DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

Homelessness Innovation Fund

Request for Proposals – Guidelines

Overview

The Homelessness Innovation Fund is a key component of the Northern Territory Government’s commitment to reforming service delivery in the housing and homelessness sectors under HousingActionNT, the Government’s five-year Housing Strategy. Under this Strategy, the Northern Territory Government is committed to establishing an integrated homelessness services system that supports the most vulnerable people in our community. The Northern Territory’s rate of homelessness sits at almost 15 times the national average\(^1\). Homelessness in the Northern Territory is a multifaceted and complex issue that requires holistic, integrated and intensive approaches to achieve successful outcomes.

The Northern Territory Government is seeking proposals from the non-government sector that identify innovative approaches to the delivery of homelessness services in the Northern Territory and demonstrate potential to achieve improved social outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Supporting innovation in the homelessness services sector will be critical to broadening the evidence base around what works to address homelessness and to inform the development of initiatives that could be implemented as part of wider system reform.

Purpose of the Fund

Research identifies as best practice the importance of a client centred approach in order to prevent or address the client’s homelessness. A client centred approach places the client at the centre and determines the service response by taking into account the individual’s circumstances and needs. The two key instruments for achieving a client centred approach are service integration and case management.

It is common for homeless people to need support from a range of agencies, including: specialist homelessness agencies (providing personal and social support and emergency and medium-term accommodation); alcohol and drug treatment services; mental health services and a range of other services. However, the agencies providing these services may work independently from each other. Because of the recognised problems with a disconnected approach, it is now common in policy and service delivery contexts to promote integrated arrangements as the way forward in meeting the needs of homeless people.

Service integration can be defined as:

“...structures and processes that attempt to bring together the participants in human services systems with the aim of achieving goals that cannot be achieved by those participants acting autonomously and separately. These goals include greater coherence and cohesion, efficiency, effectiveness, and consumer accessibility."\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Source: NT Shelter 2016 (based on ABS 2011 Census data)

The purpose of the Homelessness Innovation Fund is to provide one-off funding to trial innovative or transformational approaches to the delivery of homelessness services that will directly contribute to a reduction in homelessness in the Northern Territory and/or a reduction in the number of people who need to access repeated or ongoing homelessness services. The Northern Territory Government currently supports a wide range of services and programs that aim to address and prevent homelessness however limited opportunity has existed for the non-government sector to pursue more innovative approaches that emphasise collaborative partnerships and promote greater service integration.

Through this initiative, non-government organisations have an opportunity to pilot and test new or alternative ways of addressing homelessness that may demonstrate a level of merit worthy of further consideration, but which have not necessarily been tried, tested and proven to the same extent as other more conventional services or approaches.

The Homelessness Innovation fund aims to identify and substantiate new ways to improve outcomes in the delivery of homelessness services. A fundamental element of effectively reducing homelessness is improving cooperation, both between the government and non-government sectors and between non-government organisations across the social services sector. Delivering client centred integrated approaches and facilitating greater collaboration between service providers is therefore a key focus under this initiative.

Applicants seeking funding under the Homelessness Innovation fund are strongly encouraged to consider how innovative initiatives can be delivered through formal and informal partnership arrangements and collaborative approaches that focus on better service integration and more holistic service delivery.

What is innovation in homelessness service delivery?

While it can be difficult to define innovation, in the context of homelessness, innovation can be considered anything that represents a departure from existing conventional or standard approaches to delivering homelessness services. This may mean trialling a program that has proven successful in one location or with a particular client group, elsewhere or with a different client group. It may also be considered to be making improvements or modifications to the delivery of an existing service by way of partnerships, to achieve marked improvements in client outcomes.

Innovation may also be characterised by the scaling up of a small program or service that has yielded anecdotal successes, to test it more widely for continued positive outcomes, or a pilot initiative that seeks to target an identified need or gap in service delivery that is based on robust program logic. Ultimately, innovation in service delivery approaches should result in a reduction in homelessness and/or a reduction in the number of people who need to access repeated or ongoing homelessness services, or improved service provision that contribute to these outcomes.
Priority areas of focus
The Northern Territory Government’s broader priorities and objectives under HousingActionNT include:

- Service integration and partnerships between service providers and organisations
- Facilitating exit from crisis and supported accommodation
- Early intervention and prevention responses
- Facilitating private rental access and support programs

These are suggested areas where applicants wishing to seek homelessness innovation grant funding may wish to focus their proposals. Applicants may also choose to focus their proposals in other areas provided they address the criteria outlined below.

Eligibility for funding
To be eligible to receive grant funding under the Homelessness Innovation Fund, applicants must be a legally incorporated entity or demonstrate that they have partnered with an auspicing organisation that is. Applicants and/or auspicing organisations must also be operating on a not-for profit basis or as a non-government organisation.

Applicants do not have to be in receipt of Specialist Homelessness Services grant funding from the Northern Territory Government, however they must be able to clearly demonstrate through their proposal that the funding sought will be used to support a new and innovative homelessness service or program in the Northern Territory. While the funding is not specifically intended to support the purchase of capital items such as vehicles, infrastructure or other assets, or pay for core organisational operating costs or services, they are not precluded where they are considered necessary to support the proposed innovation.

The application process
Under this initiative a total of $1 million in 2016–17 and $1 million in 2017–18 will be made available. In 2016–17, funding will be allocated under a two-stage process:

**Stage 1 - Request for Proposals**

Interested applicants are invited to submit an outline of their proposal, the objectives, intended benefits and broad anticipated cost. An independent panel consisting of government and non-government representatives will assess proposals and shortlist those that are considered to demonstrate the greatest merits for further development. Stage 1 applications close on Friday, 12 August 2016. Applicants whose proposals are not shortlisted for further consideration will be considered unsuccessful in their application and may wish to consider reapplying at a later time.

**Stage 2 – Detailed business case development**

Applicants whose proposals are shortlisted may be invited to further develop their submission by preparing a detailed business case. Applicants who are invited to develop a business case for their proposed initiative or service are not guaranteed to receive funding.

The business case development phase will be coupled with detailed discussions and negotiation with the Department of Housing, guided by the Independent Panel, to agree on the final parameters of the proposed service or initiative, including agreed outcomes and
evaluation criteria. Once this has been completed, an offer of funding may be made and if so, an exchange of contracts will occur.

How will proposals be assessed?
An Independent Panel will be formed to oversee the process of assessing Stage 1 proposals, negotiating initiatives in Stage 2 and making recommendations on the final allocation of grant funds. The Independent Panel will be made up of representatives from the Northern Territory Government and the non-government sector. The Minister for Housing will make the final selection of initiatives/services to be funded based on advice and recommendations from the Panel. In assessing initial proposals, the Panel will consider the following:

Stage 1

Innovation
- The extent to which the proposal represents an innovative or transformational approach to service delivery.
- Evidence provided to support the proposed innovation.
- The extent to which the proposal incorporates cross-sector collaboration, formalised partnerships or service integration.

Strategic alignment
- How the proposal fits with Government’s priorities for housing and social services more broadly.
- If the proposed initiative fills an identified gap in service delivery or targets a particular client group where additional supports are needed.

Stage 2

In Stage 2, applicants whose proposals are shortlisted will be asked to provide further information about their proposed initiative/service through development of a detailed business case that expands on the formation provided in Stage 1.

Detailed business cases will be required to address the following:

Project specific
- The target client group and a description about the identified need to be addressed including evidence of that need.
- A detailed description of the proposed initiative or service and how it will work, pilot timeframes and milestones, the intended outcomes, how the outcomes will be measured and how evaluation data will be captured.
- How the proposal is innovative or represents a departure from current approaches or models.
- A hypothesis about the potential benefits that may be achieved under the proposed approach, including a broad description of the program logic to be applied.
- A description (if applicable) of proposed collaborative partnership arrangements or integration of services involved in delivering the initiative.
• How the proposal aligns with the HousingActionNT priority areas of focus and the Northern Territory Government’s broader priorities and strategic objectives for social services.

• A budget and proposed financial/funding arrangements including information about co-funding if applicable.

Scalability and/or repeatability of services
• A description about how the proposal demonstrates a repeatable new approach that could be repeated across other locations (potentially with some adaptations) or scaled up for a larger client base.

Sustainability, contestability and value for money
• Information on how the proposal contributes to the development of efficient and contestable service delivery models and is it likely to provide value for money.

• Whether the proposal has the potential to deliver public value more broadly, such as, the potential for initiative/service costs to result in broader social benefits that yield savings elsewhere within the social services system.

Organisational capability and capacity
• Evidence of organisational capability and capacity, such as past program performance.

Further information
For further information about the Homelessness Innovation Fund and submitting a proposal, please contact the Homelessness Innovation Fund Secretariat on (08) 8999 8844, or email homelessness.innovationfund@nt.gov.au.