

Evaluation of the 2023 NGO Flood Recovery Program (Central and Western NSW)

NSW Department of Communities and Justice

Summary Report

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Acronyms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission
AGRN	Australian Government Reference Number
DCJ	NSW Department of Communities and Justice
DRFA	Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
ERC	NSW Government Cabinet Standing Committee on Expenditure Review
FSO	Flood Support Officer
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
LGA	Local Government Area
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NFRP	NGO Flood Recovery Program
NFSP	NGO Flood Support Program
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
NSWRA	NSW Reconstruction Authority
ORIC	Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations

Background and Approach

In August – September 2022 communities across Central and Western NSW were devastated from flooding caused by unprecedented rainfall.

The NSW government declared the August flooding event in Southern and Central West NSW a disaster with Australian Government Reference Number (AGRN) 1030¹. The September flooding event was declared a disaster with AGRN 1034.

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) provide critical services to individuals and families. NGOs in the flood impacted areas came under stress from both the direct impact of the floods and from the increased demand they were experiencing as a result of the floods.

The Australian and NSW governments allocated \$9.1 million under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement (DRFA) to establish the NGO Flood Recovery Program (NFRP). The purpose of the NFRP was to support NGOs in the impacted Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) districts of Western, Murrumbidgee, Far West and New England so that they could continue to provide services to individuals and communities.

The NFRP consists of two grant streams:²

- A Closed Competitive Grants stream, in which \$800,000 was awarded to ten DCJ-commissioned service providers.
- An Open Competitive Grants stream, in which \$6,880,000 was awarded to 49 eligible NGOs across the four DCJ districts.

The NFRP was intended to be a flexible, rapidly deployed grant program, similar to but an improvement on the 2022 NGO Flood Support Program (NFSP) that supported NGOs as they responded to the impacts of the February – March 2022 floods in the Northern Rivers district. The key characteristic of the NFRP was that it was intended to get funds to NGOs quickly to support them at the time they were experiencing increased demand from the August – September 2022 floods. It was also intended to be flexible and accommodate the needs of a wide range of NGOs and recovery situations.

¹ <https://www.disasterassist.gov.au/find-a-disaster/australian-disasters>

² Originally the funding split was \$1.1 million for the Closed Competitive Grants stream and \$6.5 million for the Open Competitive Grants stream; however, after reviewing the applications, the Assessment Panel recommended the changed distribution, including an additional \$80,000 for the Open Competitive Grants stream.

The NFRP Evaluation

Consistent with its ongoing drive for improvement, DCJ commissioned this evaluation of the NFRP. DCJ required that the evaluation answer four Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs):

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

KEQ 2 - Was the NFRP planning process appropriate?

KEQ 3 - Was the NFRP implemented as planned?

KEQ 4 - What evidence is there of the NFRP achieving its intended outcomes?

The evidence used to support the findings included:

Documents such as the 2022 NFSP Evaluation Report, the NSW Grants Administration Guidelines, and the report to the Assessment Panel for the NFRP Open Grants program.

Program monitoring and implementation data such as eligibility and assessment data, NFRP applications, SmartyGrants grantee reports, and monitoring worksheets used by the Flood Support Officers.

Stakeholder interviews.³ Forty semi-structured interviews were completed with:

- Thirty NFRP grantees from the Open and Closed grant streams.
- A representative from NSW Reconstruction Authority.
- The Director, System, Funding and Cards, Strategy, Policy and Commissioning.
- The Manager Grant Design and Support – Projects team.
- Two Commissioning and Planning managers responsible for the Murrumbidgee, Far West and Western districts.
- Three NFRP Flood Support Officers.
- Members of the Grant Design and Support – Projects team who were responsible for implementing the program.

³ Where a similar view was expressed by multiple interviewees, this report may illustrate the view with one or more interview comments. To preserve anonymity, comments are only attributed to organisation type. In cases where a commenter has used the name of a Flood Support Officer, the officer's name has been replaced with the label 'FSO'.

Findings

KEQ 1 - To what extent has the design of the NFRP met the needs of NGOs and of DCJ?

In answering KEQ 1, the evaluation explored two aspects of the NFRP's design: 1) the characteristics of the NFRP design; and 2) the impact of operating under the DRFA.

The characteristics of the NFRP

Finding 1.1: The design of the NFRP, in terms of its characteristics, was innovative and instrumental in supporting NGOs to meet the needs of flood impacted communities.

DCJ designed the NFRP to be flexible, with minimal administrative burden, so that NGOs could focus on what they do best – supporting their local communities.

Characteristics of the NFRP included flexibility in how the funding could be used, simple administrative processes (application, reporting and acquittal), support for small and large, commissioned and non-commissioned NGOs, use of local knowledge to target support where it was most needed, and support of NGOs to facilitate the effective implementation of their grant plans.

The program delivered on all of these elements very well, and the feedback from NGOs was extremely positive. The following are typical of the comments received.

'We were so excited because I thought that they would want us to use it for a specific thing, and then they said you can use it towards your staffing. We have minimal staffing, we don't get any support from council or anything, so that that was very important. Because when you've only got one permanent staff member, and I'm part time, it's fine to say, we're going to get a grant. But if you don't have the capacity to implement them you don't even bother to go for it.'

(Representative from a small Neighbourhood Centre)

'We got a similar grant from Department X⁴ (another NSW agency) for disaster recovery, so I've got parallel experiences. The difference between the two departments has been chalk and cheese. For example, DCJ have had a consistent point person as our go to, and they have been highly engaged, checking in regularly and coordinating the services, and holding forums where all of us providers could come together and share information and knowledge. And that was really useful, because it meant you learnt from each other, you could share

⁴ Names of other departments similarly anonymised

information, and then you could also change how you implemented the next stage. In contrast, Department X didn't have a consistent point person, they changed a lot over the time period, they weren't fit for purpose, they were more like an accountant.' (Representative from a large NGO)

'A standout positive experience' (Representative from an Aboriginal Corporation, referring to the reporting process)

Operating under the DRFA

Finding 1.2: Operating under the DRFA had a negative impact on the NFRP.

The DRFA⁵ is the means through which the Australian Government provides funding to states and territories to share the financial burden of responding to disasters. The NFRP is the first disaster recovery program that DCJ has operated under the DRFA. Three agencies were involved in the approval and administration of the NFRP:

- The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), which is the Australian Government agency responsible for administering the DRFA.
- The NSW Reconstruction Authority (NSWRA), which is responsible for disaster recovery coordination in NSW and acts as intermediary between NSW agencies and NEMA.
- DCJ, which was responsible for designing, planning and administering the NFRP. DCJ provided regular reports and claims through NSWRA to NEMA to recover its program expenditure under the DRFA.

The NFRP was intended to be deployed rapidly; however the approval process took 11-months (figure 1), which meant that NGOs did not receive their funding until about 14 months after the floods.

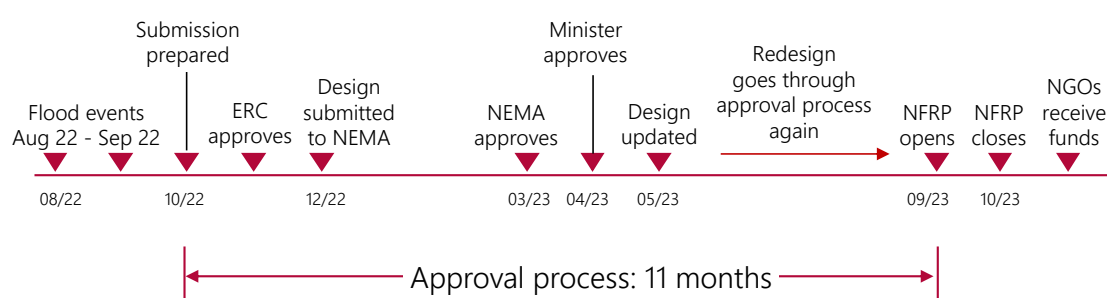


Figure 1 – NFRP approval process timeline

⁵ <https://www.nema.gov.au/our-work/disaster-recovery/disaster-recovery-funding-arrangements>

This excessive delay directly impacted NGOs because they had to carry the burden of servicing increased demand for fourteen months while waiting for support. The long delay had other negative impacts, for example, it caused confusion about eligibility for support because, after fourteen months, many flood impacted communities were well on their way to recovery.

Multiple factors contributed to the excessive delay including, for example, that:

- NEMA's internal approval process took around three months to complete.
- A minor design change which DCJ made in response to new information about NGO needs, yet which did not alter the total program cost, led to a further delay of about four months.
- NSWRA faced a number of challenges in 2023 including staff changes and shortages, loss of corporate knowledge, a significant backlog of work, and unclear processes. NSWRA has indicated that it has addressed these challenges.
- NSWRA acted as intermediary between DCJ and NEMA. Three agencies in a serial process is a recipe for inefficiency unless there is a strong focus on effective communication and process efficiency.

Finding 1.3: The DRFA financial claims process is rigorous. Agencies that don't conform to the requirements will waste resource time and experience delays in being reimbursed.

NEMA requires a lot of detailed evidence before it reimburses expenditures. NSWRA claimed that it regularly experiences issues such as poor quality or missing data or claims for expenditure that is disallowed under the DRFA, all of which delay the process.

If agencies want to resolve their claims in a reasonable time, a prudent approach would be to proactively work with NEMA/NSWRA to understand their process requirements in detail, then align their own processes and systems so that their claims meet the requirements.

Finding 1.4: DCJ and NSWRA have both attempted to improve the approval and administrative processes.

DCJ made several attempts to improve the approval and administrative processes including, for example, developing an off the shelf model for disaster response grants, similar to models developed by NEMA; attempting to formalise the relationship with NSWRA through a Memorandum of Understanding; and developing a toolkit to streamline the administration of disaster response grant programs.

NSWRA has also attempted to improve the situation by addressing its resourcing issue. In 2023 the corporate finance director, supported by one manager and a small team, was responsible for administering the DRFA. Today NSWRA claims to have two teams dedicated to claims processing and claims assurance and audit.

KEQ 1 conclusion

Overall, the design of the NFRP only partly met the needs of NGOs and of DCJ. In terms of the design characteristics, the design met the needs of NGOs very well. However, in terms of operating under the DRFA arrangements, the program did not meet the needs of NGOs very well. Furthermore, operating under the DRFA arrangements contributed to all agencies involved spending valuable resource time on non-value adding activities.

KEQ 2 - Was the NFRP planning process appropriate?

In answering KEQ 2, the evaluation explored the extent that DCJ used local knowledge to identify NGO needs; how it used past lessons to improve the planning process; and how well DCJ's processes aligned to better grants administration practice.

Finding 2.1: DCJ used local knowledge to understand and address NGO needs in planning the NFRP.

DCJ used several sources of information to inform how the grant funds should be directed. They included DCJ's own previous experience with disaster support, the local knowledge provided by its Commissioning and Planning district managers, and the knowledge and experience that NGOs themselves possessed.

NGO interviewees were particularly positive about the way DCJ tried to understand their needs. A typical comment was:

'As someone who scans the grant field on a regular basis, DCJ providing a grant like this was quite unique. Others ask a lot of questions up front about what you are going to do, and they decide what you should do. This was, I think, probably the easiest one to do, they basically said, do something that will support your community to recover, and ask a lot of questions afterwards, about what sort of event it was. So, I would commend DCJ on the process, because it was very much you know your community, do what your community needs.' (Large Aboriginal Health Organisation with experience in grant application)

Finding 2.2: Planning of NGO support could have been more tailored to individual NGO needs.

The NFRP provided very good support to NGOs through the FSOs, the information sessions and forums. However, the grantee cohort varied widely in terms of organisational capacity, capability and organisational maturity. Some of the NGOs were very large and experienced at managing grants and needed minimal support. Other NGOs are less organisationally mature and less experienced. They do not have adequate systems or processes in place to facilitate monitoring and reporting, and their understanding of contemporary governance and risk management practices is limited.

Furthermore, a number of smaller NGOs received grants that were very large compared to their typical operating income. This can place further stress on their management and administration systems which can be a risk to the effective management of their grant plans.

Although the NFRP provided all NGOs with a very good level of support, DCJ could improve planning by tailoring support to individual NGO needs around capability, capacity and organisational maturity.

Finding 2.3: The NFRP contributed to the Government's Closing the Gap focus.

Consistent with the Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2 - Building the Community-Controlled Sector, the NFRP assessment process prioritised organisations that primarily deliver services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and people.

Of the 59 NGOs that received funding 21, or 36%, are classed as Aboriginal organisations or NGOs that primarily deliver services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. By supporting these NGOs, the NFRP was directing support to the more disadvantaged members of the community and strengthening the commitments set out in the Closing the Gap agreement.

Finding 2.4: DCJ used lessons from past programs to improve the NFRP.

Overall, DCJ demonstrated a commitment to learning and using past experience to improve grant administration performance, benefiting both NGOs and DCJ. Lessons that informed the planning of the NFRP included: that NGOs have considerable knowledge about community needs; that FSOs play a critical role in supporting NGOs and in managing grantee risk; that reducing administrative burden helps NGOs operate more effectively; and that NGOs need guidance on defining appropriate monitoring KPIs.

Finding 2.5: The NFRP's planning processes aligned well with the principles and processes in the NSW Grants Administration Guide, however opportunities for greater alignment exist.

The NFRP aligned well with the seven principles and practices in the NSW Government's Grants Administration Guide. Areas for greater alignment include more robust evidence from NGOs in the applications process, improvement in the design and use of the program

logic; and use of a baseline 'Occasions of Service' for each grantee against which to monitor performance.

Finding 2.6: The NFRP adequately balanced the need for risk management with the need for rapid deployment.

Although DCJ has managed risk well the NFRP has highlighted at least two areas that future programs could address in more detail.

The first area involves future grants that operate under the DRFA. The involvement of multiple agencies in the design and approval process increases the risk of delays and should be considered in the risk assessment of future programs.

The second area for improvement involves grantee risk, which is heightened when NGOs with low organisational maturity are awarded relatively large grants. DCJ could consider additional controls in future programs to accommodate this change in risk.

KEQ 2 conclusion

In conclusion, the planning process was appropriate. DCJ determined NGO needs using several sources of information such as its previous experience with disaster support, the local knowledge held by the district managers, and the knowledge and experience that NGOs brought to the process. DCJ's process aligned well to better practice, and it used lessons from past programs to improve the NFRP.

KEQ 3 - Was the NFRP implemented as planned?

In answering KEQ 3 the evaluation explored five dimensions of implementation: Timeliness of grant establishment; administrative burden; adequacy of information provided by applicants; monitoring; and impact of the FSOs.

Finding 3.1: The time taken to implement the grant, after approval by NEMA, compared favourably with similar other grant programs.

This elapsed time between the opening of the grant and issue of funds compared very favourably with the NFSP and similar grants. The following comment reflects the sentiment of several interviewees who commented on the rapid implementation.

'It wasn't an arduous application process by any means. It was assessed in a timely manner, which is great, because sometimes you submit an application, and you may wait up to a year for a response. So, I think this was assessed and notified within about three weeks, which is very timely, so that that was a credit to DCJ in terms of their Assessment Panel and their assessment processes.' (Representative from a large NGO with experience in applying for grants)

Finding 3.2: The administrative burden was light.

All grantees interviewed commented favourably on the administration requirements. The following are typical comments.

'It was very straightforward; it was actually excellent. And you could sort of put in the narrative of what you wanted to do. What makes grants really hard for NGOs like us that work with really complex families is when they become super detailed. In terms of you will deliver 5000 occasions of service for 45 minutes. And we don't work that way. We need to be flexible. And so especially for Primary Health Networks, we get out of a lot of grants because we just can't work in the structured way they require. But this was the opposite of that.' (Representative from a large rural health provider)

'I appreciated that someone from the office actually was emailing me back backwards and forwards to clarify things afterwards if they weren't sure about what we'd put and that was an experience I hadn't had for many other grant applications. You normally don't hear about it till the outcome. They sort of came to us earlier and said, oh, look, you said this, would you be open to doing that or this? And we're not sure what it means, would you be..., and that that was great, because it meant that, you know, we had an opportunity to go, okay, we didn't hit the mark 100% but we can hit the mark 100% if.' (Representative from a medium sized health NGO)

'In comparison to grants we've done in the past; this is a walk in the park.' (Representative from a small NGO)

'A standout positive experience. While fearing it would be onerous it enabled our organisation to reflect on the support we provided. It was simple and time efficient.' (Representative from a medium sized NGO)

'The final acquittal was great because the Portal had added everything up, and we just had to confirm, send off some photographs. It was a great process.' (Representative from a medium sized women's health service)

Finding 3.3: A number of applicants gave vague answers to the assessment criteria.

The NFRP assessment process required applicants to respond to five criteria. While the application form included examples of each criterion, it was up to the applicant to determine how specifically they addressed the criteria. This resulted in some vague responses. The issue is more prevalent in smaller and less organisationally mature NGOs.

Vague answers can reduce the reliability of the assessment because they rely on the expertise of assessors to interpret the responses.

Finding 3.4: More specific information could improve assessment of NGO organisational capacity.

Criterion 2 of the assessment process asked applicants to demonstrate their capacity to deliver an increased volume or range of services. A lack of quality responses to criterion 2 made it more challenging for DCJ to assess organisational capacity.

Assessment of organisational capacity could be strengthened by complementing the applicant's responses with readily available information from sources such as the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) or the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC). In addition, DCJ could add some basic capacity related questions for the applicant.

More thorough information about capacity would enable DCJ to improve its ability to assess the risk associated with capacity of NGOs to deliver.

Finding 3.5: Monitoring could be improved by using a baseline.

FSOs monitored grant recipients' performance by reviewing the monthly 'Occasions of Service' reported by NGOs. The task was made harder because the FSOs did not have a baseline against which to compare performance. A baseline or target could simply be the answer to criterion 1 in the application form, if applicants answered the criterion question appropriately.

Finding 3.6: DCJ encouraged the better practice of 'Good news story' reporting.

Narrative reporting adds value. It raises awareness about how outcomes are developing, it can facilitate greater networking and collaboration when narratives are shared, and it is evidence that the program is benefiting individuals and communities. Stories about positive outcomes – 'Good news stories' – are an example of narrative reporting.

DCJ encouraged 'Good news story' reporting through the reporting template and service directory, and many NGOs provided examples of their 'Good news stories'.

Finding 3.7: The Flood Support Officers were a key success factor for the program.

The FSOs have delivered multiple benefits for the program. Their close and regular contact with grantees led to a detailed knowledge about issues and performance, which provided a level of quality assurance for DCJ that would not have been possible without this role.

The FSOs were a key factor in the effectiveness of the program through the support they provided to NGOs. This extended to the application process, to helping NGOs monitor their own performance, to facilitating collaboration, and even to raising NGO awareness about other funding opportunities that would help sustain services beyond the NFRP.

The value of the FSO role is evident in the very high praise that all NGO interviewees provided. Some examples of the feedback are:

'The other thing I would say is that the flood recovery grant manager that I dealt with was very hands on, very friendly, a lot of follow up emails to the extent that she was in my face just a little bit too much, but I think she was really genuine about wanting to assist. To the extent that when we organized the Wilcannia event, she was very keen to come along. Oh, wow. And she did, and she was very helpful, and she really enjoyed the event, which was terrific. I didn't take it that she was checking up on us. I took it that she was genuinely interested in being part of it. And I think she was based in Wagga, and so she came up to Wilcannia, and she sent me an email afterwards saying how much she'd enjoyed it and was really appreciative of the fact that she was allowed to be part of it, which I thought was fantastic.' (Representative from a large Aboriginal NGO)

'I've been in this role for four and a half years and I think I have worked on maybe 20 or 30 successful grants a year in that time, and our FSO is above and beyond the most helpful contract manager we've ever had. She doesn't wait for you to come to her for questions. She will actually check in and remind you that she's there to back up. And if she comes across a grant that she thinks might be relevant, she shares it with all of the network. She's actually very engaged in what she's doing, and she cares about the community. I would confirm that I think our FSO is best practice in terms of contract support.' (Representative from a large NGO with considerable experience in managing grants.)

'Our FSO was excellent, and we felt very comfortable contacting and speaking with her.' (Representative from an Aboriginal Land Council)

'Having that support person, she was amazing. We could ring her if we had a problem, she was just so accommodating and helpful.' (representative from a Small Neighbourhood Centre)

'And I think that the provision of the support officer, in our case, she has been outstanding, absolutely outstanding. Her availability, her accessibility, her competence in assisting us probably has been equally, if not more important than the forum collaboration work, because without someone like her, is very difficult to actually do the thing that is beyond, you know, our abilities. So, she's been absolutely indispensable.' (Representative from a large NGO)

KEQ 3 conclusion

Overall, DCJ implemented the NFRP exceptionally well. Following approval, the NFRP was established in a comparatively short time, and NGOs experienced minimal administrative burden and a high level of support, particularly from the FSOs. Grantees interviewed were extremely praiseworthy of DCJ and of the program.

KEQ 4 - What evidence is there of the NFRP achieving its intended outcomes?

KEQ 4 is about the results DCJ expected from the NFRP. The results, in terms of outputs and impacts, are described in the program logic (appendix 1).

Finding 4.1: Program outputs were largely delivered as planned.

Key outputs included clear and concise messaging, information forums as part of the application process, monthly grantee reports, and regular networking forums. NGOs particularly valued the networking forums, as evidenced by these comments:

'I really liked the flood forums, because I think it was one of the only ways that us as services knew what each other was doing in the community.' (Representative from a large NGO)

'It was quite interesting to me, because every community got impacted in different ways. And it was really good to see what other communities were doing and how it impacted their community.' (Representative from a LALC)

Several NGOs suggested that the forums could be improved by focusing more on networking opportunities and suggested that local face to face networking events should be considered.

Another program output, the working group which consisted of the FSOs, the district managers, and the manager and staff from the Grants Design and Support – Projects team, was an example of good monitoring practice.

Impacts the NFRP was expected to contribute

The NFRP was expected to contribute to four impacts:

- Impact 1 - 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 4.2: The program contributed to impact 1 - NGOs were able to maintain their operations.

All grantees interviewed reported that the funding enabled them to respond to the increased demand for services that resulted after the 2022 floods and helped to maintain their operations.

The impact that the program had was measured by Occasions of Service. DCJ defines an Occasion of Service⁶ as a direct benefit to an individual from a funded activity.

Similar Occasions of Service are grouped into the following categories:

- Distribution of food, personal care items and/or donated goods
- Child/youth activities
- Case management/mental health/health care/social supports
- Community activities
- Service delivery
- Disaster preparedness
- Transport and delivery
- Other

Figure 2 shows the direct impact of the program in terms of Occasions of Service.

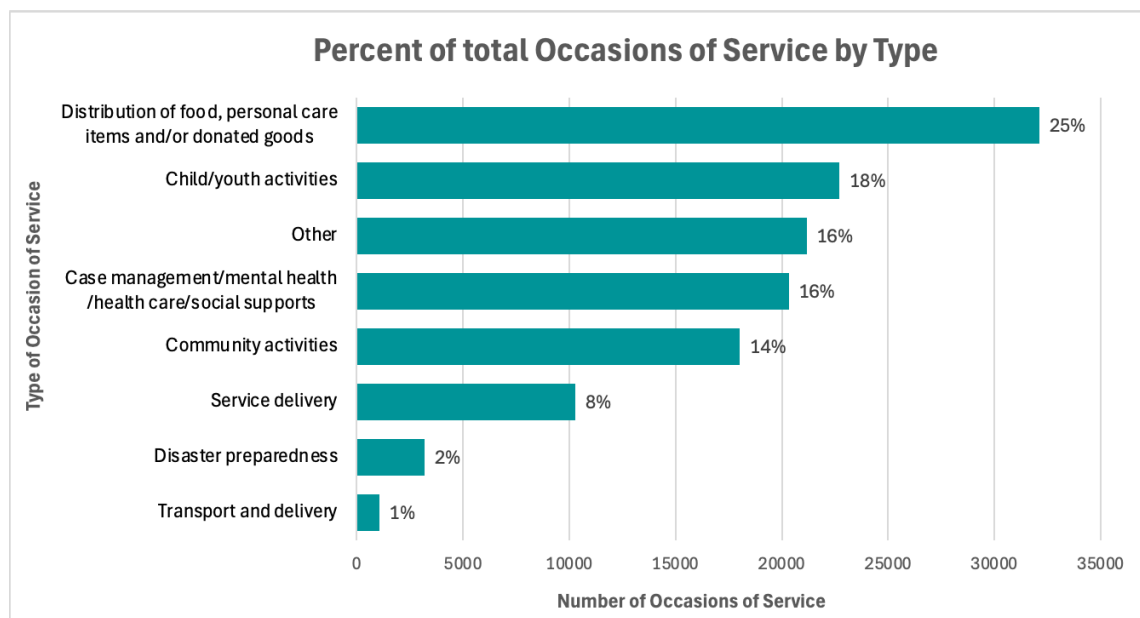


Figure 2: Impact of the NFRP in terms of Occasions of Service.

⁶ NFRP Monthly Report template

Finding 4.3: The program contributed to impact 2 - NGOs indicated that communities were able to access support services. Some said that their waiting lists were reduced.

All NGOs interviewed reported that their services had reached increased numbers of people. At least one NGO reported a reduction in waiting time. Rural Far West runs a Paediatric Developmental Program, which costs about 10 million a year and serves children with complex developmental needs in rural Australia. The program involves comprehensive assessments, parent support, and integration with local health providers and schools. The program serves around 400-500 children annually, all from rural and remote New South Wales. But resources cannot match demand. The waiting list was running at 78 weeks. The grant enabled them to employ a senior social worker and clinical intake manager to improve their intake function & reduce the waitlist time to 63 weeks, with it expected to be under 52 weeks by the end of the year.

Finding 4.4: The program only partially contributed to impact 3 - a joined-up network from large to hyper local NGOs.

The program, through the work of the FSOs, a directory it produced, and forums it held, facilitated an increase in networking by raising awareness amongst NGOs about others operating in their areas.

A standout example of collaboration was the case of Wagga Women's Health Centre and Sister's Housing Enterprises, who pooled their grant monies of \$100,000 each and worked together to deliver outreach clinics in partnership with outreach communities in West Wyalong, Temora/Cootamundra, Gundagai, Junee, Coolamon, Leeton/Narrandera, and Berrigan.

The FSOs actively promoted opportunities for networking. An example of how an FSO encouraging networking was the case of Royal Far West. In addition to their paediatric developmental program, they have a very large community recovery program, which is funded by a combination of state and federal government grants, not DCJ. Royal Far West commented that:

'The FSO actually helped to introduce the people from that program to all of the flood recovery people. So even though they're not getting the grant, she's invited them into the meetings, you know, made connections for us in that way with a lot of the other NGOs who are in the region. It's been really good.' (Representative from Rural Far West)

Finding 4.5: The evaluation could not find evidence that the program had contributed to impact 4 – that initial ad-hoc arrangements and relationships with other organisations are embedded by mainstream NGOs into their operations.

Finding 4.6: The majority of NGOs sampled said they intended to continue providing the services after the grant funding ceased.

For some NGOs the grant funding supported an existing service to respond to increased demand. As demand recovered, they would continue to operate the service that existed before the grant.

Other NGOs indicated they were already looking for additional funding to continue the service because demand still existed. The following comments illustrate their challenges:

'We've been able to secure another six months of funding through another avenue, so it'll definitely continue for another six months, and then during that six months, we'll just try to find some further funding to continue to deliver for as long as we can.' (Representative from a large NGO)

'We'll be back to relying on community donations, and community groups like the CWA and the Lions Club who can only provide small grants of \$1,000 or \$1,500. But the demand has increased with things like cost of living, it's been horrendous, and there's no change in sight, so people are really struggling.' (Representative from a small NGO)

Of the 57 NGOs that had submitted a final report at the time of the evaluation, 84% indicated they would continue to operate the service.

KEQ 4 Conclusion

Overall, the evidence suggests that the NFRP achieved some of its outcomes, particularly related to NGOs being able to cope with the additional demand generated by the floods, however the evidence is less clear about outcomes related to increased networking and collaboration amongst NGOs.

A selection of good news stories

Evidence of outcomes is also captured in the stories that grantees shared. A selection of these include:

Lachlan and Western Regional Services (LWRS) is a not-for-profit, community-led organisation that provides a broad range of services, training, and support for the communities around Conodoblin. To encourage family time and community interaction LWRS held a carp fishing competition. The event had an amazing effect, drawing more than 400 attendees (from a population of around 3000). LWRS also supported a “walkabout barber” who travelled in a large bus with indigenous paintings on the side and offered discounted haircuts, which contributed to increased self-esteem of locals. But their biggest success was the Easter egg hunt. In LWRS’s own words:

‘Our Easter Token Hunt has been an absolute hit! Most mornings our EO, who is managing the Flood Recovery Program, hits the streets, and hides little wooden tokens that have little carrots painted on them. The tokens are hidden all around Conodoblin, and we place approximately 70-80 out each day. The kids are ready and dressed for school/preschool, and insisting their parents take them down the street to find the “gold coins” from roughly 7am each morning. The streets are absolutely buzzing with little hunters, and families are meeting up to walk down together, to keep Mums and Dads sane. Local businesses are absolutely ecstatic at the initiative, as everyone is popping in for a coffee, grabbing the paper, and continuing on with their day. Families living out of town are even driving their children in to participate. It's been incredibly well-received and seeing the joy on their faces when they come to exchange their tokens for chocolates is worth the pre-dawn wake ups!’

The Police Citizens Youth Clubs NSW (PCYC) is a large NGO whose aim is to engage with and positively influence youth through mainstream sport, recreation, education, leadership and cultural programs. The PCYC operates over 66 clubs across the state and provides quality activities and programs in a safe, fun and friendly environment. The PCYC used its grant to provide families impacted by the floods with free passes to its facilities and activities and assisted families throughout the Central West to travel to national sporting events. They also provided a range of school holiday activities that focused on engaging parents and their children.

Central West Women’s Health Centre, located in Bathurst, provides services specifically for women. They used their grant to provide hygiene packs, deliver domestic violence lectures and safety awareness, bra fitting days, reproductive health awareness, and financial budgeting classes. But their most significant outcome was the positive response they received to the non-direct/ non-confronting counselling that women received while they attended to gardening activities the Centre held. they hold at their establishment.

Regional Enterprises Development Institute (REDI.E) is a Dubbo based, registered training organisation that provide services in the Central West and Far West. REDI.E hires young unskilled employees and trains them in their cafes so they can obtain a Certificate III in

Hospitality. As an Aboriginal organisation, REDI.E collaborates with local elders to work with local youth, taking the pressure off family violence and interaction with the justice system. REDI.E found the shops in the remote Aboriginal communities of Far West NSW were highly unaffordable, so it used its grant to operate stores in the remote communities, employing local Indigenous people to operate them.

Gunida Gunyah Aboriginal Corporation is an Aboriginal organisation that provides a range of programs and outreach services, in addition to housing support. Gunida Gunyah received \$200,000 under the NFRP which it used to employ a community support worker. One positive outcome involved a client who had been incarcerated for 12 years and who wanted a home of his own. The community support worker collaborated with a local real estate agent to assist the client in completing an application for a unit. They also assisted him in applying for a Rentstart bond loan, which enabled him to secure the property. The community support worker also applied for a grant through Services Our Way (AHO) and received donations from GIVIT and a local community housing provider. This allowed them to completely furnish the client's apartment with furniture, appliances, and homewares. Furthermore, they accompanied the client to his first food shop. The funding has enabled Gunida Gunyah to make a significant impact on a client's life by supporting him in his successful transition into a permanent residence.

Orana Support Services are based in Dubbo. Orana provides homeless and vulnerable people with food, clothing, housing and advice. They used their grant funding to set up a mobile caravan/food truck to provide meals for the homeless and vulnerable.

Home-Start Family Services focuses on children and families by providing practical parenting support, evidence-based training and connection. Home-Start used some of its funding to support their staff to attend a 3-day recharge retreat and to participate in a monthly Sustainability in Service program, where they are learning techniques to help relieve and manage stresses and trauma of their work, so they are better able to continue to support families in need. Home-Start also used their funding to provide small kitchen appliances to a sole parent with three children who escaped domestic violence which escalated during and post floods. Home-Start also resourced a support group for mothers with post flood anxiety. The participating mothers are now connecting with each other without the Home-Start worker, building their own informal peer support.

Mission Australia used part of their grant to host a Youth Week Fun Day in Tolland NSW. This event saw 438 people attend. At this event the community were able to access a broad range of services in one place and receive a lot of information along with a great day out. Mission Australia collaborated with the local bus company that offered a free bus service from the Ashmont and Koorinal community centres to ensure that everyone was able to make it to the event. Feedback from the day is that the community really liked that they were able to access support from a range of services at the one time without having to navigate transport.

Recommendations

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

1. Address the risk of partner agencies in future DRFA programs

DCJ has limited leverage regarding the performance of NEMA or NSWRA and the impact they can have on future DCJ programs. However, DCJ can explore its options and implement relevant controls to minimise the risk of delays or design changes caused by other agencies.

Some options to consider include: DCJ to take the lead and work collaboratively with the respective agencies to understand and document, where possible, their requirements, then accommodate those requirements into DCJ's approval approach; finalise the off-the-shelf model and MOU, consider NSW issuing grant funds ahead of NEMA approval (depends on NSW government's risk appetite), limit DRFA programs to large grants so that the additional resource investment by DCJ is worth it; develop and implement an escalation procedure when the approval process faces delays.

2. Retain corporate knowledge involved in administering DRFA grants

DCJ has developed a level of knowledge and experience with the approval and administration processes under the DRFA, however there is a risk that DCJ will lose that knowledge when staff move on, causing DCJ to incur additional learning costs in the next program. DCJ should secure corporate knowledge by documenting the requirements for grant administration under DRFA and/or embedding the knowledge in a group like a permanent grants team.

3. Strengthen the cost of project administration in future DRFA grants

Conforming to the DRFA requirements consumed a considerable amount of staff time, including the project manager's time as well as a financial resource's time. This level of engagement was an unexpected cost to DCJ. DCJ should consider increasing the project administration budget of future programs to recognise the increased cost of administration for programs under the DRFA.

4. Review the program logic and theory of change

The program logic needs to be reviewed. The evaluation questions whether impact 4 and, to a lesser degree, impact 3 are achievable in a short period of one year. Furthermore, the program logic doesn't contain outcomes around NGOs sustaining their services beyond the grant period, which the program said was important. A program logic is like a strategic plan, it should reflect what DCJ is really trying to achieve with a program and the mechanisms it thinks will lead to the preferred outcomes.

5. Tailor support to individual needs of NGOs

NGOs vary widely in their capability, capacity and organisational maturity. While a number of NGOs, particularly larger ones, are organisationally mature and have the requisite capability and capacity to deliver programs, others lack these essential organisational requirements. The Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) sector in particular suffers from capability, capacity and maturity challenges.

DCJ is committed to building the community-controlled sector, in particular the ACCO sector⁷. The NFRP demonstrated DCJ's commitment through its focus on ACCOs during the application process and through the support the FSOs provided to ACCOs (and other NGOs) throughout the program.

While overall the NFRP provided a good level of support to the participating NGOs, there is an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of support provided by tailoring it to individual needs. For example, larger, more mature organisations with sophisticated systems and experience in delivering grant programs are likely to need much less support, while smaller NGOs, particularly ACCOs and those who have not delivered government programs before, need a lot more support.

Tailoring support could start by strengthening the application and assessment process so that DCJ obtained better information about NGO capacity, capability and organisational maturity. Using that information, FSOs could then develop targeted, individual support plans.

⁷<https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/service-providers/working-with-us/how-we-work-with-you/aboriginal-community-controlled-organisations.html>

Appendices

1. 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	NGOs			
DCJ staff to manage the grants and to support NGOs locally	Develop a communication plan for the various sectors	Be engaged and accountable through regular and clear communication	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	Apply for grants with best intent	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.	Deliver funded services as per program guidelines and funding deed	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	Reporting compliance and keep DCJ informed of any changes/issue (project scope, extension, contacts)	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	Where appropriate, collaborate with other NGOs	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				