



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Q1. What experience have you had with Commonwealth disaster funding support?

I am working in a regional Local Government as Community Recovery Officer (CRO) which is a jointly State and Federal funded position under the DRFA, linked to specific AGRN's. As such, I have an intimate understanding of the day to day practicalities (and impracticalities) of the current funding arrangements, not just as they relate to the CRO position, but to other Commonwealth support.

Points in summary:

CRO funding is restrictive at the point-of-use (eg, with community). The guidelines for how funding may be used does not reflect the nuances of the disaster management cycle. The guidelines restrict CRO's to working 'recovery'; however, recovery work often involves aspects of preparedness, mitigation, and in many cases, response.

The scope for funding is often inconsistent. The guidelines prevent the purchase of things such as first aid kits, hand-crank radios etc for community members as these are 'assets', however, simple purchases like these are valuable community development aids which enable conversations around disaster preparedness.

Due to the non-suitability of the funding guidelines for grassroots application, the several layers of reporting and approval for project spending impacts ability to do work in a strategic and responsive way.

There is a large amount of reporting relevant to grant size, with a \$210k grant pa attracting 5 reports per quarter per CRO. Further, across 7 deliverables, any spend over \$2000 requires pre-approval from the NSWRA, adding further bureaucratic delay.

The time limited nature of funding is too short, and 2-year contract terms do not facilitate the development of sustainable relationships between community and the LGA or other recovery stakeholders. Long term funding terms of 5-10 years is necessary.

The gap between the AGRN event and CRO's being hired is often too long; I was hired 20 months after the AGRN event I was linked to.

Funding needs to be all-hazard and enable CRO's to work on projects that relate to the entire Disaster Management Cycle of PPRR





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Q2. How could Commonwealth funding support communities to reduce their disaster risk?

The Commonwealth should support all communities, irrespective of whether there has been a recent disaster declaration and subsequent AGRN. The Commonwealth should support long-term funding for Community Disaster Management Officers that have an all-hazards, whole-of-cycle remit. A permanent and long term Commonwealth funded disaster management workforce that is embedded within Local Governments will build the capacity of community, local governments and also support the work of emergency services and State Government response and recovery agencies.

If the Commonwealth funded roles within LGA's, it could look like this in the NSW Context:

A senior, Full Time Commonwealth funded position, employed by the LGA, to assume role of Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO) as their primary role

Full Time Commonwealth Funded positions, employed by the LGA and reporting to the LEMO, that would work alongside government and community on initiatives relating to the entire disaster management cycle of PPRR

The Commonwealth would be able to further support communities to lower their disaster risk by giving greater flexibility and self determination to LGA's in administering Commonwealth funding. The State's, in their capacity as the co-administrators of Commonwealth Funding to LGA's should better support and require of LEMC's to engage in PPRR planning and exercising. This work would be best led by permanent LEMO's with an appropriate FT staff in support.

Ultimately, the work of disaster recovery, and any work within the disaster management cycle, must rely on strong community connection and sustainable and trustworthy relationships with key community leaders, place based organisations and business and industry networks. These roles require capabilities that community development workers traditionally excel at, and the Commonwealth will do well to approach disaster risk reduction with a community centred approach that capitalises on and strengthens community knowledge and resilience. This can only be achieved if both the community and LGA's and people employed to do this work (eg CRO type roles) have certainty in their tenure.

Q3. Please describe your understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding processes.

I have a fairly strong understanding of the Commonwealth Disaster Funding processes, and have been involved in funding applications and administration of bushfire, flood and storm DRFA funding across 5 separate AGRN's, in two regional NSW LGA's which are part of a joint-LEMC. The consistent barriers faced in both LGA's relate to the restrictive nature of the funding guidelines, the onerous reporting, and the continued misunderstanding of the how the DRFA Funding Categories and thresholds are met.

Q4. Are the funding roles of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and local government, during disaster events clear?

Broadly speaking, the funding roles are clear. The most consistent reflection that I and other NSW CRO's I have spoken with have is that the guidelines are inhibitive and actually undermine our capacity to build community trust and to support their recovery. The funding guidelines frustrate the CRO's ability to work in a manner that is consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery.





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Q5. Is there any further information you would like to provide?

There will be increasing frequency and severity of disasters in our communities, particularly regional and rural communities. LGA's in the non-metro areas need extra support and capacity to appropriately prepare and mitigate risk for their communities, because we do not have the rate-base to resource this work from core-funding. Further, regional and remote LGA's have considerably higher hazard profiles, and have higher rates of disadvantage. The Region where I work is consistently in the top-five Federal Electorates for poverty ratio, and each major disaster further entrenches this disadvantage.

