**Australian Government**

**Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts**

COMMUNITY BROADCASTING SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW

# Summary of discussion–Sector peak roundtable

This document provides a high-level, deidentified summary of the discussion at the virtual sector roundtable hosted on 1 August 2024, and does not reflect all views given.

**September 2024**

## Key themes and challenges

- **Financial sustainability:** The sector faces significant financial challenges, including limited funding, rising costs, and a reliance on volunteers.
- **Governance and capacity building:** Many stations lack the necessary governance structures, skills, and resources to operate effectively.
- **Community engagement and impact:** Sector plays a crucial role in community engagement and social impact, but there is a need to better measure and communicate these outcomes.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Sector is lifting capacity to reach diverse audiences and have inclusive workplaces.
- **Funding constraints:** Limited/unpredictable funding poses a significant challenge to sector sustainability.
- **Skills shortages:** A lack of skilled personnel, particularly in leadership and management roles, hampers the sector's ability to operate effectively.
- **Outdated regulatory framework:** The current regulatory environment is seen as restrictive, confusing and out of date (i.e. sponsorship limit, tagging requirements, guidelines), and hinders the sector's ability to innovate, grow and increase its revenue.
- **Limited recognition:** The sector's social and economic impact is often overlooked/undervalued by government (i.e. for government advertising spend) and industry (i.e. sponsorship investment).
- **Inequitable access to resources:** Disparities exist between different types of community broadcasters. Some are facing greater financial challenges, receiving less support or perceive they are ineligible due to their turnover.
- **Content outputs:** Shift over last 10-15 years from producing just AM/FM services to now requiring complementary services on AM or FM, DAB+, social media, podcasts etc. without revenue increase to address the substantial additional costs. Adapting to new technology requires skills and IT investment.

## Calls for reform

### Financial support

- **Increase funding allocations:** Allocate additional funds to the sector via existing or new grant programs.
- **Stable funding:** Secure long-term/multi-year funding attached to CPI movements to ensure sustainability, provide business certainty, enable better business planning and reduce the burden of annual grant cycles.
- **Infrastructure investment:** Provide funding for infrastructure upgrades (e.g. equipment and studios).
- **Sector body funding:** Fund sector bodies to achieve purpose/goals rather than project-based deliverables.

- **Impact-based funding**: Shift the focus of funding towards outcomes and impact rather than inputs and outputs. Remove income criteria that require larger stations accessing development and operations support to have an exceptional business case.
- **First Nations support:** Commit to FNMA's 10 Calls to Action and co-design process for community control of IBMP funding to support self-determination.
- **Increased First Nations funding:** Provide increased funding to allow First Nations services to address their unique needs and challenges (i.e. acknowledging the non-broadcast roles of many First Nations services).
- **Community television funding:** Provide funding to revitalise and sustain the community television sector following a decade of uncertainty.

## Regulatory

- **Simplify licensing process:** Simplify the license renewal process to reduce administrative burdens.
- **Flexible spectrum allocation:** Ensure community broadcasters have guaranteed access to suitable spectrum for their operations across Australia, including new services for underserved communities.
- **Content regulation:** Review content regulations to ensure they are fit for purpose and support innovation.
- **Support innovation:** Update the regulatory framework to reflect the evolving media landscape.
- **Support collaboration and flexibility:** Make it easier for services/sector bodies to support at-risk stations.
- **Community participation:** focus on stations' impact aligning with community needs, and allow flexibility so different stations can innovate and experiment community participation in their services.

## Collaboration and partnerships

- **Cross-industry collaboration:** Encourage collaboration between community, commercial and national broadcasters, and other media sectors on common interest areas.
- **Partnerships with other government agencies:** Collaborate with government departments (e.g. health, education, social services) to leverage sector reach for public information campaigns.
- **Regional and local partnerships:** Foster partnerships between community broadcasters and local governments to address community issues.

## Workforce development

- **Development programs:** Invest in programs to develop capability in areas such as sponsorship sales, broadcast technology, management, and fundraising.
- **Flexible training:** Greater flexibility around CBP-funded training so that accredited and non-accredited training delivery can evolve to meet sector needs.
- **Capacity building:** Develop a comprehensive national framework to support capacity building, including support to develop strong governance structures and capability of boards, staff and volunteers.
- **Mentorship programs:** Connect experienced broadcasters with emerging talent to ensure capability building and succession planning.
- **Work placement opportunities:** Facilitate paid work placement opportunities for students and graduates.

## Recognition and impact

- **Impact measurement framework:** Develop a framework for measuring the social and economic impact.
- **Public awareness:** Undertake public awareness initiatives to grow audience and highlight the value of community broadcasting to the community.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Promote diversity and inclusion within the sector and its programming.
- **Audience research:** Support research into audience preferences and behaviors to inform programming.

## Infrastructure and innovation

- **Infrastructure:** Provide funding for upgrading infrastructure to reach audiences on relevant platforms.
- **Digital innovation grants under the CBP:** Fund innovative projects that expand reach and engagement.
  **Digital TV platform development:** Invest in platforms and tools to support the creation of content for diverse audiences, including exploring new sustainable online platform revenue streams for TV.