



# Illawarra Forum Inc

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## Managing short term projects

*To manage short term funding, we need to design an effective project – as well as to consider how short term funding affects the community sector generally.*

### How to design a short term project

Funding – short term and non-renewable – is now common in the community sector. It presents us with challenges in both management and long term planning.

#### **Here are some examples of short term funding programs**

The Illawarra Area Assistance Scheme gives grants for time-limited community development projects up to four years.

The Community Solutions & Crime Prevention Strategy (NSW Department of Community Services) funded innovative multi-agency responses to social issues, particularly crime prevention. These projects were also time-limited.

The NSW Community Relations Commission funds the Community Development Grants Program, mostly short term, non-renewable projects.

#### **How to select a short term project**

The project should:

- Have an obvious beginning and end
- Be realistic and achievable in the time frame
- Not attempt to pick up an old project
- Not address a long term need for a service
- Not fund the core demands of the agency

Some examples are:

- Pilot projects
- Community action research projects
- One-off community education projects
- Arts projects
- Festivals

## **How to set up the project**

Set out a time frame:

- Allow time for induction and orientation of new staff
- Develop a plan and evaluation process to re-negotiate delays or difficulties in the project
- Allow time for winding up the project, for example, an acquittal report and an exit report
- Ensure that staff take their leave entitlements within the project time frame

Put together the project budget:

- Include the administration fees for the work: paying wages; bills; office rent; and audit fees
- Identify the acquisition and disposal of the assets such as computer and telephone

Build in some support for the project:

- Allocate tasks for the induction and orientation of new staff
- Arrange on the job training
- Build in staff supervision – short term staff are under pressure to achieve results in the short term
- Convene a sub committee to oversee the project

## **Some models for employing staff in short term projects**

These flexible staffing arrangements allow the community organisation to better use experience and skills. They can also help employees to balance work and other responsibilities.

**Job share positions**

Job sharing is a form of part-time employment where more than one employee shares all the duties and responsibilities of one position.

**Part time positions**

Dividing the project work in part time positions may be helping in the recruitment of staff with specialised skills or experience.

**Secondments**

A secondment is an arrangement where a staff is 'lent' to another agency for a short term project but remains the employee of own agency. Both agencies benefit in exchanging expertise and experience and in understanding workplace culture.

**Consultants**

It may not be possible to recruit a staff member with the range of specialist skills. The position can be redesigned and the specialist work can be given to a consultant.

## Key issues in short term funding

### **Governance and management**

A short term project can add a burden to the work of the committee in overseeing the project: recruitment; bookkeeping and the audit. Extra work involves the induction of staff, on the job training, planning, evaluation, supervision and winding up the project.

There are inefficiencies and lost time dealing with short term funding arrangements, the constant search for funds – applying and re-applying – and then establishing support infrastructure around projects. This results in stress for staff and committees and within the sector generally.

An ACOSS survey documented these problems:

The majority of respondents found the funding requirements required under government contracts a significant burden. Many reported that this drew resources away from service delivery. Many respondents suggested that additional funding was needed to assist with this burden or that simplification of the financial and program reporting requirements commonly required by government funding departments, was required. Smaller organisations appear to suffer most from administrative burden, due to the fact that funding requirements are often no less for organisations working with small government grants.

Australian Council of Social Service ACOSS Paper 145 Australian Community Sector Survey Report 2007

### **Employment conditions in the community sector**

For the staff, employment in short term projects results in periods of unemployment and insecurity. Short term positions are seen as a work experience to gain more secure employment. Staff feel under pressure to achieve unrealistic goals and are likely to 'burn out'. In the process the organisation experiences loss of skills and loss of knowledge as the short term project finishes. Workforce planning and development becomes more complicated.

The ACOSS survey showed the community sector was characterised by high staff turnover.

In 2005-6, respondent agencies employed 13,457 full time equivalent staff and lost 1,923 full time equivalent staff. Average staff turnover across respondent agencies is therefore equivalent to 14.3% which is marginally higher than the all Australian industry average of between 10% and 12%.

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## **Development of the community sector generally**

In terms of building a viable community sector, short term projects can result in loss of specialist expertise. There is a loss of skills to the sector through retrenchments. Over time the sector has less capacity to attract skilled staff. There is a lost opportunity to build on the learning gained from pilot projects which cannot be followed up.

Short term project do not resource a strong human services system in our community to respond to the needs of people suffering the effects of long term poverty, unemployment, reduced access to health, housing and education, mental health problems, drug and alcohol problems and chronic homelessness.

A lack of commitment to real long term planning for our human services infrastructure in the Illawarra has resulted in a fragmented, ad hoc approach to meeting the diverse needs of people in our communities.

Also see the paper 'Impacts of short-term funding contracts and service cuts in the Illawarra' published by the Illawarra Forum Inc in 2004. Download from [www.illawarraforum.org.au](http://www.illawarraforum.org.au) under 'Publications'.