



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Grants Management

Submission Number: 06

Date Authorised for Publication: 08 December 2022



Inquiry into Grants Management

Landcare ACT Submission

Standing Committee on Public Accounts
ACT Legislative Assembly, GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601
LACommitteePA@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Standing Committee on Public Accounts,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on Grants Management in the ACT.

This inquiry is welcomed by Landcare ACT and our members. Landcare ACT is the peak representative body for community landcare in our region, representing and supporting over 70 As noted in the Plan, Landcare groups and thousands of individuals caring for local environments in our region. Landcarers play an important role in maintaining natural values in reserves, parklands and waterways, supporting sustainable agriculture, promoting the value of Aboriginal heritage, mobilizing the community in citizen science and improving liveability and biodiversity in cities under a changing climate. Landcare ACT works with our foundation member bodies: Southern ACT Catchment Group; Ginninderra Catchment Group; Molonglo Conservation Group; Buru-Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation; and the Rural Landholders Association. Landcare ACT is a member of the National Landcare Network and as such provides a clear pathway for grassroots landcarers to contribute and be heard from a local to national level.

Overall the ACT Government offers a range of Grants, which are appreciated by the community Landcare movement. As Landcare activities operate cross-tenure and sectors (including environment, heritage, health, sport and recreation and youth), Landcare ACT and member organisations are involved in numerous grant programs offered by the ACT Government. This submission details opportunities identified to improve ACT Government grants management including:

- Consistency across grants programs
- Longer and flexible timelines
- Including project management in funded activities
- Transparent decision making

1. **Consistency across grant programs** - Various grants programs have different requirements in information and level of detail they require. The submission provided by Chris Mobbs from Hackett Community Association and a member of the Landcare ACT Members Council, details some of these inconsistencies. The key areas where inconsistencies could be improved include; Applications, Deeds Grant Agreement, Acquittal requirements, detailed below. There is an opportunity to improve consistency between the various Directorates and sections within these.

- **Applications-** the move to smarty grants for grant applications and management by some Directorates has been welcomed. There are opportunities to further increase consistency in terms of information required. There is also an opportunity for information about each organisation to be saved on Smarty Grants, regardless of the Grant Program Directorate, to reduce administrative burden. Member organisations have also called for moves towards an initial Expression of Interest process before requiring more detailed grant applications so projects out of scope are identified early, before extensive time is committed to developing them.
- **Deeds Grant Agreement** can be very different across ACT Government Directorates and Programs. The legalistic language within the Deeds is not always easy to navigate for Landcare Groups and small not-for-profit organisations. There is an opportunity to simplify and increase consistency amongst the Deeds of Grants that various parts of the ACT Government administer.
- **Acquittal requirements** Financial Acquittal and Final Reporting is also inconsistent across ACT Government Programs. Some programs are arduous in their financial acquittal processes, requiring evidence of all money spent. Whereas this level of financial acquittal is not required for other grants or contracts for service provision that are much larger. The requirement to provide detailed information on expenditure is generally unnecessary given the governance arrangements within most not-for-profit organisations and unnecessarily adds to the administrative burden. While it is necessary to ensure financial accountability, this can be done at a higher level without requiring every invoice be provided as part of the acquittal, recognising that incorporated organisations and not-for-profit companies have thorough processes of financial management and annual audit.

- **Longer and flexible grant timelines** Many projects would benefit by multi year funding as opposed to 1 year funding to achieve real outcomes, particularly in the environment sector. This would allow the opportunity to have real environmental difference with minimum administrative burden, rather than applying for grants yearly and risking lapse in works, which increases overall costs if areas are left unmanaged for periods of time. Timelines for deliverables need to be flexible to account for climatic weather variabilities, community engagement and ACT Government land manager permissions and processes. The flexibility of EPSDD in this respect is appreciated.

- **Including project management in funded activities** Project management is a critical part of success for all projects, however not all grant programs allow funds to be spent on

developing, coordinating and acquitting the projects. Community based not-for-profit Landcare networks are calling for all grant rounds to allow for adequate project management funds to cover stakeholder engagement, contract management, monitoring and evaluation, communications etc. It is recognised that staff should not be paid for work that they would be doing as part of core business, however most projects are beyond core business and require remuneration for management. It is recommended that Project management is included in addition to administration costs (usually 10%) that covers financial management, insurances, office costs etc. This allows the projects to be managed and administered effectively and efficiently.

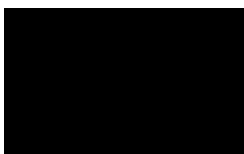
- **Transparent decision-making** Criteria for successful grants needs to be clarified in some grant rounds. To increase transparency and effectiveness, it is recommended that if the grants are for the community, a community representative is on the selection panel to contribute to the decision making regarding selection of which projects to fund. This should either be a staff member from a relevant community organisation or a paid volunteer.

Thanks again for conducting an inquiry into Grants Management in the ACT. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this submission, don't hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED].

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Yours sincerely



Karissa Preuss
CEO Landcare ACT

2/11/2022