



"1146 Beastman mural on Brisbane Radio 4ZZZ in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane." - by JAM Project is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0 - [https://www.flickr.com/photos/jam\\_project/6405002919](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jam_project/6405002919)

- Executive Summary** **2**
- About 4ZZZ** **3**
  - Our Values 3
  - Our Finances 3
  - Our Workforce and Volunteers 6
  - Our Challenges 7
    - Accommodation 7
    - Volunteers & Specialist Content 8
    - Medium to Long-term financial viability 8
    - Radio’s place in a diverse media market 8
- Commentary from the Stakeholder Discussions** **9**
  - Community Participation 9
  - Sponsorship 9
  - Volunteers & Staffing 10
- Priority Area 1 - CBP Funding & Alternatives** **11**
  - Funding 11
  - Partnerships 11
- Priority Area 2 - Legislative & Regulatory Issues** **12**
  - Licence Restrictions 12
  - Funding Streams 12
  - Social Media 12
  - Training and Development 12
  - Sponsorship Limits 13
- Priority Area 3 - First Nations Funding & Licensing** **14**

This Submission was compiled by Alexis Pink with the support of the Staff and Board of Creative Broadcasters t/as 4ZZZ  
Radio

# Executive Summary

As a community broadcaster, 4ZZZ focuses on building a community with good core values of respect, creativity, independence and making space. We have also invested in building assets and a financial base that can support our community to both make and enjoy good content. It remains a challenge for us to be responsive to our audiences, provide good accommodation and equipment and be generous and supportive employers while maintaining fiscal discipline.

Broadly, we want to see the CBF play a bigger role in funding not just our operational work, but also our core and developing creative and journalistic work, with longer timeframes to develop those ideas. Support from government and community media partners can help with that, though we have a responsibility to maintain our operational and editorial independence.

We are also keen to see a more modern approach to community broadcasting, which will allow us to experiment and integrate content with our core radio products to find audiences and content niches that we are excited to pursue.

We do not find that licence conditions and legislation considerably limit our daily work, but would welcome support on music licensing in social and new media environments. We are also looking for direct support for our employees and volunteers so we can give back to them as much as they give to us.

Overall, we are pursuing a future for our content and community, both in what we produce now, and how we present and generate revenue from that work, while staying true to our mission and supporting our volunteers and staff.

Where we could use the most support is in managing financial risks and preparing for change that will ensure we are broadcasting well into the future.

# About 4ZZZ

4ZZZ has existed since 1975, starting as a student-run community station out of the University of Queensland, where it was a home for music outside mainstream radio taste and was also home to Brisbane Line (later 4ZZZ News), which was orientated towards student activism, community news and current affairs not covered by major outlets.

We are home to alternative cultures, promoting the art and work of people from vulnerable communities, providing a voice to topics and genres that don't always get heard as well as providing an outlet for people looking to build their skills for future careers. It's this tradition that we carry on today.

While the station is financially successful, the cultural, financial and media environment presents challenges that are passed onto our announcers, content creators and other volunteers.

In this section we would like to talk about the scale of our organisation and the challenges that it faces.

## Our Values

From our early days as a broadcaster we have been developing content and community for a local audience, consistently refining our approach. In our most recent strategic plan we have set out four key values: **Respect, Independence, Creativity, Making Space**.

Through **respect**, we are looking to ensure that our workplace and the content we produce are mindful of our impacts on each other and our community. This reflects the sort of world we want to live in, one where we can have robust conversations about our values but still be conscious of the impact of our words and actions.

**Independence** is a long-running interest of the station. We empower our community to create art and do work that challenges and questions why things are the way they are, and have a responsibility to protect these efforts from influences that seek to confine and restrict our voices.

Through **creativity** we are looking to hand people the tools, skills and access to express themselves and the communities they represent across existing and emerging platforms

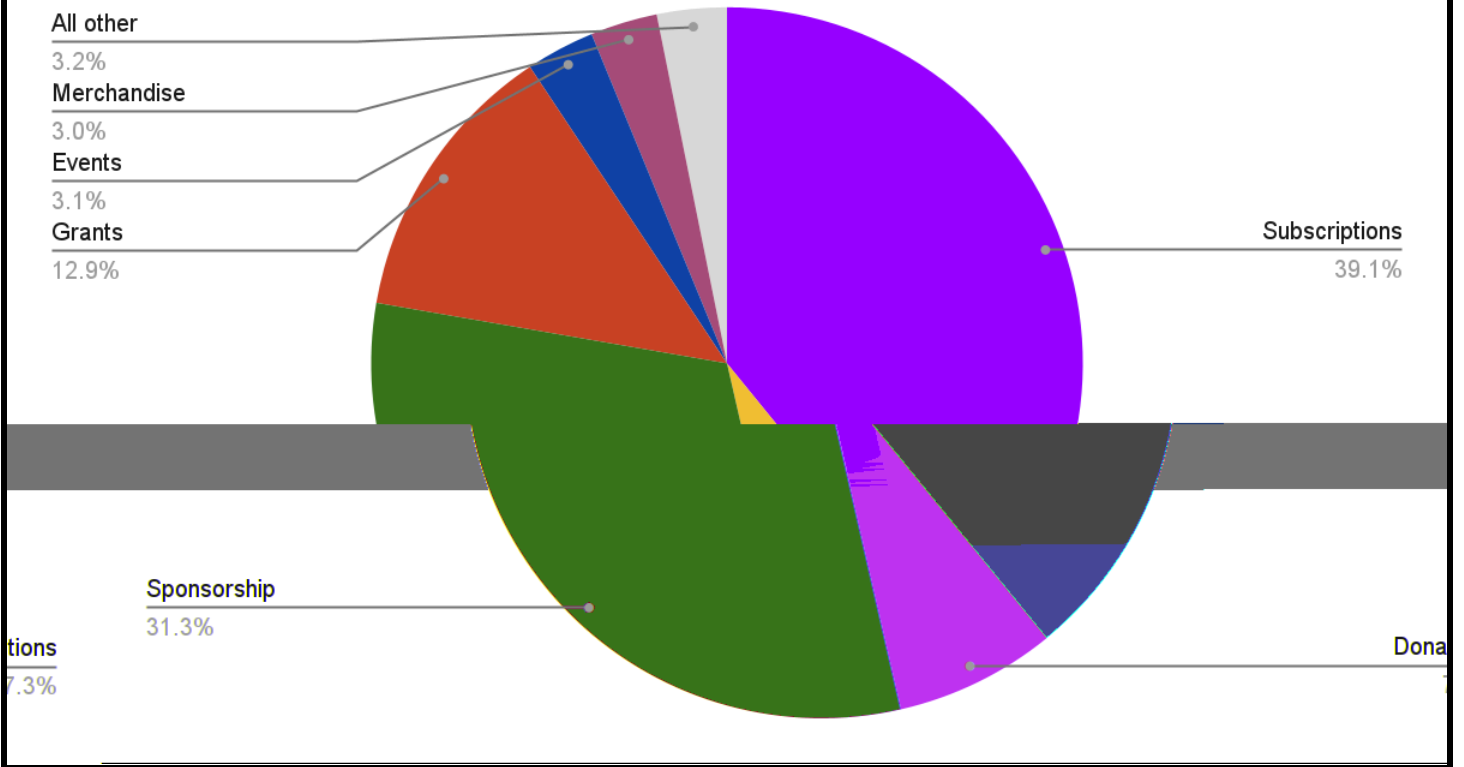
**Making space** is about making sure there are places for vulnerable and exploited communities to be heard, especially in a difficult and often discriminatory media environment.

## Our Finances

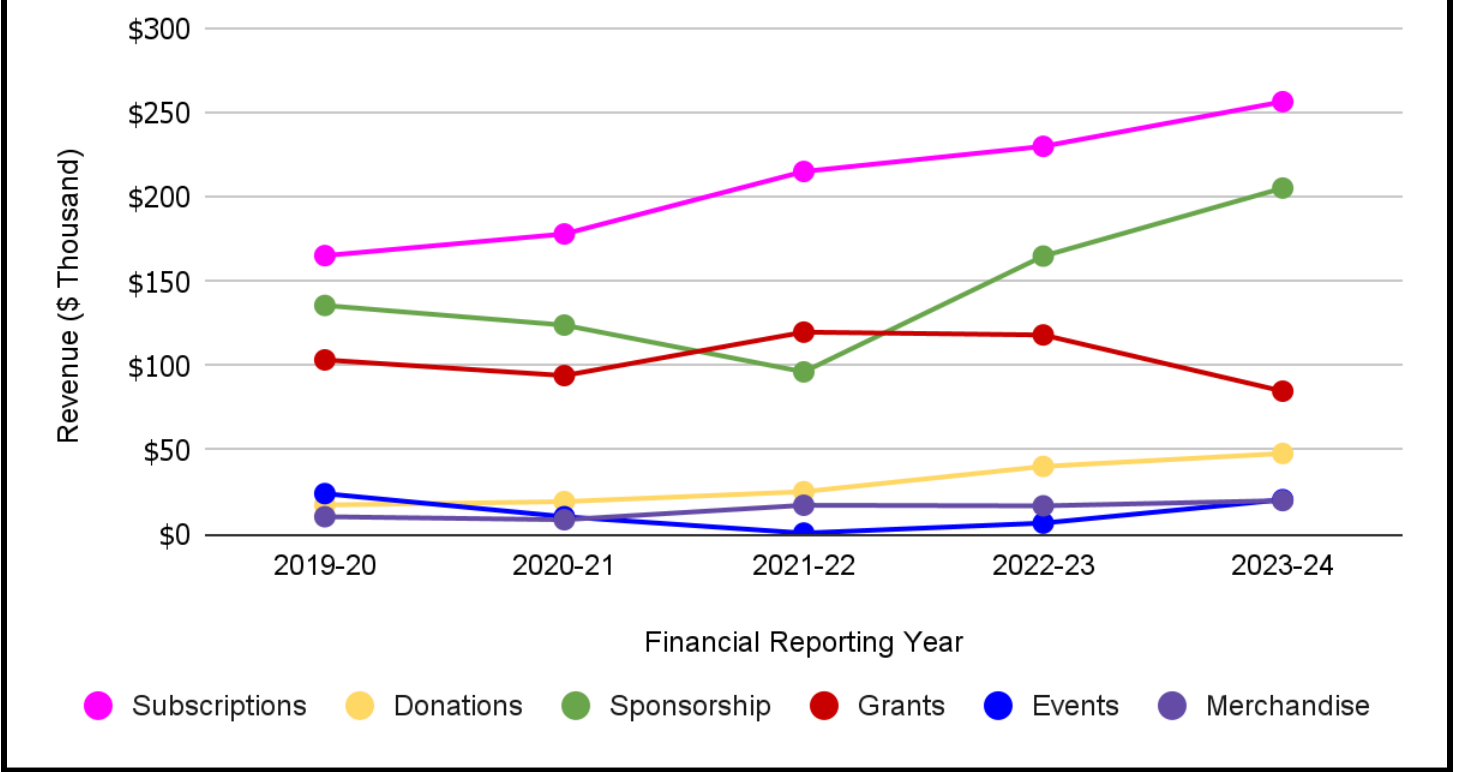
The finances of 4ZZZ have fluctuated significantly over time as our rationale, accommodation and commercial environment have changed. Taking the last five years as an indicator, our position as an organisation is strong.

Revenues to the station are in good shape, but we remain dependent on government grants to cover our expenses. The graphs below show the breakdown of revenue sources last year and the change in revenue sources over the last five years.

# 4ZZZ - Revenue Sources

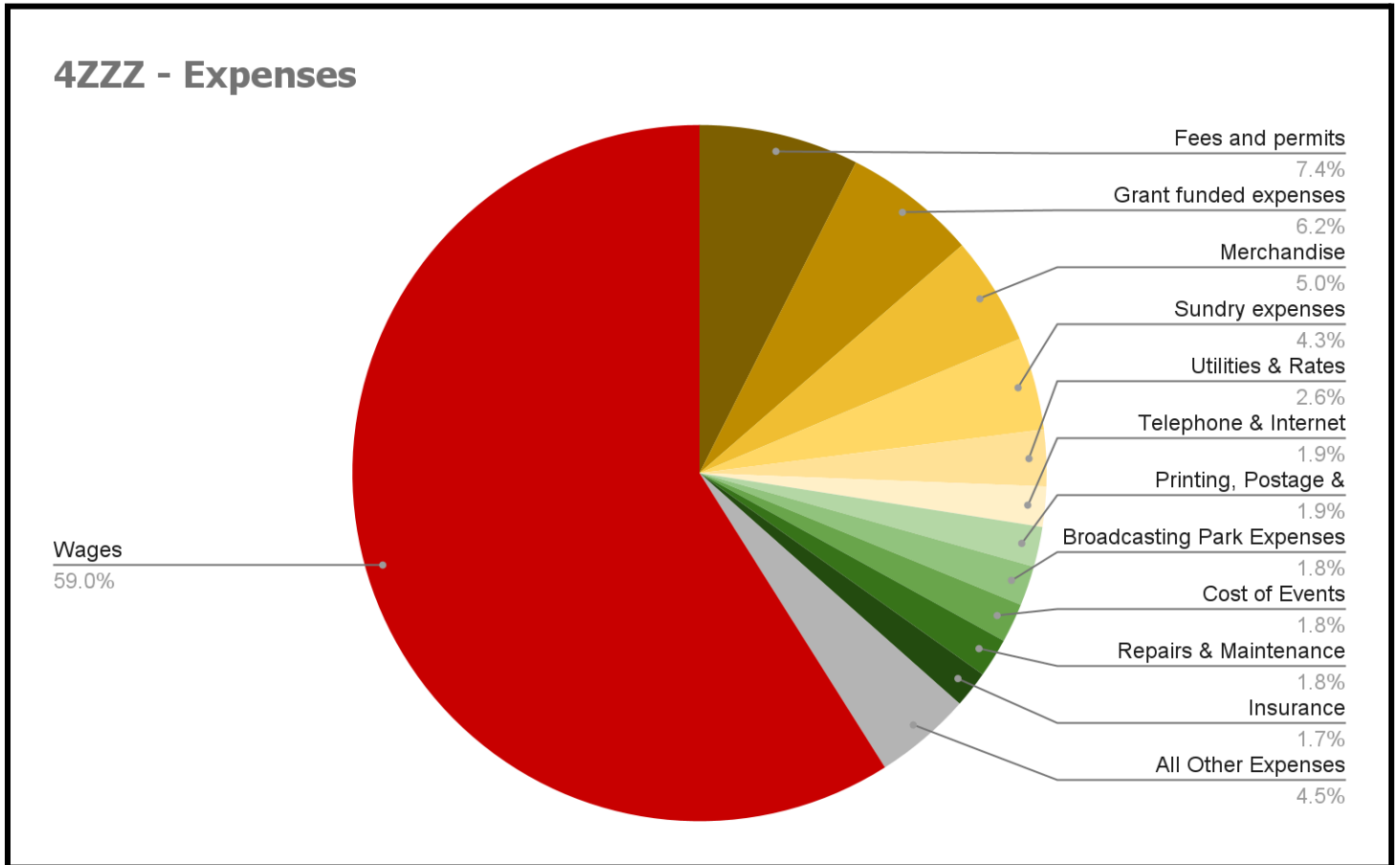


# 4ZZZ - Change in Revenue Sources

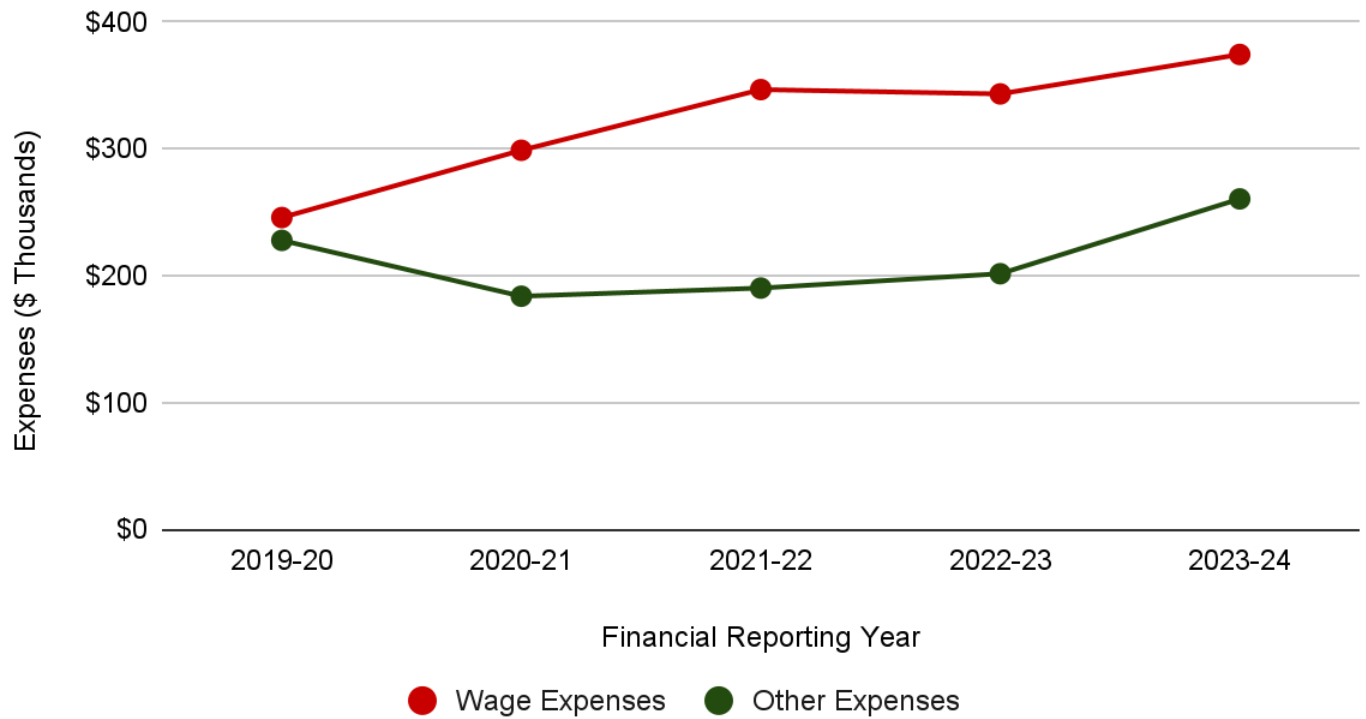


We have effectively controlled our non-wage expenses, even as the COVID-19 pandemic and the inflationary spike following it disrupted our operations. We have also made some major capital expenditures in recent times, such as replacing aging broadcast equipment. Wage expenses remains the vast majority of our expenditure.

Below is a breakdown of the previous year's expenses by category as well as the change in wage and non-wage expenses.



## 4ZZZ - Change in Expenses



We are capable of meeting our current and expected liabilities if our revenue streams are consistent. In terms of sustainability, we are increasingly constrained by a shrinking proportion of grants funding.

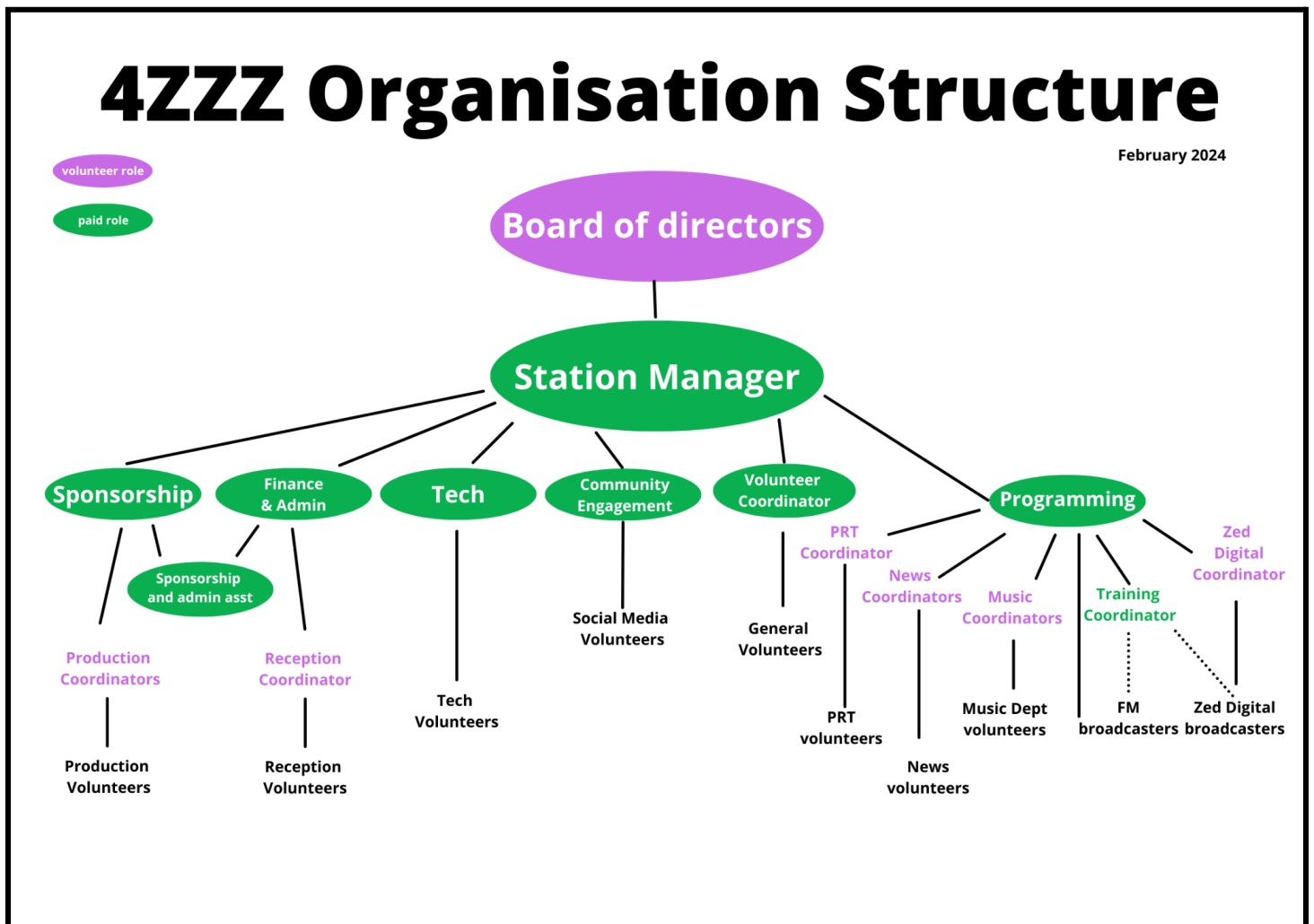
Measure	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Quick Ratio	1.29	8.06	8.06	8.23	4.34
Current Ratio	23.62	9.37	11.27	11.21	7.27
Return on Assets	0.37	0.41	0.32	0.30	0.39
ROA (Without Grants)	0.28	0.35	0.26	0.24	0.35
Net Surplus (% of Revenue)	-5.1%	18.8%	12.1%	5.9%	7.3%
Net Surplus (% of Revenue, W/o Grants)	-35.5%	3.9%	-8.8%	-17.4%	-5.3%

## Our Workforce and Volunteers

4ZZZ maintains a small number of paid employees working in specific technical and professional fields, mostly on a part-time basis on close to award wages. In total, we employ approximately 6 full-time equivalent people across 9 positions in the station.

We also appoint volunteer coordinators across our content and production base, as well as volunteer announcers, producers, receptionists, administrative staff, and retail positions on an as-required basis. Our active volunteer list currently stands at 200, with most of them active every week.

Below is our organisational chart with the current distribution of paid and volunteer positions.



## Our Challenges

We have identified some key challenges we need to address over the medium to long term to continue being responsive to our community and making a great product for our listeners.

### *Accommodation*

Among community radio stations, we are among a few that own their physical space, which keeps key costs (rental accommodation or capital interest expenses) relatively low for us. It represents a critical tactical strength for the station, but it also presents some opportunity costs.

Our space has long-term maintenance and capacity issues as we look to grow our operational capacity.



Addressing this will require some significant capital support, and it represents a significant ongoing challenge at our scale and ability to absorb financial risk.

### *Volunteers & Specialist Content*

We have a group of dedicated volunteers, from announcers on air, to audio production, music library curation, news gathering, event support, technical support, merchandise sales and administration. Many of these roles would ideally continue to be performed by volunteers, but some areas that require specialist skills or have demanding time requirements are unsustainable without further support.

We have noticed this most in specialist content production, podcast, and audio production support. Our newsroom, for example, is entirely run by volunteer staff but requires specific skills. In specialist creative production, we would like to better support talented creative teams to work on projects that will inform and entertain our community while expanding our reach.

### *Medium to Long-term financial viability*

We are financially stable at this point in time. As an organisation, we are very cost-conscious when it comes to non-wage spending, but rely on Community Broadcast Fund grants to maintain our financial position.

Given our interest in providing a reliable service, we are essentially locked into some wage funding. While delaying or cutting back on content expansion roles might provide short-term relief, over the medium term, it also represents a risk to our ability to generate interest in subscriptions.

Finding fit-for-purpose support for our operational and content production will be critical for the future.

### *Radio's place in a diverse media market*

As a station with a distinct interest in youth and alternative cultures, we are invested in attracting and retaining listeners and supporters in younger markets. That is increasingly challenging in broadcast radio, where we compete against other mediums, including streaming, short and long-form video, podcasts and social media.

We still maintain advantages through our connections to local music, but increasingly, we find ourselves outside of the spaces where we find our key audiences. We would like to bring our content to more people in these audiences, and would value external financial support to pursue this goal.

# Commentary from the Stakeholder Discussions

We thank the department for inviting us to participate in the stakeholder discussion session in Brisbane. Regarding the content from the session, we have the following thoughts:

## *Community Participation*

- We share some of the concerns around a station's worth being defined by the number of subscribers it has. We are confident we find audiences beyond our financial supporters and would like that to be reflected when talking about our community reach.

An alternative approach capturing audiences on non-broadcast radio platforms would support us to build our profiles more broadly and reach new audiences.

- A better understanding of the audiences we reach would be in our best interests and the sector's general interests. However, attaining accurate, timely, and useful survey results is challenging.
- We would also appreciate a clear definition of membership in the legislation.
- We support inclusive language in regulations, as we use this language broadly within the station.

## *Sponsorship*

- Sponsorship represents both potential risk and reward. We want to give our subscribers the best service we can, both on radio and through sub-discounting, but we are mindful of concerns that come from engaging with corporate entities with profit motives unlike our own.
- We find it challenging to provide sponsors with information to confirm our audience's reach. Better statistics in this area would make it easier to put a price on the value of our sponsorship time.
  - Adding Community radio to the GfK Commercial radio surveys may give us a better idea of our reach, but we would be concerned the current methodology radio survey companies use may underrate our impact.
  - A separate survey on regular intervals conducted by a contractor to the CBAA is a potential alternative.
- An increase in sponsorship time or a reallocation of our quotas to peak broadcast times would not greatly benefit us. We currently are not close to exhausting current limits as a choice to make the listening experience better for our community.
- We would appreciate opportunities for more federal, state, and local government advertising campaigns, especially if they help us inform our audiences about the support governments provide to vulnerable communities. We would prefer government departments to be more flexible about the presentation of their message so it better fits with the content on the station (for example using local production and voices).

## *Volunteers & Staffing*

- It is difficult for an organisation with our cash flow to commit to recruiting and maintaining the staffing levels that would make us more effective in our mission. Long-term funding rounds for key operational staff would support us in making those decisions.
- We are hesitant to consider funding some staff through donation drives because of our obligations as a registered DGR organisation.
- We would need considerably more base support from the CBF to provide for better wages and conditions for our employees, specifically to give them full-time hours and better than award pay rates.
  - It is worth considering better tax concessions for working in the sector to benefit our staff and ease the pressure on retention.
- Succession and capacity planning continue to be issued for our workplace, especially in mission-critical roles like our technical area.
- We love our volunteers and would like to reward them for their hard work.
  - Tax offsets for worked volunteer hours would encourage skilled FT workers to volunteer. This may increase our bureaucratic burden, so we would call on the government to allow for the least cumbersome filling for such benefits.

# Priority Area 1 - CBP Funding & Alternatives

## *Funding*

In terms of funding, we have the following goals in mind:

- Prioritise funding sources that share the load of running the station among many, like subscriptions and sponsorships.
- Be mindful of the limitations associated with our donations due to DGR registration, but use that money effectively to run our core operations.
- Maintain our real and perceived publishing independence and be cautious about grants from organisations that will have an impact on our independence.

We are appreciative of the Community Broadcasting funding that we have received, but find it difficult to fund long-term content projects with those funds. A longer term view on content creation and operational funding would help us greatly. Triennial funding has been mentioned during this process and is something we would be keen to see.

Funding for experimental and specialist content would be desirable to help us grow our audiences and communities, especially if such projects require specifically skilled staff.

In terms of news production, the centralisation of funding to the main news projects at the CBAA is positive for the news output for the sector, but leaves us without sustainable funding for an independent newsroom, which cannot be achieved through CBF grants. Newsgathering can be patchy in areas where there are no paid journalists. A more distributive model of funding that recognises local nuance through funding local reporters on the ground would have a positive impact on the quality of the service.

## *Partnerships*

4ZZZ is keen on retaining as much of its publishing independence as possible, but it would consider working with organisations with a high overlap of similar goals, similar to our sponsor's vetting processes. We have concerns about working with big corporations and, to a lesser degree, governments. Our major issue is around maintaining independence in our content production without fearing a loss of funding.

We have considered working with other stations to pool our resources in common areas, but we suspect the differences between stations will make that a longer-term project. Some support to make those things more viable might be helpful, especially in areas where we would be duplicating efforts like in technical support, but it would be difficult to know exactly what shape that might take. If we were to articulate one major concern it would be around self-sufficiency and maintaining our independence.

Potentially, the area where a partnership with a government or business would be a significant impact on our capacity but would have less impact on our independence would be around capital projects like major equipment, buildings and property, and major events.

# Priority Area 2 - Legislative & Regulatory Issues

## *Licence Restrictions*

In general, we don't feel as much pressure on sponsorship as others reported in the discussion session. Clearly, compliance impacts our ability to work as an independent broadcaster, specifically parts of the legislation that make it hard to maintain our DGR status for being politically active.

Another area worth investigating is music licensing agreements on social media platforms and streaming services. Currently, through the AMRAP system, licensing music for our radio offerings is relatively straightforward, but licensing music for podcasting, streaming, video, and social media platforms remains difficult for us to fund.

A deal to streamline this process negotiated through a mechanism similar to AMRAP would provide certainty to us as a station and to music creatives. This would be a good investment as technology changes the way community broadcasters engage with their audience.

## *Funding Streams*

A separation of funding pools into different capacities may be beneficial for better targeting of funding support, though we would be worried about the ghettoisation of funding by leaving specific groups of broadcasters out of either general or more specific content grants.

A structure that is more responsive to each station's financial needs would be more desirable. One that recognises that the scale of an organisation informs the sort of base support each station requires, especially when it comes to major capital expenditures. Another approach may be to split streams by function rather than station size, with things like technical and equipment grants separated from general and specialised programming.

## *Social Media*

Social media is a mixed bag for community radio. As a community radio station with license requirements and a broadcast mandate, it is hard to allocate funding to extend our social media reach significantly. On non-broadcast platforms, we compete against established producers with considerably lower overheads and better revenue streams than ours.

While some of our content has a broader appeal, diverting investment into social media potentially takes us away from our focus on local Brisbane audiences. Without more practical and financial support, and a reconsideration of our goals as a community media outlet, it represents some amount of risk for an intangible reward.

## *Training and Development*

When we receive training through the CBAA, it is highly appreciated, and any expansion of training opportunities will be welcome. However, financial support for paid staff in the sector is of greater value in terms of retention at the pay points we are currently experiencing.

## *Sponsorship Limits*

We are mostly satisfied with our current advertising limitations, but if our remit extends to social media platforms, where the ads are not negotiable, these limits may need some flexibility.

## Priority Area 3 - First Nations Funding & Licensing

As a station not primarily focused on First Nations broadcasting, this section is beyond our general remit. Like all broadcasters on this continent, we are committed to supporting First Nations broadcasters in Magandjin (Brisbane) in self-determining their paths and priorities on licensing, funding, and decision-making regarding their future.

That said, as a broadcaster with a broad remit who believes in amplifying and providing a platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and content, we would be concerned if First Nations funding and support were directed only at specialist broadcasters. It is the work of all broadcasters to provide space for First Nations programming, training and initiatives.

Many First Nations people work with us on a broad range of both First Nations-focused and general programming, which benefits our station and the community we serve. For this reason, we would like to continue to access grant programs that support First Nations-led programming.