

Grants in Australia Survey



aigm

Australian Institute
of Grants Management

An enterprise of:



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About the Survey

The 2009 Grants in Australia Survey is the fourth time the Australian Institute of Grants Management has asked questions to Australian grantseekers about their experiences with grantmakers and grantseeking.

In January 2009, the Australian Institute of Grants Management (a division of Our Community) sent out a survey to community groups across Australia asking them about their interactions with Australia's grantmakers.

A total of 520 organisations responded, making this one of the largest surveys of its kind in Australia. The results were fascinating, informative, and surprising, and all grantmakers will benefit from reading what grantseekers have to say.

In response to feedback on previous surveys, the 2009 survey focussed on grantmakers' communication efforts.

- 1. How well grantmakers provide and convey key information to grantseekers.**
- 2. Grantseekers' opinions of the application and acquittal details they have encountered.**
- 3. Opinions on grantmakers' feedback and "customer service".**

Overall, more than 33% of respondents were from Victoria, and almost 26% were from New South Wales. Around 17.5% of respondents were from Queensland, with almost 11% from WA.

Top 5 takeaways

1.

State Government still the prime source of grants.

More than 52% of respondents said their prime source of grants income was the State Government. This was an increase of more than 4% on 2008.

For as long as this survey has been operating, State Government has been the biggest provider of grants to survey respondents. And its share of the “grant provision pie” grew in 2009.

For more, see page 8.



2.

Most groups apply for, and receive, five grants or fewer.

Sixty percent of groups who responded to the survey applied for five grants or fewer, and 85% got five grants or fewer.

There were, of course, some outliers, but a large majority of grantseekers fell within these bounds.

Interestingly, the survey figures indicate that the strike rate for grantseekers as a whole would seem to be about one in three; for every three applications, they are successful once.

For more, see page 8-9.

Top 5 takeaways (continued)

3.

Mixed news on grantmakers' information provision.

Last year we reported an encouraging improvement across a number of areas relating to grantmakers' information provision.

Across a number of areas this improvement has either continued or the good practices it indicates have strengthened.

Seventy percent or more of respondents gave positive feedback on these aspects of grantmakers' efforts:

- Easily found information about the program's aims and objectives.
- Clear guidelines and application forms.
- Acknowledgement of grant application.
- Clear and useful online information.
- Adequate information provided about reporting and acquittal requirements.

However some areas still had plenty of room for improvement:

- Useful discussion regarding feasibility/eligibility of project prior to submission of grant application.
- Timely contact regarding result of application.
- Useful feedback on unsuccessful grant application.

For more, see page 11.

4.

Feedback issues.

Feedback has been a major issue since our first survey back in 2006, and while it is clear grantmakers are making strides forward in some areas, there remains much to be done in others. These three results from the 2009 survey highlight the issues surrounding feedback:

- Only 46.6% of survey respondents had a useful discussion with a grantmaker regarding the feasibility or eligibility of their project prior to application submission.
- Only 45.5% enjoyed timely contact from grantmakers about the result of their application.
- Only 20.7% received useful feedback on their unsuccessful application.

For more, see page 11-12.

Top 5 takeaways (continued)

5.

Questions of contact.

When the survey asked grantseekers about their contact with funders and their staff, it was again a case of mixed news.

Significant numbers of grantseekers were not happy with the levels of inconsistent or confusing advice they were given, while phone calls not being answered, not being returned, or being left on hold were also described as common.

On the more positive side, most grantseekers felt staff had time to talk to them, were good at getting back in touch after email queries, and were actually easy to initially get in contact with.

So while getting in touch wasn't hard, it is what happened after that that prompted frowns!

For more, see page 13-15.



Top recommendations

1.

Get serious about feedback.

"We spend hours upon hours filling out applications and making them perfect, the least they can do is give us the courtesy of letting us know how to improve our applications for next time."

This comment, in a nutshell, says plenty about how a good portion of grantseekers feel when it comes to grantmaker feedback.

And there are few things more disheartening for a grantseeker than putting in a lot of work on an application only to receive no feedback and no explanation as to why it hasn't made the grade.

A good communications plan (see below) should allow for – and detail – the provision of feedback from grantmaker to grantseeker.

Provide the opportunity for feedback on project ideas, and on the reason for an unsuccessful application. Provide a feedback form so grantseekers can provide input to your work as well.

And offer meaningful, relevant and honest feedback.

2.

Develop a communication plan for your grants programs.

As part of our 2008 survey report, we urged grantmakers to develop a communication plan for their grants programs.

This year we repeat that advice!

Poor, confusing or inadequate communication from grantmakers continues to get grantseekers' goats. And a communication plan should be part of the development of any grants program you intend on staging.

The plan should cover how you are going to spread the word to grantseekers, at what stages (and in what ways) you'll offer feedback, how grantseekers will be "kept in the loop".

Having a communication plan in place before you start – and one which is developed in conjunction with your grants program – means you know exactly what you are going to do, and at what stage of your program you are going to do it.

Top recommendations (continued)

3.

Grantseekers favour choice in application methods.

There has been growth in the number of grantmakers offering online alternatives for grantseekers when it comes to filling in applications.

We noted last year that the use of technology, when it is done well, can be a great benefit for both funders and applicants.

But what is clear from this year's survey is that applicants favour choice. Almost half of all respondents favoured a choice between applying via hard copy, electronic form or online system.

Of the remaining 50-and-a-bit percent of respondents, 31% favoured electronic forms, 10% online programs and more than 6% hard copies.

It is good practice to make your grants program as accessible as possible, and that accessibility extends to how people can apply.

Of course, if you favour moving towards electronic-based applications, do so, but with the knowledge that there will always be some applicants who will request hard copy forms as well!

4.

Get your stories straight.

An interesting trend to emerge through this survey are grantseekers' concerns over the advice they were receiving from grants staff.

More than 30% of respondents said the overuse of jargon, confusing advice and inconsistent advice were fairly or extremely common in their dealings with grants staff.

The aim of any grantmaker dealing with inquiries from applicants should be to alleviate confusion and provide clarity, not the opposite.

Stay on script and provide consistent responses to queries.

Having an FAQ section on your website is one way to do so, while staff should be drilled to provide consistent, accurate responses to queries.

And if staff are unsure, there's no harm in seeking the correct information and then ringing the applicant back in a timely way.

Findings

Grants funding sources

When asked about their primary source of grants income, more than 52% of respondents said their prime source of grants income was the State Government. This was an increase of more than 4% on 2008.

More than 21% nominated the Federal Government – up by almost 2.5% on 2008 levels. Around 10.9% said their prime source of grants was local government – down 2% on 2008.

Overwhelmingly, the Australian community groups in this survey received primarily government grants – 84.3% across Federal, State and local governments.

Only 8.3% relied primarily on the philanthropic sector, and a very small 7.4% on the corporate sector.

By the numbers – grants funding applications, successes and amounts:

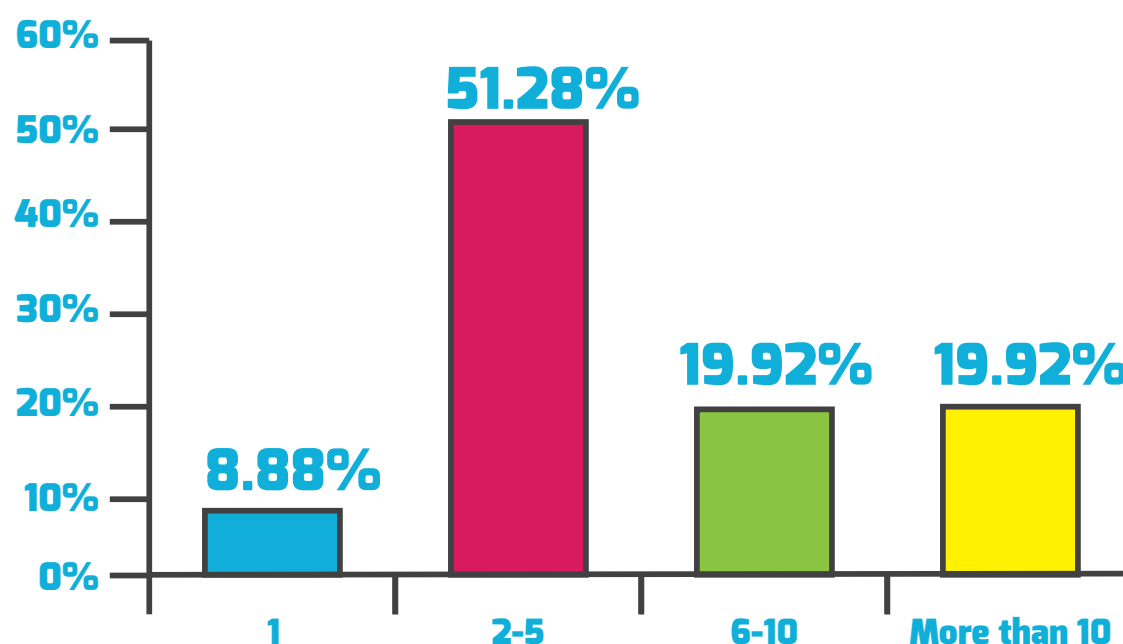
Sixty percent of groups who responded to the survey applied for five grants or fewer and 85% got five grants or fewer.

A surprisingly large 20% applied for more than 10 grants – though only 6% got more than 10. In general, the strike rate for grantseekers as a whole would seem to be about one in three.

Most respondents won less than \$50,000 in grants, with the median being about \$30,000. A quarter of respondents, however, won more than \$100,000, with 6.2% winning more than \$1 million.

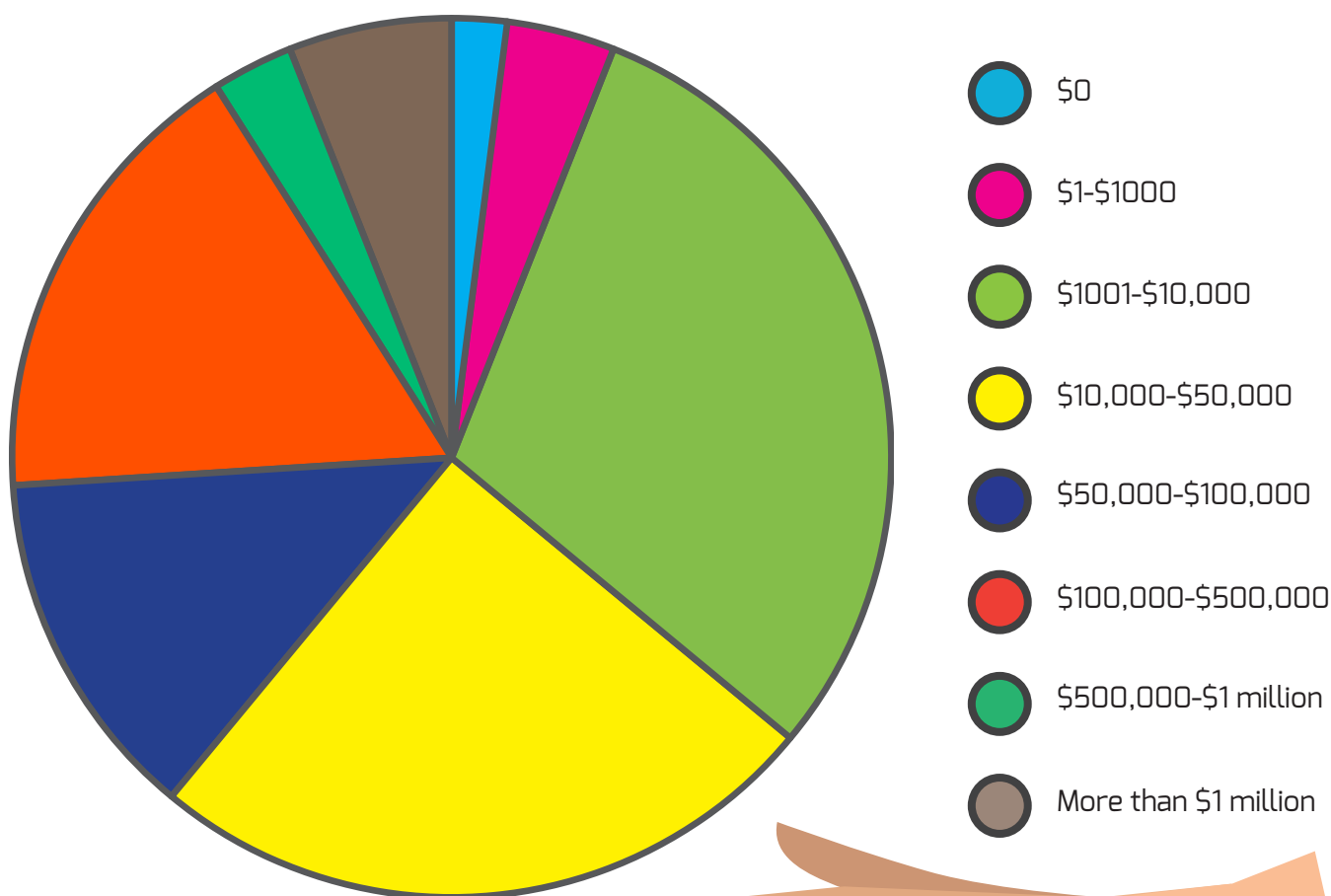
All points on the grants spectrum from \$0 to \$1 million+ are represented in this survey.

Approximately how many grants do you apply for each year?



Findings

Approximately what dollar value of grants would you expect to get from all sources during the current (2008/09) financial year.



The results

Communication and feedback

The 2009 Grants in Australia Survey slightly altered its style of questioning compared to previous years.

We asked respondents a series of yes/no questions as to what they had experienced when working with grantmakers over the previous 12 months.

The results were as follows:

Which (if any) of these have you experienced in the last 12 months?

	YES ✓	NO ✗
Easily found information about the program's aims and objectives.	83.2%	16.4%
Clear guidelines and application forms.	79.1%	20.9%
Acknowledgement of grant application.	76.0%	23.6%
Clear and useful online information.	71.8%	26.2%
Adequate information provided about reporting and acquittal requirements.	69.1%	29.5%
A helpline/inquiry line provided by grantmaking body.	59.2%	36.7%
Adequate information provided about previously funded projects.	55.2%	41.8%
Useful discussion regarding feasibility/eligibility of project prior to submission of grant application.	46.6%	49.2%
Timely contact regarding result of application.	45.5%	53.4%
Useful feedback on unsuccessful grant application.	20.7%	70.0%
A helpline/inquiry line which is available outside business hours.	10.2%	75.3%

Note: Not all totals above add up to 100%, as some respondents answered "Not Applicable" to some of the questions.

The results (continued)

There is no doubt that grantmakers have improved their efforts when it comes to providing information to grantseekers and applicants since we first started doing this survey back in 2006.

The number of grantmakers providing a helpline or inquiry line so applicants can get in touch with them has increased, and the improvement in information provision via website is also noticeable.

The clarity of information supplied about program aims and objectives is great, as is the clarity of guidelines and application forms.

But while Australian grantmakers are comparatively good at providing information on the nature of the grant, and even at providing it online, there remains struggles in other areas.

That includes not being nearly as good at providing the kind of information that assists applicants in knowing what their chances are, and actually being pretty poor at letting unsuccessful applicants know they haven't got a grant and why they didn't.

Feedback ... or lack of it

Feedback remains a major issue for grantseekers – and unfortunately that has been the case since our first survey in 2006.

These results highlight the issues surrounding feedback:

Only 46.6% of survey respondents had a useful discussion with a grantmaker regarding the feasibility or eligibility of their project prior to submission of grant application.

YES 46.6%
NO 49.2%



Just 45.5% enjoyed timely contact from grantmakers about the result of their application ... that really isn't good enough.

YES 45.5%
NO 53.4%



And a measly 20.7% received useful feedback on their unsuccessful application.

YES 20.7%
NO 70.0%



The results (continued)

Our first survey in 2006 asked respondents' thoughts on the level of feedback. At that time, a whopping 80% of grantseekers and applicants classed it as "poor" while only 17% said it was "OK".

Overall, feedback quality and feedback levels have not really improved since 2006.

A key recommendation from this report is for **grantmakers to look critically at the feedback they offer applicants.**

As one respondent put it:

"We spend hours upon hours filling out applications and making them perfect, the least they can do is give us the courtesy of letting us know how to improve our applications for next time."

- Provide the opportunity for feedback on project ideas
- Provide feedback on the reason for an unsuccessful application.
- Provide a feedback form so grantseekers can provide input to your work as well.



Contact with grantmakers

The second section of our survey asked grantseekers about the times they'd tried to contact a grantmaker over the past 12 months, and what problems they'd encountered when doing so.

The results were as follows:

	Extremely Common	Fairly Common	Extremely/ Fairly Common	Rare	Didn't Happen
Unable to obtain contact details of grants staff via internet	12.0%	39.4%	51.4%	25.0%	23.6%
Overuse of jargon by grants staff	8.4%	28.1%	36.5%	26.9%	36.7%
Confusing advice from grants staff	7.1%	27.8%	34.9%	28.9%	36.2%
Inconsistent advice from grants staff	8.0%	21.7%	29.7%	32.3%	38.0%
Grant staff too busy to talk to you	6.8%	22.7%	29.5%	34.4%	36.0%
Phone calls not answered	6.4%	24.4%	30.8%	36.5%	32.7%
Phone calls not returned	7.2%	25.5%	32.7%	35.5%	31.9%
Calls not returned in time to be of help with application	5.2%	24.4%	29.6%	29.6%	40.7%
Kept waiting on hold	7.8%	23.2%	31.0%	30.4%	38.6%
Telephone call passed from person to person	10.0%	26.1%	36.1%	30.7%	33.3%
Unable to obtain contact details of grants staff via any source	5.0%	27.0%	32.0%	38.4%	29.6%
Emails not replied to in time to be of help with application	5.7%	19.3%	25.0%	29.3%	45.7%
Grantmaker won't offer help during submission period	7.7%	16.3%	24.0%	29.5%	46.4%
Emails not replied to	4.6%	17.1%	21.7%	38.3%	40.1%
Incorrect advice from grants staff	4.1%	16.7%	20.8%	35.9%	43.3%
Incorrect contact details of grants staff provided	2.4%	15.0%	17.4%	37.9%	44.7%

Contact with grantmakers (continued)

Significant proportions of grantseekers were unhappy with the way grants staff overused jargon (more than 36% said it was fairly or extremely common), offered confusing advice (almost 35% said it was fairly or extremely common) or offered inconsistent advice (almost 30% said this was fairly or extremely common).

A number of other issues were reported as being extremely or fairly common by more than 30% of respondents. They included:



Phone calls not answered.

30.8%



Phone calls not returned.

32.7%



Kept waiting on hold.

31.0%



Telephone call passed from person to person.

36.1%



Unable to obtain contact details of grants staff via any source.

32.0%

Contact with grantmakers (continued)

However each of these issues was also the subject of mixed results, with more than 30% of respondents saying they had rarely experienced them during the past 12 months.

Other issues regarded as rare by more than 30% of respondents in the past 12 months were:



Ultimately though, the bad news here is that when it comes to dealings with grants staff the complaints are many, varied, and still quite frequent.

It seems clear that grants staff have not really taken on board the idea that part of the job is customer service, measured by customer satisfaction.

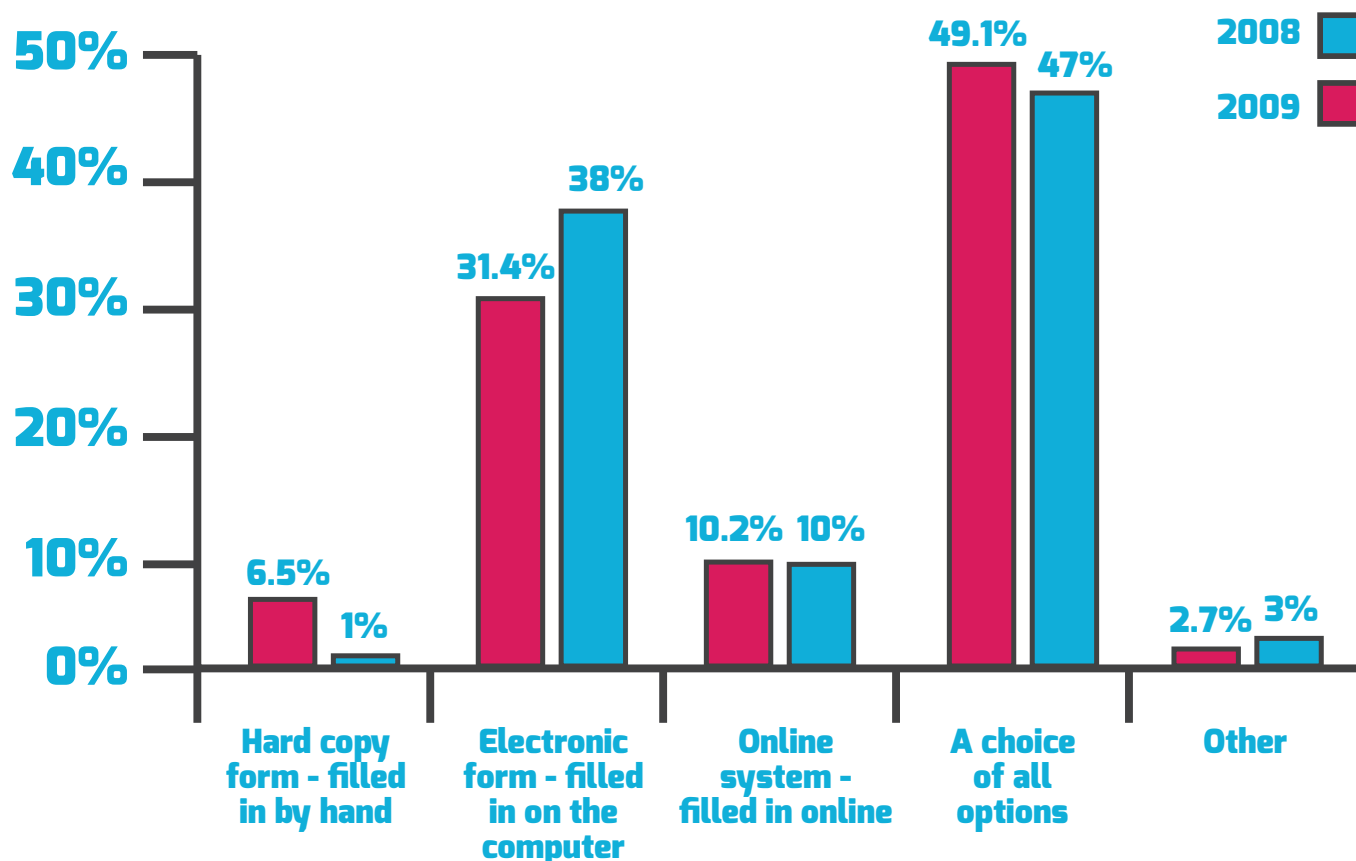
Online Applications

In 2008 we asked grantseekers how they preferred to apply for the grants. The results were interesting, and indicated grantseekers increasingly preferred to apply online, but still valued having a choice across a number of formats.

- Hard copy form - filled in by hand: 1%
- Electronic form - filled in on the computer: 38%
- Online system - filled in online: 10%
- A choice of all of the above: 47%
- Other: 3%

We repeated the question in the 2009 survey and found the desire from grantseekers to have a choice has grown even stronger. Almost half of all respondents now favouring having a choice across all formats.

A greater percentage of respondents in 2009 favoured filling in a hard copy form (6.5%) than in 2008 (1%). There has been a drop in those favouring filling in an electronic application form (38% to 31.4%) while those who wanted to use an online application system remained around the same (10%).



Online Applications (continued)

What suggestions do you have for grantmakers who want to improve their communication with grantseekers?

Check your Attitude: "Be straight up, we can take it." Be honest, consistent, contactable, flexible, patient. Be available, friendly and helpful. Listen and get to know grantseekers. Recognise that they also have wisdom to contribute.

Use Plain English: "Keep it simple." Make forms simple and unambiguous. Resist talking in jargon and using acronyms. Understand that some will be newcomers to the process.

Reform Forms: "A lot of time is wasted in reformatting applications." Simplify your forms, eliminating duplicated or ambiguous questions. Road-test them. Ensure you have all the basics covered - contact details, eligibility, timelines, grant amounts, etc. Provide a checklist for applicants. Ensure the amount of information you request is commensurate with the amount of money on offer, as well as your target grantseeking audience. Consider adopting a common application form, or at least aspects of one.

Get Serious about Feedback: "We spend hours upon hours filling out applications and making them perfect, the least they can do is give us the courtesy of letting us know how to improve our applications for next time." Provide the opportunity for feedback on project ideas, and on the reason for an unsuccessful application. Provide a feedback form so grantseekers can provide input to your work as well.

Refine Timing: "Not all applicants have dedicated staff to write funding applications." Set realistic timelines (ask last year's grantseekers if previous timeframes were reasonable), advertise them and stick to them. Be aware that for many grantseekers, a four-week gap between opening of the program and closing of the application period will not be sufficient. Ensure grant success/failure notifications are delivered in a timely fashion as well.

Spread the Word: "Get grant information out to as many people as possible who work with community groups. They can pass the word on." Ensure you don't forget rural and regional media outlets when advertising your grants (if relevant), and others working outside traditional communication loops.

Provide Timely, Knowledgeable Support: "Don't use call centre staff who know nothing more than what's on the website". Commit sufficient staff hours, particularly at peak times, and ensure staff answering phones and emails are fully across the program's aims and processes. Put in place processes to reduce staff turnover and improve transfer of knowledge to new staff. Consider providing an out-of-hours information service. Respond to all inquiries (phone or email) within 24 hours.

Consider a Staged Application Process: "Ask grantseekers to submit a one-page application seeking funding, and only then, if the grantmaker is interested in the project, proceed to a full grant application."

Review online processes: "Provide a FMM (Frequently Made Mistakes) checklist!" Include a FAQ section and ensure it is updated regularly (in fact, schedule regular updates to all of your web pages). Log queries that you receive for inclusion in next year's list of FAQs. Complement your online material with offline help.

The Australian Institute of Grants Management

The AIGM is a best-practice network for grants managers and grantmakers. The AIGM works to help grantmakers review and improve their grants programs, and keep abreast of best practices both within Australia and internationally.

The AIGM is a division of Our Community, a world-leading social enterprise that provides advice, tools and training for Australia's 600,000 community groups and schools, and practical linkages between the community sector and the general public, business and government.



What we believe

- 1** Grantmaking is an absolutely central element in the Australian economic system. Not one dollar should be wasted on poorly designed, poorly articulated, poorly evaluated or inefficient systems. Grantmakers must maximise resources by sharing lessons, and seeking and learning from those shared by others.
- 2** Australia needs more and better professional grantmakers. The job of grantmaking should be afforded appropriate professional status, training and recompense.
- 3** Grantmakers should listen to the communities they serve. Grantmakers should be driven by outcomes, not process. They should trust and respect their grantees and offer programs, systems and processes appropriate to their needs and capacities.
- 4** Grantmakers should be efficient. Wastage is indefensible. Skimping on systems, technology and professional staff is equally wicked.
- 5** Grantmakers should be ethical. Grantmakers must ensure that the process of grantmaking is fair, unbiased and open.

You can read more about our values and beliefs in our grantmaking manifesto:

www.grantsmanagement.com.au/manifesto

What we do

As well as overseeing a number of grantmaking affinity groups, the AIGM's major offerings include:



- **SmartyGrants** Australia's best-practice online grantmaking system, used by more than 3900 grants programs of all types and sizes across Australia and New Zealand.
- **Grants Management Intelligence (GMI)** The AIGM's member publication, tracking best practices in grantmaking across Australia and all over the world.
- **Grantmaking Toolkit** An all-in-one decision-making framework, workbook (including policy building templates), and check-up tool designed to walk grantmakers through the process of building, reviewing or refreshing a grants program.
- **Grantmaking Manifesto** Framing the drive for reform and professionalisation of grantmaking in Australia.
- **Code of Practice for Professional Grantmakers and Code of Practice for Grantmaking Agencies** Setting performance and practice standards for leading grantmaking organisations and individuals.
- **Grantmaking Knowledge Bank** Searchable, topic-based listing of best-practice thinking and case studies.
- **Grantmaking in Australia Conference and other training and events** Generalised and topic-based conferences, networking events and training for government, philanthropic and corporate grantmakers.
- **Grants in Australia Survey** Annual survey of grantseekers tracking the performance of grantmakers throughout Australia.

For more information about the AIGM, or to join, visit:
www.grantsmanagement.com.au

or email: service@grantsmanagement.com.au

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Special thanks: Our thanks goes to all of those who took the time to fill in the survey. Again, we at the AIGM look forward to drawing on these ideas and more as we push forward in our grantmaking reform agenda in the months and years to come.

We welcome your feedback: We are always keen to hear from you. Send your feedback to service@grantsmanagement.com.au



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