

**Submission  
No 56**

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR  
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

**Organisation:** Netball NSW  
**Date Received:** 23 August 2020

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## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL - PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Thank you for the opportunity for Netball NSW to participate in this inquiry in reviewing the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs.
- 1.2 Netball NSW has been providing netball opportunities to the NSW community for more than 90 years.
- 1.3 Over this time, netball has maintained a position as a key prominent sport, particularly amongst women and girls, within the greater sporting landscape despite significant change in sports provision.
- 1.4 This submission has been prepared within Netball NSW staffing resources specifically the Executive General Manager – Community & Pathways along with the Facilities & Infrastructure Manager. Both are available for further comment and presentation at the Inquiry if required.
- 1.5 These positions have over 40 years cumulative experience operating within the sports facilities and infrastructure strategic planning and project delivery environment.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 Netball NSW operates within a federated model with each state and territory having a lead State Sporting Organisation under the umbrella of Netball Australia.
- 2.2 Netball NSW purpose is to - Lead and support our Netball community to grow and thrive.
- 2.3 Achieved through four pillars:
  - Community Netball - Grow the Game
  - Competitions and Pathways - Strive to Shine
  - Facilities and Infrastructure - Secure the Future
  - NSW Swifts and GIANTS Netball - Fulfil our Potential
- 2.4 Netball NSW has 113 affiliated associations across the state with over 115,000 registered members.
- 2.5 Netball NSW caters for grass roots participation through to the national elite Super Netball competition, with two current licenses being held for NSW Swifts and Giants Netball.
- 2.6 The 113 affiliated Associations conduct netball competitions on a range of assets from single asphalt hardcourts to large multi-court complexes as well as multi-court indoor facilities.

### 3. Current Facility Status

- 3.1 Netball NSW has access to several thousand netball courts located on public open space across the state primarily owned by other organisations particularly either Local Government or State Government.
- 3.2 The replacement value of assets supporting netball would amount to many hundreds of millions of dollars.
- 3.3 A majority of these facilities would have been supported through a grant or contribution from key agencies.
- 3.4 Community sport would not exist in its current form if governments did not actively assist sports with grants and professional assistance and guidance.
- 3.5 Netball NSW and affiliated Associations currently have various financial commitments and active grants for construction of new or modernised facilities in various stages of delivery exceeding \$80m in value.
- 3.6 Furthermore, a number of forward plans are being developed by various agencies that would see further provision and modernisation of facilities to meet the needs and demand for a range of sports. Netball will be one of many sports to benefit from these forward plans.
- 3.7 Grants play a crucial role in the successful delivery of facilities for all sports.

### 4. Specific Grants

- 4.1 Netball NSW cannot comment on all grants listed under the terms of reference however has had involvement with the following grant programs which are included in the Terms of Reference:
  - Stronger Communities Fund
  - Stronger Country Communities Fund
  - Greater Sydney Sports Facility Fund
  - Regional Sports Infrastructure Fund
- 4.2 These grants are specifically targeted towards the construction or improvement of a physical asset, they are not program or participation grants.
- 4.3 It is not practical for Netball NSW to comment on each program individually, instead we have identified some issues and challenges generally and how these grant programs may evolve to assist in the total infrastructure process across NSW.
- 4.4 Netball NSW respect that the role of governments is to set policy to determine how funds are distributed and the greatest challenge continues to be implementing a process that can deliver a “fair go” for all applicants.
- 4.5 Recent criticism of the integrity of other infrastructure grant programs (ie federal grants) has not been the experience of Netball NSW with the operations of the NSW grants program in the grants listed in 4.1 above.

- 4.6 Netball NSW has no issue with the operation or administration of the listed funding programs and is taking this opportunity to provide constructive comment for incremental improvement to enhance the functionality and efficacy of the grants program.

## **5. Observation - Improved Planning**

- 5.1 Grant programs are increasingly being used to manage a number of shortcomings in the initial facility planning process. In a way it seems we are hoping the grant process will cover the lack of planning and communication between stakeholders.
- 5.2 Grant programs currently classify master planning or early concept planning as ineligible for grant funding, therefore a large number of grant submissions are more likely to be less prepared than others. This can pre-dispose those organisations with lower resource levels to lower success rates with grant submissions.
- 5.3 Grant programs targeting infrastructure should be operated continuously (ie annually) over several years – recommended at a minimum to be a 3-5 year program with set opening and closing times each year.
- 5.4 A grant program which operates over a longer period of time (say 3-5 years) will at least give some incentive to organisations to invest in an appropriate level of forward planning that in turn should lead to better evidence and outcomes for the project.
- 5.5 Better planning would see greater collaboration between key stakeholders, in particular Local Councils and State Agencies supporting our local sports organisations. Remembering that the majority of our local sports organisations are operated by a diminishing volunteer base with varying skills.
- 5.6 Greater collaboration then leads to the development of shared strategic processes to integrate sports planning with broader community planning with stronger evidence-based decisions.
- 5.7 Stronger stakeholder collaboration needs to have a planned approach to the management of existing sports assets as well as the development of new sports assets.
- 5.8 The greater integration of local sports facility needs into Council integrated planning processes and 10-year infrastructure plans, along with the council asset management plans, will produce a greatly improved outcome for prioritisation of infrastructure spending.
- 5.9 Netball NSW acknowledges that some of the suggestions above may not be directly attributed to the operation of a grant program, however the matters raised do have a bearing on the quality of submissions to grant programs and ultimately the equitable assessment of grants.

## **6. Observation - Assessment & Outcomes**

- 6.1 All grant submissions have a level of need in the local community.
- 6.2 Within the sport of Netball we know that if an association goes to the trouble to apply for a grant, they need it. Netball, like all sports operated by volunteers, does not have spare capacity or resources to work on grant applications for fun. All applicants have the absolute belief that their project deserves support and in many cases would have been working on a plan for many years which may have also included fundraising to meet co-funding requirements.

- 6.3 The grant process then tries to naturally select the highest order projects against other projects based on certain criteria. This criteria, if the grant program has a narrow-targeted focus, may be on areas such as a female changerooms or target populations like youth facilities or at-risk communities.
- 6.4 However, a broad grant program needs to rely on secondary criteria to separate and differentiate projects to form an opinion on which application has higher need or greater merit than the other. Secondary criteria may include geographic distribution or diversity of facilities as an example. Secondary criteria may be more subjective in nature and ultimately projects that cannot be separated by assessment criteria will need to be separated by a person's decision as identified by the government policy.
- 6.5 The use and collection of objective facility and participation data is an ongoing task that should be the foundation of all decisions in relation to supporting community grants.
- 6.6 This information supports the development of the application but also can be used by the assessment panel in verifying the need of the submission.
- 6.7 Significant advancement has been achieved over recent years with the collection, storage and sharing of data and mapping systems to support forward planning, Agencies such as NSW Office of Sport, NSW Planning and others are continually providing better access, guidance and support.
- 6.8 Further improvement is considered possible by ensuring each of these planning systems can be cross referenced and form consistent data sets. Such that the Local Council land planning systems complements the State Government land planning systems.
- 6.9 Continued refinement of grant framework, assessment criteria, timing and support documents would always add value to the grant submission process.
- 6.10 Timing delays and speculation of uncertainty around the continuation of grant programs has caused some complications and angst. As stated, (see 5.3 and 5.4) it would be beneficial for grants to be over a minimum 3-5 year period, accompanied by guaranteed set opening and closing dates.
- 6.11 There is also a clear need for the criteria which grants operate under to remain as consistent as possible from year to year, thereby allowing applicants time to build their submission safe in the knowledge that the 'goalposts won't move' when the grant is next opened.
- 6.12 It is difficult for sports to secure support and key criteria components from key partners when sport tends to work on a 'just in time' strategy whilst other partners work within their own restraints. For example, Local Government have a very structured yearly cycle from July to June. They draft budgets early in each year and set their budgets around May. The council financial cycle runs independently of the State Government financial cycle and sporting seasons differ again amongst the codes.
- 6.13 Decision making around the assessment criteria should be documented and published for transparency.
- 6.14 There must be a meaningful feedback mechanism incorporated in all grant programs as a point of reference for all applicants and to enable that feedback to be utilised for future submissions.

- 6.15 Netball NSW acknowledges that not all submissions can be supported and funded within each grant year, with many (if not all) programs being over-subscribed. If the grant program was a 3-5 year rolling program then the submissions that qualified but missed out due to exhaustion of funds for that year could be considered in the following year. If an application was deficient then the applicant can correct this for the following year.
- 6.16 The assessment process needs to be well-resourced to ensure disadvantaged communities are not further disadvantaged by a competitive process.
- 6.17 Assessment should not rely on the quality of the application rather the merit of the project.

## **7. Summary**

- 7.1 Netball NSW and affiliated Associations across the State have been, and continue to be, beneficiaries of the various grant programs put forward by governments from time to time.
- 7.2 Over the many years of operations Netball NSW has seen many different grant programs with each attempting to support the target markets as intended.
- 7.3 Netball NSW acknowledges that not all grant programs run as predicted and not all applications can be supported. Being unsuccessful does not mean the grant program is flawed or compromised.
- 7.4 It is imperative that grant programs continue as they are a key component of local community infrastructure provision. Most community sport would not exist today if not for the local community group, the volunteers, the support of key stakeholders and appropriate grant programs.
- 7.5 Netball NSW appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and hope that our comments add value to the process.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 Grant Programs should continue and be constantly refined and improved as they play such a crucial part in the successful delivery of facilities for all sports.
- 8.2 Consider inclusion in grant eligibility the process of sport and recreation facility planning into existing grant programs, or the development of a specific sport and recreation facility planning grant program to improve overall facility delivery processes.
- 8.3 Grant programs targeting infrastructure should be operated over several years – recommended at a minimum of 3-5-year programs with set opening and closing times each year.
- 8.4 Criteria which grants operate under to remain as consistent as possible from year to year to enable submissions to be built up over time with confidence.
- 8.5 Consider forwarding the comments to relevant Ministers around the need for greater integration of local sports facility needs into Council integrated planning processes and 10-year infrastructure plans along with specific council asset management plans.

- 8.6 Ensure that modern digital data collection, storage, sharing and mapping systems can be cross referenced and form consistent data sets such that the Local Council land planning systems complement the State Government land planning systems.
- 8.6 Continued refinement of grant framework, assessment criteria, timing and support documents to further add value to the grant submission process.
- 8.7 Decision making around the assessment criteria should be documented and published for transparency.
- 8.8 Development of meaningful feedback mechanisms incorporated in all grant programs as a point of reference for all applicants.

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