

Volunteering organisations tied up in DSS grants process, and facing an uncertain future

Volunteering Tasmania has recently announced their support for a submission from Volunteering Victoria to Minister Morrison about the Department of Social Services grants process (Attachment 1).

The submission highlights the crippling effect the new process has had, and will continue to have, on the volunteering sector.

The intention of the new grant arrangements announced by the Department of Social Services (DSS) in May were designed to streamline grant arrangements for the community services sector. In reality, these arrangements were more complex and onerous than before, made even more disheartening by the resulting significant cuts to funding for a majority of organisations.

“We were given a short timeframe of just four weeks in which to apply for key funding,” said Adrienne Picone, CEO of Volunteering Tasmania.

“In contrast, DSS took from 23rd July 2014- 30 January 2015 to provide advice on whether applications were successful, leaving our organisation, as well as most in the sector, in limbo,” she said.

“Funding announcements were ultimately very underwhelming; and despite the programme information provided online by the DSS specifying that funding was available for organisations for up to five year terms, grants were only offered to organisations for 12 month and 15 month periods,” she said.

“No one can be expected to be able to offer any meaningful forward planning or strategic vision with such short funding terms. It is a period of great uncertainty for organisations, their employees, and ultimately their clients in the community,” she said.

New processes for grant funding were undertaken without consultation with volunteer Peak bodies. Organisations like Volunteering Tasmania are well placed to provide advice on the complexity of grant funding arrangements, and how services may be streamlined to better support volunteering activities.

Volunteering Tasmania has found the new process to be a high cost, and unnecessarily time consuming. The time used to complete the new funding applications was time and resources diverted from Volunteering Tasmania’s own policy, advocacy and service delivery.

The impact of the new funding arrangements have continued to place significant uncertainty over Volunteering Tasmania’s future as an organisation.

“Our research shows that volunteering makes a critical social and economic contribution. It is essential that a Peak organisation remains to continue 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,” Ms Picone said.

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