

COMMUNITY BROADCASTING SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW

# Summary of stakeholder discussion—Rural and remote

This document provides a high-level, deidentified summary of the discussion at the workshop held virtually on 20 August 2024, and does not reflect all views given.

**September 2024**

## Challenges for community broadcasters in rural and remote areas

* Funding based on historical models that have not kept pace with inflation or increased needs.
* Complex and competitive grant application processes, with grants not reflecting the full range of activities undertaken by stations and requiring a high level of reporting.
* Workload pressures due to understaffing; reduced capacity to grow services.
* Aging equipment with limited technical support, and high costs to maintain infrastructure.
* Difficulty transitioning to new technologies like video broadcasting.
* Competition from commercial media and social media platforms for advertising and sponsorship.
* Lack of recognition of the essential service provided by community radio, particularly in emergencies.

Calls for reform

* Increase overall funding, and move away from historical funding models.
* Easier application process, especially for smaller grants.
* Longer, multi-year funding cycles to provide greater stability and allow for better planning.
* Review/standardise pay across the sector, considering factors like location and cost of living.
* Invest in digital infrastructure, and support the transition to new technologies (e.g. video, digital media).
* Provide support for broadcasting in emergencies, disaster relief, and to promote social cohesion.

## Community participation

* Lack of sufficient funding and staffing to support community participation initiatives, including training, equipment, and outreach programs.
* Difficult to reach and engage with communities in remote areas, due to travel time, travel costs and capacity of staff working outside of the main hub.
* Poor internet connectivity and limited access to technology can reduce engagement.

Calls for reform

* Allocate more funding and resources to support community participation initiatives.
* Invest in better infrastructure, such as broadband and technology, in remote areas.
* Offer a variety of engagement opportunities to support different locations, preferences and schedules.

## Staff recruitment, training and retention

* Difficulty attracting and retaining staff, particularly locations away from the hubs due to geographic isolation, working by themselves and not having adequate infrastructure.
* Limited access to mentorship and professional development opportunities.
* Demanding nature of the work, isolation and limited resources lead to burnout and stress.
* Outdated equipment or facilities pose safety risks to staff and volunteers.
* Lack of funding prevents the hiring/retention of staff, as services cannot pay competitive wages.

Calls for reform

* Significant increase in funding for remote stations; directed to staffing, training, and infrastructure.
* Prioritise core operational costs like staff salaries, rent and utilities, rather than project-based funding.
* Improve working conditions, with appropriate buildings and adequate support resources.
* Opportunities for career advancement, including training, mentorship, and leadership.

## Sponsorship

* Larger media companies and platforms have an unfair advantage in attracting sponsors.
* Marketing agencies often ask community broadcasters to promote state/federal government advertising for free because it is in community interest, but are not willing to pay for it.
* Applying for and managing sponsorship funds can be complex and time-consuming.
* Concerns that a weekly limit for sponsorship may be too difficult to log and manage.

Calls for reform

* A flexible approach to sponsorship with a daily limit to reduce burden and increase revenue.
* Promote community broadcasters as a beneficiary of government advertising spend.
* Increase in funding to support the recruitment of station and/or sponsorship managers, who would strategise and pursue sponsorships.

## Grants programs

* Consolidate the 2 programs under one government department.
* Application process is time-consuming, bureaucratic and hard to navigate, particularly for small grants.
* The approval process has similar problems, delaying disbursement of funds and creating financial strain.
* Lack of funding opportunities tailored to specific needs, such as film production or technical support.

Community Broadcasting Program

* Simpler and more user-friendly grant application processes, particularly for small grants.
* Adopting flexible approaches to funding, such as multi-year funding or funding based on core needs.
* Distribute funding equitably and fairly (i.e. balance the distribution between remote/metro stations).
* Create a funding stream for video production.

Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program

* Overall funding available for remote broadcasting stations is insufficient to meet their needs.
* Funding is not distributed fairly, with some stations receiving disproportionate amounts.
* One station stated their funding budget had not increased since 2008, apart from a CPI increase in 2023.
* Develop tailored funding that addresses the needs/challenges of remote broadcasting stations.