


WIMMERA INFORMATION NETWORK inc (A7459)
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Standing Committee on Infrastructure,
 Transport, Regional, Development and Local Government.
 PO Box 6021
 Parliament House
 Canberra ACT 2600

RE: Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program.
To whom it may concern,

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to have input.

It's especially important that the people who are most impacted upon have input into the new regional development funding program and have this opportunity to improve upon its development and convey their experience of past deficiencies and future opportunities and improvements

From Wimmera Information Networks perspective:

- Government investment in Rural Victoria to ensure sustainable services = growth = social and economic outcomes.
- No investment = death and destruction to Rural Victoria or Rural Australia.
- **Duplication** of established and existing services and resources = **waste of taxpayer money.**
Past government repeatedly funded organisations to recreate and duplicate community information databases. This action dis-encouraged sharing of existing and well established community resources.
- **Duplication** of long standing, well established and maintained regional community resources = insult to the intelligence of communities, their workers, their members as well as their volunteers including management and steering committees.

Acknowledgement:

- We feel the Commonwealth Government should acknowledge the existence of established valuable community resources e.g. Wimmera Information Network Inc which has been servicing the Wimmera, Mallee and Grampians region with accurate and up to date community information for the past **29 years** and maintains a regional database of some **3000** plus not for profit community groups, services, clubs and sporting organisation. To view our website visit www.wimmerainfo.org.au
- We believe the Government should acknowledge existing and long standing valuable regional community resources e.g. **WIN WHY-H Project** (Wimmera Information Network Inc, West Wimmera Shire, Horsham Rural City, Yarriambiack Shire and Hindmarsh Shire). The Wimmera, Mallee and Grampians regional community database – has been established through the creativity of local communities and has been self-sustaining but can only be further developed and enhanced with government support. This database is now online **no thanks** to State or Federal Government funding or support. (We were even told by government staff member not to even bother applying for funding - suggested we approach a local benefactor. On another occasion when we agreed to a department worker arranging a government facilitator to support us to demonstrate community support, we were informed by the facilitator at the commencement of discussions that no one wanted online information. This is despite the fact that we knew that person was funded \$500, 000 to print a phone book in another electorate).
- It is a fact that information is power and therefore the contribution that Wimmera Information Network Inc, has made to Regional Victoria's sustainability and community connectiveness cannot be measured in monetary value alone.
- If government was to fund Wimmera Information Network Inc, which has demonstrated its value to the community and the region (website hits: 19, 000 plus per year) the government would not only acknowledge the value of community information but also acknowledge the value of locally driven service organisations such as Wimmera Information Network Inc.

In light of the above and the fact that in the past there has been no funding for service orientated organisations such as Wimmera Information Network Inc, or if it was it was not provided or accessible to our service we recommend:

1. **Three year service orientated funding is a must** for service orientated organisations, because many of these not for profit community organisations such as Wimmera Information Network Inc save taxpayer money as they are managed and supported by volunteers and volunteer committees of management. The past onerous task of sourcing funding, tedious submission writing, complex and lengthy grant processes all pursued to no avail leads us to recommend that any new grant process needs to be for a **three year period**. Three year funding period would then allow regional services and organisations to better plan and sustain their service to support their communities, empowering them to achieve genuine regional economic development and community infrastructure that results in enhancing the sustainability and liveability of regional Victoria or regional Australia.
2. **Reduced turnaround time for grant applications is a must.** (In the past it has taken years to get an application up and then a decision has been strung out until an election is called and then nothing happens. Following an election and change of government applications have then been dismissed both at State and Federal levels.
3. **Recognition and consideration of diversity of circumstances** must be applied to any new funding and grant process. For example past government funding programs have not allowed a workers component, focusing on equipment and material items; included funding ratios that were not relevant to projects and did not allow for **exceptional circumstance** or discretion of the funding body should a project be deemed a worthy project.

Some examples of exceptional circumstances include such issues as:

- A service orientated applicant
- Poorer municipalities
- Tyranny of distance and access to services
- Rural Isolation
- Need to retain our youth
- Lack of government support for sustainable service delivery
- Long term drought effected region
- Reported increased family violence
- High suicide rates
- Aging Population
- Declining Population

4. A merit based approach with personal consultation and face to face dialogue. (The local personnel are not always the ideal persons to conduct face to face as they can have their own bias and stress). A merit based approach tied to three year funding terms would be a much fairer process not only for the application but also government workers. We believe it would result in genuine regional economic development with outcomes that enhances the sustainability and liveability of regional Australia.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry process.

I would just like to conclude that should you take into consideration our recommendation we believe that it would result in individual organisations feeling empowered as well as providing them with an ongoing sense they have had "a fair go" which is something that is close to the hearts of rural Australian's and something they value with pride. Although rural Australian's are resilient, the feeling they have had a fair go has certainly been eroded by past funding process in the community sector over the past years.

Yours sincerely

Judith Bysouth
8/7/2008

