

2022 NGO Flood Support Program (Northern NSW)

Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Overall, the NGO Flood Support Program (NFSP) has been a very successful program. It was efficiently and effectively delivered, and it supported a range of Non-Government Organisation (NGO) services which benefited many members of the community and enabled them to continue with their recovery journeys.

The NFSP received considerable positive feedback from grantees about its flexibility, its low level of administrative burden compared to other grant programs, and the level of support they received from all program staff but particularly from the two District Support Officers.

NGOs are critical early responders in the disaster recovery process. Looking forward, the forecast increase in frequency and impact of disasters means that NGOs will continue to be involved in disaster recovery. Their ongoing sustainability challenges means they will continue to need further support, especially in times of disaster recovery.

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) has a role in supporting NGOs in their disaster recovery roles since their work to improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups, and for the community in general, is directly aligned with DCJ's purpose.

Supporting NGOs in their recovery work currently takes the form of discrete time-limited interventions, however predictions of more frequent and impactful disasters in the future means that DCJ will likely have an ongoing role funding disaster recovery. For this reason, DCJ should consider a permanent Rapid Grant Delivery capability, which means developing agile approaches to grant management, along with appropriate resourcing, so that it can respond efficiently and effectively as disasters create a need for NGO support.

Although the NFSP has been successful, DCJ has considerable opportunity to refine its approach to disaster grant programs and become recognised as leaders in Rapid Grant Deployment. This refinement means developing and documenting a standard model based on Lean/Agile principles and investing in the right capability and capacity for quickly and effectively implementing the model.

Findings

KEQ 1 - To what extent does the design of the NGO Support program meet the needs of NGOs and of DCJ?

- 1A: DCJ clearly has a role in supporting NGOs to continue to provide community services in disaster situations.
- 1B: Rapid deployment of grant programs requires a standard model that is accepted and approved by DCJ and by funding partners.

1C: The NFSP could not demonstrate it had used a well-developed approach to risk management. The program used several excellent risk controls to minimise risk, and it had access to risk management resources and experience, it just couldn't demonstrate that it had followed a structured process to manage risk, and this could undermine the confidence that a risk sensitive partner might have in DCJ.

1D: Resource inflexibility led to support issues for grant recipients.

KEQ 2 - Was the NFSP planning process appropriate?

2A: DCJ's use of lessons from past programs represents good grant practice in action.

2B: DCJ used local knowledge from district staff, however engaging the NGO community in the planning process could improve the depth of knowledge available to DCJ.

2C: DCJ's assessment process was comprehensive, however it could be refined.

2D: The District Support Officers (DSOs) acted as a risk control of grantee risk.

2E: DCJ has been unable to provide a risk register.

2F: The NFSP's planning processes aligned with the principles and processes in the NSW Grants Administration Guide to a moderate extent, however opportunities for improvement exist.

KEQ 3 - Was the NFSP implemented as planned?

3A: The establishment process was completed in an appropriate time.

3B: The application process and the level of reporting were commensurate with the risk involved.

3C: DCJ used several risk controls to minimise grantee and governance risk in the NFSP.

3D: The information required to be reported by grantees is commensurate with the risks involved.

3E: The use of DSOs enabled DCJ to actively monitor grant performance and take adaptive action when required.

3F: The information reported by grantees was only marginally useful for monitoring the program. The information reported by grantees was not a uniform measure, and it was only the experience and knowledge of the DSOs, who can interpret this information, which made it marginally useful.

3G: The DSOs had a significant positive impact on the program.

KEQ 4 - What evidence is there that the NFSP achieved its intended outcomes?

4A: Program outputs were delivered as planned.

4B: The distribution of Open Grants did not align with the plan. There were fewer grants issued and of greater value than anticipated in the planning stage.

4C: Forums were very successful and valued by most.

4D: The grant funding meant that DCJ-funded NGO grant recipients were able to continue to operate their services (program logic impact 1).

4E: The evidence does not allow an assessment of program logic impact 2 - whether people were able to access support services or whether waiting lists were reduced.

4F: The program contributed to program logic impacts 3 and 4 to a small extent.

The program resulted in some level of collaboration between NGOs however it did not lead to a joined-up network of large to hyper-local organisations (program logic impact 3) or to ad-hoc arrangements being embedded by mainstream NGOs into their operations (program logic impact 4).

Recommendations

It detracts nothing from DCJ's success to note – in the spirit of continuous improvement – that some opportunities exist to improve all aspects of the grant processes.

1. Develop a standard model for Rapid Grant design and delivery.

A documented standard model for rapid design and delivery would contribute to effective and efficient implementations because the process would be streamlined, and stakeholders would know what to do to ensure efficient and effective processes.

The model should be documented and published so that it becomes the standard for rapid grant deployment. DCJ has an opportunity to become a recognised leader in Rapid Grant Deployment, which may be useful in negotiations with funding or delivery partners.

2. Collect and use the elements of good grants practice that DCJ already has developed.

DCJ has many examples of good practice, such as its guide to developing program logics as part of a program's planning stage or for informing monitoring and evaluation, a guide and templates for risk management, and past templates for developing an outcomes framework that the program could use for reporting. However, these examples of good practices or templates to aid good practices were not used by the NFSP program.

DCJ has a low-cost opportunity to improve the way it manages its grant programs by bringing together these resources and employing them as part of a standard process.

3. Develop an Outcome Tree for NGO disaster assistance.

A framework of outcomes has several benefits. It would support and guide NGOs in their applications because the framework would help to identify the outcomes their services would contribute to. The framework could also include basic approaches to measuring the outcomes, which NGOs could include in their monitoring programs. An outcomes framework would help DCJ report on the program because the various NGO outcomes could be consolidated into an overall program metric, and the standard definitions of an outcomes framework would assist in undertaking a Social Return on Investment which would inform a value for money assessment of the program.

4. Plan for greater capability for the Rapid Grants team.

The structure for the current grants team consists of a permanent manager and one staff member, plus several temporary resources. The problem with this approach is that knowledge and experience are lost when the temporary resources return to their substantive roles.

As disaster events become more frequent and impactful, the more frequent seconding of staff will become disruptive and potentially lead to inefficiencies and problem with knowledge retention.

DCJ should consider and plan for a larger core team. It could achieve this by incrementally advancing the size of the team over time and based on demand. Alternatively, it could establish a larger core team now and use its excess capacity (when it is not involved fully in disaster support programs) to manage other DCJ grant programs.

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AIDR	Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience
CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
COVID	Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
CSIRO	Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation
DCJ	NSW Department of Communities and Justice
DRFA	Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
DSO	District Support Officer (within the NFSP)
ERC	NSW Government Cabinet Standing Committee on Expenditure Review
FACSIAR	Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LGA	Local Government Area
NCOSS	NSW Council of Social services
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NFSP	NGO Flood Support Program
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRCF	Northern Rivers Community Foundation
NSW	New South Wales
RFS	NSW Rural Fire Service
SES	NSW State Emergency Service
SROI	Social Return on Investment
SSSF	Social Sector Support Fund
SSTF	Social Sector Transformation Fund

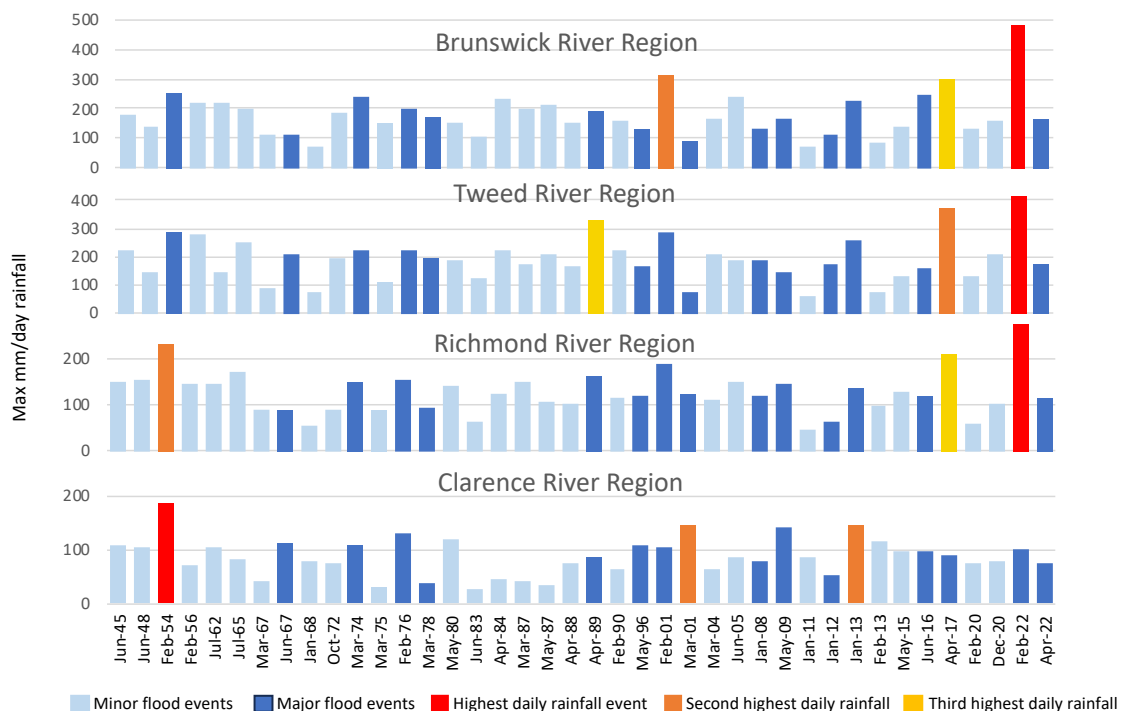
Background

The 2022 floods

The eastern Australia floods in 2022 followed two years of above average rainfall, and nationally, the wettest month on record was recorded in November 2021.¹

In February / March 2022 three of the Northern Rivers catchment areas received the highest maximum daily rainfall amounts on record (figure 1). Multi-day rainfall records were broken across northeast NSW, with multiple sites recording more than a metre of rainfall. In the north-east of NSW, the last week of February was the wettest on record, and in the Hawkesbury-Nepean, 1-9 March was the catchment's wettest nine-day period since records began. Major flood levels were reached in rivers across the region.

Profile of flood events in the Northern Rivers Region, 1945 to 2022



Source: Lerat J, Vaze J, Marvenek S, Ticehurst C, Wang B (2022) Characterisation of the 2022 floods in the Northern Rivers region. CSIRO, Australia

Figure 1 – Profile of flood events in Northern NSW

¹ Natural Hazards Research Australia. 2023. Community experiences of the January-July 2022 floods in New South Wales and Queensland: Summary Report, available at www.naturalhazards.com.au/floods2022.

The impact of the floods

The NSW Government Inquiry² into the 2022 floods recorded the devastation and trauma caused by the exceptional weather events:

- As communities continued their recovery efforts from the February and March floods, heavy rainfall began to fall again from 27 June, leading to further flooding. More than 170 evacuation warnings and orders were issued, affecting over 110,000 people across the state. Seventeen evacuation centres were established.
- Natural disaster declarations were made for 61 Local Government Areas (LGAs) that experienced flooding in the first half of 2022, and 37 LGAs for flooding in July 2022.
- Over 14,500 homes were damaged and over 5,000 rendered uninhabitable – more than the number of homes damaged and destroyed in the 2019–20 bushfires and the March 2021 floods. As of July 2022, there were close to 8,000 people in emergency accommodation.
- Nearly 8,500 personnel across the NSW State Emergency Service (SES), NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), Australian Defence Force (ADF) and other emergency services were deployed to assist in the floods – many more than those deployed in the bushfires and floods in the preceding years.
- The Northern NSW Local Health District Disaster Recovery team experienced a high demand for support, mental health and wellbeing services following the floods. The main reasons for seeking support included distress about being displaced from home, being refused a grant application, or having an insurance claim rejected. People also reported distress due to the cumulative effect of previous disasters such as drought, bushfire, COVID-19, and floods. These numbers only reflected people who visited a NSW Health disaster recovery team or facility, and not the true number of those seeking help through other providers.
- Close to \$4 billion in government support was committed by the NSW and Australian governments.

² In March 2022, the NSW Government commissioned an independent expert inquiry into the preparation for, causes of, response to and recovery from the 2022 catastrophic flood event across the state of NSW. The full report can be accessed at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/floodinquiry>

The impact on NGOs

Northern Rivers' flood-impacted communities already had high rates of disadvantage.

According to the NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS), analysis undertaken by the University of Sydney prior to the 2017 flood, 2019 fires and 2022 floods found that LGAs in the Northern Rivers region had experienced the highest number of disaster declarations across NSW and were also home to 43% of NSW's most disadvantaged LGAs.³

NGOs play an important role in providing services to vulnerable and disadvantaged community members. During disasters, their role becomes critical. They are trusted by their communities and by the vulnerable and disadvantaged community groups they support, they bring expertise in working with people in challenging circumstances, and they provide practical assistance and specialised support. In the aftermath of a disaster, they can shift their focus to supplement or replace their 'business as usual' service provision with the critical, immediate services required. And they continue to provide services once the disaster subsides and the task of rebuilding the community is underway.

But NGOs face their own challenges, even in non-disaster times. Many have low organisational maturity,⁴ limited funding, and human resource capacity issues, because their priority is to focus on service delivery and not organisational capability or even sustainability. The impact of the 2022 floods exacerbated the issues they face in delivering their services, as staff were personally impacted by the floods, facilities were rendered unusable, and they were overwhelmed with demand.

The 2022 Flood Support Program

In response to the challenges that NGOs experienced from the 2022 floods and their critical role in serving the community, the NSW Government allocated \$13.3 million to support NGOs working in the Northern NSW communities of Richmond Valley, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Tweed, Ballina, and Byron.

The NFSP was designed to embed social cohesion, support community-led social recovery and respond to community feedback about local decision making. This funding was to be used in conjunction with, and not replace, other NSW Government support services and/or Australian Government disaster assistance services.

The funding was intended to support NGOs for one year to help with the sudden increase in demand; it was not intended as ongoing recovery support.

³ NCOSS Submission to the NSW Independent Flood Enquiry. 2022. NSW Council of Social Service

⁴ Organisational maturity is the measure of the quality of an organisation's operations. Mature organizations have effective planning, data management, and resourcing processes. They also typically have the processes and technology in place to enable them to capture information consistently in a repeatable way.

Two streams of funding were offered:

- Direct Allocation Grants. A total of \$3.53 million was disbursed to 18 DCJ funded service providers in the seven Northern Rivers LGAs. The grant was intended to support DCJ service providers to provide critical services to vulnerable individuals and communities. Eligible service providers were assessed by DCJ and directly invited to submit a grant application.
- Open Grants. A total of \$8.54 million was disbursed to 64 non-DCJ funded NGOs.

Features of the grant program included:

- Prioritisation of applicants who deliver services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and/or culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- Use of two District Support Officers (DSOs) who worked closely with grant recipients.
- Reduced administrative burden through simplified application and reporting processes.
- Flexible grant guidelines, which allowed grant recipients to respond to the changing demands of the recovery effort without undue administrative overhead.

The Evaluation

With the completion of the NFSP in August 2023, DCJ sought to evaluate the program to identify lessons learned and assess how well the program met its intended outcomes.

The objectives of this evaluation are:

- To determine the relevancy of DCJ's role in providing NGO support in the context of the role of the Reconstruction Authority which has overall responsibility for responding to disaster situations.
- To assess the appropriateness of the program design in terms of how well it met the needs of NGOs operating in the flood affected target areas.
- To determine the effectiveness of the program in terms of how well it resulted in the planned outcomes.
- To assess the efficiency of the program design and delivery processes.
- To identify lessons learnt and improvement opportunities that can be applied in future scenarios that require rapid design and deployment of NGO support.

Audience

The primary evaluation audience includes:

- The Executive Director Partnerships
- Director Systems, Funding and Cards
- Manager, Grants Design and Support - Projects

The secondary evaluation audience includes:

- NSW Reconstruction Authority
- National Emergency Management Agency
- DCJ Director Capability and Practice
- Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research (FACSIAR)

Methodology overview

The evaluation used a mixed methods evaluation design. It was based on sound, evidence-based evaluation practice, complied with the NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines, used a participatory approach in the design of the evaluation plan, in making sense of the findings and in ensuring the recommendations were practical and relevant, and focused on improvement and lessons learned.

Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs):

KEQ 1 - To what extent does the design of the NGO Support program meet the needs of NGOs and of DCJ in the context of disaster situations?

- 1.1 What is the role of DCJ with respect to supporting NGOs in disaster situations? Is there a need for a standard model for NGO support in disaster situations? What are the characteristics of such a model?
- 1.2 How can the risk perspectives of partner agencies be reconciled to minimise administrative burden in supporting NGOs in disaster situations?
- 1.3 What is the most cost-effective model for resourcing NGO support programs in a disaster context?

KEQ 2 - Was the NFSP planning process appropriate?

- 2.1 How were the needs of NGOs in this flood situation determined?
- 2.2 To what extent were lessons from past programs used to improve the 2022 Support program?
- 2.3 What role did local knowledge play in the planning of the program?
- 2.4 Did the program adequately balance the need for risk management with the need for rapid deployment?
- 2.5 To what extent did the program's planning processes align with the principles and processes in the NSW Government's Grants Administration Guide?

KEQ 3 - Was the NFSP implemented as planned?

- 3.1 Did the grant establishment process conform to planned timelines?
- 3.2 Was the administrative burden on applicants and grantees proportionate to the grant value and risk involved?
- 3.3 Was the information provided by NGOs in deeds sufficient to satisfy DCJ's risk management requirements?
- 3.4 Was the program adequately monitored and adaptive management practised? Was the information provided by NGOs in reports sufficient to enable DCJ to monitor performance?
- 3.5 What impact did the district support officers have? Did the use of district support officers add value over and above the traditional approach of using DCJ's contract managers to provide support? Was the additional cost of employing district support officers an effective use of funding?

KEQ 4 - What evidence is there that the NFSP achieved its intended outcomes?

- 4.1 Were program outputs delivered as planned?
- 4.2 To what extent did the planned outcomes develop?
- 4.3 Was the program effective in sustaining NGO services after the grant funding ceased?
- 4.4 Were there any unintended consequences?
- 4.5 What lessons can be learned to improve outcomes in future programs?

Evidence

To answer these questions, the evaluation used the following sources of evidence:

A range of internal documents, including the Final Report of the NFSP, the Open and Direct Grants Administration Guidelines, the Report to Assessment Panel for the NFSP Open Grants program, the NFSP Eligibility Assessment form, the NFSP Direct and Open Grants Assessment forms, and support material for the NFSP ERC submission.

A range of external documents, including: the NSW Grants Administration Guide 2022, Review of grants administration in NSW, April 2022, NSW Auditor-General's Report on Grants administration for disaster relief 2021, NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines 2016, the AIDR Community Recovery Handbook 2, and the DCJ Developing a Program Logic Guide, 2021.

Program monitoring and implementation data, including:

- The Eligibility and Assessments data.
- The Direct and Open grants NFSP applications.
- SmartyGrants grantee reports.
- SmartyGrants acquittal data and final reports.
- Monitoring and issues worksheets used by the DSOs.

Stakeholder interviews. Twenty-four semi-structured interviews were completed with:

- Ten NFSP grantees from the Open and Direct Allocation grant programs.
- Representatives from NCOSS and the NSW Reconstruction Authority.
- The two NFSP District Support Officers.
- The director and manager of the NFSP.
- A range of DCJ stakeholders including the manager of Northern Rivers district, representatives from Policy & Practice, Prudential Oversight, Capability and Practice, and DCJ Disaster Welfare.

Findings

KEQ 1 - To what extent does the design of the NGO Support program meet the needs of NGOs and of DCJ?

- 1.1 What is the role of DCJ with respect to supporting NGOs in disaster situations? Is there a need for a standard model for NGO support in disaster situations? What are the characteristics of such a model?
- 1.2 How can the risk perspectives of partner agencies be reconciled to minimise administrative burden in supporting NGOs in disaster situations?
- 1.3 What is the most cost-effective model for resourcing NGO support programs in a disaster context?

The intent of KEQ 1 is to use the experience of the 2022 grant program to reflect on the future role of DCJ in supporting NGOs impacted by disasters.

1.1 What is the role of DCJ with respect to supporting NGOs in disaster situations? Is there a need for a standard model for NGO support in disaster situations? What are the characteristics of such a model?

DCJ's strategic directions document⁵ makes clear the relationship between DCJ and NGOs. It states that DCJ 'works with the community, non-government partners and other agencies to improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups' to 'help create a safe, just, resilient and inclusive NSW in which everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential'.

Disadvantaged groups are disproportionately affected by disasters.

While natural disasters can be devastating for all affected individuals and communities, their impacts can be significantly greater for people already facing disadvantage, such as those in poverty, migrants, refugees, children, older people, people with disabilities, people who are homeless or transient, and people living in poor quality housing.

Socially disadvantaged people frequently have little choice in deciding where they live and are often disproportionately concentrated in areas at high risk of negative environmental impacts. They generally have fewer economic resources to assist with preparing for and managing extreme weather, including taking out insurance against loss. They may have chronic physical and mental health conditions that affect their mobility and resilience or lack access to mainstream sources of information about impending danger because of

⁵ DCJ Strategic Direction 2020 - 2024

language barriers, remoteness, and poverty. Socially disadvantaged people, who are disproportionately affected by disasters, are the focus of DCJ's commissioned services.

Disasters are going to become more frequent and more impactful.

The CSIRO report *Climate and Disaster Resilience*⁶ claims that the frequency and impact of natural disasters is expected to increase in the future due to the significant further changes in our climate.

More frequent and impactful disasters means that people won't have as much time to recover between disasters which, in turn, will likely increase the numbers of people seeking support from DCJ's services.

NGOs play a critical role in disasters.

DCJ already commissions NGOs to deliver its core community services, and these organisations play an important role in disaster recovery. In addition, other small to large NGOs, for example Lions Clubs or School Parent & Friends associations, also pivot their activities towards helping disaster affected community members. And hyper-local NGOs – sometimes single community members – also emerge immediately after a disaster to respond to community need.

The 2022 NSW Flood Inquiry⁷ highlighted the critical role that individuals and community groups took in responding to the needs of people impacted by the floods:

'Early on, communities realised that government support was slow or unable to reach or fully service their communities, so they began to self-organise and establish 'community hubs'. They were run by locals and provided essential services. They also gave many traumatised people a place to share mutual experiences and access support.

Hubs became centres of activity as people attempted to salvage or clean out their houses; a place for volunteers to coordinate, sort through donations and distribute what they could to the community. With little to no telecommunications services available, they became pivotal places to give and receive information. Many became makeshift hospitals, shopping centres and miniature hardware/do-it-yourself warehouses. These hubs also helped feed hundreds of volunteers and residents who had no access to kitchens.

⁶ CSIRO (2020) *Climate and Disaster Resilience*

⁷ In March 2022, the NSW Government commissioned an independent expert inquiry into the preparation for, causes of, response to and recovery from the 2022 catastrophic flood event across the state of NSW. The Full Report is available at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/floodinquiry>

Hubs quickly formed alliances with groups like local bowling clubs, Rotary clubs or charities which provided centralised locations to put on barbecues, deliver pre-cooked meals or volunteer services. When government support services arrived, they often linked up with community hubs as that was where people who needed assistance were going.'

The Inquiry concluded that in emergencies of significant scale, 'self-organising' in local communities is inevitable. It also concluded that without these community hubs, the flood response and recovery would have been much more difficult.

NGOs – funded, non-funded, large, and small – are critical first recovery service providers which pivot or emerge to address the urgent needs of community members impacted by disasters.

However, NGOs need support even outside of disaster events.

Many NGOs experience a high cost of doing business and face challenges in delivering their services, even in non-disaster times. Low organisational maturity⁸ is common, many have limited funding, some of which is tied to specific programs and cannot be easily shifted to focus on recovery activities, and many have staffing issues and rely heavily on volunteers or part-time staff.

Disasters bring added challenges for NGOs.

Disasters bring additional challenges for NGOs, such as damage to their facilities, their capacity to deliver can be impacted because their staff may not be able to attend work, or they may be less efficient because staff are traumatised by working with disaster-impacted people.

Disasters usually mean increased demand on NGOs which their business-as-usual capacity may not be able to meet. In addition, and as noted above, their funding sources may be tied to specific programs or activities and not able to be applied to the disaster activities.

Disaster recovery support funding often focuses on reinstatement of assets, not on supporting service delivery.

Disaster recovery support is available; however it often does not directly support service provision. For example:

- Category B of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018 (DRFA)⁹ includes two types of support to NGOs: Clause G offers concessional interest rate

⁸ Organisational maturity is the measure of the quality of an organisation's operations. Mature organizations have effective planning, data management, and resourcing processes. They also typically have the processes and technology in place to enable them to capture information consistently in a repeatable way.

⁹ The Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018 is the formal agreement on cost sharing for disaster support between the states and the Australian Government.

loans for non-profit organisations that have suffered a significant loss of income as a direct result of an eligible disaster, and clause I provides for grants to NGOs whose assets have been significantly damaged as a direct result of an eligible disaster.

- Category C part b provides for recovery grants for small businesses and not-for-profit organisations where the business sector is severely affected and the community risks losing essential businesses. Grants are aimed at covering the cost of clean-up and reinstatement, but not compensating for losses.
- The Cabinet Standing Committee on Expenditure Review (ERC) submission, that Resilience NSW submitted and that the NFSP was initially part of, included funding for businesses and not-for-profits organisations 'that have experienced a minimum 40% decline in turnover in March 2022 compared to March 2021 or March 2020'. This criterion suggests that the package designers were limiting their target NGOs to commercially focussed NGOs rather than community service NGOs because, in contrast to businesses which saw a decrease in turnover (because of reduced demand or supply chain disruptions), community service NGOs saw an increase in their service activity, so they would not have qualified for these grants.

Finding 1A: DCJ clearly has a role in supporting NGOs to continue to provide community services in disaster situations.

Summing up, DCJ has a role to support NGOs in disaster situations because:

- Disasters are likely to occur at increased frequency and with increasing impact, affecting all communities, particularly disadvantaged groups.
- NGOs are critical and often first responders in the recovery process. Unlike businesses which may experience a downturn post disaster, NGOs experience an upturn in demand for their services. These services may not be the ones they usually deliver because many NGOs pivot away from business-as-usual to meet the urgent needs of their communities.
- NGOs already experience a high cost of doing business and need extra support immediately after a disaster.
- Supporting NGOs to support the community is aligned with DCJ's purpose to work with the community, non-government partners and other agencies to improve outcomes.

Is there a need for a standard model for NGO support in disaster situations? What are the characteristics of such a model?

A key deliverable of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Review is a set of pre-agreed 'off-the-shelf' recovery packages. These 'off-the-shelf' packages are one of the responses to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.¹⁰

It is important to understand that the recommendation for 'off-the-shelf' packages was in response to the inefficiencies and lengthy lead time that the Commission found. The following are extracts from the report.

'It is apparent that developing new recovery programs as a disaster is unfolding, as was the case during the 2019-2020 bushfires, is inefficient. New recovery programs require the establishment of administrative processes and guidelines, which can delay assistance. It also leads to unnecessary and inequitable inconsistencies in the assistance provided to disaster affected individuals.

There are also gaps in the assistance provided through the DRFA in respect of certain needs that regularly arise out of natural disasters. We have previously noted that a number of social issues can emerge after a natural disaster, such as family violence, and this can lead to an urgent demand for legal assistance and social services.

Establishing pre-agreed assistance packages would ensure that governments can respond quickly, effectively, and consistently. It would allow delivery agencies, as well as all levels of government, to train staff and develop administrative processes, including guidelines and eligibility criteria, prior to a disaster occurring. This would reduce the time from damage to decision to delivery, as all stakeholders would be familiar with the basic components of the recovery program.'

Key words in the text point to the nub of the issue: Current processes are inefficient, government needs to respond quickly (that is, it needs to minimise lead-time from disaster declaration to funding received), programs need to be flexible so that they can address emerging social issues, and staff need to be familiar with the 'package' so that time isn't 'lost' training or bringing them up to standard.

¹⁰ The Australian Government established the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements in 2020 in response to the extreme bushfire season of 2019-20. The report can be accessed at: <https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-12/Royal%20Commission%20into%20National%20Natural%20Disaster%20Arrangements%20-%20Report%20%20%5Baccessible%5D.pdf>

The Disaster Recovery Funding review is addressing the recommendations from the Royal Commission. Details can be found at <https://nema.gov.au/about-us/governance-and-reporting/reviews/DRFAf>

Some work has started on developing a set of 'off-the-shelf' packages; however, the focus is on a set of guidelines for specific domains of assistance (they are even called 'guidelines').

This approach will potentially fall short of the Commission's expectation of efficient grant programs because it doesn't give enough weight to the other important factors which facilitate the efficient deployment of a program – factors like a set of efficient and standard processes, experience in managing in complex environments and being able to pivot flexibly, having staff who are capable with the processes and the principles that underpin rapid deployment so time isn't 'lost' training them.

These other elements of rapid deployment were referred to by the Commission, however their importance (and the work involved to implement them) has not been adequately promoted by implementing agencies.

The elements required for an efficient implementation are the focus of improvement approaches like Lean Thinking and Agile. The intent of these practices is to reduce waste and increase flexibility of the delivery system, which results in fast, efficient, flexible, and accurate delivery processes.

It is particularly important that a standard model for NGO support is accepted and approved both within DCJ, in order to facilitate rapid internal and cabinet approval, but also externally by NEMA and the Reconstruction Authority who will approve future grant funding through the DRFA.

Finding 1B: Rapid deployment of grant programs requires a standard model that is accepted and approved by DCJ and by funding partners.

The elements of a standard model would include:

- An evidence-based theory of change. A theory of change makes explicit the way change is expected to occur and is closely related to but precedes a program logic. DCJ should undertake research into the best ways to support NGOs in disaster situations, including a study of how to best manage complex situations.
- A set of principles for best practice NGO grant support in disaster situations. The principles can be developed from the principles in the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, the National Principles for Disaster Recovery,¹¹ the NSW Grants Administration Guide, and best practice Rapid Procurement.
- A documented Rapid Grants process. DCJ should consider taking the best practice Grants Administration Guide and reframing it with a rapid/agile lens. The refined process should be published as a separate Rapid Deployment Grants Administration Guide and used to guide future rapid grant programs.

¹¹ <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-for-disaster-recovery/>

- A set of support documents and templates including guidelines, standard application forms, reporting forms, acquittal forms etc. DCJ already has many of these documents.
- Documenting the other elements that support a rapid program such as the acquisition and role of DSOs, the extent that DCJ will build capacity of NGOs and the processes to achieve it, and the extent that DCJ will facilitate collaboration amongst NGOs and the processes for achieving it.
- A defined approach for triggering an NGO support grant.

Approach for triggering an NGO support grant.

A standard model for rapid grant deployment requires a defined and structured mechanism for triggering grant initiation, so that the initiation process is evidence based and consistent.

The aim of DCJ's NGO recovery grants is to support NGOs to meet demand for their current (pre-disaster) or new services in the initial recovery period after a disaster.

The challenge is that the stage at which NGO support is required will vary with the impact of the disaster, the level of community resilience, which will impact demand for services, and the level of NGO resilience, which will impact the ability of NGOs to meet changing demand while maintaining acceptable levels of service.

The process

The process for triggering a support grant would involve:

- Establish a set of indicators that inform DCJ about the stresses that NGOs are experiencing in a recovery situation.
- Define a baseline for each indicator against which to judge performance.
- Establish targets for each indicator. The targets represent the point at which it is unreasonable to expect NGOs to absorb further increases in demand for their effective capacity to deliver an acceptable level of service. DCJ would have to engage the NGO community in research to develop a sound understanding of NGO resilience and the factors that influence service capacity.
- Starting immediately after a disaster is declared, monitor the indicators at a high sampling rate. DCJ could consider establishing a reference group of representative NGOs to participate in the monitoring and decision-making process.
- Compare the monitoring results to the relevant baselines and use a process like Multi Criteria Decision Analysis to decide whether a grant should be initiated.

Indicators of NGO stress

The monitoring indicators should inform DCJ about the ability of NGOs to meet demand for their business-as-usual or new services at acceptable levels of service. Indicators to consider include:

- Change in access to DCJ-funded services, as measured by the experiences of the community.
- The ratio of demand to effective capacity for a cross section of DCJ-funded and non-DCJ-funded NGOs. This ratio would increase with an increase in demand, a decline in effective capacity, or both.
- The proportion of community members seeking non-funded recovery services (e.g. to address physical, social, or cultural needs). DCJ understands what these disaster-related needs are through the NFSP and previous disaster grant programs.
- Direct impact indicators such as x% of houses destroyed, x number of emergency callouts or hospitalisations because of the disaster.

In practice, triggering NGO support would not depend on any one indicator, it would typically use multiple indicators and an approach like Multiple Criteria Decision Analysis to decide whether to proceed with a package of support.

Establishing targets

DCJ would need to undertake research into better practices or use past disaster experiences to develop targets for the indicators. DCJ has considerable experience with the impacts of disasters on NGO service performance from previous support programs. DCJ could also consider engaging the NGO community in this research to gain greater insights into the drivers of effective NGO performance.

1.2 How can the risk perspectives of partner agencies be reconciled to minimise administrative burden in supporting NGOs in disaster situations?

Risk appetite refers to the amount of risk an organisation is prepared to take in pursuit of objectives it values. The risk appetite an organisation accepts varies with the organisation's culture, the initiatives it pursues (e.g. large construction projects versus small initiatives), the industry or sector it works in, or the amount of external scrutiny it is subjected to.

Reconciling risk perspectives is best done by 1) understanding the position of the partner and their business-as-usual expectations, 2) demonstrating an organisationally mature approach to risk management, and 3) demonstrating that risk controls are in place and that the residual risk is acceptable.

Finding 1C: Aligning risk perspectives requires a well-developed approach to risk management which the NFSP did not demonstrate.

The NFSP had several excellent risk controls in place which it could use to demonstrate that the residual risk is small. For example, monitoring of grantees by the DSOs was an excellent mechanism for monitoring risk. By regularly meeting with grantees, the DSOs were able to identify emerging issues and respond as required. However, the program's risk management was not well formalised, and its approach and evidence of risk management would be unlikely to instil confidence in a risk sensitive partner.

DCJ has demonstrated in past programs that it has the experience, knowledge, and resources to implement a more formal approach to risk management. A more formal approach would likely enhance its credibility with funding or delivery partners.

1.3 What is the most cost-effective model for resourcing NGO support programs in a disaster context?

Finding 1D: Resource inflexibility led to support issues for grant recipients.

Optimistic timing assumptions in initial approvals sought for funding combined with strict NSW Government finance rules around extension of funding into a new financial year caused the funding for program support, such as the DSO and administration staff, to cease on 30th June 2023, before the grant period was completed. This led to lack of support issues when grant recipients are completing final reporting, seeking extensions and there is no one to undertake this work.

Resourcing NGO support programs.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements¹² highlighted that an important factor for rapid implementation of a grant program is staff who are well trained and familiar with the administrative processes.

The rapid deployment of a grant will be difficult if there is not a core team that can be immediately deployed. For example, the delay in recruiting the volunteer team members meant that the manager and one staff member had to. Rapid deployment requires practical experience in grant program management, including use of and familiarity with the SmartyGrants online platform, knowledge of legislated requirements, an in-depth understanding of the requirements of the NSW Grants Administration Guide, understanding of the Lean/Agile principles that underpin rapid design and deployment, and understanding outcomes and performance measurement. As these attributes are specific to the rapid deployment context, they will be difficult to find in people in other roles within DCJ, and hiring temporaries through agencies will bring other problems related to working within DCJ.

¹² Ibid, p13

Two options can be considered for resourcing of rapid grant programs. Option 1 represents a minimal resourcing position; it is less costly but not as effective as option 2. Option 2 involves a full core team; it will lead to more effective rapid grant programs however it represents an additional ongoing cost for DCJ. Over time, as disasters become more frequent and impactful and the demand for rapid grant programs increases, option 1 may become more costly than option 2 because of the inefficiencies in recruiting temporary staff and the losses due to their inexperience in rapid grant deployment.

Option	Description	Positives	Negatives
1	<p>A core team of a manager and an officer to support basic administrative maintenance.</p> <p>Supported by program-specific temporary staff when programs are initiated.</p>	<p>Manageable cost. Temporaries could be covered by administrative component of grant funding.</p> <p>Could maintain a rapid grants model.</p> <p>Core team could train seconded staff, mentor them in the initial stages of the program.</p> <p>Core team would also be the knowledge retainers</p>	<p>Heavy load on core team, effectiveness may be compromised.</p> <p>Risk of errors due to inexperience of temporary staff.</p> <p>Unlikely to be as effective at rapid grants administration than a dedicated team.</p> <p>Increased disruption to rest of DCJ due to secondments and as frequency of disasters increase.</p>
2	<p>A permanent team of manager and several subject matter experts (e.g. in community engagement, strategic networking, M&E) plus admin staff</p>	<p>Most effective composition.</p> <p>Supports leadership credibility (in rapid grant management).</p> <p>Maintains rapid grants administration model as best practice.</p> <p>Likely to be well utilised as frequency of disasters increase.</p> <p>Minimal disruption to rest of DCJ from seconded staff</p>	<p>Most costly. Could offset costs in short term by using team to manage other grants in non-disaster times.</p>

KEQ 2 - Was the NFSP planning process appropriate?

KEQ 2 is supported by six sub-questions:

- 2.1 How were the needs of NGOs in this flood situation determined?
- 2.2 To what extent were lessons from past programs used to improve the 2022 Support program?
- 2.3 What role did local knowledge play in the planning of the program?
- 2.4 Did the program adequately balance the need for risk management with the need for rapid deployment?
- 2.5 To what extent did the program's planning processes align with the principles and processes in the NSW Government's Grants Administration Guide?

2.1 How were the needs of NGOs in this flood situation determined?

Delivering funding for NGOs impacted by the February - March floods in Northern NSW was a protracted process.

Early evidence from the field informed a decision to support NGOs. District Services was receiving information that some of its commissioned services were having difficulty opening or staffing their services. It was also receiving feedback that non-funded NGOs and community groups were organically activating to serve community needs, which prompted the idea of an Open support package alongside a Direct Allocation support package.

Initially, NGO funding was included in a large and complex package that Resilience NSW submitted to the Cabinet Standing Committee on Expenditure Review (ERC) in March 2022. NGO funding was included as part of the funding for Small Business Flood Support.

In contrast to the \$50,000 Flood Disaster Recovery Small Business Grant (which was also available to NGOs to pay for the costs of clean-up and reinstatement), the Small Business Flood Support package was intended to offer \$10,000 for small businesses and NGOs which had seen a minimum 40% decline in turnover due to the floods. The funding was to cover salaries and wages, some operational expenses, financial or legal advice, marketing and communications and other business costs.

Although some evidence of NGO need was available, a lack of robust data contributed to challenges in reaching agreement about the funding, which led to DCJ approving a separate NGO Flood Support Program (the NFSP).

The planning of the NFSP was then rapidly undertaken by a DCJ working group, enhanced with a representative from NSW Aboriginal Affairs. The process was overseen by a Steering Committee with representatives from DCJ Partnerships, Northern NSW District, and Resilience NSW.

The final grant package was a flexible design that enabled grantees, who were closest to the community and best understood their needs, to determine how best to use the funds to support individuals and communities. Key features of the design included:

- Staffing costs, to meet the need for increased and sustained support.
- Reimbursement of expenses incurred since February-March 2022 that were directly related to the floods.
- Purchase of minor equipment and other small operating expenses up to \$5,000.
- Operational costs to deliver critical service delivery, for example vehicle hire and overheads directly related to service delivery.
- Minor expenses, up to \$1,000 per individual.

2.2 To what extent were lessons from past programs used to improve the 2022 Support program?

Finding 2A: DCJ's use of lessons from past programs represents good grant practice in action.

The design of the NFSP was informed by the evaluation of the four special grants programs (the COVID-19 Partnership and Regional Partnership Grants, Social Sector Support Fund (SSSF) and the Social Sector Transformation Fund (SSTF)), the COVID-19 Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Infrastructure Grants¹³, and the NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) completion and outcomes report for the Social Sector Transformation Fund.

Lessons from past programs included:

- That mutual trust and collaboration are drivers of effectiveness of a grants process. DCJ achieved this in the NFSP through their initial engagement with NGOs, through forums and communication, and most effectively through the DSOs who were from the region and had a sound understanding of the issues, and who developed strong relationships with the grantees.
- Disaster situations require a rapid response. The NFSP achieved a rapid delivery of funds.
- NGOs value minimal administrative burden, particularly in disaster situations where their resources are stretched and devoted to service delivery. DCJ achieved this by making the application documentation and process simple, the reporting requirements reasonable, and support very accessible.
- Monitoring of program delivery, and adaptive management (that is, flexibility to change as issues arise) are key drivers for program effectiveness. DCJ was

¹³ These funds were designed to support NGOs manage the impacts of the COVID pandemic. The Social Sector Transformation Fund (SSTF) helped small and medium-sized NGOs working in health and social service to modernise their operations — with a focus on capacity building, better digital service delivery, remote working capabilities, and improved business strategies. The Social Sector Support Fund (SSSF) helped NGOs in the social, health, disability & animal welfare sectors to sustain their operations where COVID-19 had led to increased demand, reduced revenue, or disrupted staffing. The Partnership and Regional Partnership grants supported NGOs to continue to deliver services to vulnerable people & diverse communities. The COVID-19 Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Infrastructure Grants were for projects such as acquisition, construction, or refurbishment of buildings for services that supported survivors of sexual, domestic, and family violence.

admirably flexible in its approach – several grantees commented on this. The flexibility allowed them to focus their resources on meeting needs as they emerged.

The following feedback, from a medium-sized NGO experienced in grant funding processes, is typical of the comments received about the NFSP program.

'The simple application process, quick turn-around and broad scope of the program worked well for us on the front end. We appreciated the flexibility to shape and amend service delivery categories and metrics as the program developed to respond to changing community needs. This also allowed us to focus resources where they were needed as other flood-related funding came through with more restricted criteria.'

'We appreciated the simplicity of monthly program reporting so that our time was spent on service delivery rather than grant administration. We also enjoyed the gatherings with other providers to share ideas, provide support and develop opportunities for collaboration.'

2.3 What role did local knowledge play in the planning of the program?

Finding 2B: DCJ used local knowledge from district staff, however engaging the NGO community in the planning process will improve the depth of knowledge available to DCJ.

Local knowledge played an important role in planning the NFSP. The District Director and Manager were both involved in the design and planning process. District staff have significant local knowledge acquired through their role in administering commissioning services. Other group-specific knowledge was provided by NSW Aboriginal Affairs to ensure the design adequately catered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander NGOs.

An opportunity exists to improve the quality of local knowledge by using a rapid NGO engagement process. For example, early in the design process DCJ could conduct a rapid focus group with a small group of representative NGOs to better understand the impact of a disaster on NGOs. This could become a standard feature of a rapid grant administration framework.

2.4 Did the program adequately balance the need for risk management with the need for rapid deployment?

Rapid deployment is achieved through efficient processes, sound program management, and minimal non-value-adding process steps.

Risk management involves a process of identifying, assessing, and treating risks, then monitoring and reviewing. The NSW Grants Administration Guide identifies three categories of risks to consider:

- Program risks relating to the planning, design, and implementation of the grant, such as the scale and complexity of the grant; whether it is a novel approach; and the agency's capacity to administer the grant.
- Grantee risk such as the grantee's industry or sector; the grantee's experience and capacity to deliver the grant activities; and the history of the grantee.
- Governance risks relating to the governance of the grant, such as the relationship between the grantor and grantee; the relationship between the parties to the grant agreement, and the grantee's accountability procedures.

DCJ employed several practices which acted as risk controls.

- Program risk was managed through DCJ's prior experience and understanding of the target NGO cohort.

For example, DCJ district staff have considerable experience and understanding of NGOs through their administration of commissioned services. Furthermore, DCJ has experience in delivering NGO support grants in disaster situations, for example, SSTF, SSSF, Partnership and Regional Partnership programs, and the COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Stimulus.

- Grantee risk management had the biggest impact on rapid deployment.

Risk involved in the Direct Allocation stream was minimised because applicants were known DCJ providers, so DCJ had a sound understanding of their capacity and capabilities. Risks in the Open grant stream were minimised using a comprehensive application and assessment process, the use of DSOs and monthly reporting for grants above \$100,000.

Finding 2C: DCJ's assessment process was comprehensive, however it could be refined.

The assessment process was highly structured considering the risks involved. For example, The Open grant stream managed risk with a comprehensive two-stage application process.

Stage 1

Applicants completed an Expression of Interest in June 2022 via SmartyGrants, providing details about increased need and demand for their services. DCJ minimised the administrative load by asking one question with a 50-200 word response. Applicants were also required to demonstrate that they were an eligible NGO. Of the 103 Expressions of Interest received, 95 were approved.

Stage 2

The 95 eligible applicants submitted applications directly into SmartyGrants in July 2022. DCJ minimised the administrative burden with a simple application form which required

applicants to submit a 50-200 word summary of their planned use for the funds plus a 50-200 word response addressing each of five criteria:

- That they have experienced an increase in demand.
- That they have the capacity to meet the increased demand.
- That they are capable of delivering high quality, flexible and sustainable services.
- That they demonstrate an ability to understand and respond to the changing needs of local communities.
- That they can expend the grant by August 2023.

Preliminary assessment. Two project team members then independently assessed and rated each application. The project lead then reviewed all preliminary assessments, including:

- Applicant plans for use of the funding and requested funding packages.
- Preliminary assessor comments in relation to ineligible elements of funding.
- Preliminary assessor comments in relation to providing lower funding packages than the applicant's first preference.
- Ensuring equitable geographic distribution, including references to ABS population and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population data.
- Prioritising applicants that "primarily deliver services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and people, culturally and linguistically diverse groups".

An Assessment Panel then recommended a list of projects to the Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Policy, and Commissioning for funding, who made the final decision.

There are opportunities to streamline the process, for example, by using a single stage process, by using a single assessor, and by eliminating the project lead review or replacing it with checking of a small sample of high value applications. There is value in DCJ working through each step of the process and asking – What value does it add? and Is the value worth the cost?

Finding 2D: The District Support Officers acted as a risk control of grantee risk.

The DSOs were a significant part of DCJ's approach to managing grantee risk. Through their close relationship and understanding of grantee performance, DSOs operated in a risk assurance role, providing oversight to NGO activities and rapid feedback if issues arose.

Finding 2E: DCJ has been unable to provide a risk register.

Although DCJ implemented a robust process for assessing applications, and thus minimising some grantee risk, it has not been able to provide a risk register to demonstrate that a formal process was followed where risks were identified, controls applied, and residual risk reviewed at regular intervals.

There are numerous risk management guidelines, templates, and support within DCJ and across government that future programs could use to better manage risk.

2.5 To what extent did the program’s planning processes align with the principles and processes in the NSW Government Grants Administration Guide?

Finding 2F: The NFSP’s planning processes aligned with the principles and processes in the NSW Grants Administration Guide to a moderate extent, however opportunities for improvement exist.

The NSW Grants Administration Guide is based on seven principles and contains seven component processes.

Principles	Processes
Robust grant planning & design	Planning & designing
Collaboration & partnership	Promoting the grant opportunity
Proportionality	Receiving & assessing applications
Outcome orientation	Providing grants
Value for money	Publishing grant information
Governance & accountability	Monitoring & acquitting grants
Probity & transparency	Grants evaluation

The NFSP was aligned to a large extent to the principles of proportionality, governance & accountability, and probity and transparency. Its processes of promoting the opportunity, assessing applications, providing grants, and publishing grant information were also aligned to the Guide.

Areas that offer potential for greater alignment include:

- Robust planning and design could benefit from having greater regard for issues such as risk identification and management, appropriate application and assessment processes, performance measures, and documentation of processes.

Documenting processes is good management practice. It is also consistent with a recommendation the Audit Office of NSW made in a 2021 review of the grants

administration of a disaster relief program¹⁴, where it recommended that “Service NSW should develop a framework that documents expected controls for how it administers grants, including business processes, fraud control and governance and probity requirements.”

- Outcome orientation could benefit from making outcomes explicit and linked to state or agency outcomes. The theory of change that links inputs and activities to outcomes should be explicit (documented), and the evaluation would benefit from measures to assess whether intended outcomes are being realised.
- Improved use of program logic and theory of change. The program logic (Attachment 1) does not state the problem being addressed or the objective of the program – although it can be inferred from the outcomes. The outputs focus on governance, but don’t include disbursement of grants, and the format, where NGO activities are shown alongside program activities, is confusing.

DCJ has a comprehensive guide to developing program logics¹⁵ and an evidence portal to help program designers and planners develop evidence-based theories that describe how change is expected to occur.¹⁶ DCJ should consider using these resources to improve its program design.

- The program could have greater regard for demonstrating value for money. This does not necessarily mean a complex cost benefit analysis (CBA). The NSW Grants Administration Guide offers the following advice: ‘For smaller or time-critical grant opportunities, value for money may be assessed with more streamlined approaches, such as rapid CBAs, which are based on the same principles but requires less precision.’
- Grantee reporting could be improved. NFSP Open grantees were required to report ‘occasions of service’, but also asked to define an ‘occasion of service’ for their context. Many NGOs struggled to define their occasions of service, and the acquittal reports recorded over 365 different descriptions. An opportunity exists to develop a structured outcomes framework which would lead to more useful outcome data.

¹⁴ Audit Office of NSW. *Grants administration for disaster relief*, 2021

¹⁵ DCJ’s guide to program logics can be accessed at <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=805260>

¹⁶ Evidence portal can be accessed at <https://evidenceportal.dcj.nsw.gov.au/evidence-portal-home/using-evidence.html>

KEQ 3 - Was the NFSP implemented as planned?

KEQ 3 is supported by the following sub-questions:

- 3.1 Did the grant establishment process conform to planned timelines?
- 3.2 Was the administrative burden on applicants and grantees proportionate to the grant value and risk involved?
- 3.3 Was the information provided by NGOs in deeds sufficient to satisfy DCJ's risk management requirements?
- 3.4 Was the program adequately monitored and adaptive management practised? Was the information provided by NGOs in reports sufficient to enable DCJ to monitor performance?
- 3.5 What impact did the district support officers have? Did the use of district support officers add value over and above the traditional approach of using DCJ's contract managers to provide support? Was the additional cost of employing district support officers an effective use of funding?

3.1 Did the grant establishment process conform to planned timelines?

Finding 3A: The establishment process was completed in an appropriate time.

Although initially delayed as part of the Resilience NSW ERC submission, once DCJ approved the funding package, the NFSP was rapidly established.

DCJ does not have service level standards for lead-time of grant programs. Without a standard for comparison, the evaluation used available lead-time data from similar programs to compare the NFSP. This comparison should be approached carefully, however, to ensure that the 'comparable' programs are similar in complexity and character.

Three sources of information were used as a guide to an appropriate timeframe:

- The Australian Government Business Grants Hub offers a streamlined and standardised end-to-end delivery service across a grants program lifecycle. The Hub advertises that: *'your program will be ready for launch about 12 to 16 weeks after you tell us you want to deliver it through the Business Grants Hub.'*
- The 2021 report by the Audit Office of NSW of the 2021 Small Business Support Fund. The audit reported on two grant streams – the \$10,000 Small Business Support Grant and the \$3,000 Small Business recovery Grant.
- Data from the 2021 COVID-19 Partnership, SSSF and SSTF grant programs¹⁷.

¹⁷ Ibid, p20.

The following table summarises the performance of comparable sources.

Comparison	Time definition	Elapsed workdays
Australian Government Business Grants Hub	Approval to funds distributed	60 – 80
Audit Office of NSW 2021 audit	Announcement to distribution of funds	11 – 26
DCJ Social Sector Transformation Fund	From 1 st Steering Committee to invitations	80 – 90
DCJ Social Sector Support Fund Open Grants	From media release to applications	50
DCJ COVID-19 Partnership Grants	From announcement to funds distributed	20

Figure 2 shows the NFSP lead time performance.

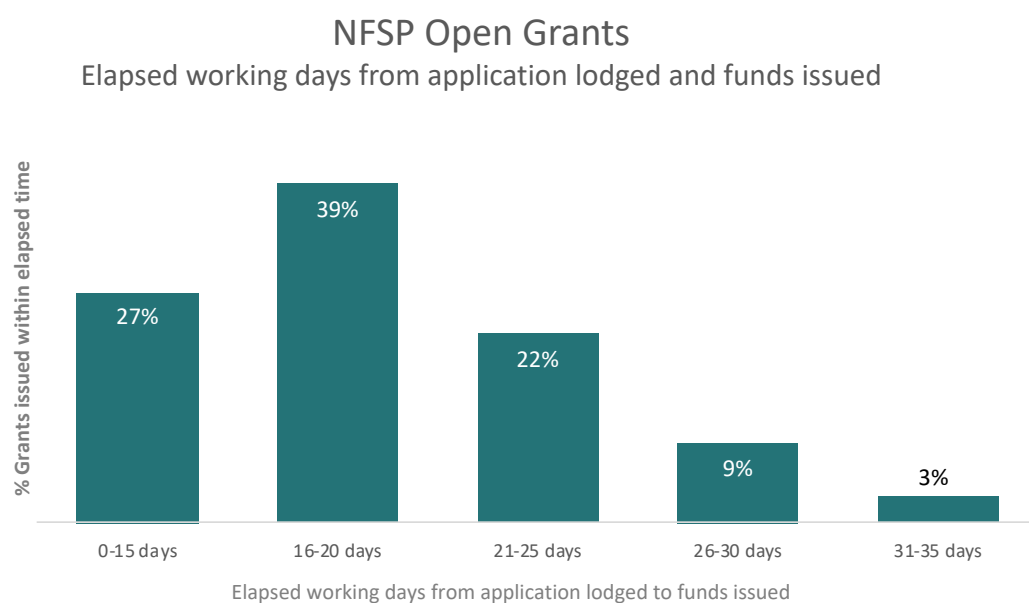


Figure 2 – Working days between lodgement and funds received

Comparing the NFSP lead-time to the table of comparable sources, the NFSP performs favourably against the comparisons, however opportunities exist for improving lead-time performance, for example, by streamlining the assessment process.

3.2 Was the administrative burden on applicants and grantees proportionate to the grant value and risk involved?

Finding 3B: The application process and the level of reporting were commensurate with the risk involved.

Most grantees appreciated the minimal administrative burden:

'The support and resources made available by DCJ were excellent. The reporting was straightforward and not cumbersome. Monthly reporting was great and forums were always timely.' (Small NGO Open Grantee)

'The simplicity and relatively low amount of paperwork coupled with the high availability of the main DCJ staff who can personally keep track of progress with a phone call or email - contact. This is how all funding should be! The monthly reporting and all paperwork associated with this grant was excellent. Too often funders overburden NFPs with paperwork and unnecessary reporting requirements, but this is a much better model so we can get on with what we do best.' (Small NGO Open Grantee)

A review of both the Open grants application and acquittal forms confirmed there was little redundant information that would burden grantees.

3.3 Was the information provided by NGOs sufficient to satisfy DCJ's risk management requirements?

DCJ's risk management requirements are guided by the NSW Grants Administration Guide. The guide advises that risk management should be proportional to the risk level (low, medium, or high), which depends on the likelihood and consequence of the risks occurring. The amount of information and frequency that DCJ requires grantees to report should depend on the risk involved.

Finding 3C: DCJ used several risk controls to minimise grantee and governance risk in the NFSP.

The likelihood of Direct Allocation NGOs misusing grant funds was low because of the relationship DCJ has with its commissioned services and the knowledge DCJ has of the pressures on its funded service providers.

The likelihood of Open grant NGOs misusing grant funds was minimised through a comprehensive selection process and a robust monitoring process. For grants over \$100,000, grantees also had to report monthly on their use of the funds.

The selection process minimised risk because the information provided by NGOs allowed DCJ to assess the credibility of submissions. Applicants had to demonstrate that they had

experienced an increase in demand, that they had the capacity and capability to respond flexibly to the demand, and that they could expend the funds by August 2023.

The robust monitoring process involved two DSOs visiting grantees several times across the year. In addition to gathering intelligence about NGO performance, the DSOs developed strong relationships with grantees. All grantees who were interviewed commented on how much they valued and relied on the DSOs. Strong relationships encouraged open and frank communication which, in combination with the regular visits, resulted in a high level of understanding about grant performance and risk of non-compliance. Potential issues were logged and addressed.

Finding 3D: The information required to be reported by grantees is commensurate with the risks involved.

DCJ's reporting requirements were designed to minimise the administrative burden on grantees, but also consider the level of residual risk.

For grants of \$100,000 and over, grantees had to provide monthly occasions of service, recording their statistics directly using SmartyGrants. For grants below \$100,000, grantees only had to submit a financial acquittal in September 2023.

Given the low likelihood of risks occurring in the use of the grant funds, the level of reporting that grantees are required to do is adequate. That is, more frequent or more detailed reporting is unlikely to improve the risk profile while it would contribute to additional administrative burden.

**3.4 Was the program adequately monitored and adaptive management practised?
Was the information provided by NGOs in reports sufficient to enable DCJ to monitor performance?**

Finding 3E: The use of DSOs enabled DCJ to actively monitor grant performance and take adaptive action when required.

Recovery situations are complex environments, and needs can emerge and change rapidly. Some grantees recognised that they could provide more appropriate services than the ones listed in their application and requested a variation.

Variation requests were handled in the first instance by the DSOs. The DSOs approved variations that were clearly within the grant guidelines and referred others to the program manager. The DSOs recorded variation decisions in SmartyGrants and copied the grantee via email.

This flexibility is an example of program management adapting to the circumstances. It represents good grants administration practice. The flexibility was also appreciated by grantees, as this comment demonstrates.

'The flexible funding allowed us to be responsive to changing needs of our community and organisation.' (Small NGO Open Grantee)

Finding 3F: The information reported by grantees was only marginally useful for monitoring the program.

The information reported by grantees was not a uniform measure, and it was only the experience and knowledge of the DSOs, who could interpret this information, which made it marginally useful.

Grantees were required to report 'occasions of service', however DCJ did not define what an 'occasion of service' was, and instead directed NGOs to define it for themselves. This resulted in over 365 different 'occasions of service' being reported, which limited the value of the reported data.

Several grantees said they were challenged in defining their 'occasions of service' and liaised with the DSOs to resolve their uncertainties about how to define KPIs.

Some grantees, however, did find the reporting process beneficial because they said it helped them to manage their grant processes and monitor changes in the environment which helped them fine tune their service delivery.

3.5 What impact did the district support officers have? Did the use of district support officers add value over and above the traditional approach of using DCJ's contract managers to provide support? Was the additional cost of employing district support officers an effective use of funding?

Finding 3G: The DSOs had a significant impact on the program.

The DSOs provided multiple benefits. In liaising and visiting NGOs regularly the DSOs provided a degree of quality assurance that helped to monitor for grantee risk. They acted as the vehicle for adaptive management of the program that enabled it to respond flexibly to the changing environment. The DSOs also provided support and capacity building via the forums and one-to-one mentoring.

The value of the DSOs is best appreciated from feedback received from NGOs:

'The regular support from DCJ was good. There was a great sense of trust and flexibility which was greatly valued.' (Large NGO Direct Grantee)

'The forums they ran were informative and allowed us to understand what other NFP's were doing to ensure no duplication of resources.' (Medium size NGO Open Grantee)

'[the DSOs] support has been amazing, they have been present throughout this whole experience. I really enjoyed the forums that were held on a

regular basis, these helped network, form supports and learn from what other people were doing.' (Large NGO Open Grantee)

'The support available from [the DSOs] was outstanding.' (Small NGO Open Grantee)

'Communication between [the DSOs] and our team was exceptional. They made the whole process so streamline and actually enjoyable. Huge thank you to them.' (Small NGO Open Grantee)

KEQ 4 - What evidence is there that the NFSP achieved its intended outcomes?

KEQ 4 is supported by the following sub-questions:

- 4.1 Were program outputs delivered as planned?
- 4.2 To what extent did the planned outcomes develop?
- 4.3 Was the program effective in sustaining NGO services after the grant funding ceased?
- 4.4 Were there any unintended consequences?
- 4.5 What lessons can be learned to improve outcomes in future programs?

4.1 Were program outputs delivered as planned?

Finding 4A: Program outputs were delivered as planned.

According to the program logic, the program outputs were intended to be:

- Clear, concise messaging through website, social media, and district newsletters.
- Working group established and meeting regularly.
- Steering group established and meeting regularly.
- Use of established communication channels (including Hot Topics, Communications, Resilience recovery coordinators and community hubs).
- Eligibility and assessment criteria, assessment processes.
- Acquittal and project reports to assess service delivery.

The evidence suggests that these outputs were largely delivered as expected.

Finding 4B: The distribution of Open Grants did not align with the plan.

Figure 3 shows that fewer grants of greater value were issued than planned. This was not an intentional change to the design of the program; however, it does suggest that the original understanding about the appropriate size of grants was incorrect. The difference can be interpreted as evidence of adaptive management, changing the size of grants to suit the circumstances.

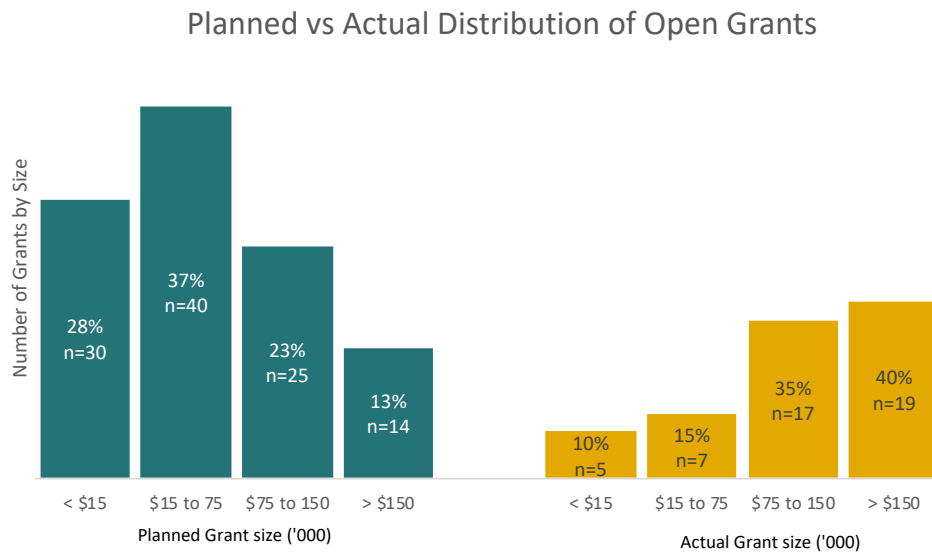


Figure 3 – Distribution of Open Grants

Finding 4C: Forums were very successful and valued by most.

Grant recipients were required to attend at least one forum over the 12-month period. The purpose of the forums was to bring participants together and facilitate networking, raise awareness about potential collaborators, build capability, and share experiences and lessons learned. Seven face-to-face and two online forums were held.

Series	Attendees	Organisations represented
Oct/Nov 2022	111	71
March 2023	120	61
August 2023	113	59

Most grantees commented positively on the forums. For example:

'Forums really helped connect with collaborators and gain insight into many local organisations. DCJ team was very helpful and supportive throughout the process.' (Small NGO Open Grantee)

'It was also good to collaborate with other providers through the Forums that were hosted by DCJ and to build greater organisational capability to front line preparation, response and recovery to disasters to better support clients and communities through large scale natural disasters.' (Large NGO Direct Grantee)

However, a few suggested the travel was too far.

4.2 To what extent did the planned outcomes develop?

Sub-question 4.2 refers to the changes in the observed problem that the program was intended to achieve.

Although the program logic does not state it clearly, the observed problem was that the community was not able to access the services they needed because of flood impacts. The services needed may have been those that community members were receiving before the floods, or they may be new services they now needed because of the floods. Causes of the observed problem included:

- The increased demand exceeded NGO capacity to respond and/or their capacity was impaired because of impacts on their staff, on their facilities, or on their environment (that is, the floods meant that people couldn't get to them)
- The floods caused new needs to emerge which may have been outside the scope of funded service providers to deliver.
- Hyper-local service providers established rapidly in response to needs. Many of these groups provided critical response yet were not resourced to sustain their efforts even in the short term.

The NFSP aimed to address the causes to the observed problem by providing short term funding to DCJ-funded and non-DCJ-funded NGOs to enable them to meet existing and new demand caused by the floods.

The final measure of success of the intervention would be that the community was able to access the support it needed when it needed it.

The program logic describes four planned impacts the intervention was intended to deliver:

Impact 1 - Funded NGOs maintain their operations.

Impact 2 - People are able to access support services and waiting lists are reduced.

Impact 3 - There is a joined-up NGO network from large to hyper local working collaboratively.

Impact 4 - Initial ad hoc arrangements and relationships with other organisations are embedded by mainstream NGOs into their operations.

Finding 4D: The NFSP meant that DCJ funded-NGO recipients were able to continue to operate their services (impact 1).

Of the 61 acquittal reports reviewed, all grantees reported that they were able to maintain their services because of the funding.

Finding 4E: The evidence does not enable an assessment of the extent that people were able to access support services or waiting lists were reduced (impact 2).

Although all grantees provided services, the evidence is not available to assess the extent of impact 2 and understand whether the community was able to access the support services when and where they needed them.

A typical way of assessing whether a community can access the services they need would be to ask them via a survey, interviews or focus groups, however this may not be practical or considerate in a disaster situation.

DCJ could consider using DSOs to informally collect evidence about access as they travel around the community visiting NGOs.

Finding 4F: The program contributed to impacts 3 and 4 to a small extent.

The forums and work of the DSOs facilitated some collaboration between NGOs. Grantees were asked to report on the number of NGOs they collaborated with, and Figure 4 shows that while some collaborations did occur, there were a number who did not, including about half the DCJ-funded NGOs.

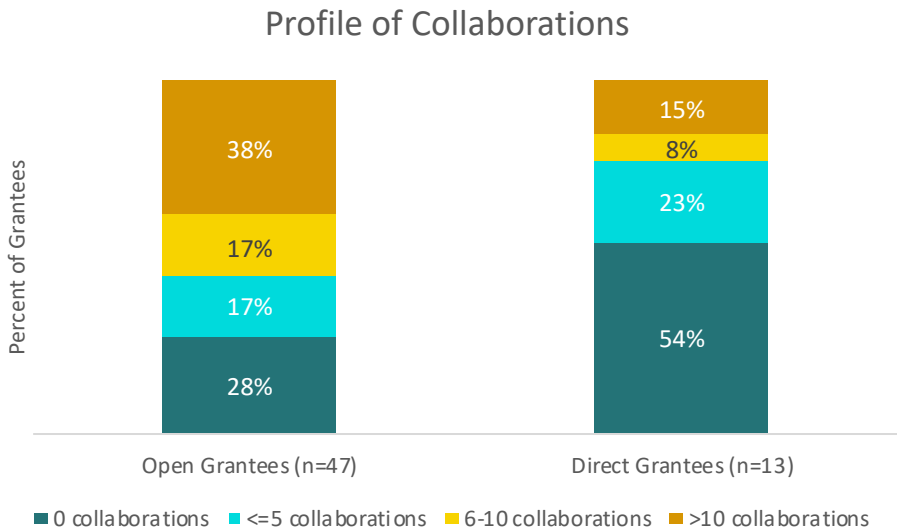


Figure 4 – Profile of collaborations

While some collaboration occurred, a joined-up network of large to hyper-local organisations (impact 3) did not. Impact 3 is a long-term outcome; it is not a realistic outcome for an intervention limited to one year.

There is no evidence to suggest that impact 4 - Initial ad hoc arrangements and relationships with other organisations are embedded by mainstream NGOs into their operations – was progressed.

4.3 Was the program effective in sustaining NGO services after the funding ceased?

Grantees were asked whether they intended to continue providing the services once the grant funding is expended. Figure 5 shows that 83% of Open grantees and 69% of Closed grantees plan to continue to provide some level of service after the grant funding is expended.

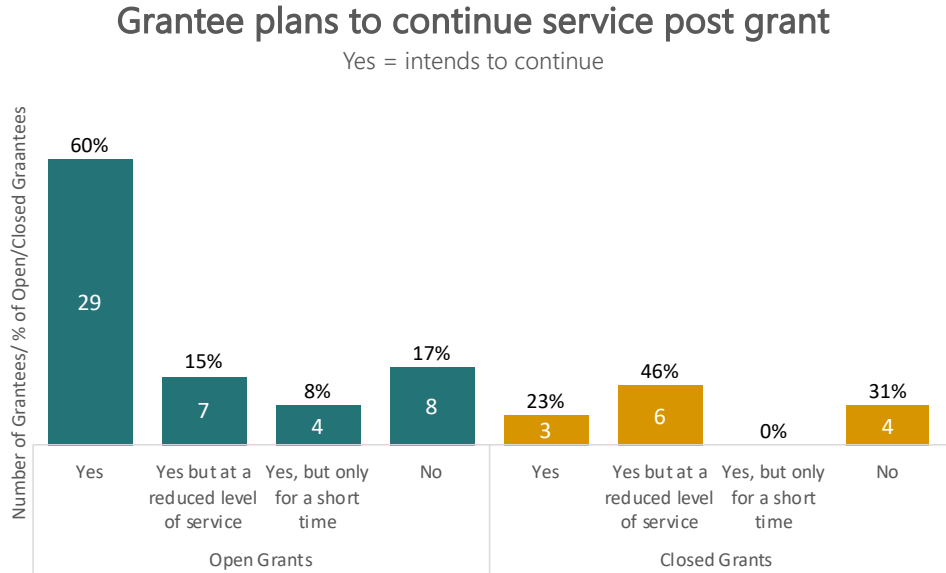


Figure 5 – Grantee intentions regarding service continuity

The main reason given by 'No' respondents was that the funding covered additional staffing which they could not sustain. In contrast, some of the Yes respondents also used the funding for staffing but had either already or planned to find other funding sources.

4.4 Were there any unintended consequences?

Positive unintended consequences included:

Producing outcomes beyond the immediate service. For example:

- Marine Rescue Brunswick Heads undertook advanced training which allows members to head into devastated areas where roads are impassable by normal vehicles. This increased their capacity to support and respond to disasters, assist in evacuations, and supply goods into devastated areas. They are now seen as the model for the Marine Rescue across NSW and are training other brigades in some of the more advanced rescue capabilities.
- The NGO - Our Plan C - trained Community Carers and Responders to form a trained, connected, and empowered network of community leaders and neighbourhood activators, dedicated to improving community cohesion and disaster resilience. In addition to a significant amount of training, they have been asked to carryout training in communities in the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury,

and Sunshine Coast, thus extending their impact well beyond the Northern Rivers region.

Negative unintended consequences.

A negative unintended consequence was the impact of allowing NGOs to select their own definitions of 'occasions of service'. Over 365 different definitions were provided, causing some confusion amongst grantees but also making the data only marginally useful as it was difficult to compare or to consolidate service outputs.

A second unintended outcome was the dissatisfaction with the limited timing for the funding. Many NGOs wanted more funding over a longer time, claiming (correctly) that recovery takes much longer than twelve months. This may have been due to a misunderstanding about the purpose of the funding, or it may reflect the ongoing issues NGOs have with respect to funding even outside of disaster situations. Clearer messaging about timelines may help.

Lessons learned

The changes that DCJ incorporated to rapidly deploy the NFSP were successful.

DCJ's Rapid Grants process, with its minimal administrative burden and use of DSOs, was significantly better from grantee perspectives than other grants – which they described as overly burdensome and plagued with issues. There is an opportunity for DCJ to become recognised leaders in the application of rapid grant programs.

The DSOs are the most critical factor in managing grantee and governance risk. The detailed and in-depth knowledge gained by the DSOs is invaluable for monitoring grantee performance and for adaptive management of the program.

There is, however, significant opportunity to further improve and formalise many of the grant activities. DCJ already has many of the practices and documents/templates it needs to formalise its approach, they just need to be developed into a framework or model that becomes the Rapid Grants Administration approach.

The use of risk controls throughout the application process to minimise the likelihood of risks occurring, coupled with the use of DSOs who act as a further risk control, means that routine reporting by grantees does not add much value in terms of risk management. Grantee reporting also does not add much value for program management. However, some grantees found the reporting process beneficial because they said it helped them to manage their grant processes and to monitor changes in the environment which may lead to changes in the services they deliver.

Giving NGOs the freedom to define their occasions of service led to the unexpected consequence that over 365 definitions of occasions of service were recorded, limiting the value of the data for making conclusions about the program's effectiveness. However, when the 365 definitions of 'occasions of service' were reviewed there was a lot of commonalities across the definitions, and they were grouped into ten categories.

This offers DCJ an opportunity to significantly improve the way outcomes are reported by developing a framework of potential outcomes that NGOs could use to guide the definition of outcomes they would expect their services to deliver. An example of this Outcomes Tree approach is available at <https://communityservicesoutcomestree.com>

The Outcomes Tree was developed by the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University, and it is designed to help NGOs define the outcomes that their service recipients experience as a result of the community services delivered.

Furthermore, the Outcomes Tree could be aligned with DCJ's outcomes framework. DCJ's outcomes framework consists of a set of core client outcomes and indicators.¹⁸ The core

¹⁸ <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/human-services-outcomes-framework/communities-and-justice-core-client-outcomes-and-indicators>

outcome categories are safety, Empowerment, Social and Community, Health, Home, Economic, and Education and Skills. Aligning to the core outcomes makes it easier to understand how the grants program contributes to DCJ's purpose.

The use of an Outcomes Tree approach would also make it easier for applicants to define the benefits of their proposed service activities. The framework could incorporate suggested KPIs which could also form the basis of grantee monitoring.

A further benefit is that using an outcomes tree approach is that it makes assessing the value for money of the program easier. Value for money could be assessed using a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis. An SROI would be more achievable if there was a manageable number of outcomes with clear outcome descriptions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the NFSP has been a very successful program. It was efficiently and effectively delivered, and it supported a range of NGO services which benefited the community and enabled them to continue with their recovery journeys.

The program received considerable positive feedback from grantees about its flexibility, its low level of administrative burden compared to other grant programs, and the level of support they received from all program staff but particularly from the two DSOs.

NGOs are critical early responders in the disaster recovery process. Looking forward, the forecast increase in frequency and impact of disasters means that NGOs will continue to be involved in disaster recovery. Their ongoing sustainability challenges means they will continue to need further support, especially in times of disaster recovery.

DCJ has a role in supporting NGOs in their disaster recovery roles since they support the community, and particularly the disadvantaged, who are ultimately DCJ's reason for being.

Furthermore, in the future, disaster recovery support is likely to look like an ongoing program. Even if disaster recovery support continues to take the form of time-limited discrete interventions, across the state and across multiple years with more frequent events, it will feel like DCJ is always funding disaster recovery. For this reason, DCJ should consider a permanent Rapid Grant Delivery capability, which means developing agile approaches to grant management, along with appropriate resourcing, so that it can respond efficiently and effectively as disasters create a need for NGO support.

Although the NFSP has been successful, DCJ has considerable opportunity to refine its approach to disaster grant programs and become recognised as leaders in Rapid Grant programs. This refinement means developing and documenting a standard model based on Lean/Agile principles and investing in the right capability and capacity for quickly and effectively implementing the model.

Recommendations

It detracts nothing from DCJ's success to note – in the spirit of continuous improvement – that some opportunities exist to improve all aspects of the grant processes.

1. Develop a standard model for Rapid Grant design and delivery.

A documented standard model for rapid design and delivery would contribute to effective and efficient implementations because the process would be streamlined, and stakeholders would know what to do to ensure efficient and effective processes.

The elements of a standard model are:

- An evidence-based theory of change. A theory of change makes explicit the way change is expected to occur and is closely related to but precedes a program logic. DCJ should undertake research into the best ways to support NGOs in disaster situations, including a study of how to best manage complex situations.
- A set of principles for best practice NGO grant support in disaster situations. The principles can be developed from the principles in the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, the National Principles for Disaster Recovery, the NSW Grants Administration Guide, and best practice Rapid Procurement.
- A documented Rapid Grants process. DCJ should consider taking the best practice Grants Administration Guide and reframing it with a rapid/agile lens. The refined process should then be published and used for training all stakeholders involved in the grants process.
- A set of support documents and templates including guidelines, standard application forms, reporting forms, acquittal forms etc. DCJ already has many of these documents.
- Documenting the other elements that support a rapid program such as the acquisition and role of DSOs, the extent that DCJ will build capacity of NGOs and the processes to achieve it, and the extent that DCJ will facilitate collaboration amongst NGOs and the processes for achieving it.
- A defined approach for triggering an NGO support grant.

The model should be documented and published so that it becomes the standard for rapid grant programs. DCJ has an opportunity to become a recognised leader in Rapid Grant Deployment, which may be useful in negotiations with funding or delivery partners.

2. Collect and use the elements of good grants practice that DCJ already has developed.

DCJ has many examples of good practice, such as its guide to developing program logics as part of a program's planning stage or for informing monitoring and evaluation, a guide and templates for risk management, and past templates for developing an outcomes framework that the program could use for reporting. However, these examples of good practices or templates to aid good practices were not used by the NFSP program.

DCJ has a low-cost opportunity to improve the way it manages its grant programs by bringing together these resources and employing them as part of a standard process.

3. Develop an Outcome Tree for NGO disaster assistance.

In a similar way to the example of the outcomes tree discussed earlier, DCJ should consider developing an outcomes framework aligned to the DCJ core outcomes, but with sub-outcomes developed from the experience of the NFSP.

A framework of outcomes has several benefits. It would support and guide NGOs in their applications because the framework would help to identify the outcomes their services would contribute to. The framework could also include basic approaches to measuring the

outcomes, which NGOs could include in their monitoring programs. An outcomes framework would help DCJ report on the program because the various NGO outcomes could be consolidated into an overall program metric, and the standard definitions of an outcomes framework would assist in undertaking a Social Return on Investment which would inform a value for money assessment of the program.

4. Plan for greater capability for the Rapid Grants team.

The structure for the current grants team consists of a permanent manager and one staff member, plus several temporary resources. The problem with this approach is that knowledge and experience are lost when the temporary resources return to their substantive roles.

As disaster events become more frequent and impactful, the more frequent seconding of staff will become disruptive and potentially lead to inefficiencies and issues with knowledge retention.

DCJ should consider and plan for a larger core team. It could achieve this by incrementally advancing the size of the team over time and based on demand. Alternatively, it could establish a larger core team now and use its excess capacity (when it is not involved fully in disaster support programs) to manage other DCJ grant programs.

Attachments

1. NFSP Program Logic

NGO Flood Support Program – Program Logic

Input	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Resources, tools, capabilities to enable activities	Key actions to deliver the NGO Flood SP and to achieve outputs and outcomes of the grant program	Tangible outputs and visible signs of a good grant program	Expected outcomes for the sector and Government	Medium term goals NGO Flood SP can contribute to achieving
DCJ				
DCJ staff to manage the grants and to support NGOs locally	Develop a communication plan for the various sectors	Clear and concise messaging through website, social media and district newsletters	Service system is viable and continue to meet the needs of the community	Funded NGOs maintain their operations
Local insights from DCJ District and Resilience NSW Recovery Coordinators	Design and implement a multistage grant process to allow known organisations and new organisations to participate	Working group established and meet regularly		People are able to access support services and waiting lists are reduced
Procurement Support team & payments	Create governance structure to ensure accountability, probity, transparency and fairness.	Steer Co established and meet regularly	Service system supports longer term recovery activities	There is a joined up NGO network from large to hyper local working collaboratively
Digital and Media teams to support promotion	Set up grants administration team and secure resources to assess grant applications	Use of established communication channels (including Hot Topics, Communications, Resilience recovery coordinators and community hubs)	Service system can adapt and respond to future external events	Initial ad hoc arrangements and relationships with other organisations are embedded by mainstream NGOs into their operations
Grants assessors	Develop clear eligibility, assessment and grant allocation guidelines	Eligibility criteria, assessment criteria, assessment processes, evaluation framework		
	Monitor and report on project and expenditure	Acquittal and project reports to assess service delivery		
	Provide support to NGOs to facilitate a successful application			