



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA (Chair), Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Andrew Braddock MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Grants Management

Submission Number: 05

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**SOUTHERN ACT CATCHMENT
GROUP Inc.**



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To the Standing Committee on Public Accounts,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Grants Management

The Southern ACT Catchment Group (SACTCG) is a Landcare Network. We are a community - based Incorporated Association and Not for Profit Charity operating in the ACT for the past 20 years. Our member base consists of volunteers in small unincorporated groups (currently 29) and individual Landholders working on projects to improve the natural values of Southern ACT.

SACTCG applies for a minimum of 13 grants per year, many of which are ACT Government grants and have a high (roughly 90%) success rate. This strong history of success is evidenced in the ACT Environment Grants Program where we have received and delivered more grants under this program than any other organisation. We have a strong relationship with the ACT Government and have previously provided feedback on grants programs to assist better delivery of these programs to the community.

The Programs we have been funded under in the ACT recently include the ACT Environment Grants, Adopt-a-Park Grants, Community Gardens Grants, ACT Heritage Grants, Floriade Community Grants, ACT Rural Grants (historical) amongst others. We also hold grant agreements for the delivery of the Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch Program and the Community Stewardship and Education Environmental Program and other smaller projects.

We would like to refer the committee to the Review of the ACT Environment Grants (2019) where we made considerable contributions that are of relevance here.

We welcome the opportunity to provide this submission. For convenience and brevity we have summarised the main points below and welcome the opportunity to elaborate on these further for the Standing Committee.

- Consistency across grant programs

We apply for many programs in the ACT as we undertake projects on all tenures. Each program has different requirements in information and level of detail they require. This is not consistent with the calibre of funding required rather with the internal policy of the Department or Section offering the grant (eg. ACT Environment and ACT Heritage)

- Deeds

Grant Agreement or deeds are vastly different across Government Agencies and Programs. Understanding Deeds can be difficult to interpret for small NFP organisations who do not have easy access to legal advice. This is confounded by the many different contracts offered by ACT Government. It is also unclear what kind of contract is offered and why.

As a community organisation which relies on government funding the range of contractual arrangements (grants and other) provided in general are too large with limited information regarding why one form of contract is offered as opposed to another.

- Acquittal requirements
Financial Acquittal and Final Reporting is inconsistent across ACT Government Programs. Some programs are arduous in their financial acquittal processes embedding a sense of mistrust with the community based organisation. NFP charities go through yearly external audits and ACNC reporting and are governed by volunteers providing personal time and energy for altruistic purposes. The possibility of these organisations misusing public funds is very low with no opportunity for personal gain. In addition, the quantum of funds provided by these grants is small. We rely strongly on our good reputation and relationship with the ACT Government given we have been working on public land for 20 years. The requirement to provide detailed information on expenditure is unnecessary given the transparency of our organisation. Expectations of deliverables by grant administrators is also often at odds to the quantum of funding providing.
We are also aware that this level of financial acquittal is not required for contracts for service provision that are much larger.
 - Timelines
Timelines for deliverables need to be flexible to account for climatic weather variabilities, community engagement and ACT Government land manager permissions and processes
 - Requirements for in-kind contribution
Community based organisations such as Landcare Networks, provide significant contributions to Canberra's environment and society as core business and according to their constitutions. This is often free or at a low cost supported by volunteers. Grant eligibility requirements that identify NFP community-based organisations as target applicants should not require the explicit in-kind (often matched) contributions. All grants require the delivery of outputs and are, in essence, a contract to deliver these services with the engagement communities. The request to demonstrate what is offered for free in a competitive process appears to not appreciate the types of organisations that are eligible to apply.
 - Grant Application Preparations
Time to develop the projects with community engagement is unfunded. Grants could ask for an initial EOI before requiring more detailed work up so that time of volunteers and work from community organisations is not wasted
 - Funded activities
All grants should allow for adequate project management funds to cover community and Government Liaison, contract management, M and E , communications etc. This should be in addition to administration costs (usually 10%) that covers financial management , insurances, office costs etc. This would also recognise and value the Project Management expertise provided by organisations like ours.
- General Comments
- Many projects would benefit by multiyear funding as opposed to 1 year funding to achieve real outcomes, particularly in the environment sector.
 - If the grants are for the community there should always be a community representative on the panel to contribute to the decision making regarding selection of which projects to fund.
 - We appreciate the flexibility EPSDD in their administration of ACT Environment Grants - particularly when it comes to uncontrollable delays in delivery such as weather/site conditions.
 - Heritage Grants are unwieldy to manage when it comes to navigating ACT Government requirements for engaging with the local Aboriginal community and on Aboriginal Heritage places.

Yours Sincerely,

Martine Franco
Executive Officer
Southern ACT Catchment Group.
Mobile: [REDACTED]

Date: 1/12/2022