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.