



Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

**FEEDBACK ON THE MENTAL HEALTH
SELECTION PROCESSES**

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Introduction

The Mental Health Branch of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has recently evaluated various selection processes for the latest Mental Health funding rounds.

This paper presents some of the key learnings that have been identified as common areas that organisations should focus on when preparing an application for funding and to provide guidance for future funding rounds.

The following information and tips provide organisation's with guidance only, and does not guarantee success in future funding rounds.

Basis of service provider selection

The key principle driving the selection process is the value in social service delivery to the Australian Government and the Department. This includes the optimum combination of quality and cost with minimal risk. 'Best' value does not necessarily mean monetary value or lowest cost. A funding proposal that represents best value for the Department's Mental Health Branch programs will:

- meet the objectives of the Department – such as building strong and resilient communities
- meet the aims of the program
- meet community requirements
- be delivered in an efficient and effective way*.

* Efficient means the extent to which the processes (activities/strategies/operations) used to produce outputs of the program represents value for money.

Effective means the extent to which the program outcomes achieve the stated objectives or the extent to which actual outcomes match planned outcomes.

Understanding of the program and application requirements (Program Documentation)

Program Guidelines, Application Guidelines and the Application form provides core information about the program and funding process. This information will assist organisations to submit a well developed and thorough application and is essential to read when completing an application.

The application telephone hotline is a useful and recommended service if organisations need to seek clarification on any aspects of the program, application or assessment process.

Program Guidelines

The Program Guidelines contain primary information which includes:

- the background information—this will help organisations to understand the origins of the program and the reasons behind the development of the program
- the purpose of the program—this will assist organisations in deciding whether their proposed project fits within the government's intended outcomes and areas of need to be addressed by the program
- the program outcomes—this will explain what the program aims to achieve and will assist organisations to think about how their project will contribute to these outcomes
- target/priority groups—these are the target individuals or groups that the organisation's project must assist
- program-specific requirements and reporting requirements—this provides details on how funded organisations will be managed and the requirements they need to abide by..

Application Guidelines

The Application Guidelines is the main source of information to assist organisations in submitting their application. The main areas that are of particular importance include:

- eligibility requirements—this ensures that the organisation and their project activities are eligible for funding
- instructions on how to complete the application—this information will assist organisations to ensure they enclose all required information and guidance on how to submit before the closing time;
- mandatory compliance requirements— this includes information on the strict style requirements for the application to be accepted, such as page limits and font sizes
- the selection criteria—ensures that organisations understand the questions, address any prompts that have been provided and do not exceed the page limit where specified (otherwise penalties may ensue)
- the assessment process—this outlines what information will be assessed and how it will be assessed
- where to get assistance—this provides information on where to obtain assistance if organisations require further information or clarification and it is not available in the Application Guidelines.

Application Form

Organisations should use the Application Form to submit their application and this is usually a mandatory compliance requirement. Organisations should seek immediate assistance if they are having difficulties using the form.

The organisation must ensure that their application is lodged using the method identified in the form. Organisations should pay particular attention to the closing date and when applications must be post mark by (if applicable).

Generally, an application consists of three parts:

1. The organisation's information that confirms eligibility;
2. The selection criteria which establishes the organisation's capacity and ability to meet the needs of the program and to deliver appropriate/effective services; and
3. Information about the organisation's financial administration and structure which is used to assess the organisation's capacity to manage government funds.

Each part of the application carries equal importance. If the organisation addresses the selection criteria to a very high standard, but does not meet the eligibility requirements or does not provide sufficient information on the organisation's capacity to manage government funds, then the organisation will not be considered for funding.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria are a critical part of the application and provide essential information against which an organisation is assessed for funding. The selection criteria inform the Department that the Applicant has a clear understanding of the aims of the program, expectations and the organisations' capacity to deliver strong outcomes.

The following tips will assist organisations in responding to selection criteria:

- gain an understanding of the question and break it down into parts if necessary. For example, one criterion may ask how the organisation's project will identify, attract and engage participants. These are all separate processes and should all be addressed in the response.
- refer to the Application Guidelines for further clarification on what is expected for each criterion and refer to the information before completing the response. The guidelines, may provide prompts for each criterion (such as sub criteria) and it is important to address each prompt as part of the response.
- to ensure a thorough assessment of the application, it is important that language is clear and concise. Sufficient information must be provided under each criterion, such as examples of past experience and how it links into the organisation's successful delivery of services.
- do not assume that the reader (assessor) has prior knowledge of the information provided in the application. The application should take the format of a written explanation of the organisation's capacity to deliver the proposed project to someone outside of the industry and should avoid the use of acronyms or technical language.
- responses should demonstrate a direct link to the program under which you are applying for funding. For example, "an aim of the project is to empower participants by informing individuals of how to get further help. This aim will assist the XX program to meet the objective *to integrate services by linking participants to other key services*".
- strong applications are able to provide evidential support for their claims to demonstrate the capacity of the organisation to deliver the

program effectively. These applications also demonstrate existing service delivery skills in specific or related areas as well as a suitable approach for the target audience.

It is important for organisations not to assume that other information outside of the selection criteria, such as attachments, will be considered if it has not been clearly specified in the Application Guidelines. Usually attachments are used to verify the claims made against the criterion. Exceptions include certificates of currency and legal status, and financial and insurance documentation.

Some general selection criteria has been provided below to assist organisation's in understanding some of the key elements and what information the Department is looking for in response.

Knowledge and understanding of identified needs and/or geographical area to be serviced (Target Group(s) and Local Area)

It is essential that the proposal clearly assists the program's identified target group(s). A strong knowledge and understanding of the target group(s) will strengthen the application. This will include (but not be limited to):

- individual needs;
- barriers individuals face;
- appropriate service delivery methods;
- preferred mode of communication;
- living standards; and
- geographical location.

Applications that do not address the target group(s) needs or do not have a good understanding of the target group(s) will not receive funding. Evidence should be provided to support all statements made in the application.

Some programs request information about the **secondary** beneficiary target group(s). These target groups differ from the **primary** target group that will be directly serviced by the organisation's project. Secondary beneficiaries are those who will indirectly benefit from the services the organisation will provide through a "flow on" effect. It is important that organisations do not confuse target groups when completing an application for future funding.

The majority of programs will focus on a need within a geographical area. The geographical area could be identified either by the Department (for example, as a result of community consultation or research) or by the applicant. Factors that impact on a need within a geographical area may include employment rates, socio-economic status, social inclusion, access to services, multicultural influences, and remote or high density living. It is important to demonstrate an understanding of the unique factors that relate to the geographical area, including an explanation of how the organisation's services are appropriate and accessible to the target groups. Evidence, wherever possible, should be provided to support claims.

Capacity to deliver an effective service that will provide positive outcomes for clients (Service Delivery Model)

Applications must provide a clear and concise service delivery model. Assessors will be looking for a thorough description of the proposed services, how the services will be delivered and what the services will achieve in the short and long term. The service delivery model must link back to the program as outlined in the Program Guidelines.

The service delivery model must be clear and concise and could include:

- identification of the unique needs of the target group within the geographical service area, including barriers;
- a description of the project including the activities, objectives, strategies to meet the objectives and how barriers will be overcome;
- information about how the project will meet the service requirements of the program, such as the program objectives and outcomes;
- any past experience the organisation has in delivering similar services or working with the target group. Relate how this experience will be utilised to deliver the proposed services. Where an organisation does not have experience in delivering similar services, the response could be enhanced by highlighting the benefits of the organisation delivering the proposed services;
- the appropriateness of the services for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Indigenous people. Strong applications are able to demonstrate good experience in implementing culturally appropriate and specific policies, procedures and partnerships to improve outcomes for CALD and Indigenous people. Where possible, the organisation should provide examples of service delivery experiences with these groups, including outcomes achieved;
- what the organisation hopes to achieve in the delivery of the proposal and demonstrate how these achievements will deliver the program outcomes;
- how the organisational supports will enable outcomes to be achieved. For example, the support frameworks in place to retain and support staff.

Ability to link with and work collaboratively within existing service infrastructure (Collaboration and Networking)

The development of effective working relationships between stakeholders and community organisations is important. Effective networks and collaboration enhance and maximise program outcomes and assist to provide more effective services to the target groups.

Selection criteria will often request Applicants to provide information on existing networks and linkages. This will include detail about how collaborative working relationships have been established and the benefits of these working relationships in achieving program outcomes.

A strong response would include detailed and substantiated information on:

- who the organisation does or intends to collaborate with
- how the organisation will attract the identified key stakeholders

- how the organisation will engage with key stakeholders
- how building these relationships will assist in achieving the positive outcomes for clients
- how the organisation will collect and share learnings with other services such as sitting on boards or committees, consultations with key stakeholders, or conducting forums.

A creative response may strengthen an application by showing innovation in the ways the organisation would effectively network and collaborate in a manner appropriate to the stakeholder.

If the organisation does not have existing relationships with key stakeholders in the sector, the application can be strengthened by providing good evidence to demonstrate how the organisation would build such relationships. For example, attending community network meetings, or serving on local relevant committees.

A key issue to remember is that the Department will be looking for how the organisation can demonstrate networking activities that will benefit service delivery and outcomes for participants in the specific program for which the organisation is applying for.

Capacity to manage resources and public money (Organisational Structures)

An important consideration in providing value in social service delivery is the ability of an organisation to manage the project's resources and funding with minimal risk to the Australian Government. Usually, this will incorporate the governance and organisational supports that are in place.

An application can be further strengthened if the organisation is able to demonstrate how its governance arrangements meet the requirements of the program. Governance refers to the processes by which organisations are directed, managed and held to account. These processes greatly influence the achievement of objectives, reduces risk and overall performance of the organisation. Evidence of good governance provides assurance to the Department that the organisation can support the operation of the proposed project in an open, transparent, ethical and accountable manner. For example, demonstrating that the organisation's reporting frameworks will enable the organisation to fulfil the identified reporting requirements of the program.

Organisations would be expected to provide information on the types of structures in place such as board appointments, delegation levels, reporting and risk frameworks; financial, human resources and stakeholder management. To provide evidence of good governance, for example, the organisation can note recent achievements supported in corporate documentation such as the annual report.

All organisations, irrespective of size, would be expected to provide detailed information on the organisational supports in place to assist in delivering quality services. Organisational supports are policies and procedures by which the organisation operates to deliver the project according to set values and principles. For example, an organisation may manage, support and value staff in accordance with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act.

Strong applications provide links between internal processes and supports in the organisation and achieving positive outcomes for participants. For example, investment in the development of staff can assist in maintaining high levels of morale, resulting in a motivated team who positively impact on participants.

The size, complexity and operations of organisations differ; therefore, how an organisation responds to a criterion requesting information on organisational supports may vary somewhat. Organisations would be expected to have governance structures in place that are appropriate to the size of the organisation. Smaller organisations will not be disadvantaged if responses provide sufficient assurance that the organisation has the capacity to support the project through appropriate governance and good organisational support.

Evidence and Supporting Documentation

Statements made against selection criteria will always be strengthened with empirical evidence. For example, a claim stating that the organisation delivers strong outcomes for clients would be further strengthened by quantifying the claims with evidence such as "surveys administered to clients at the cessation of services found that XX% of clients had improved their situation".

The evidence presented must be directly relevant to the claim made. Where possible, use the most local and relevant information available. Information such as statistics, research, successful service delivery models or surveys may be used. When using overseas research, it should be made clear why the results would be applicable to the target group in Australia and why this information is relevant and beneficial to the project.

Evidence in the body of the response should be clearly referred to and it should **not** be reliant upon the reader (assessor) to search through a large attachment to find the relevant evidence to support statements. For example, "The Board of Management is highly skilled in business administration and has vast experience in managing government funds. Further detail is provided in the Annual Report (see Attachment A, pg 30)".

Supporting documentation provided outside of the selection criteria may or may not be submissible. The Application Guidelines will provide information on what (if any) documentation will be considered. Usually, the supporting information is only used to verify the information contained within a response and further information not detailed within a response will not be considered.

Supporting information might include annual reports (or extracts), referee reports or letters of support.