

20 March 2017

Strong and Resilient Communities (SARC)  
Redesign Team  
Department of Social Services  
Level 6, Siruis Building Phillip ACT

### **FECCA response to Paper on the Redesign of the Strengthening Communities Grants Program**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

It is with regard to the above principles that FECCA provides the following response to the questions posed by the discussion paper relating to the redesign of the Strengthening Communities Grants Program.

#### **Q1. What are some of the characteristics of a socially cohesive and fully participating community that you believe the Department should address in the grant guidelines and/or consider when assessing applications?**

At FECCA we believe that a socially cohesive and fully participating community is one where all members can share fully in the economic, social and cultural life. We believe that in cohesive communities, expressions of faith and culture are encouraged and others are encouraged to share in and learn from those expressions. We believe that this fosters acceptance and understanding and we believe that inter-community understanding and acceptance should be prioritised when assessing applications. Multicultural arts and festivals activities are particularly useful in allowing cross-cultural cohesion. In recognition of the fact that, in redesigning the grants scheme, substantial restrictions have been placed on organisations with Multicultural Arts and Festivals at the core of their activities, priority should be given to applicants whose proposals make cultural expression a key element of their program.

**Q2. How could organisations collaborate to deliver projects in your community? What do you see as some of the potential barriers to organisations collaborating?**

Many organisations are already working cooperatively to complement the programs they deliver. One way of enhancing this collaboration might be to provide additional funding for information hubs which allow for organisations to provide detailed information about the projects they deliver. Other organisations can then receive that information, assess to what extent there is overlap and adapt accordingly. Additional funding could also be provided to assist with projects that build an evidence base from which many organisations can work. An example of this is the NFP Benchmarking Project, a collaboration between 13 not for profit organisations attempting to provide evidence for best practice back of house procedures.

One barrier to cooperative program delivery is to be found in the ethno-specific nature of many of the most successful programs directed to CALD Australians. In seeking to collaborate some organisations may fail to see the benefits of programs delivered to ethno-culturally specific communities from within those communities and may be intent upon more generalised delivery. This fails to recognise the value to CALD people of maintaining bonds with communities of origin whilst forging their Australian identity. Projects and programs which seek to collaborate through focussing on generalist delivery at the expense of culturally specific programs should be eschewed.

**Q3. What are some of the key issues of national significance relating to community resilience, social cohesion and inclusive communities that you believe require further research, or innovative solutions to help address?**

We believe that one of the barriers to social cohesion is cross-cultural misunderstandings. This is particularly true with reference to the South Sudanese communities in Australia. It is also the view of FECCA that misconceptions concerning the practice of Islam have created tensions in some areas. This has damaged community cohesiveness and made some communities less inclusive. This in turn impacts negatively upon the resilience of the communities in question. Programs which specifically address these kinds of issues in innovative ways should be considered as a priority.

**Q4. The new SARC program will allow funding for three and a half years (with consideration given to offering extensions for up to a further two years for projects of high priority). Does this funding period provide a better guarantee of support to your organisation than the previous Strengthening Communities grants program?**

FECCA is supportive of changes to the program which reduce the administrative strain upon organisations and which also provide increased levels of certainty and stability of funding. In this respect the amendments are to be applauded.

**Q5. Would you like to see the Government identify specific areas/locations that require funding? If not, what information would organisations be able to provide to self-identify their community as an area of high need?**

FECCA makes no submission about proposals to direct funding related to an identified, geographically-based need except to note that it ought not be prioritised over other equally relevant factors. Demonstrated need based on other identifiers such as age or ethnicity or an intersection of factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and disability ought be given equal consideration. FECCA recognises the need for evidence-based allocation but reminds the redesign team of the need for flexibility in this regard. Smaller organisations will often lack capacity for sophisticated data management. Evidence provided anecdotally should not be given less weight, particularly since earliest identification, when any response is likely to be most effective, will most often occur prior to the production of comprehensive figures. Articulations of a communities' shared experience evidence should be given equal consideration.

**Q6. As a potential applicant, and based on the information currently available to you, do you see any barriers your organisation might face in applying for funding under SARC? If so, please elaborate.**

FECCA does not propose to make submissions in respect of this aspect.

FECCA thanks the redesign team for this opportunity to contribute to the process and welcomes the opportunity for further involvement. Please do not hesitate to contact our offices for comment on (02) 6282 5755 or at [emma@fecca.org.au](mailto:emma@fecca.org.au)