

LEARNINGS FOR GRANTMAKING PRACTICE

VFFF recently conducted an outcomes analysis of 100 grants acquitted over a three-year period.

This work will inform our 2021 strategic review. It builds upon a similar analysis conducted in 2017 by Emily Fuller, which brought to light many insights that have informed and enhanced our approach to grantmaking since then.

The FY18 to FY20 learnings were explored via Thematic Analysis – a qualitative method which involves identifying recurring patterns of meaning, or ‘themes’ in a dataset. Several measures were taken to reduce subjectivity, and we acknowledge that this analysis would be strengthened with supplementary objective data to avoid creating an echo chamber of our own ideas. It is not powerful enough on its own.

We are pleased to share these learnings. VFFF aims to be transparent, retain a learning mindset, contribute to strengthening the sector and optimise our resources to effectively support not for profits and the communities they work with.

Summary of learnings:

VFFF’s approach:
Stronger outcomes are seen when VFFF invests time and resources to engage deeply in the assessment process, meets with key leaders within the organisation, structures the grant to increase chances of success, stays flexible and provides ongoing consultation.
Go forward assuming that the risks identified at the assessment stage will play out.
VFFF funding is a powerful leverage tool. Look for organisations who will maximise this opportunity.
Retain our priority for multi-year funding and invest in long timeframes to allow for greatest observable impact.
Continue directing funds into core salaries to build an organisation’s capacity to deliver. This can be done by recruiting staff to new roles, supporting professional development and upskilling, or restructuring existing teams. When employing a new staff member, ensure there is a solid plan for the role’s future sustainability, and factor in extra time for recruitment.
Continue to practice openness and flexibility in grantmaking, and look for the same in the organisations’ work, either responding to participants’ needs or embedding it in the design.
Support organisations who are combining forces with others in an effective way to collectively deliver outcomes.
The level of ambition involved is not an indicator of a good or bad outcome – look at other factors. Keep supporting ‘big dreams’ and aim for measurable and tangible outcomes.
Building trust and engaging with communities
When working with rural and regional communities, prioritise organisations who are consistent, embedded in and embraced by that community, and maintain a strong ongoing focus on local

<p>consultation, ownership and pride in the outcomes. Look for examples of local people contributing their time, resources and expertise.</p>
<p>Community engagement is a two-way street. Organisations should have a thorough understanding of the community’s needs, priorities and capacity to engage, and communities should also have a thorough understanding of the program’s purpose and rationale.</p>
<p>It takes time to earn a community’s trust if you are an ‘outsider’. Expect that vulnerable communities have been failed by the system and therefore establishing trust is key, and without it communities will not engage.</p> <p><i>“The relationship of trust and support you have with the children, young people, families and communities is more important than what you do.” – VFFF grant recipient, 2019</i></p>
<p>People and capacity to deliver</p>
<p>Consider an organisation’s capacity to deliver by looking at their track record, ability to prioritise and distribute their human resources, passion and commitment in leadership, volunteer involvement and rates of staff turnover. Look for warning signs of a disengaged board – delays in finalising documents and low levels of meeting attendance.</p>
<p>High staff turnover is probably the greatest predictor of poor outcomes and can derail the work and make collecting data to demonstrate impact particularly difficult.</p>
<p>Maintaining a large and diverse base of committed volunteers can provide much needed support.</p>
<p>Ensure organisations have a sufficient understanding of the specific barriers and challenges they may encounter in a particular system.</p>
<p>Fundraising</p>
<p>Organisations are stronger when they have diverse income streams and maintain deep engagement with funders.</p>
<p>The requirement to fundraise is relentless. Building an organisation’s fundraising capacity is a highly impactful place to invest resources.</p>
<p>Storytelling and communication</p>
<p>Stronger outcomes are observed when organisations share their learnings with others and effectively use data and evidence to communicate their impact. Participant surveys tend not to be the strongest method of conveying impact and can be hard for community members to prioritise.</p>
<p>Social media can be a wide-reaching promotional tool to share positive stories and grow engagement.</p>
<p>Support communities to express resilience through a creative medium – there are few opportunities to do so in rural and remote areas particularly. Sharing a creative product via radio, documentary, music, social media or YouTube can foster a sense of pride in heritage and culture and can encourage community cohesion in tough times.</p>