



## Summary of stakeholder discussion—Regional

This document provides a high-level, deidentified summary of the discussion at the workshop held virtually on 15 August 2024, and does not reflect all views given.

September 2024

### Challenges for community broadcasters in regional areas

- Difficult to secure stable funding in a competitive environment amidst rising operational costs.
- Complex and inefficient grant application processes with restrictive guidelines.
- Evolving media landscape, including digital platforms and changing listener habits.
- Lack of technical support, lack of access to transmission towers, aging equipment.
- Copyright laws are obstructive and not inclusive of community, e.g. people with vision impairments

#### Calls for reform

- Alternative funding models, e.g. matched funding, low-interest loans, and government support.
- Government recognition of the social and economic value of community radio stations to justify increased funding and support.
- Clearer guidelines and support for stations navigating copyright laws and attempting to obtain permissions for content, particularly for reading programs for people with vision impairments.

### Staff recruitment, training and retention

- High turnover rates among paid staff due to limited job security, low wages and lack of training or professional development opportunities.
- Lack of staff continuity, and difficult to attract new staff.
- Insufficient funding hinders the hiring and retaining of paid staff.
- Staff at risk of burn-out, as they are taking on multiple roles while also learning on the job.

#### Calls for reform

- Increased funding to support the hiring, training and retention of staff.
- Create clear career pathways and opportunities for advancement.
- Equitable distribution of resources among community radio stations.
- Recognise and appreciate the valuable contributions of volunteers to community radio.

## Community participation

- Recruiting and retaining volunteers is difficult, particularly in smaller communities.
- Communities respond well with strong listenership numbers, memberships and donations when the stations deliver hyperlocal content that satisfies their needs. However, funding is required.
- Various regulations make it difficult to engage fully with the community (e.g. copyright laws prevent stations from reading more materials for print handicapped programs, sponsorship guidelines create uncertainty when broadcasting from a sponsor's business).
- Difficult to balance community-driven and diverse programming with audience preferences.

### Calls for reform

- Greater emphasis on community-driven content and involvement in programming decisions.
- Community radio stations to support local businesses through programming, to encourage sponsorship and positive relationships.
- Financial and administrative support for stations to engage meaningfully and regularly with their communities, via outside broadcasts, events and surveys.

## Sponsorship

- COVID-19 pandemic caused economic hardships for businesses and they are less likely to sponsor.
- Stations in low-income areas and with smaller populations have difficulty attracting sponsors from businesses with limited resources.
- The rise of digital platforms and social media has increased competition for advertising dollars.
- Strict guidelines limit ability to promote sponsors effectively and disincentivises new sponsors.
- Many stations wish to hire dedicated sponsorship managers, but do not have the funds to do so.

### Calls for reform

- Increased government funding for community radio to reduce reliance on sponsorships.
- Tax incentives or other financial benefits to encourage businesses to become sponsors.
- Government to allocate a portion of their advertising budgets to community radio stations.
- Simplify sponsorship guidelines (e.g. whether outside broadcasts from local businesses count).
- Greater flexibility - sponsorship guidelines to accommodate different businesses and programming (e.g. increasing the 5-minute hourly limit or changing the limit to daily or weekly).

## Grants programs

- Limited funding availability with a large number of applicants, leading to high competition.
- Many stations find it difficult to 'stand out'.
- Grant applications can be lengthy, bureaucratic and detailed, requiring significant time and effort.
- Specialised knowledge and skills are required for successful grant applications, which inadvertently places more emphasis on writing skills than the need for the grant.
- Short-term projects seem to be prioritised over long-term sustainability.
- Grant guidelines offer limited flexibility in how the funds are used, and do not consider the changing circumstances and priorities of stations throughout the funding period.

### Calls for reform

- Increased funding to address the rising costs of operation and reduced revenue opportunities.
- Multi-year, long-term funding to provide greater certainty and stability.
- Simplified grant application process with clearer guidelines.
- Equitable distribution of grant funds; considering factors such as size, location, and programming.
- Targeted funding for community radio stations in regional areas.