and aspirations are given proper recognition in public policy (This special purpose funding is not subject to open selection processes).

2.3 Applicant eligibility

The following entity types meet the eligibility requirements to be invited to apply for a grant for this Activity:

a. Incorporated Associations (incorporated under state/territory legislation, commonly have 'Association' or 'Incorporated' or 'Inc.' in their legal name)
b. Incorporated Cooperatives (also incorporated under state/territory legislation, commonly have 'Cooperative' in their legal name)
c. Companies (incorporated under the *Corporations Act 2001* – may be a proprietary company (limited by shares or by guarantee) or public companies)
d. Aboriginal Corporations (incorporated under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006)*
e. Organisations established through a specific piece of Commonwealth or state/territory legislation (public benevolent institutions, churches, universities, unions etc
f. Partnerships, and
g. Trustees on behalf of a Trust.

In addition to the entity types listed above, an individual representing a volunteer based community group will also meet the eligibility requirements to be invited to apply for the Volunteer Grants round in 2016 which forms part of the Volunteering Sub-Activity (refer 2.2.2).

Not-for-profit entity types specified above meet the eligibility requirements.

The following entity types may be eligible and invited to apply in special circumstances:
• For-profit entity types listed above
• State and Territory Governments
• Local Governments.

2.4 Participants/clients/recipients/target group

Organisations receiving grants under the Strengthening Communities Activity deliver free, independent, non-judgemental services to support the development and cohesiveness of communities, as well as to assist disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals and families.

Priority groups include:

• Individuals/communities who are vulnerable or at risk of social exclusion or who have more complex needs and experience greater barriers to social and economic participation in their communities. Priority groups include Indigenous Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, senior Australians and people with disability or who have mental health issues
• seniors aged 50 years and over with limited knowledge and or experience, or who lack confidence, in using digital technology
• volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and individuals and organisations interested in participating in volunteering activities and that need support in these activities
• high need and at-risk culturally and linguistically diverse communities and community leaders where community relations issues are prevalent, and
• new and emerging culturally and linguistically diverse communities and community leaders.

In specific circumstances, funding may also be provided to organisations for the specific purpose of providing advice to Government, such as for research, project development or evaluations.

2.5 Funding for the Activity

An amount of $112.61 million has been allocated over four years from 1 July 2014 by the Australian Government for the program. All amounts are GST exclusive.

Funding amounts are inclusive of discretionary grants awarded under these Program Guidelines and funding provided through other process such as procurement. Funding amounts included in these

Program Guidelines are estimates and may change in the course of the budget year as government priorities change.

The Minister for Social Services has overall responsibility for the Strengthening Communities Activity.

Where DSS has invited applications for grants, the final decision about Activity Delivery Areas, sites and proposals for service delivery will be made by the Departmental delegate.

DSS may negotiate grant agreements ranging up to a five year term based on the grant purpose and degree of risk and priorities for funding.

As part of the Strengthening Communities Activity, organisations may choose to use up to 10% of their funding for innovative projects. This will be negotiated as part of the grant agreement.

In accordance with the Fair Work Australia decision of 1 February 2012 to increase wages in the Social and Community Services (SACS) sector, the DSS will provide supplementation funding to organisations employing SACS workers delivering Strengthening Communities. To be eligible for supplementation funding organisations must be delivering in-scope Commonwealth funded programs and have employed staff under the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 (SACS Modern Award), specifically under one of the following Schedules:

- Schedule B – Classification Definitions - Social and Community Services Employees, and
- Schedule C – Classification Definitions - Crisis Accommodation Employees.

Organisations affected by the Western Australia Industrial Relation Commission (WAIRC) SACS Decision of 29 August 2013 may also be entitled to SACS supplementation.

The amount for Strengthening Communities funding offered may be less than the amount requested in your application. In such cases, organisations will be asked to revise their budget and negotiate a work program in line with the funding offered.

Funding is managed to ensure efficient, ethical, economical and effective use of public monies.

2.6 Eligible and ineligible activities

The grant may be used for:

- staff salaries and on-costs which can be directly attributed to the provision of the Activity in the identified service area or areas as per the grant agreement;
- employee training for paid and unpaid staff including Committee and Board members, that is relevant, appropriate and in line with the Activity;
- operating and administration expenses directly related to the delivery services, such as:
  - o telephones
  - o rent and outgoings
  - o computer / IT/website/software
  - o insurance
  - o utilities
  - o postage
  - o stationery and printing
  - o accounting and auditing
  - o travel/accommodation costs
  - o assets as defined in the Terms and Conditions that can be reasonably attributed to meeting agreement deliverables, and
  - o evaluation.

Grants are not provided for:

- purchase of land
- major capital expenditure
- the covering of retrospective costs
- costs incurred in the preparation of a grant application or related documentation

- subsidy of general ongoing administration costs such as electricity, phone and rent of an organisation
- major construction/capital works
- overseas travel, and
- activities for which other Commonwealth, State, Territory or Local Government bodies have primary responsibility.

2.7 Activity links and working with other agencies and services

Effective links with other agencies and services provide the opportunity to raise awareness broadly and on specific issues. Where appropriate and relevant to the funded Activity, grant recipients are encouraged to strengthen service networks, including linkages and partnerships with other agencies, services and communities, to help deliver responsive and integrated services that meet local needs and builds cooperative relations.

2.8 Specialist requirements (e.g. Legislative requirements)

In delivering the Activity, organisations are required to comply with all relevant laws; and DSS Policies as specified at Doing Business with DSS.

Grant recipients must comply with all relevant Commonwealth and state/territory legislation and regulations, including, but not limited to:

- *The Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* in preforming the obligations outlined in the grant agreement
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- *The Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) in regards to undertaking the Activity
- *The Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth)* (FOI Act), and
- Any applicable Occupational Health and Safety and Equal Employment Opportunity laws.

Service providers, through their Strengthening Communities grant Activity, that support organisations that work with Vulnerable Persons, must assist those organisations to meet legislative requirements.

Australia's *Multicultural Access and Equity Policy: Respecting diversity. Improving responsiveness* obliges Australian government agencies to ensure that cultural and linguistic diversity is not a barrier for people engaging with government and accessing services to which they are entitled, for example, by providing access to language services where appropriate. Grant applicants should consider whether services, projects, activities or events may require the use of professional translating or interpreting services in order to communicate with non-English speakers. If required, based on an assessment of the target group, costs for translating and interpreting services should be factored into grant applications. For further information on the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy please refer to the DSS website.

2.9 Information technology

Strengthening Communities grant recipients must have systems in place to allow them to meet their data collection and reporting obligations outlined in their Schedule.

Performance information (e.g. client characteristics and service delivery information) will be required to be collected by service providers at the client level and entered directly into the department's client data capture system, its predecessor or via a DSS approved alternative mechanism.

Where collection of client level data is not appropriate for instance due to the Activity involving a large group, aggregate reporting will be permitted.

The Data System protocols and requirements are available at the DSS website.

The new application will:

- Be a web based portal,
- Allow submission of data through external approved third party applications, and

- Support submission of data through other approved methods.

Performance information required to be collected may include (but is not limited to):

- Client consent (where required)
- Client identity characteristics
- Client demographic characteristics
- Service delivery information, and
- Client outcomes.

Please Note there are no minimum Information Technology requirements for grant recipients.

2.10 Activity Performance and Reporting

DSS focuses on outcomes; however, other information, not related to outcomes includes information that can be used to monitor ongoing operation of the grant recipient's service delivery/project; and track issues that may affect the operation of the grant recipient's service delivery/project.

DSS's Performance Indicators focus on three key questions:

1. Are we achieving what we expected?
2. How well is it being done?
3. How much is being done?

Performance Indicators based on these questions may be included in the grant agreement for the grant recipient.

Performance against agreed targets for the indicators, and additional information needed to evaluate service delivery/project performance, must be reported in progress reports and a final report as outlined in the grant agreement with DSS.

Full details of reporting requirements will be listed in the grant agreement for each grant recipient.

2.11 Financial Reporting

The Activity will be managed to ensure the efficient and effective use of public monies. This will be consistent with best value in social services principles; the DSS grant agreement and will aim to maintain viable services and act to prevent fraud upon the Commonwealth.

Acquittal documents must be provided to DSS as outlined in the grant agreement.

Funding must only be used for the purposes for which it was provided.

2.12 DSS's responsibilities and accountabilities under the Activity

The Minister for Social Services has overall responsibility for the Families and Communities Program.

DSS will:

- meet the Governments terms and conditions of the grant agreement established with organisations
- ensure that services provided under the Program are accountable to the Australian Government under the terms and conditions agreed in the grant agreement
- administer the operation of the Program in a timely manner
- identify suitable providers to deliver the activities required as per the grant agreement
- work in partnership with the provider to ensure the Program is implemented and will provide the service provider with constructive feedback
- ensure that the outcomes contained within the Program Guidelines are being met and evaluate the provider's performance against the Program outcomes, and
- Information on the successful grants will be published on the DSS website within the required timeframes.

2.13 Grant recipients responsibilities and accountabilities under the Activity

In entering into a grant agreement with DSS, the grant recipient must comply with all requirements outlined in the suite of documents that comprise the agreement including these Program Guidelines, the grant agreement and the [Standard Agreement Terms and Conditions](#).

Grant recipients are responsible for ensuring:

- the terms and conditions of the grant agreement are met
- service provision is effective, efficient, and appropriately targeted
- highest standards of duty of care are applied
- services are operated in line with, and comply with the requirements as set out within all state and territory and Commonwealth legislation and regulations
- ensuring Indigenous Australians have equal and equitable access to services
- working collaboratively to deliver the Program, and
- contributing to the overall development and improvement of the Program such as sharing best practice.

2.14 Risk management strategy

All DSS grant agreements are managed according to their level of risk. Organisations will be subject to a Provider Capacity Risk Assessment prior to the negotiation of grant agreements. Organisations may also be required to participate in a Financial Viability Assessment during the Assessment process of an application. A periodic monitoring process is undertaken during the term of an agreement which monitors service delivery and is used to provide evidence for ongoing risk assessments.

2.15 Special conditions applying to this Activity

N/A

3   Application Process

3.1   Overview of the application process

All grant processes will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Commonwealth Grant Rules (Commonwealth Grant Guidelines will cease 30 June 2014 and will be replaced with Commonwealth Grant Rules 1 July 2014) and will be for purposes that are consistent with the objectives and priorities of the Activity.

3.2   Program Guidelines

Applicants for grants funding rounds conducted for this Activity will be provided with the Program Guidelines suite of documents comprising:

- the Program Guidelines Overview (this document), and
  an Application Pack - a suite of documents with information specific to each grant funding round conducted within the Activity.

3.2.1   Application Pack

The Application Pack will comprise the following documents:

Funding Round Summary

This document includes the following information:

- objectives and requirements of the funding round
- the type of selection process being used
- opening and closing dates
- the value of the funding round

- how to submit an application
- selection criteria, and
- eligibility criteria.

Application Form

This document asks you to address selection criteria relating to the particular funding round you are applying for and also requires you to complete general information about you as the provider applying for funding.

DSS Streamlined Grant Agreement template – General Grant Conditions

The signed grant agreement will include information relating to the Grant objectives, the activities to be undertaken, the duration of the grant, payment, reporting requirements, supplementary terms and conditions, and signatures of DSS and providers.

Applicants for funding rounds may also be provided with the following additional information as part of the Application pack including:

Questions and Answers

This document aims to answer any questions and provide additional information relating to the activity and the application process for each individual activity that you are applying for funding. This will include operational guidelines if applicable.

3.3 Achieving value for money

In assessing the extent to which the application represents value for money, DSS will have regard to the following:

- the relative merit of each application
- the overall objective/s to be achieved in providing the funding
- the relative cost of the proposal, or of elements of the proposal
- the extent to which the applicant has demonstrated a capacity to fund the proposal taking into consideration all possible sources of finance, including debt finance
- the geographic location of the proposal, and
- the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates that the proposal will be located in a community with one or more of the following features:
  - the community is identified as a priority community by DSS
  - the community has high levels of the target population or of a special needs group
  - the community has high population growth in the target population or has anticipated high population growth in the target population.

3.4 Choice of selection process

When undertaking a selection process DSS will consider the proportionality of scale, nature, funding amount, complexity and risks involved in the funding round. DSS will consider proportionality to inform the choice of the application and selection process, the type of grant agreement to be used and the reporting and acquittal requirements.

The Strengthening Communities Activity funds a diverse range of service types and other activities. Due to the size and complexity of the Strengthening Communities Activity, access to funding will be available through a variety of means and at various times throughout the funding period. DSS proposes to undertake a mix of the following selection processes to achieve the objectives and priorities for the Strengthening Communities Activity.

3.4.1 Open competitive selection process

An open competitive selection process is open to all providers operating in the market place. Open processes are advertised through the media, the DSS website and other sources in order to attract as much interest as possible. Open competitive grant rounds have open and closed nominated dates, with eligible applications being assessed against the nominated selection criteria.

3.4.2 Restricted competitive selection process

A restricted (or targeted) selection process is used where there are few providers available due to highly specialised services being required, there are geographical considerations, specific expertise is required or there are time constraints. A restricted grant round is still competitive, but only opens to a small number of potential grant recipients based on the specialised requirements of the granting activity or project under consideration. Potential grant recipients are invited to apply and will still need to be assessed against nominated selection criteria.

3.4.3 Direct selection process

A direct selection process is a closed non-competitive process, where an approach is made directly to an existing, high performing provider to expand their current service delivery activities or deliver new services. It involves assessment of a provider's capacity to deliver an expanded service or capability to deliver a new service through use of selection criteria and/or an assessment of a provider's current performance.

3.4.4 Expressions of Interest (EOI) process

DSS may call for EOIs to test the market to ascertain the extent of potential applicants. An EOI will be advertised as the first in a two stage process. The second stage involves applicants selected through the EOI process applying in either a targeted or direct process.
DSS may advertise any funding process:

- in major national newspapers and other selected newspapers
- on the DSS website, and
- on the Government grants website.

Any advertisement will inform potential applicants of where to obtain application information for the relevant process. Processes will be provided on the DSS website under the Grants tab.

DSS from time to time may conduct a direct selection in the event that there is a change in government policy, a shift in demographics, unforeseen circumstances or due to service provider failure.

3.5 Service delivery areas

It is expected that if a service area changes, the grant recipient will be able to meet the cost of delivering the Activity in the revised area through its own efficiencies and within the funding provided.

Service delivery areas or catchment areas designated within the grant agreement must not change without prior written agreement from DSS. However, grant recipients are encouraged to monitor demographic changes in their broader region and discuss varying their catchment areas with DSS if this helps address an emerging need not being met in that area. Where service delivery areas or catchment areas require definition, this will be provided in the Application Pack.

DSS may also, at its discretion, facilitate flexible grants in circumstances where grant recipients have met grant agreement requirements within a specified service area and wish to reallocate all or part of any remaining funds to another service they are funded to deliver in another service delivery area under the same grant agreement.

3.6 Selection criteria

This section sets out the full suite of selection criteria that may be used for any funding process under the Strengthening Communities Activity. Some Sub-Activities may have specialist criteria applied.

Depending on the Activity/Sub-Activity and type of funding process, a reduced set of assessment criteria may be set by the appropriate departmental delegate exercising their ability to waive certain criteria. The final set of selection criteria will be reflected in the Application Pack.

The equally weighted selection criteria are:

- demonstrate your understanding of the need for the funded Activity in the specified community and/or the specified target group
- describe how the implementation of your proposal will achieve the Activity objectives for all stakeholders, including value for money within the Grant funding
- demonstrate your experience in effectively developing, delivering, managing and monitoring Activities to achieve Activity objectives for all stakeholders, and
- demonstrate your organisation's capacity and your staff capability (experience and qualifications) to deliver the Activity objectives in the specified community and/or the specified target group.

Applicants will need to demonstrate/address the following, across all selection criteria:

- appropriateness of the proposal to the objectives of the Activity
- potential for the proposal to meet the objectives of the Activity
- the need for the proposal to be carried out
- the governance, expertise and capacity of the applicant, including the applicant's financial, risk and audit/fraud strategic plans, and evidence of sound governance
- the applicant's track record in delivering quality Activity services, where applicable
- relevant stakeholders (target groups, communities, government etc)
- evidence base, where applicable
- the applicant's viable and sustainable financial model
- value for money (of the proposed outcomes, projected deliverables, location, community benefit and the amount of funding sought as detailed in the Application Form)
- the broad assessment requirements outlined in the relevant attachment, and
- other assessment criteria specifically relating to the Activity being funded.

For some Strengthening Community sub-activities, a combination of the following alternative criteria may be used to assess applications:

- Demonstrate how your proposal will provide provision of services to disadvantaged communities, based on the Socio-Economic Index for Areas or emerging incidents or events that contribute to disadvantage.
- Describe how your proposal will provide services that contribute to increased social participation by assisting disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, families and communities, including the engagement of volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Demonstrate your understanding for the existence or establishment of partnerships/linkages with public, private and community organisations.
- Demonstrate how your organisation will use innovative cross-sector partnership models including those that leverage other sources of community funding and/or promote longer term sustainability.
- Describe your organisation's commitment to volunteering and how your proposal will support your volunteers. In responding to this criteria, please consider and address the following information:
  - Your commitment to volunteering
  - How your organisation supports disadvantaged individuals and communities, including through the engagement of volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds
  - How the funding will be used to support your volunteers
  - What is the proportion of volunteers to paid staff within the organisation
  - The number of volunteers within the organisation
  - The number of volunteers to benefit from the funding
  - Provide your operating budget, and
  - The level of grant funding being sought to support volunteers.

Please note that preference will be given to organisations which demonstrate their ability to deliver services to disadvantaged individuals and communities; have a high proportion of volunteers in their workforce; show a small operating budget, and who did not receive this funding in a previous year.

3.7 How to submit an application

To apply under this process, applicants will need to complete the Application Form and respond to selection criteria as detailed above. Applications must be received electronically by the closing date and time as stated in the Application Pack.

All applicants including current service providers will need to respond fully to the selection criteria in the Application Form and provide the information required in the format and to the extent specified.

Applications can only be submitted during the application round for the Activity and for the locations or sites as defined in the Application Form.

Your application is not an agreement or contract. Meeting the selection criteria does not guarantee funding. Funding is limited and applications will be assessed and prioritised according to the extent to which they meet the selection criteria. Only applications meeting the selection criteria to a high degree are likely to be considered for funding. All information requested on the application must be provided to enable your application to be fully considered.

3.7.1 Applicant responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that their application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information to DSS is a serious offence, applicants or their partners who do so may be prosecuted under section 137.1 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995.*

Make sure you keep a copy of your application and any supporting papers, either electronically or in hard copy, for your own records.

Only one application per organisation/region will be assessed. If more than one application is submitted, only the latest application will be considered.

3.7.2 What needs to be included?

DSS will not assess applications that do not contain all required attachments (see Application Form checklist) outlined in the Application Form where an Application Form is provided for completion by applicants.

3.7.3 What should not be included?

Any attachments to the Application Form which are not specifically requested in the Application Form will not be considered as part of the assessment process.

3.7.4 What happens if you provide more than the specified number of words?

The Application Form specifies a word limit for each selection criteria. Text beyond the word limits will not be considered as a part of the assessment process.

3.7.5 Closing date and time

The timeframe for submission of applications for any funding process will be set out in the Application Pack.

In order to be received by DSS, the application must be submitted in full via the method prescribed in the Application Pack.

The applications must be received by DSS within the application period to be considered.

3.7.6 Late applications

DSS may reject any application lodged after the closing date. If an application is late, DSS may determine that there were exceptional circumstances beyond the applicant's control that meant the deadline could not be met. The applicant will need to supply documentary evidence to support any

exceptional circumstances. DSS has no obligation to accept a late application. Any decision by DSS to accept or not accept a late application will be final.

3.7.7 Questions and answers during the application period

Details of 'Questions and Answers' facilities and contact details will be provided on the DSS website under the Grants tab. DSS will respond to emailed questions within five working days.

Note: A list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' is available on DSS's website. Responses to questions of interest to all applicants may be added to the list during the application period.

DSS will only respond to requests for information that seek clarification of issues to allow them to better understand the requirements of the Application Form and Program Guidelines.

3.7.8 Questions after the application period

DSS will **not** accept or respond to any applicant requests for information or correspondence about the status or progress of their application during the assessment phase.

3.7.9 Application acknowledgement

Unless prior agreement has been reached with DSS an application will not be considered lodged until it is received by DSS. The applicant will receive email notification from DSS within 48 hours of an application being lodged correctly. If the applicant has not received notification in this timeframe, the applicant should contact DSS to confirm that the form has been lodged correctly.

3.8 Conflicts of Interest

Applicants must identify, in their application, any potential or actual conflicts of interest they believe will or may arise from submitting the application. This should address their responsibilities to the Australian Government and other parties in the course of the Activity.

A conflict of interest can arise when an applicant's integrity, objectivity or fairness in performing the services is at risk due to a pecuniary interest of a person or organisation associated with the applicant or a conflicting business arrangement.

Applicants must specify in their applications how any actual or perceived conflict of interest will be addressed and monitored to ensure it does not compromise the outcomes desired for this grant process.

DSS reserves the right to assess the potential impact of the conflict or perceived conflict and what plans, if any, are proposed to address the conflict of interest in relation to the application for funding.

DSS may reject an application if DSS is not satisfied that there are arrangements in place to appropriately address/manage a perceived or actual conflict of interest.

DSS also has mechanisms in place for identifying and managing potential or actual conflicts of interest such as requiring assessment staff to sign conflict of interest declarations prior to undertaking the assessment of applications.

Follow this link for more information on the Conflict of Interest Policy for DSS employees and contractors (who are treated as agency staff and required to abide by this policy and the APS Values and Code of Conduct).

4 Terms and conditions applying to Selection/s

4.1 Liability issues

DSS is not liable to the applicant in relation to the selection process, including without limitation, when DSS:

- varies or terminates all or any part of the selection process or any negotiations with the applicant
- decides not to acquire any or all of the services sought through the selection process
- varies the selection process, and/or
- exercises or fails to exercise any of its other rights under, or in relation to the Program Guidelines.

4.2 DSS's rights

DSS reserves the right to amend the Program Guidelines by whatever means it may determine at its absolute discretion and will provide reasonable notice of these amendments.

4.3 Disclaimer

DSS, its officers, agents and advisors:

- are not, and will not be, responsible or liable for the accuracy or completeness of any information in or provided in connection with the Program Guidelines
- make no express or implied representation or warranty that any statement as to future matters will prove correct
- disclaim any and all liability arising from any information provided to the applicant, including, without limitation, errors in, or omissions contained in, that information
- except so far as liability under any statute applies, accept no responsibility arising from errors or omissions contained in any information in this document and the Application Form, and
- accept no liability for any loss or damage suffered by any person as a result of that person, or any other person, placing reliance on the contents of these documents, or any other information provided by DSS.

4.4 Fraud

DSS is committed to the Commonwealth Fraud Control Policy and Guidelines. Applicants should familiarise themselves with the DSS Fraud Control Policy Statement. The Fraud Control Policy Statement also underpins an applicant's respective fraud and risk minimisation responsibilities when dealing with DSS.

One key responsibility outlined in the DSS Fraud Control Policy Statement is to report all fraud concerns by:

- leaving an anonymous voicemail message on the DSS Fraud Hotline (1800 133 611), or
- emailing fraud@dss.gov.au.

4.5 Personal information

Any personal information you provide is protected under the *Privacy Act 1988*. It can only be disclosed to someone else if you have been given reasonable notice of the disclosure; where disclosure is authorised or required by law or is reasonably necessary for the enforcement of the criminal law; if it will prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to a person's life or health; or if you have consented to the disclosure.

If you have questions or concerns about how your personal information is handled you can contact the Privacy Officer at DSS on 02 6244 1449, the Privacy Commissioner on 1300 363 992 (local call cost, but calls from mobile and pay phones may incur higher charges) or the Australian Government Privacy Officer by emailing: privacy@privacy.gov.au.

4.6 Freedom of Information

All documents in the possession of DSS including those in relation to the Activity are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act).

The FOI Act creates a general right of access to documents in the possession of DSS and this right of access is limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary for the protection of essential

public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

Decisions regarding requests for access under the FOI Act will be made by an authorised decision-maker in accordance with the requirements of the FOI Act.

All FOI requests are to be referred to the FOI Coordinator, Public Law Branch, in DSS.

By mail: FOI Coordinator
                 Department of Social Services
                 Commercial and Corporate Law Branch
                 GPO Box 9820
                 CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: foi@dss.gov.au

For more information on making a request for access to documents in the possession of DSS under the FOI Act, please visit the Freedom of Information page on the DSS website.

5   Financial and Other Arrangements

5.1   Financial arrangements

DSS uses standard grant agreements. Grants will only be provided in accordance with an executed grant agreement. The terms and conditions of DSS's grant agreements cannot be changed.
The grant agreement will contain the entire agreement between the parties. There is no binding agreement on any parties until the grant agreement is agreed to and signed by the delegate and the applicant's authorised representative.

The grant agreement is the legal agreement between DSS and the grant recipient over the grant period. In managing the grant provided, the grant recipient must comply with all the requirements of the grant agreement.

Grant recipients are responsible for ensuring that:

- the terms and conditions of the grant agreement are met
- service provision is effective, efficient, and appropriately targeted
- highest standards of duty of care are applied, and
- services are operated in line with, and comply with the requirements as set out within all state and Territory and Commonwealth legislation and regulations.

Grant recipients should also be aware of any case based law that may apply or affect their service delivery.

The Terms and Conditions of the grant agreement are available on the DSS website.

6   Complaints

6.1   Applicants/grant recipients

Applicants and grant recipients can contact the complaints service with complaints about DSS's service(s), the selection process or the service of another of DSS grant recipients.

Details of what constitutes an eligible complaint can be provided upon request by DSS. Applicants and grant recipients can lodge complaints through the following channels:

Telephone: 1800 634 035
Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Mail:

DSS Feedback
GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Email: complaints@dss.gov.au

If an applicant or grant recipient is at any time dissatisfied with DSS's handling of a complaint, they can contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman through the Ombudsman Website or on 1300 362 072.

6.2 Client/customer

It is a requirement of your grant agreement to have a transparent and accessible complaints handling policy. This policy should acknowledge the complainant's right to complain directly to you, outline the process for both dealing with the complaint and provide options for escalation both within your organisation and to DSS if necessary. Ensure that you provide information about your complaints handling policy and processes in all correspondence to guarantee it is readily available to the public.

7 Contact information

Contact information for the Activity:

Address: Tuggeranong Office Park
Soward Way (cnr Athllon Drive)
Greenway ACT 2900

Mail: GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Phone: 1800 625 136. If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can use the National Relay Service to contact any of DSS's listed phone numbers.

Email: grants@dss.gov.au

8 Glossary

N/A