



Summary of stakeholder discussion—Melbourne

This document provides a high-level, deidentified summary of the discussion at the workshop held in Melbourne on 2 July 2024, and does not reflect all views given.

September 2024

Strengths of community broadcasters in Melbourne

- Community radio has a positive impact on listeners, such as providing a sense of local community, fostering cultural diversity, and offering a platform for underrepresented voices.
- Community radio plays vital role in arts, culture, social services and disaster preparedness, especially for regional and First Nations communities.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, stations were a reliable source of information and social connection.

Challenges for community broadcasters in Melbourne

- The high cost of transmission, and limited supply chain options, puts a strain on budgets and disproportionately impacts smaller stations.
- Many stations struggle financially due to rising costs, smaller sponsorships and stagnant funding. The need for revenue diversification through grants, events and innovative funding streams is crucial.
- Reliance on traditional revenue streams like sponsorships is decreasing, especially for youth stations with age appropriate restrictions like alcohol sponsorship.
- There is opportunity in Australian Government advertising spending to focus on audiences that are not getting government messaging because they don't engage with mainstream media.
- The NDIS/Aged Care funding changes add financial stress to stations supporting people with disability.
- Specific funding needs and challenges faced by First Nations broadcasters require tailored solutions and centralised funding allocation.
- Community radio aspires to be a platform for promoting local music and artists. COVID-19 has seen the closure of music venues and traditional partnerships, and has impacted royalty distributions.

Calls for reform

- Increase government support to address funding shortfalls and rising transmission costs.
- Review the current royalty system to ensure fair compensation for artists and stations.

Community participation

- Volunteerism is increasing, with stations providing training and support for new volunteers. However, the rising cost of living creates challenges for their continued participation.

- Many stations are concerned about attracting younger demographics as their current member base ages.
- Being able to pay wages is a struggle for many stations, and there is acknowledgement across the sector that wages are lower than other media sectors.
- Stations often lack dedicated staff for activities, especially for crucial tasks like sponsorship acquisition, and many staff are juggling a range of roles. Funding limitations prevent stations from hiring full-time staff, impacting program quality, innovation and staff capacity.
- Community broadcasting provides a foundation pathway for many broadcasters and journalists; many go to work for national or commercial broadcasters.
- Stations struggling with volunteer recruitment or staff loss can collaborate with educational institutions or youth-focused stations to create training programs and pathways for young people to enter the community radio sector.
- Stations with strong volunteer bases offer diverse programming catering to specific community needs.
- Volunteers contribute essential programming and operational support, which allows staff to use their expertise in other areas (e.g. secure sponsorships and navigate regulatory complexities).
- Dedicated staff and volunteers contribute to the overall sustainability and resilience of stations.

Calls for reform

- Revise funding models to better support staff salaries, training and governance.
- Make human resourcing more accessible by implementing incentives (e.g. transport subsidies, training programs, cadetships to pay staff salaries).
- Explore alternative revenue streams (e.g. other grants and fee-for-service could ease reliance on sponsorship and CBP grants).
- Promote community broadcasting as a pathway for media and journalism personnel.

Collaboration and networking

- Stations can collaborate on content creation, such as jointly broadcasting events. This allows for resource sharing and potentially larger audiences.
- Collaboration can help with audience research and data collection, advocating for interests with government bodies like ACMA, and securing better funding or address licensing issues. A united front can be more persuasive than individual efforts.
- Collaboration on local programming, research and archives is encouraged, but challenges exist in finding the right partners (e.g. governance issues and diverse interests within the community radio landscape).
- The current funding system, with limited multi-year funding and competition for grants between stations with different needs, disincentivises collaboration.
- The lack of standardised audience measurement and social impact makes it difficult to demonstrate the collective impact of community radio.
- Collaboration with the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) is seen as essential for effective advocacy.
- Stations can share best practices and expertise.
- Stations can present a more compelling picture or argument for issues such as funding and licensing.

Calls for reform

- Develop funding streams that encourage stations to collaborate on projects or content, including allocating a portion of funds specifically for collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
- Develop a common framework for measuring audience reach and engagement to strengthen bargaining power when advocating for funding or reform.
- Encourage networking across the sector for shared resources and best practices.
- Increase support for workshops or resources to improve governance practices at smaller stations.
- Create online platforms or forums for stations to share resources, best practices, and connect with potential collaborators.