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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local
Government
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

RE: Inquiry into a new Regional Development Funding Program

Conargo Shire Council appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. In partnership with our communities and with support from other organisations we successfully accessed funding under the Regional Partnerships program and would like to share our experiences.

The community of Wanganella would not have been able to complete its new community hall without the support of the Regional Partnerships Program. The community of Blighty would not have been able to undertake a major upgrade to their facilities without the support of the Regional Partnerships Program. The small communities of Conargo Shire do not have the capacity to raise or otherwise access funds required to complete large worthwhile projects such as these mentioned, without a funding program for regional development.


1. Provide advice on future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.
 - It is essential that a program continues for funding regional development for our communities to grow, experience, receive support and participate in various activities. Community infrastructure in remote rural locations is the hub for creating and sustaining positive social framework.
 - In order to support non-profit and local government applicants the funding process and forms need to be simplified. This review is required for the application forms, agreement paperwork, acquittal forms, and the decision making process. Other funding bodies have a less arduous and more efficient application and acquittal processes meeting relevant legislative and legal requirements. There is a risk that worthwhile projects developed by small community groups that may lack the time or skills to undertake a difficult and lengthy process are unfortunately overlooked.

- Timeliness of announcements has an effect on costs and project delivery and could be structured with rounds of funding instead of being an open application program.
 - The decision making process lacks transparency, and communications with the decision makers is limited. Our local ACC supported us in these communications which was essential for success.
 - Splitting of funding levels for projects could be set at “over \$50,000” and “\$50,000 and below”, with a more simplified application for the later category.
 - Partnership rates for community projects within smaller councils like Conargo Shire could be reviewed, as meeting current rates does prove difficult for our small non profit community groups.
 - Local ACC’s provide an essential educational role in applying for community funds (for both councils and community) and provide expertise and support for project development and assisting in communications and coordination of multiple funding applications. This service must continue for effective outcomes (funding of worthwhile projects) to occur.
2. Examine ways to minimize administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers.
- There may be an opportunity for the program for smaller projects (“\$50,00 and below”), to be outsourced for administration by another existing community fund administrator.
 - Simplifying application, acquittal and agreement forms would be a major cost reduction. The nature of the Regional Partnerships process was timely and inefficient. Other funding bodies supporting large projects are evidence that delivery of an accountable funding program does not necessarily require large and complicated forms and procedures.
 - Continued support and educational role from ACC streamlines process and assists with producing quality projects.

I hope this summary of our experience is constructive in the development of a new program. Conargo Shire Council and the community are appreciative for the opportunity to access funds for infrastructure and economic development projects, helping to sustain our region.

If you wish to discuss the content of this letter further, please do not hesitate to contact Simone Hughes on 03 5880 1200.

Yours sincerely,


 Simone Hughes
 Grants Officer
 Conargo Shire Council