

Mid-point Review (draft),
Greater Dandenong City Council
Strategic Grant Program
March 2024

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Introduction

This document serves as a draft mid-term review of the Greater Dandenong City Council's Strategic Grant Program. Located in the southeast region of Greater Melbourne, the Greater Dandenong City Council is focused on fostering a socially connected, safe and healthy city. The Strategic Grant Program, spanning from mid-2022 to mid-2024, aims to improve community connection and health outcomes. To achieve its aims, the program allocates \$80,000 annually to 20 grantees for a two-year period.

The Greater Dandenong City Council uses the SmartyGrants grants management software to administer grants. In late 2021 the council subscribed to SmartyGrants' newest offering, the Outcomes Engine, to support the collection and reporting of outcome data.

Midway through the program, grantees submitted a series of progress reports via SmartyGrants. This review uses the data collected to help grant managers to assess activities, outcomes, metrics and qualitative data and to make adjustments for the final evaluation and future program rounds.

The analysis relies on quantitative and qualitative data from grantees' progress reports, and it forms the basis of ongoing assessment and program enhancement.

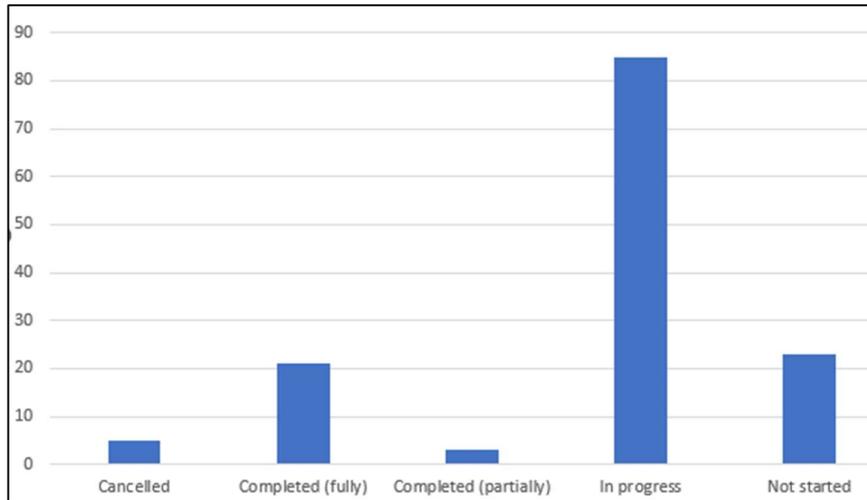
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Activities progress

Are the grantees' activities on track?

Figure 1 shows that most activities are currently marked 'in progress' (have started), which aligns with expectations for the mid-point review. A notable portion has been marked as either completed or partially completed.

Figure 1: Activities reported by status



Who needs following up?

The data shows that five activities have been designated 'cancelled' and 23 activities are marked 'not started.' Detailed information regarding the five cancelled activities, including the application ID, activity name and activity notes, is available (see Figure 2, below). This information enables grant coordinators to follow up with the grantees and take any further action needed, such as reallocating funds to another activity if deemed appropriate.

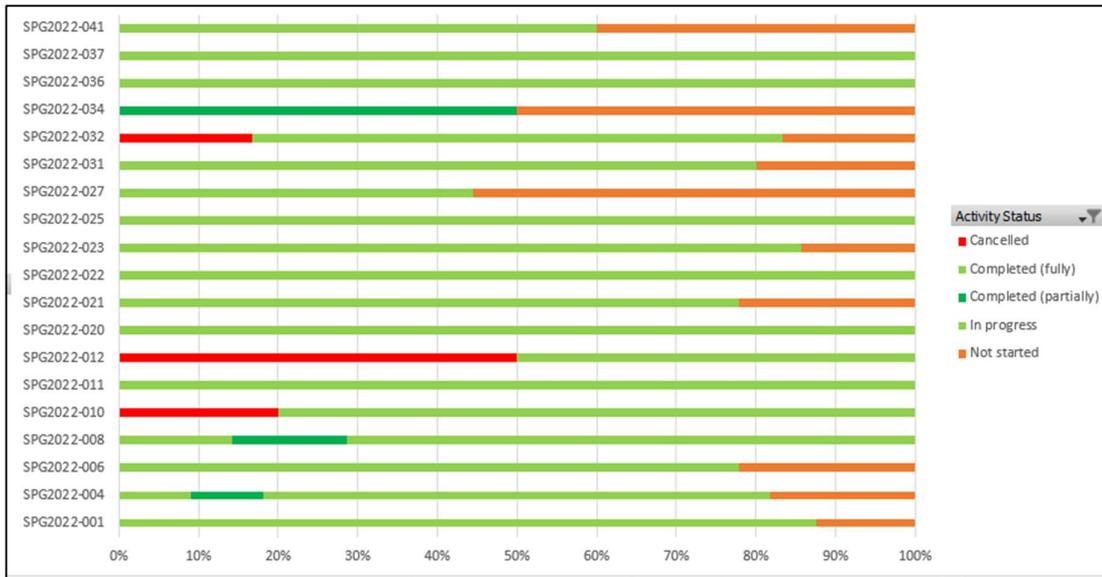
Figure 2: Breakdown of the cancelled activities by applicant ID, including name of activity and activity notes

Cancelled
SPG2022-010
Online Community of Practice This has never been used.
Organisation Advisory Group The existing members may change. There are currently 5 organisations & 3 community members who have a lived experience of disability, (plus the co-facilitator) who attend bi-monthly online meetings to monitor the workshops, attendance, project materials, online resources and presentations.
SPG2022-012
Establish and deliver a volunteer run community meal that operates 3 days per week It was decided that due to barriers with logistics and workforce capacity, we would not proceed with providing meals at the [REDACTED]
SPG2022-032
Delivering Job Interview Prep service There was no interest or referrals to the service for local people. Received referrals for clients from the outside of CGD, with no local connections whatsoever.
Establishing a reach out service in Springvale The results of the interim evaluation indicated there was no need for a permanent project station in [REDACTED]

A comprehensive report comparable to the one shown in Figure 2 is available for the 23 activities categorised as 'not started.'

For a more overarching perspective on the program, Figure 3 (below) shows the activity status of each program.

Figure 3: Grant program by activity status



This visualisation shows us the three projects with cancelled activities (in red; we have looked at these in detail) and those organisations that have activities yet to start (in orange). From the traffic light colour scheme, the grant managers can see immediately that the majority of activities are completed or in progress (all in green) and most organisations are ‘in the green’ over 50% of the time. SPG2022-027 is the only program that has 55% of activities yet to start, so this particular project may require a closer look at in terms of performance (noted in the recommendations).

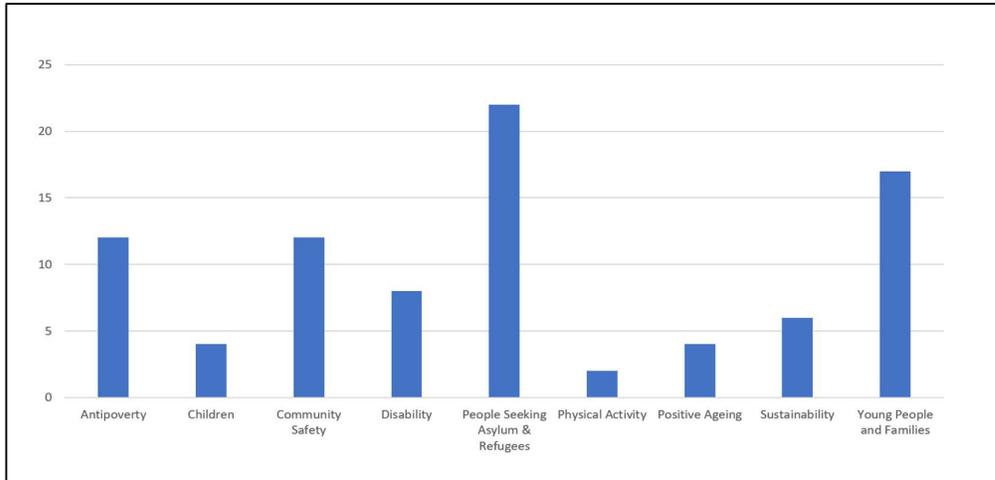
Outcomes progress

What program outcomes have been achieved?

Overall, 20 grantees reported on 98 outcomes spread across nine grantmaker domains (subject areas). The sheer volume of outcomes poses a challenge in effectively reporting progress against each program outcome. For the next round, we recommend reducing this number to a maximum of 20 to make aggregated data reporting under these outcomes more efficient.

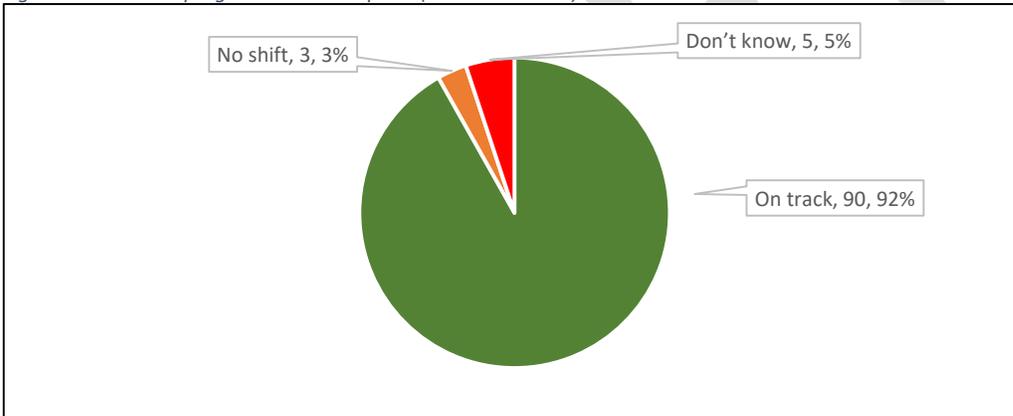
Figure 4 (below) illustrates that the approved applicants (grantees) predominantly opted for outcomes associated with People Seeking Asylum and Refugees, as well as Young People and Families. This alignment is consistent with the demographics of the Greater Dandenong area.

Figure 4: Number of approved applicants selecting outcomes across the nine domains (subject areas)



Using the default report template 'summary of outcomes progress', we can see a summary of outcome results in Figure 5 (below) using a traffic light colour scheme for quick analysis.

Figure 5: Outcomes progress at the mid-point (November 2023)



From this visualisation, we can see that of the 98 outcomes reported on across 20 grant organisations, 90 (92%) are 'on track', three outcomes (3%) have had 'no shift' and five (5%) have an outcomes status of 'don't know'.

Are grantee outcomes progressing in line with the timeframes provided?

In general, yes, grantee outcomes are advancing as per the designated timeframes. The three instances of 'no shift' in outcomes progress are all linked to the same program, and that grantee had already communicated a delay in implementation. The outcomes with 'don't know' status have been consolidated into Table 1 below, along with expected timeframes. With this information, the grants team can follow up with the grantees and offer to support them in their final reporting.

Table 1: Data associated with the outcome progress response 'don't know'

Application ID	Round	Grantseeker Outcome	Outcome Timeframe	Grantmaker Domain	Grantmaker Outcome	Outcome Alignment Notes	Outcome Progress	Outcome Notes
SPG2022-001	Strategic Grants Program 2022	Increased employability skills for women from refugee and migrant backgrounds participating in the program.	Medium-term	People Seeking Asylum & Refugees	People Seeking Asylum & Refugees have improved housing, employment, education, financial support and health		Don't know"	Financial literacy topics have been embedded into literacy and numeracy classes and Parenting classes
SPG2022-010	Strategic Grants Program 2022	Increased disability awareness among people / community members who work (paid and unpaid), at the participating community organisations.	Long-term	Disability	Community members have an increased awareness of the issues faced by people with a disability	Community Wellbeing Plan	Don't know"	Unable to know if other volunteers have increased disability awareness when working with people with a disability, but I am sure it would occur organically.
SPG2022-010	Strategic Grants Program 2022	Increased in employment of people with a disability by community organisations.	Long-term	Disability	People with a disability, particularly youth, have increased employment and training options	Imagine 2030 Community Plan	Don't know"	Unable to know this statistic.
SPG2022-031	Strategic Grants Program 2022	Improved mental-health of vulnerable CALD community members;	Long-term	Antipoverty	Improve work across the system to minimise social isolation and the impacts.	Council Plan 2021 – 25, Principles 1, 2 and 4. Strategic Objective 1: Support the mental and physical	Don't know"	

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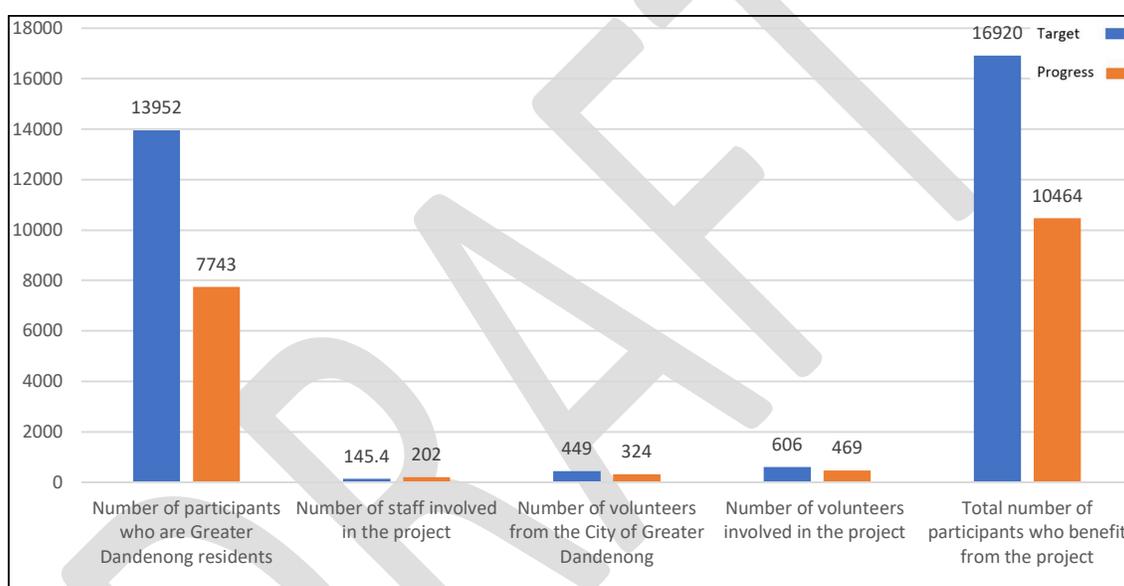
Metrics: target vs progress

How are grantees tracking against metrics targets?

The next set of data relates to 'grantmaker metrics' and 'grantseeker metrics'. These metrics refer to the numbers of participants, staff, volunteers and so on who are involved in funded projects.

The grants team mandated reporting on six grantmaker metrics. The 'Grantmaker metrics target vs progress' report shows the aggregated target and mid-point results for five of these, and these are illustrated in Figure 6, below. However, in generating this report, the grants team realised that it appears some applicants have double-counted across reporting periods, so these numbers are unlikely to be accurate. To rectify this we will be requesting **progress to date** as opposed to requesting progress per reporting period which can lead to double counting.

Figure 6: Outcomes progress at the mid-point report



As well as mandating six grantmaker metrics (the above five plus the number of volunteer hours), the grants team permitted applicants to choose their own metrics ('grantseeker metrics'), yielding a total of 152 metrics across 20 grantees.

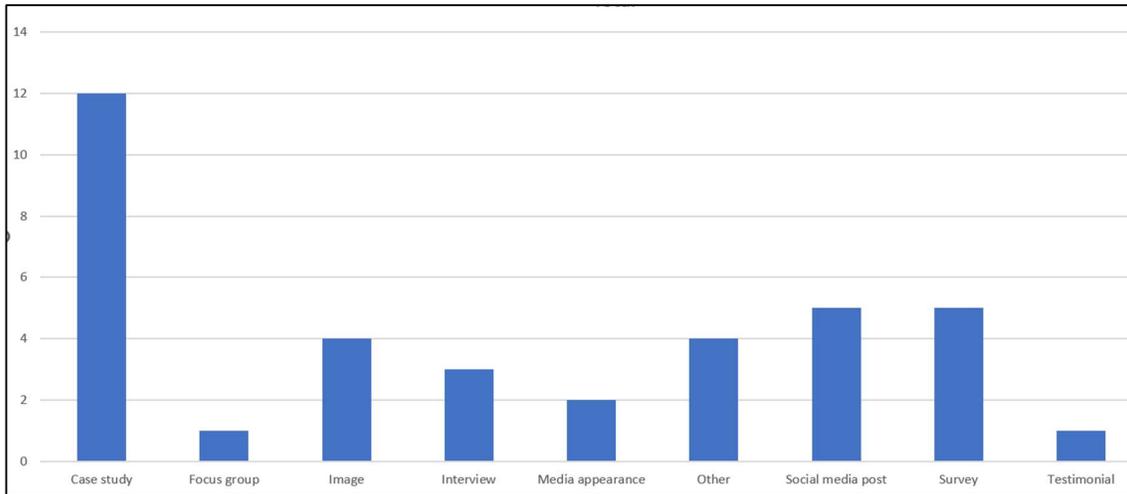
Notably, only four of these metrics were reported on by more than one organisation. However, this diverse list has offered the Greater Dandenong City Council a foundation for a community-informed set of indicators. This set can be streamlined into a more concise list for future use in grant rounds.

Qualitative data

What type of qualitative data was provided to complement the quantitative data?

The grants team also used the Qualitative Data standard section of the Outcomes Engine. Grantees reported qualitative data in a range of forms (see Figure 7, below), the most popular being case studies, and the least popular being testimonials and focus groups.

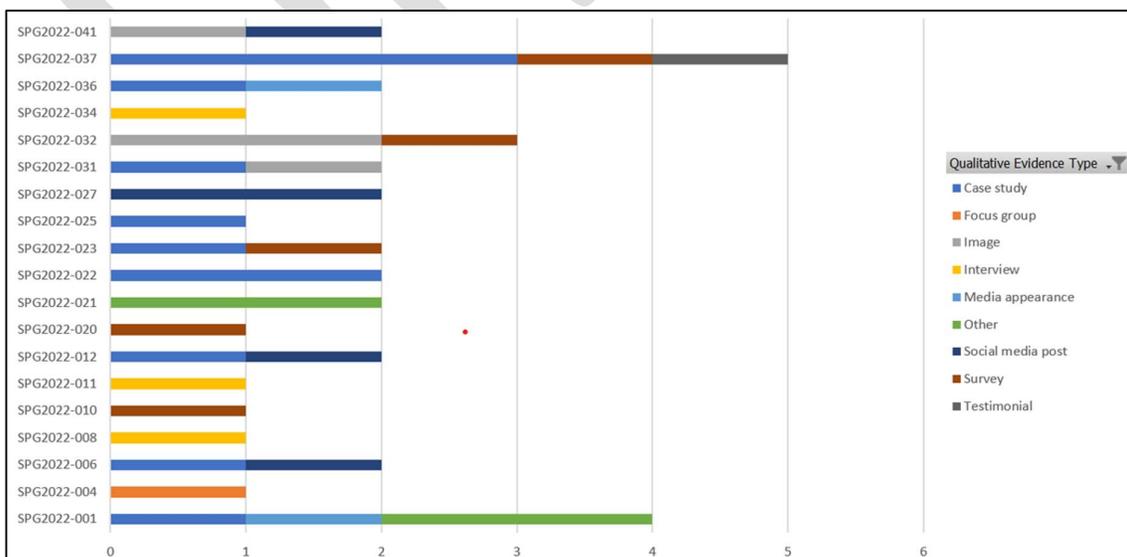
Figure 7: Types of qualitative data reported by grantees (n=20) at the mid-point review



Over two-thirds of the applicants (n=14) reported more than one type of qualitative data.

For future rounds it might be worth considering standardising the type of qualitative data collected; e.g. all grantees do case studies or surveys.

Figure 8: Types of qualitative data reported by grantees (n=20) at the mid-point review



Are we on track for program impact?

The sheer number of outcomes that grantees are aiming to achieve will make it difficult to make summative judgements about whether each program has achieved its intended outcomes.

Therefore, for the final evaluation it is recommended that the grants team reviews the acquittal data against a rubric, grant by grant, to evaluate the extent to which each outcome has been achieved.

The team could use SmartyGrants to produce an admin form for each program listing all the program outcomes for that grant and allowing grant managers to make a judgement on each one. The results could then be aggregated at a program level.

For example, one of the grantees, Happy Days (name changed to protect the privacy of the organisation), reports against the following outcomes:

1. Increased services that focus on skills development, personal safety, self-esteem and respectful relationships
2. CALD community members are less isolated
3. Community members have increased health and social wellbeing
4. Young people have a decreased chance of disengaging from education and employment pathways
5. Young people have an increased sense of confidence in navigating education and employment pathways
6. People Seeking Asylum & Refugees have improved housing, employment, education, financial support and health outcomes

Let's examine the third outcome: "Community members have increased health and social wellbeing".

Happy Days reports that it has run 90 sessions (3 x 2-hour sessions a week for 30 weeks) over the past 12 months, engaging 44 participants. In the qualitative data section, it reports that:

- 88% of participants agreed that they were aware of self-care and how to care for themselves, while 12% were unsure.
- 88% agreed that self-care was important for having healthy relationships, while 12% were unsure.
- 88% said they knew where to get information about their mental health and wellbeing and who they could ask, and 12% were unsure.
- 80% strongly agreed that the program had exceeded their expectations because it was informative, and that they learned a lot in terms of their physical health and mental health, while 20% agreed that the program met their expectations.
- 100% said they enjoyed each session with the volunteer yoga trainer and would like to have more such sessions.

This data tells us that the participants have a good attitude to self-care and know where to go for help. It tells us that the program exceeded or met their expectations. However, it doesn't tell us whether participants' attitudes to self-care have improved or whether their knowledge has increased as a result of the program, because Happy Days didn't take baseline measurements or frame questions to capture changes in attitudes or knowledge since the start of the program.

The data doesn't explicitly point to evidence that participants have improved their health or social wellbeing. Having a good attitude towards self-care and knowing where to go for help are some of

the (necessary but not always sufficient) pre-conditions for increasing health and social wellbeing. What we do know from the health literature is that attending a social group can have positive effects on participants' health and social wellbeing.

The documented 'lessons learnt' provided by the grantee are important. The grantee attributed the high level of engagement in the sessions to the fact that staff spoke the languages of the migrant participants, and to the free childcare provided so that parents could engage in the program. The grantee also noted that the 'self-care' sessions were most successful when topics were selected by the participants. The report states, 'Participants are eager to check the participant-driven schedule regularly.'

It would be good to know the attendance rate of the participants. We do know from participant feedback that the sessions were of good quality. We also know that the reach of the program was 44 people, and we know that the program was provided in regular 'doses' (3x 2-hour sessions a week over 30 weeks).

If we used a rubric (see Table 2, below) to answer the evaluation question based on the evidence, including the photo and the case study, the answer would be 'To a satisfactory extent' or 'To a proficient extent', or somewhere in between.

The rubric shown in Table 2 was generated by ChatGPT. Ideally, a rubric from a reputable source would be used.

Table 2: Data associated with the evaluation question 'To what extent have participants increased their social wellbeing as a result of this program?'

Social wellbeing enhancement	Outstanding (5)	Proficient (4)	Satisfactory (3)	Limited (2)	Insufficient (1)	No data (0)
Strong social connections	Participants establish a wide network of strong connections, fostering a robust and supportive social environment.	Participants show noticeable improvement in the quality and depth of their interpersonal relationships.	Participants demonstrate moderate improvements in interpersonal relationships, with some evidence of increased social connections.	There is minimal evidence of improved interpersonal relationships; social connections remain largely unchanged.	There is no observable improvement in participants' interpersonal relationships; social connections remain stagnant or decline.	No data
Active community engagement	Participants actively contribute to community initiatives, demonstrate leadership, and positively impact the wellbeing of others.	Participants engage in community activities, contributing positively to the community and showing a commitment to social responsibility.	There is limited but discernible involvement in community activities, indicating a willingness to participate in social interactions.	Participation in community activities is minimal, indicating a limited impact on the community and social interactions.	Participants show no involvement in community activities, demonstrating a lack of commitment to social engagement.	No data

Enhanced sense of belonging	Participants feel a deep sense of belonging and support within their social circles and community.	Participants report an improved sense of connectedness with others, suggesting a positive impact on their overall social wellbeing.	Participants express a basic sense of connectedness, though it may not be significantly different from the pre-program state.	Participants report a weak sense of connectedness, with little indication of improvement in their social wellbeing.	Participants express a lack of connectedness with others, suggesting that the program has had no positive impact on their social wellbeing.	No data
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A form such as the one below (Figure 8) could be made available for grant managers to complete in SmartyGrants to capture assessment information from each outcome.

Figure 8: Proposed SmartyGrants form that could be used by grant managers to capture assessment information

Outcome	Evaluation (score from rubric out of 5)
Increased services that focus on skills development, personal safety, self-esteem and respectful relationships	
CALD community members are less isolated	
Community members have increased health and social wellbeing	3.5
Young people have a decreased chance of disengaging from education and employment pathways	
Young people have an increased sense of confidence in navigating education and employment pathways	

The score may be higher than the rating given here. Ideally, the grant manager would make this draft assessment, document some questions and then work with the grantee to finalise the assessment by visiting the site and talking to participants.

This process should be repeated for the other four outcomes for this grant and then the other 113 outcomes for the other 19 applicants. Sourcing the rubrics alone for the 98 unique outcomes will take a long time.

It is highly recommended that program outcomes are limited to three outcomes and that a set of rubrics for a maximum of 10 outcomes is established as a way of evaluating the program.

Summary and conclusion

The team is generally confident, given the results so far, that the grant program is on track.

It will be difficult to assess the overall outcomes of this program because of the high number of outcomes selected by the applicants. However, the team will be able to assess each applicant's individual outcomes and create a heat-map of impact at the end of the program to give a general indication of the grant program's overall impact.

Recommendations

Current round

Following the mid-point review, the authors recommend that the grant team:

- follow up on SPG2022-027. This is the only program that has 55% of activities yet to start
- follow up on the grantees who reported 'don't knows' in relation to their progress, and offer capacity building support (see Table 1)
- review the metric data for the potential of double-counts and change the progress question in the final report from progress for reporting period to progress to date
- include a section headed 'Unintended outcomes' in the final report template
- include a section in the acquittal form asking grantees how they plan that the benefits of their work will be sustained after the program finishes

Future rounds

For future rounds, the authors recommend that the grant team:

- develop a more focused Outcomes Framework, including a shorter list of outcomes and a short list of metrics developed from those harvested to date
- add information on program logic and theory of change to the forms, along with offers of capacity building support
- limit the number of outcomes to three per grantee. In the current round, applicants are reporting against six outcomes on average, which is a lot. One applicant is reporting on 10.
- limit the number of metrics to six per grantee (two per outcome). In the current round, applicants are reporting against 13 metrics on average, which is a lot. Three applicants are reporting on 18 each.
- consider standardising the qualitative data response types (e.g. requiring all applicants to report on survey data).
- use the collection method in the grantseeker metrics table. This was not used in the current round so we don't know how the data was collected and verified.