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18 March 2015

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Minister for Social Services
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Morrison,

Department of Social Services Grants Process

Volunteering Victoria has recently provided an open letter to Minister Morrison on the Department of Social Services grants process (Attachment 1). This submission is supported by Volunteering Tasmania (VT). However, we have also taken the opportunity to provide additional comments and feedback on the grants process.

The new grant arrangements announced by the Department of Social Services (DDSS) in May, were designed to streamline grant arrangements for the community services sector. Whilst VT understands that the intention behind the new grant arrangements was to reduce 'red tape', we –along with other volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) – found that these arrangements have been more complex, with higher levels of paperwork and reporting than in previous years.

New (onerous) processes for grant funding were undertaken without consultation with volunteer peak bodies. Organisations like VT are well placed to provide advice on the complexity of grant funding arrangements, and how services may be streamlined to better support volunteering activities. I would particularly draw your attention to some of the significant challenges VT and our member organisations in completing applications:

- A four week period was allocated to apply for all new funding arrangements;

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- Serious malfunctions within the DSS website throughout the application period (including a website crash the day that submissions were due);
- Length of period for DSS to notify status of its grant agreements. As an example, the DSS took from 23rd July 2014- 30 January 2015 to ultimately provide advice on whether VT applications were successful.

During the application period, VT completed 5 applications for funding, taking 99 hours to complete. The time needed to complete the new funding applications, was time and resources diverted from VT's own policy, advocacy and service delivery.

VT has found the process undertaken by the DSS a high cost and time consuming exercise. The impact of the new funding arrangements have continued to place significant uncertainty over VT's future as an organisation.

Additionally, programme information provided online by the DSS specified that funding was available for organisations for up to five year terms. However, grants were offered to organisations for 12 month and 15 month periods. VT's funding was also significantly reduced over this period. Within these circumstances VT will be challenged to be able to offer any forward planning or strategic vision with such short funding terms.

VT's ability to strategically plan volunteering services in Tasmania has also been hindered by a funding agreement between DSS and a Queensland based service provider. This provider has displaced VT's essential services in the North of Tasmania, despite our strong history and local support within this community. This decision seems at odds with the object of the DSS's funding requirements. The DSS stated that priority would be given to community led program delivery and for place based organisations with demonstrated local support.

Our research shows that volunteering makes a critical social and economic contribution. It is essential that VT continues as a peak organisation, delivery much valued services to VIO's in order to support this vital industry. It is our opinion that the DSS has neglected to understand the value that volunteering has within a community and the resources required to support these activities.

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I hope that this feedback has been valuable, and provides opportunity for the DSS to reconsider its approach to grant funding arrangements with the volunteer sector into the future.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrienne Picone'.

Adrienne Picone
CEO, Volunteering Tasmania

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