



Families and Communities Program: Strong and Resilient Communities (SARC) Activity – Inclusive Communities Grants

Feedback for applicants

Overview

The objectives of the SARC program are to support vulnerable and disadvantaged people on pathways to self-reliance and empowerment through local community-driven solutions which support them to participate socially and economically. The SARC Activity – Inclusive Communities Grants will focus on supporting people of working age (15 to 64 years) in geographic areas of high socio-economic disadvantage across all states and territories.

The grant opportunity opened on 5 October 2021 and closed on 15 November 2021.

There was a strong interest in the program and successful applications were of a good standard. Applications were assessed according to the procedure detailed in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines and outlined in the Selection Process below.

1,258 applications were received and 38 applications were selected for funding to a value of \$12 million (GST exclusive).

This feedback is provided to assist grant applicants to understand what generally comprised an application which was selected for funding, and the content of quality responses, compared with the assessment criteria. This feedback is provided to help applicants develop stronger applications to future grant opportunities and is intended to be a helpful guide only.

Summary of General Feedback

Value with government money

Through this grant opportunity, it was not considered value for money to fund services which are already being delivered with funding from other Government sources. Section 8.1 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines (the Guidelines) states “the Selection Advisory Panel will have regard to overlap with other Australian Government grant programs”.

The Department of Social Services (the department) received a high number of grant applications which, if funded, would have duplicated services already funded by the Australian Government.

Applications duplicating existing services funded by government were unable to be selected for funding.

Outcomes versus Outputs

The SARC program has an outcomes-focused approach and the department has encouraged, through webinars and online content, the development of strong program logics and measurable implementation approaches to underpin proposed SARC activities. Applications needed to demonstrate an outcomes focus which was measurable.

SARC applications which focused on outputs only (and not outcomes) were unable to be selected for funding. For example, describing the number of participants the project aimed to assist or the number of participants which may gain a new skill could be considered as an output only. In order to have a more outcomes focus, applications needed to include information about the change to a client's experience and how this leads to one or more of the SARC outcomes (strengthened community connections, economic and social participation and increased levels of self-reliance, wellbeing and mental health).

More information on how to identify a project's intended outcomes and describe this in a grant application is provided on the Community Grants Hub website in the Program Logic Infographics and Cohort Presentations attached to the SARC Activity – Inclusive Communities Grants grant opportunity [here](#).

Project scope

Applications which were not for time-limited (that is, up to 2 years) or short-term projects were unable to be funded. Other applications which were aimed at continuing to deliver an existing project but did not outline how it would be expanded, for example to a new location or to a new target cohort or reframed in some way, were unable to be funded.

Section 2 of the Guidelines set out the intended outcomes of the program, “funding will be available to eligible organisations to deliver one-off, time-limited, projects in their communities.”

Evidence of the need for the project

Applications which lacked evidence on the need for the project, including the need within the target cohort/s and the community were unable to be funded. Some applications did not address how the service would be received by target cohorts or did not include proposed recruitment methods.

Guidance for applicants on how to support your grant application with strong evidence can be found [here](#).

Selection Process

The department used an open competitive selection process to select 38 providers to be funded to deliver the Strong and Resilient Communities (SARC) Activity – Inclusive Communities projects.

Applications were assessed for eligibility and compliance against requirements outlined in the Guidelines.

Eligible applications were then assessed on merit, based on:

- how well it met the criteria
- how it compared to other applications
- whether it provided value with relevant money.

Each applicant was required to address the following selection criteria:

1. Demonstrate a strong need for the project within the target community (30%)
2. Describe the project in detail (30%)
3. Demonstrate your organisation's capability to deliver the project in the identified community (20%)
4. Demonstrate your organisation's governance arrangements to support the delivery of the project (20%).

Each of the above criteria had sub-criteria.

Preferred applicants were identified based on the strength of their responses to the selection criteria and their demonstrated ability to meet the grant requirements outlined in the Guidelines.

Applications selected for funding

Further detail about what constituted a strong response to each criterion is provided below against the criterion as written in the Guidelines. Examples are intended to be a helpful guide only.

Criterion 1

Demonstrate a strong need for the project within the target community (30%). In responding to this criterion, you should include:

- a) a description of the problem or need your project will address
- b) a description of the demographic of the community your project will target/benefit
- c) evidence of the need for the project including the extent to which the identified problem or need relates to the identified community (for example statistics, research, empirical evidence, evidence of unmet need or service gap, consultation with the target group)
- d) the extent to which the problem or need relates to the objectives/intended outcomes of the SARC Activity – Inclusive Communities Grants.

Strength	Example
Applicants strongly demonstrated or described the problem or need the project would address and provided evidence of this need, including the extent to which the identified problem or need relates to the identified community (meets criteria 1a and 1c).	Applicants provided statistics, reports and data which discussed the issues or problems the target cohorts were facing and evidence to what extent (i.e. the degree of unmet demand), such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ABS data about the region ▪ Academic research or reports which discussed the issues or barriers experienced by the target cohort in their community.
Applicants clearly and comprehensively described the demographic of the community the project would target, and how this aligns with the objectives of the SARC Activity – Inclusive Communities Grants (meets criteria 1b and 1d).	Applicants referred to socio-economic data (such as the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) score of the service delivery area) and other supporting information. This helped identify projects which targeted areas of highest need and vulnerable communities were prioritised.
Applicants demonstrated the need identified amongst the target cohort in the community aligned closely with the needs the SARC Activity – Inclusive Communities Grants seek to meet (meets criteria 1d).	Applicants specifically targeted their projects to one or more of the target cohorts described at page 5 of the Guidelines and their proposed projects clearly intended to achieve outcomes for participants the same or similar to those listed on page 6, and within a 2-year period.

Criterion 2

Describe the project in detail (30%). In responding to this criterion, you should:

- a) provide a description of the project including details of how the project will be implemented, delivered and promoted
- b) explain the intended outcomes of the project, including how the project will address the identified problem or need and lead to the intended short, medium and long term outcomes
- c) explain how you will measure the intended outcomes of the project, including any tools or strategies you intend to utilise and at what points in the project they will be used

describe the extent to which the intended outcomes of the project relate to the objectives/intended outcomes of the SARC Activity – Inclusive Communities.

Strength	Example
Applicants described the project in detail including how participants would be recruited, and how the project will be implemented, delivered and promoted (meets criterion 2a).	Applicants described the projects clearly in relation to what specific activities would be delivered and when (i.e. key deliverables), how the applicant intended to promote the project and methods for recruiting participants (and why these were likely to be successful), and timeframes for when service delivery would commence.
Applicants described how a participant's situation would improve over the short, medium and long term and strongly demonstrated how the activity will lead to achieving this change (meets criterion 2b).	Applicants described in detail how, as a result of the project, the outcomes will cause a reduction in the problem identified (theory of change). For example: activities aimed at helping engage children and young people aged 12 to 18, so they have more opportunities to overcome personal barriers to participating in school and social life, described how the activity would directly enable them to build friendships and confidence, leading to greater social and educational participation.
Applicants described how, and through which means, the outcomes of the project would be measured including tools or strategies it intended to utilise and at what points in the project they would be used (meets criterion 2c).	Applicants included methods such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ participant surveys at the beginning and end of a participant's time in the project ▪ collection of other data specifically designed to help measure outcomes ▪ monitoring of the project by an independent evaluator employed by or contracted to the organisation ▪ intermittent participant reviews throughout the project.
Applicants clearly demonstrated they understood the intended outcomes of the SARC Activity – Inclusive Communities Grants (meets criterion 2d).	Applicants described the links between the outcomes the project is likely to achieve and the objectives of SARC, rather than rephrasing the objectives/outcomes of the SARC program. Applicants specifically targeted projects to one or more of the target cohorts described at page 5 of the Guidelines and proposed projects, which clearly intended to achieve outcomes for participants and within a 2 year period.

Criterion 3

Demonstrate your organisation's capability to deliver the project in the identified community (20%)

In responding to this criterion, you should:

- a) demonstrate your organisation's knowledge of the local community your project is intended to target/benefit and why your organisation is well-placed to deliver this project to the target groups within the identified community
- b) describe how you have consulted with and/or involved the target groups in the design of the project, including their role in, or support for the project
- c) explain how your organisation intends to support/facilitate the target groups within the identified community to gain access to/participate in your project
- d) demonstrate how your organisation will leverage existing relationships and work with other services to deliver the project.

Strength	Example
<p>Applicants comprehensively described their organisation's knowledge of the local community the project is intended to target/benefit and why the organisation is well placed to deliver the project to the target groups within the identified community (meets criterion 3a).</p>	<p>Applicants described relevant previous experience the organisation has had with enacting or delivering services to the community, including how successful this had been, the number of participants who were assisted and the outcomes achieved.</p>
<p>Applicants described how they had consulted with and/or involved the target groups in the design of the project, including their role in, or support for the project (meets criterion 3b).</p>	<p>Evidence was provided of the organisation's consultation with, and support for, the project amongst members of the target cohort and the community.</p> <p>Other applicants described how the project would use feedback from participants to improve the project along the way if necessary.</p>
<p>Applicants described how the organisation intends to support and facilitate the target groups within the identified community to gain access to, and participate in, the project (meets criterion 3c).</p>	<p>Applicants described current and proven mechanisms the organisation has in place to support and help target groups to participate in the services it provides and how the organisation intends to utilise these for the proposed project.</p> <p>Other applicants outlined proven supports used in other successful programs to facilitate participation which they intend to utilise.</p>
<p>Applicants demonstrated how the organisation would leverage existing relationships and work with other services to deliver the project (meets criterion 3d).</p>	<p>Applicants described working relationships and existing partnerships which their organisation has with other organisations or businesses in the community and how these would assist them in successfully delivering their projects. These relationships included other community organisations and existing service providers funded by government.</p> <p>Applicants also outlined how their projects would complement but not overlap existing services being provided to the target cohort.</p>

Criterion 4

Demonstrate your organisation's governance arrangements to support the delivery of the project (20%).

In responding to this criterion, you should:

- a) provide an overview of your organisation, including governance structures, geographical coverage, and dispute resolution policies
- b) describe the relevant experience and qualifications you intend of staff who will deliver services and how you will ensure they are appropriately skilled and supported, including staff from other organisations funded through any consortium or sub-contracting arrangements
- c) describe your processes for ensuring that all reporting requirements in section 12.2 for this grant opportunity will be met
- d) outline your plan to maintain delivery of the project in response to COVID-19.

Strength	Example
Applicants provided a comprehensive overview of the organisation, including governance structures, geographical coverage, and dispute resolution policies (meets criterion 4a).	Applicants provided details which demonstrated their organisation had the capacity, capability and risk mitigation strategies to effectively deliver the project and achieve intended outcomes. This may have included aspects such as a board of directors with relevant experience which would oversee the project and relevant policies or frameworks relating to dispute resolution and child safety.
Applicants described the relevant experience and qualifications project staff will have and how the organisation will ensure they are appropriately supported (meets criterion 4b).	Applicants specified the various roles of project staff, and outlined their capability, relevant experience and qualifications. Applicants provided details of training or other supports, which would be provided to staff to ensure they would be effective in their roles.
Applicants demonstrated how their organisation had mechanisms in place for ensuring all reporting requirements will be met to a high standard (meets criterion 4c).	Applicants described the organisation's previous experience or capacity to use the DSS Data Exchange or other reporting mechanisms, and staff responsible for reporting and managing performance of the project had sufficient experience and expertise.
Applicants describe their plan to maintain delivery of the project in response to COVID-19 if this was required (meets criterion 4d).	Applicants outlined their plans for managing COVID-19 risks to delivering services (e.g. reducing face-to-face engagement where appropriate, moving service delivery to online) and the organisation had a COVID-19 plan consistent with relevant state/territory health orders.