Country Shows Support Package 2022 Process and Outcomes Evaluation

Department of Regional NSW

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Executive Summary

The Country Shows Support Package – 2022 (CSSP) aimed to deliver local economic stimulus and boost the liveability of communities by supporting COVID safe Country Shows to be held in 2022. The CSSP was part of the Regional Recovery Package (RRP). The package was part of the $2.8 billion COVID-19 Economic Recovery Strategy aimed at creating new jobs, increasing community engagement, boosting tourism by supporting events, shows and festivals in regional NSW, providing housing for health care workers in the regions, and giving young people more opportunities to access programs and activities.[1]

A process and outcomes evaluation of CSSP was conducted by the DRNSW Regional Programs Evaluation Team, to evaluate the process components of the program, whilst also capturing short to medium term outcomes data that will be used for a broader Regional Recovery Package Evaluation.

Summary of Findings

The CSSP was generally found to be well designed to meet the needs of the target group and valued by communities in regional NSW. There were clear outcomes that aligned with the objectives of the fund.

Most (89%) of the available CSSP funding was committed[2]. The grant funded 163 projects totalling $4.2 million across 91 eligible Local Government Area (LGAs).

The evaluation found that the CSSP supported COVID safe shows, while providing increased funding certainty and economic stimulus to local communities. Data on outcomes showed that the CSSP supported 'bigger and better shows' post COVID and attracted more visitors overall compared to previous shows. The evaluation found that the shows contributed to community connectedness and wellbeing, supported long term investments, and provided a platform for community collaboration.

The design and administration of the CSSP was informed by the outcomes of an evaluation of a Country Show funding program delivered under the Drought Stimulus Package. That evaluation recommended the following changes that were implemented in the CSSP:

- Increased funding was made available to enable all country shows in NSW to access appropriate funding depending on their size
- The Agriculture Societies Council of NSW Ltd was consulted in the development and promotion of the program
- SmartyGrants was utilised to manage time variations using online forms linked to the original funding decision.
- The application process was simplified to remove the need for separate funding deed negotiation
- The expected time to assess applications was extended from 7 to 10 working days

The CSSP Process Evaluation found two key areas for improvement:

- Improve internal communication on minimum invoice requirements to increase ease and speed of assessments

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[1] https://www.nsw.gov.au/regional-recovery-programs/regional-recovery-package
[2] $ 4,195,593.32 out of $ 4,725,000 available

- Ensure to communicate 'funding stop' at the end of a financial year to improve clarity around and timeliness of payments

The evaluation findings, recommendations for any future Country Show funding and considerations for other programs are provided in Table 1. These recommendations are intended for the use of program teams, the Evaluation Team and/or the Grants Management Office. The considerations for other programs are a collection of lessons, both successes and areas for improvement, that similar programs may wish to consider in their program design and administration

Table 1 | Summary of findings and recommendations

Finding	Recommendations for future program design and implementation
The program design was evidence based and aligned with broader program objectives. Key stakeholders were consulted to ensure that needs and timeframes of eligible organisations were incorporated in the program design phase.	Ensure key stakeholders are consulted in the program design phase to optimise application processes and integrate specific design elements related to needs of applicant organisations.
The CSSP program was generally set up for success with adequate administration in place, however some improvements could be made.	Ensure that roles and responsibilities for teams involved in administration are clear when implementing new program design and project assessment methodology. When a program is targeting applicants with limited experience in grant writing, it is recommended to plan additional time for project assessment, as there may be additional clarifying communication required with applicants.
The combined application and funding deed process was generally fit for purpose.	When implementing a combined Application and Funding Deed process, allow extra time for assessments towards the deadline for applications, as applicants may wait until the last moment to send in their application. Proactively communicate with the Finance Team to review timeframes of payments across financial years, in order to minimise delays and improve communication with grantees on payment dates.
Applications were assessed appropriately and transparently, however assessment guidelines could include additional detail to support assessors.	When implementing an assessment methodology where programs teams are performing assessments, ensure that detailed guidelines are made available that include requirements for invoicing.
Appropriate outcome data collection mechanisms were not in place.	When measuring social outcomes, plan for data collection at the appropriate level – sometimes data will need to be collected at project participant level. Guidance could be provided in the form of a list of survey questions, or an online survey hosted by DRNSW.

Finding	Recommendations for future program design and implementation
	Outcome guidance to grant recipients should be provided as part of the funding terms and conditions.
Projects are being delivered as intended and in line with guidelines.	Where grantees are primarily volunteer-based organisations, it is recommended to implement longer than average acquittal timeframes to accommodate any time limitations of volunteers.
	The reporting template or guidelines on reporting requirements should be provided as part of the application process.
Initial data shows that the program achieved its intended short- medium term outcomes. Outcomes were considered in the design phase of the program, enabling organisations to meet the needs of their specific community and to provide economic stimulus to local businesses.	Providing funding to volunteer based organisations to facilitate events and infrastructure for social gatherings can have positive social outcomes for communities. Providing guidelines for spending locally can provide economic stimulus to local businesses and regional economies.

Introduction

Overview of Country Shows Support Package

The $5 million Country Shows Support Package (CSSP) was announced as part of the $200 million COVID-19 Regional Recovery Package. The package aimed to deliver local economic stimulus and boost the liveability of communities by supporting COVID-safe Country Shows to be held in 2022.

This funding aimed to support country shows to bounce back bigger and better than before while ensuring that these local events could take place with required COVID-safe practices. The Country Shows Support Package was administered by the Department of Regional NSW.

The CSSP aimed to:

- support the costs of organising and running COVID-safe Country Shows in 2022,
- ensure shows could continue with increased funding certainty, and
- provide economic stimulus to local businesses and regional economies.

The package delivered tiered funding of up to $15,000 per applicant for small shows, $30,000 per applicant for medium shows, or $45,000 per applicant for large shows.

Eligibility

The program supported projects in all NSW Local Government Areas (LGAs) to apply, including Metro LGAs. Eligible applicants were Show Organising Committees who planned to hold a show in NSW in 2022 and were recognised by the Agricultural Societies Council of NSW Ltd,

Eligible costs included funding of costs related to COVID safety plans, locally incurred expenses, and costs associated with local arts and culture, as well as upgrades or maintenance of facilities that are critical to shows. A key element of CSSP cost eligibility was the focus on spending funds locally to boost local economies.

For costs to be eligible, they could be incurred from the time of submission of the application up to 30 days after the show.

Application and Assessment

CSSP was designed as a rolling grant program where applications could be submitted at any time during the application open period. Applications were assessed and approved in several tranches, rather than assessing all applications at once.

CSSP opened for applications on 14 December 2021 and closed on 29 April 2022. Due to severe flooding in multiple LGAs during the application phase, Show Societies in flood affected LGAs were given a one-month extension to submit applications (to 29 May 2022). An expedited application and assessment process occurred for shows planned to be held in January and February 2022. Assessment and notification of these applications was prioritised to ensure they could meet eligibility criteria in regard to event timing.

The assessment of CSSP applications was completed by the Program Team. As part of the rolling assessment process, the Program Team aimed to reach a decision on an outcome within ten days of receiving a complete application submission. Lists of recommended shows were sent to the Director for approval on a weekly basis. The team then notified grantees of the outcome within 3 days of Director approval.

CSSP implemented a combined application and funding deed process, where the approved application combined with a statutory declaration made up the funding deed. This combined

process is referred to as 'the **application process'** in this report.

Purpose of this Evaluation

This report is the Process and Outcomes Evaluation for the CSSP. It was undertaken by the evaluation team of: Elisa Trepp, Rani Austin, Leanne Perry and Kate Robinson between 20 November 2022, and 28 February 2023.

The purpose of this Process and Outcomes Evaluation is to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the design and implementation of CSSP and to summarise short- and medium-term outcomes of the CSSP funding. It covers the program design, implementation of the combined application and funding deed process and the perceived outcomes from the grantee perspective.

Evaluation Approach

The CSSP Evaluation used mixed methods of stakeholder engagement, document review and data analysis to develop triangulated findings for each of the Key Evaluation Questions.

At the time of writing of this report:

- 62% or 101 of the 163 grantees had completed the Completion Form
- 45% or 73 of the 163 grantees had responded to the Completion Survey, and
- 15 grantees had been interviewed.

The data sources used for the evaluation are listed below.

Stakeholder interviews

- Individual interview: former Director of Regional Growth Programs
- Individual and one small group interview: 15 grantees
- Small-group interview: CSSP Program Team
- Small-group interview: Grants Management Office
- Small group interview: two representatives of AgShows NSW

Document review

- Reviewed relevant program documents, guided by the Key Evaluation Questions
- Reviewed participant survey data collected from a subset of grantees (n=9)

Data analysis

- Analysed SmartyGrants project data, including application volume, project type, project location, application, notification and payment dates
- Analysed Completion Report data (n= 101) (qualitative & quantitative). All grantees were asked to fill in a Completion Report as part of their project acquittal within 30 days of completion of their project
- Analysed Completion Survey data (n= 73) (qualitative & quantitative). A link to the survey was included in the Completion Report.

Grantee interview selection

A sample of grantees from small, medium and large country shows was taken based on completion survey data. The sample also reflected the geographical distribution of country shows. Interview questions aimed to draw out detailed qualitative information on experiences of the grant process, as well as short-term outcomes for local communities.

The Department invited 26 applicants and grantees to interview to ensure an adequate sample size- out of these invitees, a total of 15 grantees were interviewed. Invitations were sent for either small group or individual interviews.

Interviews conducted with grantees:

- 2 respondents that had positive responses to completion survey questions joined a small group interview. Additional respondents from the completion survey pool were interviewed individually due to challenges in identifying suitable availabilities for a group session.
- 13 grantees who identified that they had collected participant survey data or had encountered challenges during the application process participated in individual interviews.

Invitations were sent to the following applicants and grantees; however they did not respond to the invitation and follow up communication:

- 1 eligible applicant was contacted who did not submit their drafted application.
- 4 grantees who had postponed their shows to dates in 2023 were contacted.

The Department also reviewed survey data that was collected by grantees. Of the 101 grantees who had submitted Completion Forms, 9 indicated that they had conducted their own surveys of show participants. One grantee attached survey data with their completion form. The Department contacted the remaining 8 grantees to obtain details of participant surveys and 3 provided some data. The participant survey data that was provided has not been included in this report as the data collected was not relevant to the outcomes being measured and the key evaluation questions.

Evaluation Findings

### Evaluation Domain 1: Overview of program results

Grantees

There was a total of 190 eligible Show Societies in NSW, of which 86% (n=163) received a CSSP grant.

Out of the 169 applications submitted, 163 were successful and 6 applications were ineligible. Out of the ineligible submitted applications, 2 applicants submitted a second successful application, 2 were not eligible Show societies, and the remaining 2 cancelled their Show before the assessment process was completed.

28 application forms were drafted but unsubmitted. 15 of these applicants submitted a second, successful application. 10 out of the 28 applications were drafted by ineligible organisations, whilst 3 eligible Show Societies commenced application drafts but did not submit them (Figure 1).

Figure 1 CSSP Applications
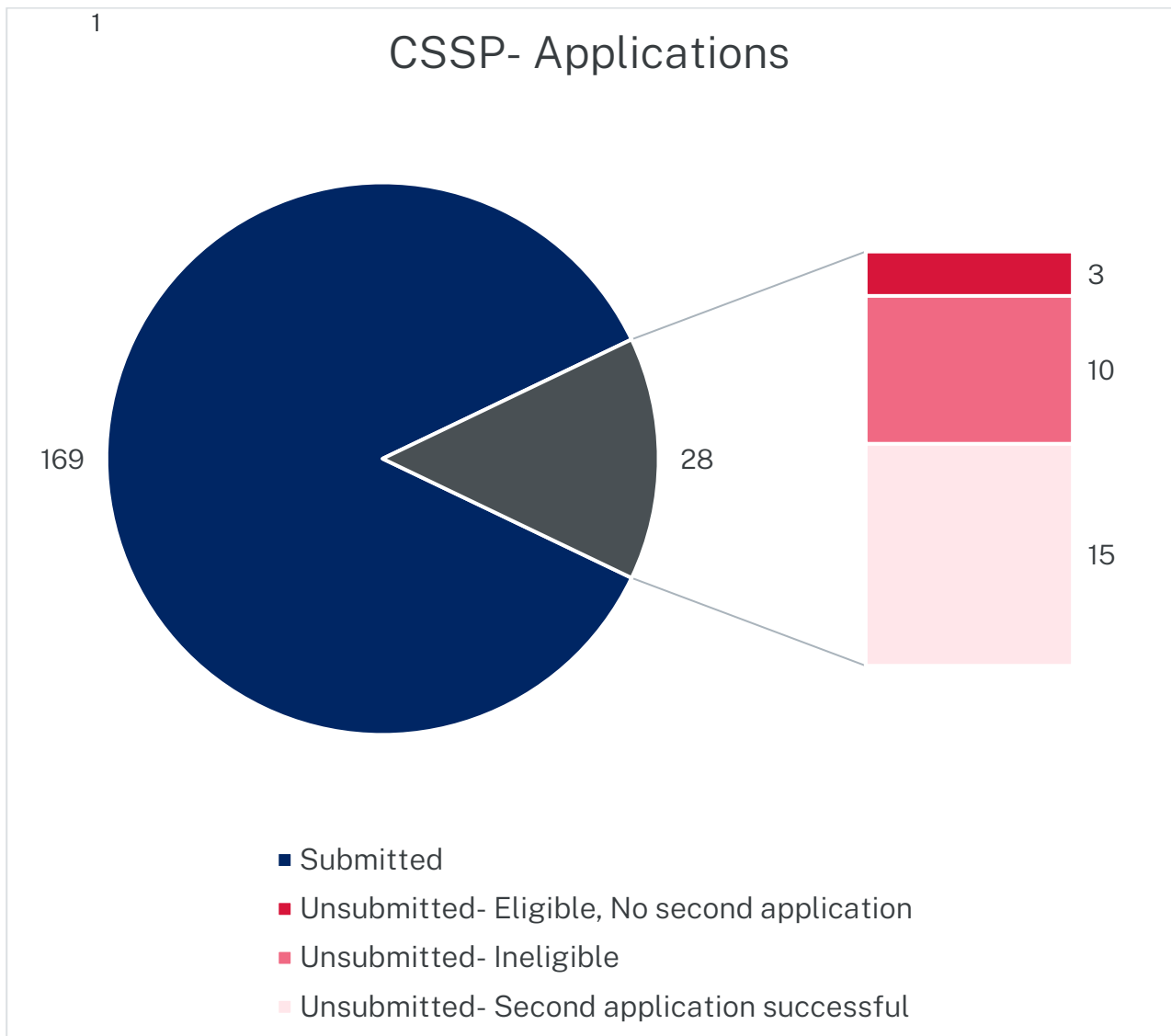
As shown in table 2, the majority of grantees were small shows (45%), medium sized shows made up 30% of grantees, and 25% of grantees were large shows.[3] Figure 2 shows the average grant value and number of grantees by Show size.

Table 2 Grant distribution by show size- Number and proportion

Show Size	$AU Maximum grant value	# of grantees	% of grants
Small (<2000 attendees)	$15,000	74	45%
Medium (2,000 to 4,999 attendees)	$30,000	49	30%
Large (5,000+ attendees)	$45,000	40	25%

Figure 2 Average grant value and number of grantees by show size
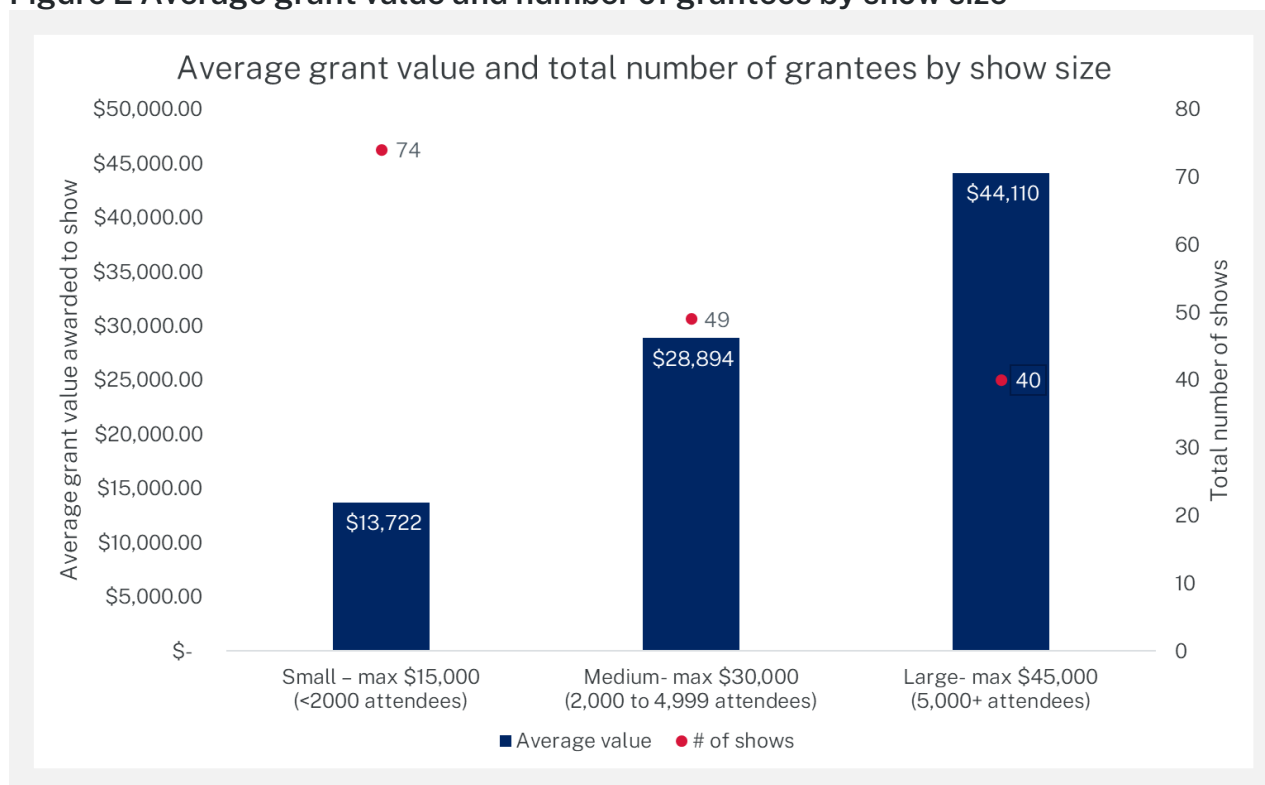
Shows took place across 91 NSW LGAs in 10 regions (table 3). The median number of shows per LGA was 1 and the mean number of shows per LGA was 1.79. The highest number of shows per LGA was in the Mid North Coast with a total of 6 shows.

More than half of all grantees (58%) were located in the Central West & Orana, Riverina Murray and Southeast & tablelands regions, which reflects eligible show society locations (table 3).

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[3] Shows with less than 2000 attendees were considered small, shows with 2,000-4,999 were considered medium, and shows with 5000 or more attendees were considered large. Data from previous shows on number of attendees was used to calculate the show size category.

Table 3 Grantees per NSW region

| Region	# of Shows	% of total shows
Central West & Orana	41	25%
Riverina Murray	27	17%
Southeast & Tablelands	26	16%
North Coast	19	12%
New England & North West	17	10%
Hunter	13	8%
Metro	8	5%
Illawarra-Shoalhaven	7	4%
Far West	4	2%
Central Coast	1	1%

Figure 3 Map of successful CSSP Shows

Country Shows Support Package - Successful Projects
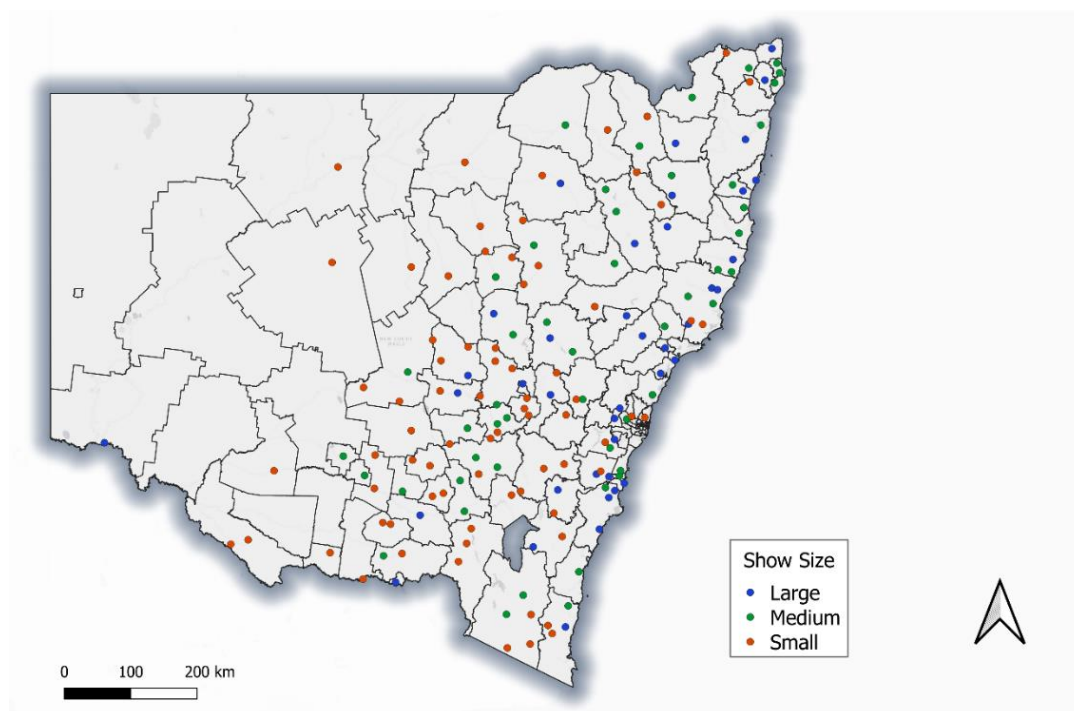
Program timeframes

The CSSP opened for applications on 14 December 2021 and closed on 29 April 2022. An extension was given to flood affected LGAs to submit by 29 May 2022. All applications were submitted by these dates. Figure 4 shows the monthly break down of applications submitted between the opening of the round and the final deadline.

Figure 4 CSSP Applications over time

CSSP: Number of application submissions over time
n=163
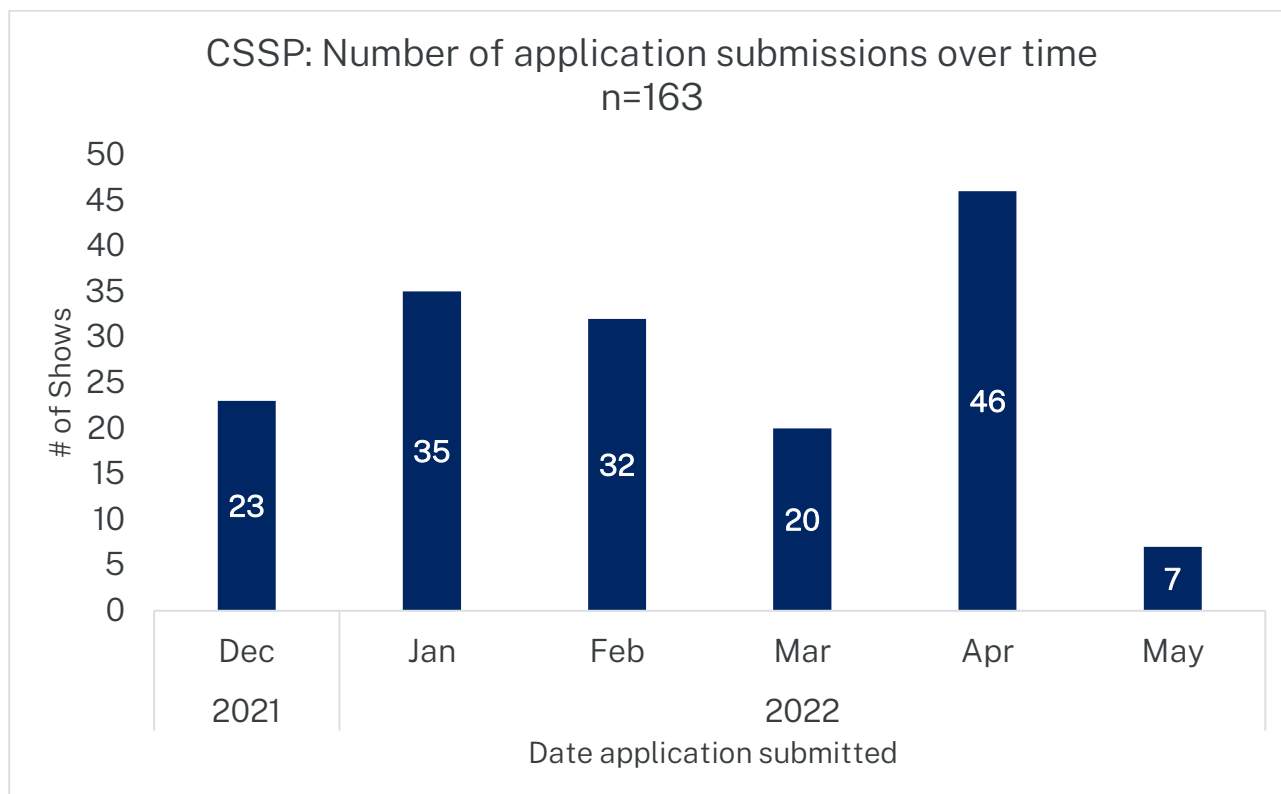
Extension of the grant closing date due to severe flooding in early 2022 was generally perceived positively by grantees:

> "We appreciated an extension to the application closure date due to flooding at the start of the year, and assistance from the staff when completing the application."
>
> Grantee- Completion survey

According to the CSSP guidelines, 'Applications for funding must be submitted before the 2022 show has taken place. Applications submitted after the show has been held are ineligible'. Only one show did not meet this criterion as the applicant was confused around the time extension for application in flood affected LGAs and left the application submission until after their show. After consultation with AgShows NSW and the probity advisor, the application was approved by the Program Team.[4]

Fast tracked process for shows in early 2022

There was an expedited application and assessment process for shows that were planned to be held in January and February 2022. These shows were prioritised for assessment and notification to ensure they would meet eligibility criteria regarding event timing.[5] Data in SmartyGrants confirms that all 15 applications for shows planned for early 2022 were approved and notified of outcomes by 23 December 2021. This enabled show committees to plan and pay for costs associated with their show in early 2022. The average time between application submission and notification for these 15 shows was 4 days.[6]

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[4] 40 - Approval email Assurance provider to Program Team

[5] 10 – FAQs, 3 - Critical Path

[6] SmartyGrants data: Date of notification – Date of submission for 15 applications submitted in December 2021

Assessment timeframes

Although there was generally a fast turnaround time between application submission and approval notification, there were some exceptions. The CSSP guidelines note that 'Assessments of applications is estimated to be completed within 10 Business Days of submitting a complete application. Applicants will be notified shortly after the assessment is complete.'[7]

On average, there were approximately 15 business days (21 calendar days) between the date of application and date of notification.[8] For those that had longer wait times for approval, this was mostly due to prioritising of applications according to show dates. The Programs Team confirmed that this reflected their strategy of prioritising assessments of applications with an earlier start date. For two shows that did not receive their notification until a few days prior to their show date, this was due to various parts of the application needing revision. Further detail on this data can be found in domain 5 on assessment below.

Acquittal & Completion reports

The Funding Terms and Conditions for CSSP note that grantees must acquit and fill in a Completion Form within 30 days after the show.[9] At the time of writing this report, there were 151 shows where more than 30 days had passed after their last show date, with 34% of these having overdue completion reports (52).[10]

On average, the 101 grantees that had filled in a Completion Form at the time of writing took 52 days after their last show date to submit the form. Only 27% of these grantees that submitted a Completion Form had done so within 30 days of the last show date (27).[11]

Multiple survey respondents noted that timeframes for acquittal were tight:

"Communication was great however we were only given a bit over a week to complete acquittal. With our current flooding situation this made it difficult to prioritise. Nothing against the funding body itself just a small timeframe given the situation."

Grantee- Completion Survey

"Four weeks to complete the acquittal process after the show date is not long enough. We have spent considerable time chasing invoices to ensure all accounts were paid for the acquittal process. Please consider a longer timeframe to complete the acquittal process."

Grantee- Completion Survey

In an interview with the Programs team, respondents agreed that the 30-day timeframe for acquittal was too short, especially when keeping in mind the fact that most grantees are volunteer organisations with limited resources. They also noted that there are no consequences for applicants that do not meet the timeframe:

"... I feel like we've been fairly flexible on extending [the timeframe for acquittal] if people have gotten in touch and said there's a problem and I'm not able to. It's not like there's any particular penalty."

Programs Team- Interview

[7] 8 - Program Guidelines

[8] SmartyGrants data: Date of notification – Date of submission. *Note that the 10-business day rule was for the assessment of complete applications, this was adhered to by the Programs Team. The 10 business days did not take into account the approval, notification or payment period.*

[9] 11- Funding Terms and Conditions

[10] SmartyGrants data- Completion Form dates compared to final Show dates

[11] SmartyGrants Completion Form data

Evaluation Domain 2:
Program design: Was the program design appropriate?

> **The program design was evidence based and aligned with broader program objectives. Key stakeholders were consulted to ensure that needs and timeframes of eligible organisations were incorporated in the program design phase.**

Considerations for future program design and implementation	Ensure key stakeholders are consulted in the program design phase to optimise application processes and integrate specific design elements related to needs of applicant organisations.

The Regional Recovery Package was announced on 14 October 2021. The purpose of the package was to support job growth and reconnect communities.

Part of the Regional Recovery package was a Regional Events and Festival Package, primarily designed to increase tourist numbers and enhance community members' enjoyment of local townships, connectedness, and feelings of belonging in the context of recovery from COVID-19 restrictions.[12]

The CSSP is aligned with economic and social outcomes outlined in the Regional Events and Festivals Package under the Regional Recovery Package.

The decision to support country shows as part of this package was strongly influenced by the positive community outcomes reported in the Drought Stimulus Package (DSP) outcomes evaluation. Feedback from the DSP round of country shows funding fed into the CSSP program design and enhancement.

> "The original concept was essentially to build on what had been done under the Drought Stimulus Program and expand that to all country shows. The desire was to support shows… that had been unable to be held principally due to COVID in 2020 and 2021and to give communities an opportunity to come together after the isolation of lockdown in late 2020 and 2021."
>
> Programs Team- Interview

In an interview with the former Regional Programs Director, the Evaluation Team heard that the key drivers for selecting the CSSP as part of the Regional Recovery Package were that the package could be rolled out across many communities across NSW, it was a tested model, there was a definite demand for another show support package, and that outcomes related to social connectedness had been demonstrated through the DSP.

> "Funding Shows that were recognised by the Agricultural Show Society would provide us with a neat package where we could inject money across 190 communities, so it would have an economic stimulus but also reach… communities effectively as well."
>
> Former Regional Programs Director- Interview

The CSSP design expanded on the DSP Country Show funding design by increasing the number of eligible organisations to all show societies in NSW (compared to 100 for DSP) and increasing the maximum amount of funding per show from $5,000 (DSP Country Show grant)

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[12] RRP Framework - Program specific outcomes

to $45,000 (CSSP).[13] In addition, the Programs Team reviewed the Federal Country Shows grant to ensure that the CSSP would not overlap with this funding.[14]

Co-design with AgShows NSW ensured that program design was appropriate for eligible organisations

AgShows NSW (ASC) is the peak body for agricultural shows in NSW, providing support and services for shows across the State. The Program Team contacted representatives of ASC in the program design phase, which set the stage for ASC representatives to be involved in designing and supporting CSSP applicants from the outset. Initially the Team met with ASC representatives weekly, although the frequency decreased over time.[15]

During an interview with ASC representatives, they highlighted a range of ways in which the ASC supported applicants and provided valuable input into the design of CSSP. This included:

- communicating show committee needs and priorities to DRNSW

- ensuring simplicity of the application process

- providing data on show sizes to inform the tiered funding categories

- providing public liability insurance for shows, and

- distributing communications around the CSSP application process to show committees.

ASC representatives explained that they consulted with some of the show committees in the design phase to understand what the priorities and needs were at the community level.

> "After we were first contacted by DRNSW about CSSP, we had a few days to reach out to shows and ask them what would make their show bigger and better, and what would help the wellbeing of their community. We were involved right from the outset, which was good so we could share the challenges with the volunteers and help them with planning what kinds of items they could claim in their grant'
>
> Former President AgShows NSW

ASC also provided input and guidance on the key shows that needed to be prioritised in assessment:

> "...we needed to make sure that 10 shows that were happening in January were able to apply before Christmas in order to be able to get the money before their events early in the year. [By working together on this] the Program Team understood more about the shows and the challenges with it and then carried on with this [prioritisation process]."
>
> Former President AgShows NSW

The ASC representatives noted that they were motivated to simplify grant documentation and processes for applicants, as this had been onerous for show committees in other grant programs. In their view, the CSSP process had much clearer documentation which was echoed by all the grantees interviewed.

> "The close collaboration with ASC enabled the fast roll out of the grant to show committees in NSW and facilitated their additional support to grantees.

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[13] 2 - CSSP 2022 Project Overview

[14] 41 - Supporting Agricultural shows and field days- Australian government

[15] Programs Team interview

"The relationship between AgShows NSW and DRNSW worked very well... this was one of the smoothest grant programs we've seen."   Former President AgShows NSW

Alignment of process and program objectives

The evaluation found that the program objectives were clearly documented in the program guidelines[16] and that program design elements and processes were aligned with these objectives.

To simplify and speed up the process of approving applications and to expedite the grants administration process, approvals of successful applications were delegated to the Director, Regional Growth Programs. Successful applicants were notified by the Executive Director of Regional Programs. A simplified, one-step application and agreement process was also developed.

This approach was considered appropriate given the program's low funding value and low risk profile. This approach was selected to make the process less onerous on applicants, and more efficient for the Programs Team so that they could process applications quickly. The simplified process was clearly summarised and approved.

Combining these 2 processes saved time for applicants, however the combined process resulted in the need for some additional support for applicants that was not anticipated:

"We were a little bit thwarted from what had been intended to be a one touch process for applicants, because it meant that we also became the administrators of invoices in a way which wouldn't normally be part of our function... in the end we did have quite a lot of back and forth with applicants on a range of matters, which also reflected the fact that that in this case applicants were a particular group with lots of volunteers."

Programs Team Interview

The CSSP design ensured shows could continue with increased funding certainty by paying the grant as soon as possible after an application was successful. For successful applicants, the grant agreement was established when the Notification Letter to Successful Applicants was provided. Establishment of the agreement triggered a single payment of the approved grant amount.[17]

Program design also supported stimulus to local businesses and economies with the guidelines clearly stating that at least 50% of costs incurred needed to be made locally.[18] Completion Report data confirms that grantees spent more than half of the grant funding on local costs.[19]

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[16] 8 - Guidelines

[17] 4 - Brief- Executive Director- Program documents

[18] 8 - Guidelines

[19] SmartyGrants - Completion Report data - Completed Show expenditure and question 'Can you confirm that at least 50% of grant expenditure was spent locally?'

Evaluation domain 3:
Program administration: Was the program set up for success?

The CSSP program was generally set up for success with adequate administration in place, however some improvements could be made.

Considerations for future program design and implementation	- Ensure that roles and responsibilities for teams involved in administration are clear when implementing new program design and project assessment methodology. - When a program is targeting applicants with limited experience in grant writing, it is recommended to plan additional time for project assessment, as there may be additional clarifying communication required with applicants.

Project Planning

The evaluation found that the Country Shows Support Package had appropriate project planning in place. Program overviews and briefs sent to the Executive Director covered key elements of project planning and design, and Critical Path documentation shows clear tasks and timeframes related to various aspects of the program planning.[20] The evaluation found evidence of a communications plan being developed and executed, including statistics on broad reach of a social media campaign that promoted the CSSP.[21] Although it was not formalised, a risk register was drafted, covering the risks and related impacts. The CSSP was defined as low risk as individual grants were under $100,000 and applicant organisations are community organisations.[22] The administrative processes such as the combined application and deed process and the absence of an assessment panel reflected the low risk profile of the program.

Adaptive management

The CSSP demonstrated adaptive management to emerging issues by integrating key stakeholder feedback early in the program design and the decision to provide an extension of time to applicants impacted by natural disaster. The ASC advised to prioritise the assessment of shows planned for early 2022 to ensure their eligibility, and this was implemented through an 'expedited assessment process' enabling the prioritisation of these shows.[23]

Resourcing

Resourcing provided to administer the CSSP was generally perceived as appropriate by the Programs Team. In an interview, team members agreed that the program was relatively easy to administer due to the 'one step' grant agreement design. On the other hand, timeframes were condensed in order to launch the program at a time where it would be able to support shows taking place in early 2022. This was viewed as a challenge. The team also noted that the administration of CSSP was more resource intensive than expected due to the amount of work added by having to check which costs were eligible and the additional amount of assistance required by applicants.[24]

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[20] 1- Program Design Brief, 2- Project Overview, 3- Critical Path

[21] 30- Communication Action Plan, 36- Social media ad plan and reach statistics

[22] Recommended risk management processes: https://environmentnswgov.sharepoint.com/sites/Regional-RDP/SitePages/gppm-risk-considerations.aspx#risk-register-and-matrices

[23] 2- Project overview, 14- ASC slide pack, slide 11

[24] Programs Team interview

> "A team member spent a lot of time explaining a lot to [applicants], even though the instructions were there a lot of them still needed things repeated or explained. Examples of an invoice being submitted without a date and then that's going back to them and saying alright, so you need to put a date on this invoice and then the invoice would come back with the date but then another aspect which was correct the first time was missed and then we had to go back to them again. Little things like this happened a lot."
>
> Programs Team Interview

This additional support stretched existing program resourcing at some points in the process, which meant that some internal deadlines were not able to be met.

Governance framework & clarity of roles and responsibilities

A clear governance and probity framework was in place for the administration of the CSSP. The evaluation reviewed the probity plan and program brief specifying the engagement of Nexia Australia as an external advisor.[25]

The evaluation heard that roles and responsibilities in the CSSP program administration were generally clear, however there were some unclear processes around the assessments of time and scope variations. According to a member of the Programs Team, this was primarily since the role of the team was quite different compared to other programs. A document describing the process for project variations notes that the Programs Team would handle scope variations, and the Grants Management Office (GMO) would handle time variations.[26] A member of the Programs Team noted that this process was challenging at times:

> "When it came to time variations, even though it's meant to be GMO, we [would] often be contacted, liaise with GMO, then send out a letter from [the Executive] advising them of what is available, and then we would ask GMO to take over the process from there and put in a project variation request…it just took a lot of work to get the variation process in place and to get everyone clear about who was doing what because we had taken on some of the accountabilities the grants management would normally do."
>
> Programs team Interview

From the GMO team's perspective on the other hand, the variations process for CSSP was perceived as easy and quick due to the flexible scope of CSSP. In an interview with the GMO team, it was explained that for other programs, grantees sometimes need to go through a scope variation process that can take up to a month:

> "[The] looseness of the scope… makes it a lot easier both on us when we're reviewing everything, and on the grantees, because if they need to change something, then they can do it, they don't have to go through what could potentially be a month of back and forth between us and them trying to get to somewhere that we're both happy with… So that's been quite helpful."
>
> GMO Team Interview

As the roles taken on by teams were different from other programs, there were some processes that could have been clearer for members of the Programs Team who are usually not involved in reviewing variations. The GMO team is accustomed to reviewing variations requests.[27] A recommendation for future programs of this nature would be to clarify roles and responsibilities of internal teams when implementing new program designs and team roles.

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[25] 20- Probity Plan, 4- ED Brief- Program Documents, 40- Email Nexia to program team

[26] 45- Process for Variations

[27] GMO Team interview

Evaluation domain 4: Program Application and Funding Deed Process: Was the combined application and funding deed process fit-for-purpose?

The combined application and funding deed process was generally fit for purpose.	
Considerations for future program design and implementation	- When implementing a combined application and funding deed process, allow extra time for assessments towards the deadline for applications as applicants may wait until the last moment to send in their application. - Proactively communicate with the Finance Team to review timeframes of payments across financial years to minimise delays and improve communication with grantees on payment dates.

Program communication

The CSSP was actively promoted via direct emails and social media.[28] As agricultural show committees in NSW were a clear-cut eligible group, ASC was able to communicate the grant opportunity to them quickly and easily via their mailing lists.

> "Generally, the promotion of the grant ahead of time via ASC and social media was great."
>
> Grantee interview

The Communications Team at DRNSW developed and implemented a communications plan and all NSW Show societies were sent emails and reminders to apply for the grant. Documentation in a project tracker shows that follow up emails were sent to most shows that did not apply.[29] Social media campaign results show that promotion of the CSSP via social media reached many people.[30]

When interviewing ASC representatives, the evaluation team heard that they thought the shows that did not apply for the grant may have missed the opportunity because they were not checking their emails at the time of program promotion. They noted that committee members are generally volunteers that work at specific times of the year and tend not to check show emails year-round. In this light, the fact that 86% of the eligible organisations received the CSSP funding can also be taken as evidence for strong program communication.

Program Guidelines

Stakeholder interviews and surveys provided mixed feedback on the CSSP guidelines. Some were positive:

> "There was generally a very clear framework and guidelines so that was appreciated."
>
> Grantee interview

However, others felt that the guidelines were too broad:

> "Communication was good however I feel the guidelines left a lot to be determined by the recipient and easily misunderstood."
>
> Grantee Survey

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[28] ASC interview

[29] 3 - Comms action plan, 22- Ops Tracker

[30] 36a- Communications Plan media campaign results

The Programs Team also expressed that the guidelines were too broad in their Post Implementation Review notes. The Team listed a range of recommendations for improvements to the guidelines.[31] The key points for improvement were:

- Add a clarification in the guidelines that subsidiary events are not eligible applicants

- Consider excluding events that have received discretionary funding by a local member where the funding allocation could be much higher for them

- Improve the definition of 'locally incurred expenses' as it was too broad in the CSSP guidelines.

- Include guidance on 'local' for cross-border communities specifically.

- The 'upgrades and maintenance' category could specify infrastructure to be more specific.

- Include examples of correctly rendered invoices (one for GST registered and one for not GST registered) as this would save a lot of going back to applicants.

- Review the section on successful applicants to ensure timeframes and language reflect the intended process. For example, the 30-day timeframe for submitting completion reports was identified as very short by the team and not adhered to by a significant proportion of grantees.

Clarity & appropriateness of combined grant agreement process

The CSSP design included a one-step grant agreement process, which meant that the application form together with the signed Terms and Conditions formed the grant agreement. Applications assessed by the Program Team were sent to the Director, Regional Growth Programs for approval, after which the grantee would receive notification and payment as soon as possible. This design was implemented in this program to allocate and pay funding quickly and resulted in fast processing of applications.

An assessment panel was not required, as the Program Team conducted the assessments on a rolling basis. This resulted in quick turnaround times, where the team aimed to take a decision on applications within 10 business days of submission.

Most of the grantees interviewed were pleasantly surprised at the ease and speed of the application process.

"After the application was approved, I hadn't realised that the money came in so quickly- I was surprised and thought we would have to send through invoices before getting the money as has been the process with other grants."

Grantee interview

"Oh, [the process] was fantastic. Yeah, I thought that was really quick. I'm pretty sure it was sort of under a month from our application being submitted to being notified. So yeah, that was great.'

Grantee interview

The general process was experienced as positive by grantees, with some noting that this was the easiest and quickest application process that they had encountered.

"This was the best application I ever filled out and I've filled out a few! It was clear, straightforward, no difficult information. It's usually a burden to fill in funding applications but this one was amazing."

Grantee interview

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[31] 9- Post implementation review

In the Completion Survey, respondents also noted the ease of the application process:

> "The application form was easy to fill out, the funds were delivered promptly, and the acquittal was straightforward."
>
> Grantee- completion survey

> "Having applied for grants in the past, this one was by far the simplest and gave the quickest response as to the success or otherwise of the application."
>
> Grantee- completion survey

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback, one suggestion that came up multiple times during grantee interviews and in the Completion Survey was that electronic signing would be helpful to implement as the process of getting signatures and scanning documents drew out the process:

> "Our application was a bit late as I was working from home and needed to get into the office to print, and then needed a witness to sign and then rescan, which was annoying and time consuming. We're all volunteers and short on time."
>
> Grantee interview

As noted in the Administration section above, members of the Program Team noted that although the process was designed to be quick, the implementation from their perspective was more challenging than expected, as there was substantial back and forth communication with some applicants that took time. The implementation of the recommendations listed in the 'program guidelines' section above as well as adding an option for electronic signing would assist in retaining the efficiencies gained by combining in the application and funding deed process.

Funding Payments

Data in SmartyGrants shows that 38 of the grantees (23%) received their grant payments after their show had taken place. The time lag between the notification date[32] and payment date[33] ranged from 7 to 110 days. Most of these shows were paid after the show date because they had submitted their applications only days before their show was taking place. Just under half of the grantees that received payment after their show had taken place received this within 4 weeks of notification (18 shows, 47%).

Four shows that had their payments delayed to July or August in the 22/23 financial year also had the longest time lag between notification and the payment date, ranging from 11 to 16 weeks (figure 5).

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[32] The notification date is the date that a notification was sent to grantees that their application was successful.

[33] The payment date is the 'date finance confirmed payment released' from SmartyGrants.

Figure 5 Grantees with payments after Show date
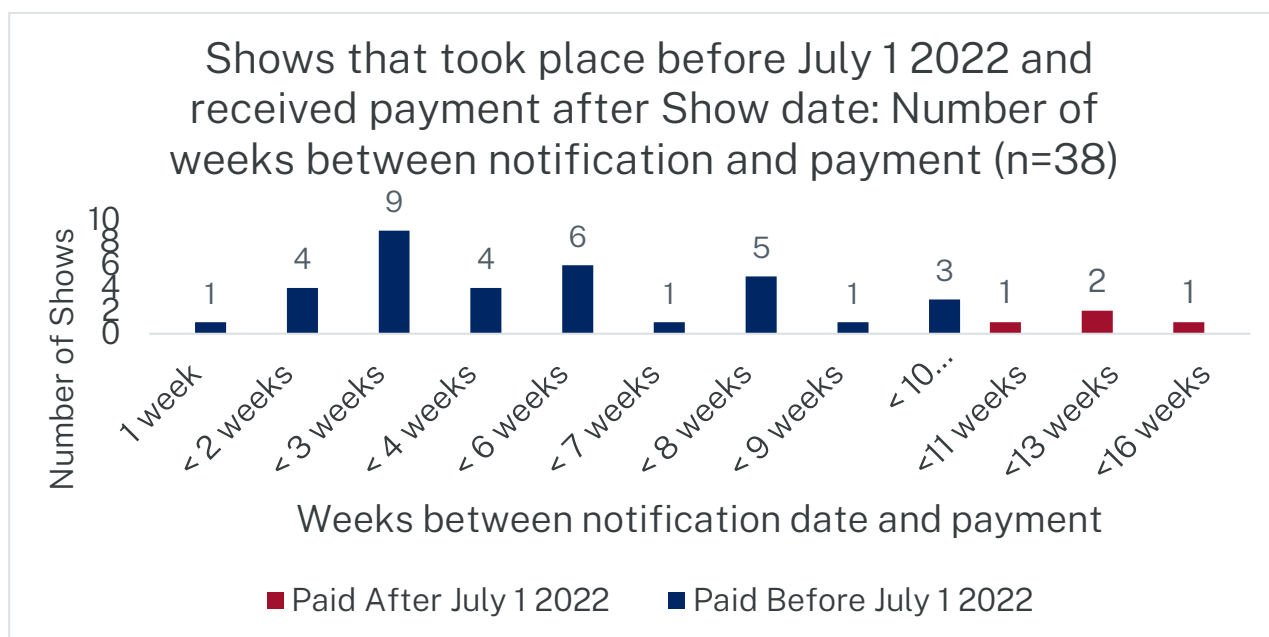
Some of the grantees shared that the information on payment delays was not communicated proactively.

"Payment of grant was only completed after contact."

Grantee Completion Survey

There were some misunderstandings as payments were delayed to the new financial year (starting 1 July 2022). The evaluation found that the reason for the payment delays was related to a lack of clarity around payment processing and budget allocation across the 21/22 and 22/23 financial year.[34] Although requests for payment had been submitted via SmartyGrants, the Finance Team was not able to finalise the payments until the following financial year as the funding profile for the 21/22 year had been reached. The Program Team was not aware of this and reassured the grantees that they would be paid before the end of the financial year. When the funding arrived later than expected, this meant that some shows had to use their own funds to cover costs whilst they had expected to receive money earlier.

"Late payment was the only issue... the show was in May; we got the outcome notification in early April and were told that money would be paid before end of Financial Year. When I called the Department, I was told- 'oh sorry we forgot about you, and you missed the pay run.' Luckily, we had enough cashflow to manage but it wasn't great."

Grantee interview

The DRNSW Finance Team, confirmed the division of CSSP funds across the two financial years and the funding stop in June 2022. Effectively, this meant that no more money was paid to grantees at this time. This was not communicated clearly to the whole organisation,[35] which meant that although this was clear to the GMO Team[36], the Programs Team was not aware of the implications in terms of payment timing and did not communicate this to grant recipients.

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[34] 42- RRP per financial year

[35] Finance Team interview

[36] GMO Team interview

Payment data from SmartyGrants shows that 24 shows that were planned to take place between August to November 2022 had been paid before 1 July 2022 (figure 6). Based on this data, a recommendation for future rounds of funding would be to clarify the division of budget allocation across financial years with the GMO and Finance teams prior to assessments and requests for payments. Projects could be identified where payment can be delayed to prioritise payment to those projects taking place earlier in the year.

Figure 6 Financial Year of show payment by Show start date[37]

Shows paid in 21/22 FY vs 22/23 FY by Show Start Date (n=163)

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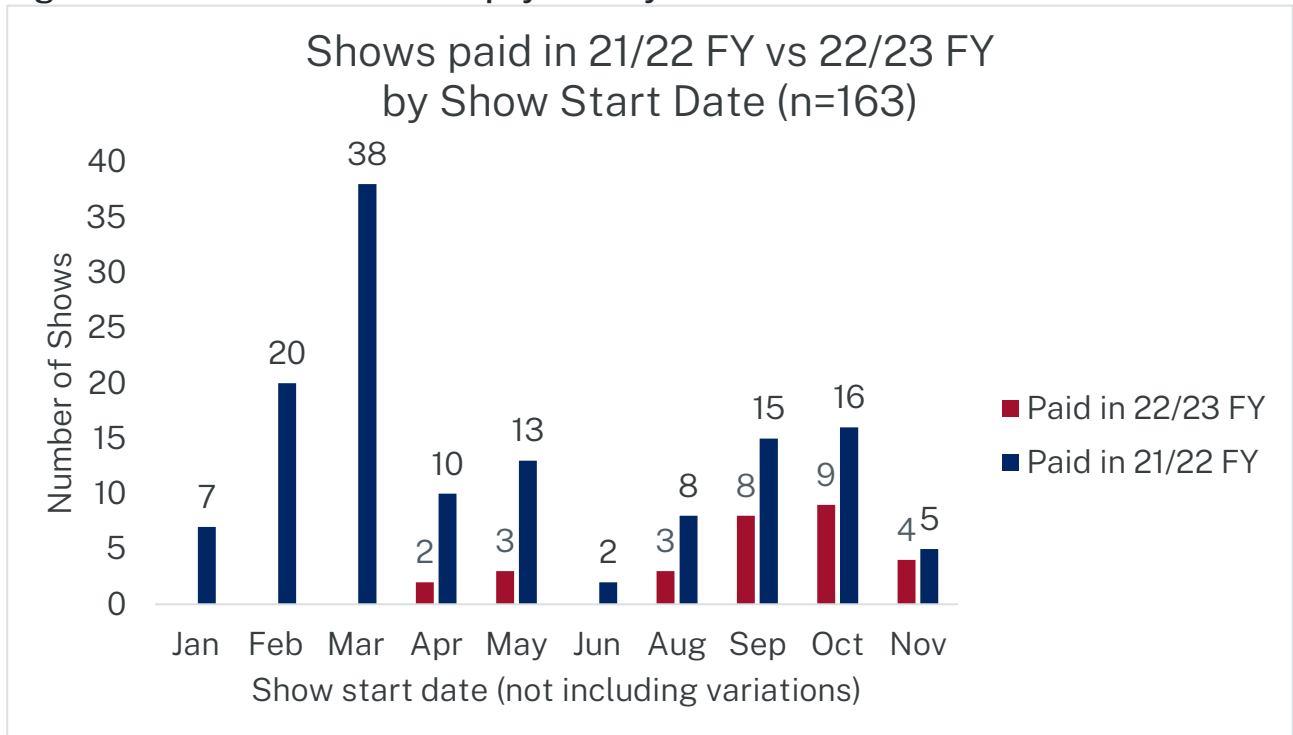
37 Note that one additional Show in May was paid in 22/23 FY and is not included in figure 5. This was an exception where the Show applied after the Show start date which was approved by Nexia (40- email Nexia to Programs Team)

23

Evaluation domain 5: Application Assessment Process: Were applications assessed appropriately and transparently?

Applications were assessed appropriately and transparently, however assessment guidelines could include additional detail to support assessors.

Considerations for future program design and implementation	- When implementing an assessment methodology where programs teams are performing assessments, ensure that detailed guidelines are made available that include requirements for invoicing.

Approval process

The evaluation found the application approval process to be appropriate. The assessment of applications to CSSP took place on a rolling basis, with the Program Team aiming to take a decision on outcomes within ten days of application submission. After Director approval, grantees were notified as quickly as possible. The assessment methodology was well documented[38], and there is clear evidence of approvals being batched and sent to the Director for approval to notify applicants of their outcome as soon as possible.[39]

Eligibility criteria

The eligibility and assessment criteria for CSSP generally enabled objective assessment, as there was a very specific cohort of 190 organisations that were eligible for the grant. On the other hand, the eligible costs were broad, which posed some challenges for grantees and the Program Team.[40] The rationale for the broad eligibility criteria was an identified need for shows to receive assistance for both infrastructure costs as well as elements of the shows themselves. After two years of cancelled shows due to COVID 19 restrictions, the broad criteria would allow support for show societies that had been affected by the restrictions.[41]

Grantees were able to use CSSP funds for a wide array of goods and services which allowed for flexibility and customisation based on the grantee's needs. The final cost overview in the Completion Report shows that the most common cost categories used by grantees were 'locally incurred expenses' and 'costs to support show exhibits and events' (Table 2).

Table 2 Cost categories- Count of occurrence in completion report

Cost Category	Number of times listed in completion report	% of cost items listed
Locally incurred expenses (e.g. hiring of equipment and other services)	170	29%
Costs to support show exhibits and events	108	18%
Contributions to awards and prizes for competitions	76	13%
Marketing and promotion material for the show (using local suppliers only)	65	11%

[38] 5- Assessment Methodology

[39] 4- Brief, Executive Director

[40] Eligible costs listed in Appendix C

[41] Interview- Director of Regional programs

Cost Category	Number of times listed in completion report	% of cost items listed
Upgrades or maintenance to facilities that are deemed critical for the Show	64	11%
Costs associated with supporting locally based arts, culture, and musical offerings	46	8%
Costs related to implementation of COVID-19 Safety (e.g. purchase of equipment and supplies, or security services)	23	4%
Subsidised stall fees for locally based community organisations and local businesses	18	3%
Other: Entertainment, first aid, fireworks	13	2%

The CSSP criteria specified that costs were to be incurred locally as much as possible. This was perceived as a challenge for some grantees, especially those in small towns or living near the NSW border.

"Being a small town. what's available to you as far as trying to keep things local is a challenge…I rang [DRNSW] and made inquiries and I was told to do something and then later on I got [the application] back and they said- no, you need to do it this way. There was a differing of opinion [on what was local]."

Grantee interview

These stakeholders often reached out to DRNSW to check if the costs they were covering were acceptable according to the criteria.

"[We only needed some] clarification…on the definition of using local providers, because we're a small town… so whether us obtaining our goods that we wanted to claim from [a larger town] was still considered local, and we were told yes it was. I couldn't find this information anywhere in the outlines of the grant … maybe we needed a radius indicated."

Grantee interview

When we interviewed ASC representatives and asked about the main issue that grantees contacted them about, they also mentioned that 'sourcing local' was challenging for some of the grantees:

"Some [applicants] were struggling- like those in the border towns on the Victorian border because they source goods and services from just over the border… that was challenge because NSW government wants to invest in NSW, so there was some confusion on where they could source things. Sourcing from Officeworks for example was turned down so they had to find something else to put into their show."

Former president AgShows NSW

The guidelines include "locally incurred expenses (e.g. hiring of equipment and other services)" as one of the eligible cost categories.[42]

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[42] 8- Program Guidelines

In an interview with the Programs Team, team members noted that they found this eligible cost category to be too broad, as it allowed for most costs to be included.

According to the Programs Team and the post implementation review notes, the meaning of 'locally incurred costs' was broadened as part of a communication team edit of the CSSP guidelines. Evidence of this change could not be verified via documentation.

The team found that checking individual invoices was time consuming and that there was a lack of clarity around the requirements for invoices with or without GST included.

The team suggested in their post implementation review to have a 'documented assessment/ brief process (step-by-step guide)' which would also act as a checklist.[43]

Documentation of assessment decisions

Decisions for each application are clearly documented and consistent with the guidelines. Letters to eligible and ineligible organisations were sent and saved for each show that applied.[44] Decisions and correspondence dates were tracked in an 'operations tracker' Excel sheet and saved on SmartyGrants with individual applicant documents.

For the 4 ineligible applicants, the tracker also clearly notes why they were ineligible, in line with the CSSP guidelines.[45]

12 shows were postponed to dates in 2023, 10 of which submitted time variation request forms in SmartyGrants.[46]

At the time of writing of this report, the GMO Team has confirmed that they will follow up with the 2 other shows that have unsubmitted time variation forms in SmartyGrants.[47]

Timeliness of communication to applicants

The evaluation found that decisions were generally communicated to applicants in a timely manner although there were some exceptions.

The guidelines state that *'Assessments of applications is estimated to be completed within 10 Business Days of submitting a complete application. Applicants will be notified shortly after the assessment is complete'*.[48]

The average number of calendar days between the date of application and the date of notification was 21 days (Figure 7 below).

The shortest amount of time between application and notification was 3 days and the longest was 68 days. [49]

This data indicates that on average, notifications were sent out within the timeframes noted in the guidelines.

Further data review showed that shows that were notified more than one month after submitting their application mostly took place in the second half of 2022.

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[43] 9- Post implementation review

[44] 17 Letter to successful applicants, 18- Letter to unsuccessful applicants

[45] 22- Application and Assessment Ops Tracker

[46] SmartyGrants data- CSSP variations

[47] 47- GMO confirmation email

[48] 8- Program Guidelines

[49] 22- Application and Assessment Ops Tracker compared to 'date of application' in SmartyGrants data

Program Team staff confirmed that this reflected their strategy of prioritising assessments of applications with an earlier start date.[51]

Figure 7 Days between application and notification

Number of days between application submitted and approval notification (n=163)
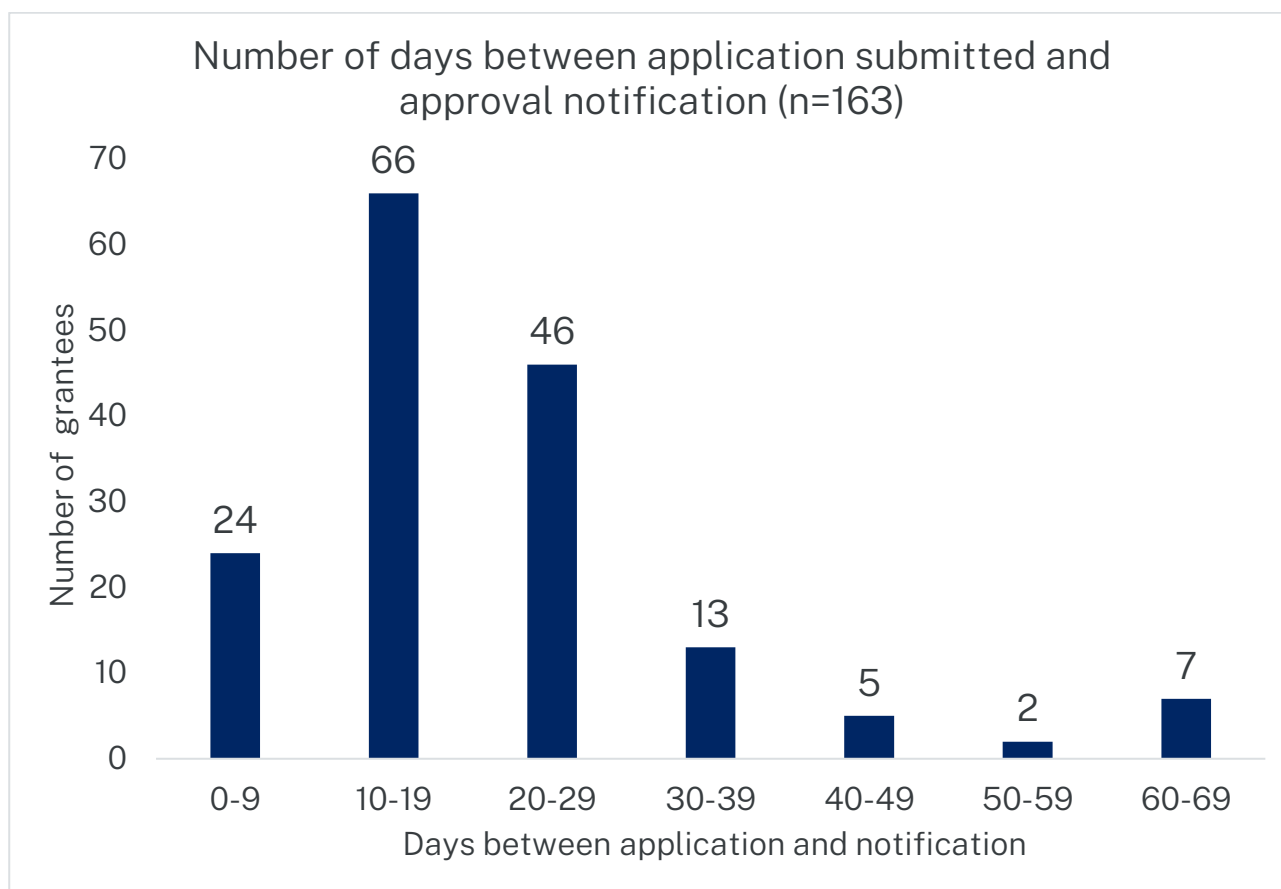
Data on show dates and notification timeframes confirms that late notification took place for 8 shows that were planned in the first half of 2022.[52] Six of these delays were due to applications being submitted shortly before the show date.

For the 2 other shows, one was notified 4 days before their show and the other was notified 9 days after their show. The operations tracker shows evidence of various amendments that were required to the applications which resulted in delayed approval and outcome notification.[53]

Even though SmartyGrants data supports the fact that approval timeframes were generally adhered to, grantee perceptions of the timeframes were diverse. When we asked one grantee how they perceived the time between submitting their application and receiving a notification, they responded that

"It was fantastic and very quick. It was under a month from submitting to being notified."

Grantee interview

Other respondents noted the tight timeframes around receiving a notification of their grant outcome in the completion survey.

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[51] Verbal confirmation by Programs Team staff at Reflection Session on 28/2/2023

[52] Late notification was defined as the grantee being notified of their outcome on or after their show date.

[53] 22- Application and Assessment Ops tracker (CSSP22-095, CSSP-125)

> "The project felt rushed due to the funding notification letter only been received 5 days prior to our show and with the acquittal process due 4 weeks post the show."
>
> Grantee- completion survey

One grantee that was interviewed noted that she had expected the notification sooner and she rang DRNSW 5 days before the show to check in. She was aware that the additional communication between her organisation and DRNSW had extended the application process and hence the outcome notification.

> "I expected the notification a bit sooner as I put in the application a month before the show. Someone else I spoke with had a very quick process with the outcome coming back within a week, so thought it would be quicker. The back and forth around eligible costs made it a bit longer."
>
> Grantee interview

Evaluation domain 6: Monitoring and Evaluation: Can the program be effectively evaluated?

Appropriate outcome data collection mechanisms were not in place.	
Considerations for future program design and implementation	When measuring social outcomes, plan for data collection at the appropriate level – sometimes data will need to be collected at project participant level. Guidance could be provided in the form of a list of survey questions, or an online survey hosted by DRNSW. Outcome guidance to grant recipients should be provided as part of the funding terms and conditions.

Program Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

A Program Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the CSSP was developed at program commencement. This plan stated that an outcome guidance note would be developed and shared with grantees however, these guidelines were not developed or shared with grantees. This resulted in limited data gathering by grantees, and no data being collected directly from show visitors to measure community outcomes. Reporting requirements outlined in the CSSP Funding Terms & Conditions were basic (*Section 1.2*), noting that grantees must submit a completion report within 30 days of the show being held, which includes reporting on attendee figures. In addition, section 1.21 noted that grantees 'must participate in program evaluation reporting as and when requested by the Department'.

Outcome measurement

Responses to the completion survey echo the lack of guidance on outcome measurement. Two respondents disagreed with the statement 'The department provided clear guidance on how to measure the outcome of your show' and 7 responses were neutral. The respondents noted that there was no guidance provided on how to measure show outcomes:

> "We will be trying to survey our community later in the year on the outcomes of the show, but the initial grant instructions did not give clear guidance on how this could be done efficiently, by our volunteers.'
>
> Grantee- Completion survey

> "There wasn't clear outcome measurement guidance for this grant. I would like to know what to do ahead of time- For example, give a list of questions so we have an idea of what is needed afterwards, and we can plan.'
>
> Grantee- interview

> "These requirements only became clear to us after the completion of the show as we opened the relevant link at that time. In future there needs to be clearer and more direct communication prior to the event in terms of the reporting requirements"
>
> Grantee- completion survey

In the CSSP completion report, grantees were asked if they had collected survey data from show visitors. Nine grantees responded that they had conducted surveys. As part of the stakeholder consultation, the Department requested this survey data. Four respondents provided data or a summary of the data.

Grantees asked questions on show content and visitor numbers but did not collect data on community wellbeing outcomes. As the completion reports were not available to applicants at

the point in time of applying for the grant, they would not have been able to anticipate this question beforehand.

As the Evaluation Team was aware of a lack of outcome data collection when planning the stakeholder consultation, grantee interview questions were tailored to collect qualitative data on community outcomes. This data is summarised in the *Evaluation domain 9: Effectiveness* below.

To measure community outcomes of the CSSP and other programs under the Regional Recovery Package specifically, further data may need to be collected as part of the RRP strategic evaluation.

Evaluation domain 7: Project Delivery:
Have projects been delivered as intended?

| Projects are being delivered as intended and in line with guidelines.	
Considerations for future program design and implementation	- Where grantees are primarily volunteer-based organisations, it is recommended to implement longer than average acquittal timeframes to accommodate time limitations of volunteers. - The reporting template or guidelines on reporting requirements should be provided as part of the application process.

Project delivery

The majority of the CSSP sponsored shows were held in the 2022 calendar year as per the CSSP guidelines (150, 92%). All of the shows were planned to take place in 2022, however wet weather and flooding across NSW caused the cancellation of several shows; one show was cancelled due to a COVID-19 outbreak in the community, 4 shows were postponed to a later date in 2022 and 12 shows were postponed to dates in 2023 (figure 7).[54] Most shows were held in autumn and spring, with more than half of the shows taking place in March, September and October of 2022.

Figure 8 Grantee final show dates including variations
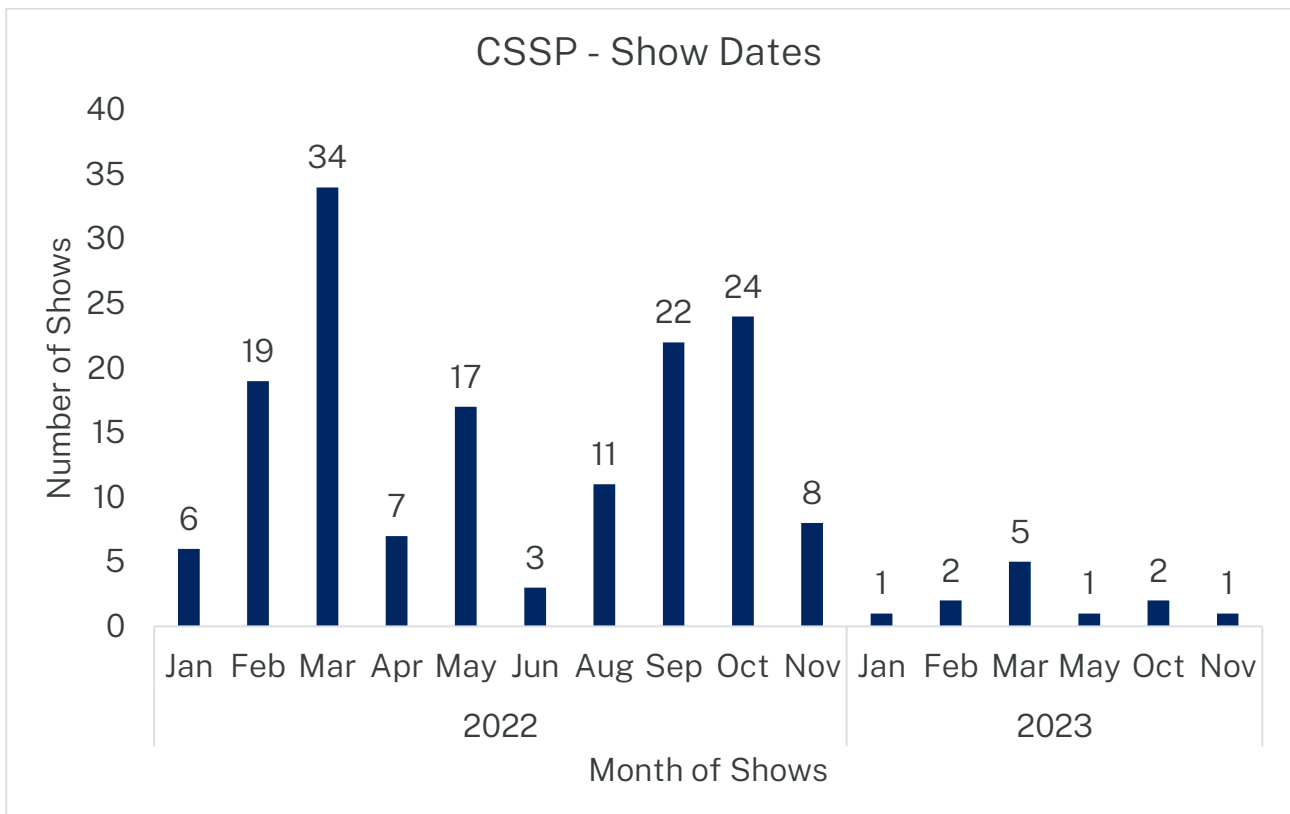
14 shows submitted time variation requests and 2 shows submitted scope variation requests in SmartyGrants. The scope variations included new scope activities identified for unspent funds.

[54] Completion Report data, Ops Tracker

In the Completion Reports, 22 out of 101 grantees noted that they made some changes to the original approved activities.

The form does not include a question on what activities changed, however this is being reviewed by the GMO team based on the completion and acquittal review process. At the time of writing of this report, 26 of the CSSP shows have been approved for closure by GMO.[55]

Reporting requirements

Reporting requirements were outlined in section 1.2 of the CSSP funding terms and conditions.[56] Responses in the Completion Survey showed that grantees were generally clear on the requirements. In the Survey, 95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'the reporting requirements were clear' (38/41).[57] A minority did not agree on this point, and noted that more guidance in terms of the reporting expectations would have been helpful:

"The acquittal paperwork required more data than expected, a specific document outlining the reporting requirements prior to completion of project would be helpful"

Grantee- Completion Survey

As mentioned in the Monitoring and Evaluation section above, the evaluation found that providing additional guidance on outcome measurement and reporting would improve the clarity of reporting requirements for grantees.

Quality of progress and acquittal reporting

At the time of writing of this report, 39 Acquittal and Completion review forms have been drafted by the GMO team. 70% (27) of the forms note that 'evidence provided is sufficient to close the grant'.

The remaining forms (12) note that some financial or completion evidence is missing, with one noting an underspend where some funding is to be returned.[58]

The general quality of the acquittal reporting has been mixed, as 30% of Completion Reports reviewed by the GMO still require additional evidence to be added. In addition, there are currently 52 Completion Reports missing where more than 30 days have passed since the final day of the show.[59]

The GMO team is sending reminders to submit final Completion Reports. In an interview with the Programs Team, it was confirmed that there are no further repercussions for submission of late Completion Reports.[60]

Reporting requirements for grantees consisted of submitting a Completion Report together with invoices for expenditure funded by the CSSP and evidence of project completion. 96% of respondents to the Completion Survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'the reporting requirement was appropriate' (39/41).

Several respondents expressed that they found the amount of work related to acquittal commensurate to the grant:

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[55] Completion Report data

[56] 11- Application/ Deed form

[57] Completion Survey data

[58] GMO Completion & Acquittal Review Form

[59] Completion Report data compared to final show date data

[60] Programs Team interview

> "The grant process was very straight forward; the questions were relevant and easy to answer, and I felt like all requested supporting documentation was relevant to the project."
>
> Grantee- Completion Survey

During interviews and in the Completion Survey, some grantees gave the feedback that the acquittal timeframe was too short. One grantee noted that they are dependent on other parties to send through invoices quickly to meet the acquittal process deadline and suggested extending the timeframe:

> "There was a was a very short turnaround from when you had your show to when your acquittal was due, and a lot of businesses hadn't submitted their invoices for us to pay… maybe that acquittal process that needs to be a bit longer."
>
> Grantee Interview

The Programs Team noted in their post implementation review that they recommend extending the period of time allocated to acquittal.[61] As the evaluation found that one third of completion reports expected at the time of writing had not yet been submitted, and the timeframe for acquittal was perceived as too short by both the Programs Team and the grantees, a longer acquittal timeframe is recommended for grants where grantees are primarily volunteer-based organisation.

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[61] 9- Post implementation review

Evaluation domain 8: Effectiveness:
To what extent did the program achieve its intended outcomes?

Initial data shows that the program achieved its intended short- medium term outcomes. Outcomes were considered in the design phase of the program, enabling organisations to meet the needs of their specific community and to provide economic stimulus to local businesses.

Considerations for future program design and implementation	- Providing funding to volunteer based organisations to facilitate events and infrastructure for social gatherings can have positive social outcomes for communities. - Providing guidelines for spending locally can provide economic stimulus to local businesses and regional economies.

Feedback from grantees on the program were overwhelmingly positive and provided ample examples of program aims being met.

CSSP supported COVID safe shows

The CSSP funding covered a large portion of costs for a majority of the NSW shows in 2022. During the interviews, we asked about the cost of shows and how funds are usually raised to run these events. Multiple show representatives explained that the CSSP grant made up a large portion of their total costs- in one case a grantee noted that it made up 50% of their total expenditure. Several grantees commented on the significance of the grant to alleviate show committees from asking for sponsorship from local businesses:

"Our community has been significantly affected by drought, bushfires and COVID-19, this year we found it difficult to gain sponsorship from local businesses, who have been under financial pressures for the last 3-4 years. Therefore, this grant is invaluable to our local show and most importantly our local community."

Grantee Interview

"Extremely happy with the support received not only for this show...The district having experienced the most severe drought in memory, followed by COVID pandemics, mouse plagues and then floods, the funding allowed this Association to provide some relief to our community, by way of entertainment that otherwise would be outside the financial capabilities of the Association, without them having to put their "hands in their pockets" to see the standard of entertainment provided."

Grantee Interview

As COVID lock downs had significant impacts on business operations across the state, the CSSP alleviated the need of securing business sponsorship for shows following this period of uncertainty.

Some of the CSSP funding was used to purchase supplies to support COVID-19 prevention at the event themselves. These costs fell under the cost category named 'Costs related to implementation of COVID-19 Safety plans (e.g. purchase of equipment and supplies, or security services)' and included items such as additional cleaning and purchasing hand sanitizer. From invoice listings on SmartyGrants we can see that 92 grantees (56%) included a COVID prevention related purchase in their expenditures.

Feedback from grantees via interviews and surveys indicated that the implementation of COVID safety at the shows generally went smoothly.

"We were able to provide our volunteers and show patrons with an assurance that the show would be run with the best possible safeguards against COVID 19 and entertainment for our 2022 show as well as allow us to purchase items which will help us put on future shows."

Grantee Interview

Although the wet weather in 2022 was identified as the main hindrance (Table 5) for most respondents in the completion survey, 5 respondents noted COVID as a main hindrance in the delivery of the show:

Table 5 Main hindrances in project delivery

Main hindrance in project delivery	Number of respondents
Weather	28
COVID	5
DRNSW admin process	5
Timeframe	4
Lack of volunteers/ Council	1

For shows that were delayed, respondents were asked for the reasons why in the Completion Form. One respondent noted COVID as the reason for the delay, whilst others noted that flooding and bad weather forced them to change the date.

During interviews, some grantees mentioned that they were negatively affected by COVID in some form, for example due to volunteers that were sick, and in one case a respondent missed their own show due to having contracted COVID. In general, interview respondents noted that they felt prepared and were able to put COVID safety practices into place:

"[COVID safety implementation] … was more about the social distancing. We didn't have to necessarily keep a record of the number of people in there so that helped us, but more maintaining that social distancing, having the toilets cleaned more regularly than what we would normally have in other years, and then having more hand sanitizer spread around the showground and just strategies like that, which is probably the same as what we'll plan again for this year."

Grantee Interview

CSSP provided increased funding certainty and enabled confidence in planning

Data gathered via the completion survey reflected how CSSP enabled shows to go ahead with additional confidence after two years of COVID restrictions:

"The grant has enabled us to provide our community with a quality show after two years of COVID restrictions and cancelled shows. Locals were supported with subsidies from the grant, and in general made the whole running of the show a much more doable project as it relieved some of the financial pressure we have been under."   Grantee- Completion survey

"It is not just that we were giving financial support, it was also the encouragement it gave the Committee members to keep working on organising a show, knowing that we had financial help, if something happened (eg a local COVID outbreak) that resulted in not many people attending the show, which would result in our gate takings being down and potentially running the show at a loss because of the expenses of the overheads and entertainment."

Grantee- Completion survey

Some survey respondents specifically noted that the grant made all the difference for their financial situation.

"This program was a god send to us as we would have either not run a show or made a very large loss that would affect our long-term viability."

Grantee- Completion survey

"Without this generous Support Package our show would definitely have used up a lot of our savings which we have put away for maintenance."

Grantee- Completion survey

Short and long-term outcomes

Data collected via stakeholder consultation provided evidence indicating that the anticipated outcomes noted in the CSSP Program Logic were achieved. Anticipated short term outcomes in the CSSP Program Logic included:

- *Local businesses deliver elements of the project, increasing revenue (E1)*
- *Tourist numbers and expenditure increases (E4)*
- *Increased community participation in sport, recreation, arts and culture events (S2)*

Anticipated medium to long term outcomes for CSSP included:

- *Community members enjoy their local township (S5)*
- *Community members feel connected and a sense of belonging (S6)*

Evidence supporting the achievement of these outcomes is summarised in the sections below.

CSSP provided economic stimulus to local communities

Completion Report data confirms that grantees spent more than half of the grant funding on local costs.[62] As shown in Table 4 'Cost categories- Count of occurrence in completion report'[63], the majority of cost categories used by grantees were locally incurred costs. Local businesses delivered many elements of the shows, which increased their revenue. In the completion survey and interviews, grantees gave examples of how CSSP provided economic stimulus to local businesses and regional economies, by buying goods and services in the local area.

"The [show] provided an economic stimulus to the local community by attracting day and overnight visitors; buying consumables and equipment locally where possible; using local professional services and trades; and food vendors buying locally."

Grantee- Completion survey

"Over $20,000 was spent on the show and every cent was spent in the community."

Grantee- Completion survey

"The Show Society also used local motels for visiting competition judges and sourced all of the printing, advertising, hire equipment, stationery, animal bedding and supplies, catering supplies etc, locally, which would have been a boost economically to the local businesses."

Grantee- Completion survey

"The show itself provided local business with a boost through the purchase of goods and services, with the significant amount of funding provided by the Country Shows Support

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[62] SmartyGrants - Completion Report data - Completed Show expenditure and question 'Can you confirm that at least 50% of grant expenditure was spent locally?'

[63] Domain 5 in this report

> Program making an important contribution… Our total expenditure for this financial year has been approximately $80,000, with the vast majority being returned directly to our local community."
>
> Grantee- Completion survey

A grantee interview respondent also mentioned an innovative way of making sure that prize money was spent in the local community:

> "One of our key components of what we did was we went through a [local] gift card program that all the money, all the prize money went out in that. So all of it has to be spent in [the community] so there was $3650…that had to be spent [here] because that's only place you can use those cards. And so that was a benefit to our local community, whereas people most previously had got cash."
>
> Grantee interview

CSSP supported 'bigger and better' shows post- COVID

Out of the 98 grantees who had completed their completion form at the time of writing, almost two thirds noted an increase in the number of show visitors compared to the previous show. Those who reported less visitors noted that this was due to very wet weather conditions.

Attendance at CSSP sponsored shows ranged from 100 to 60,000 visitors. 64% of shows noted an increase of visitors (63), whilst 31% noted a decrease in visitors (30) compared to the previous show. 5% noted the same number of visitors compared to the previous show (5).

Table 5 Change in visitor numbers

Visitors in 2022 compared to previous Show	# of shows	% of shows
More visitors	63	64%
Less visitors	30	31%
No change	5	5%
Total respondents	98	100%

62% of small shows and 74% of the medium sized shows reported increases in visitor numbers, whilst 53% of large shows reported an increase compared to the previous show (figure 7).

Figure 9 Change in visitor numbers by show size

Number of shows with change in visitor numbers compared to previous show, by show size (n=98)
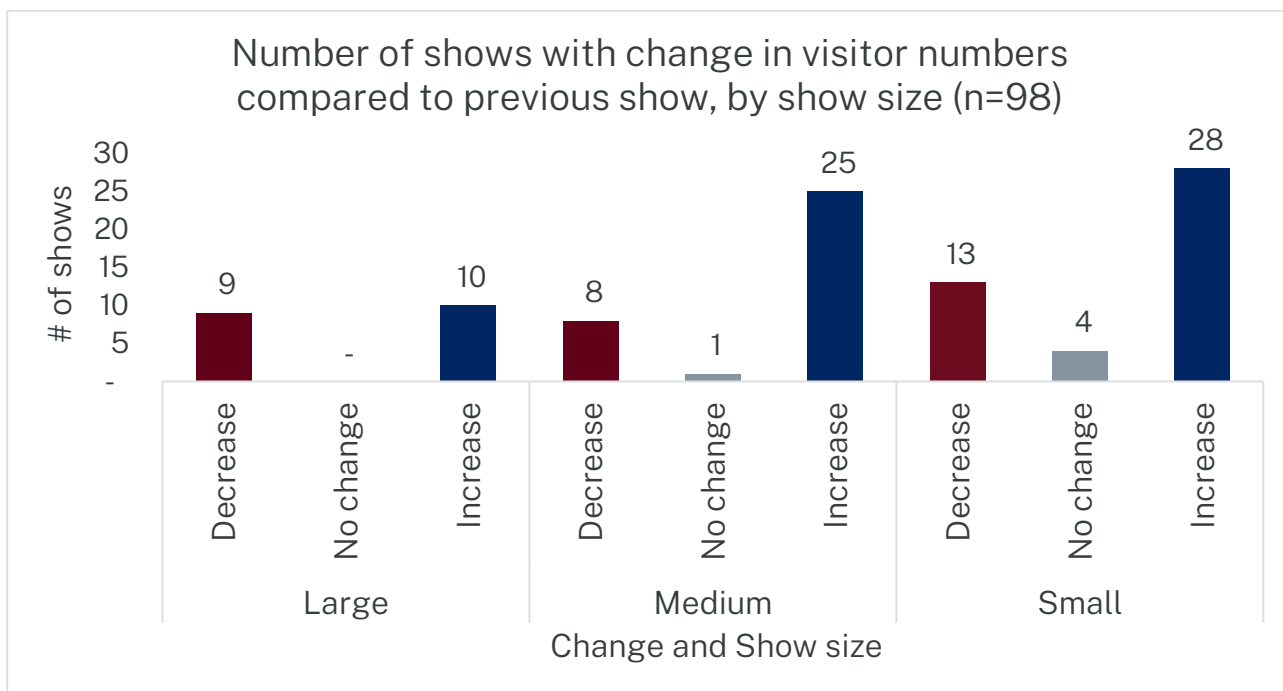
For shows that saw an increase in visitors, this ranged from 17 to 13,374 more people and for Shows that reported a decrease in visitors, this ranged from of 39 to 10,000 less visitors.

In general, responses to the completion survey gave an impression of how the show was bigger and better than before due to the CSSP funding:

> "The funding allowed us to engage much for entertainment than we could normally afford. We really wanted our attendees to go away with a great impression of the [show] to ensure they return in future years. With the CSSP funding we were able to make sure that we delivered something for everyone."
>
> Grantee- Completion survey

> "The funding made our show more attractive to our patrons as there was more quality in what was displayed and more variety in the entertainment."
>
> Grantee- Completion survey

In some cases, grantees highlighted the link between the increase in events and investments due to CSSP funding and the increase in visitor numbers:

> "…Our 2022 show was the biggest in history by attendance and we put this down to the increased number of events and improvements to existing show sections that this grant allowed. [I] could not be more appreciative of this support and am really proud that we used it to supercharge our event and it really paid dividends."
>
> Grantee- Completion survey

> "The grant enabled the show society to hold a bigger and better event than ever. We were able to double our entertainment. We increased our advertising and updated and modernised our external signage and directional sign throughout the ground. Our spend for the show with local business was more than doubled. Our attendance by stall holders and sideshow was also higher than normal. Community engagement and involvement was at an all-time high… the attendance on the second day was highest we believed in more than 20 years. Feedback we received from attendees was that it was a great event and very much enjoyed and missed over the last few years."
>
> Grantee- Completion survey

Shows attract both local community and visitors

In addition to the increase in visitor numbers compared to previous shows outlined above, data shows that tourists were also attracted to these events.

Completion report respondents were asked to state the number of visitors that came to the show from outside of town.[64] 49 shows collected data on visitor postcodes or were able to estimate the number of visitors that came from outside of the town where the show was being held.

Small shows had a slightly higher proportion of visitors from outside of town. This aligns with interview data collected, as respondents explained that people from nearby towns often support multiple small shows in an area. In general, completion form data shows that more than 73% of show visitors were locals from the town where the show was held.

Figure 10 Percentage of show visitors from outside town

% of show visitors from outside of town
out of total visitors (n=49)
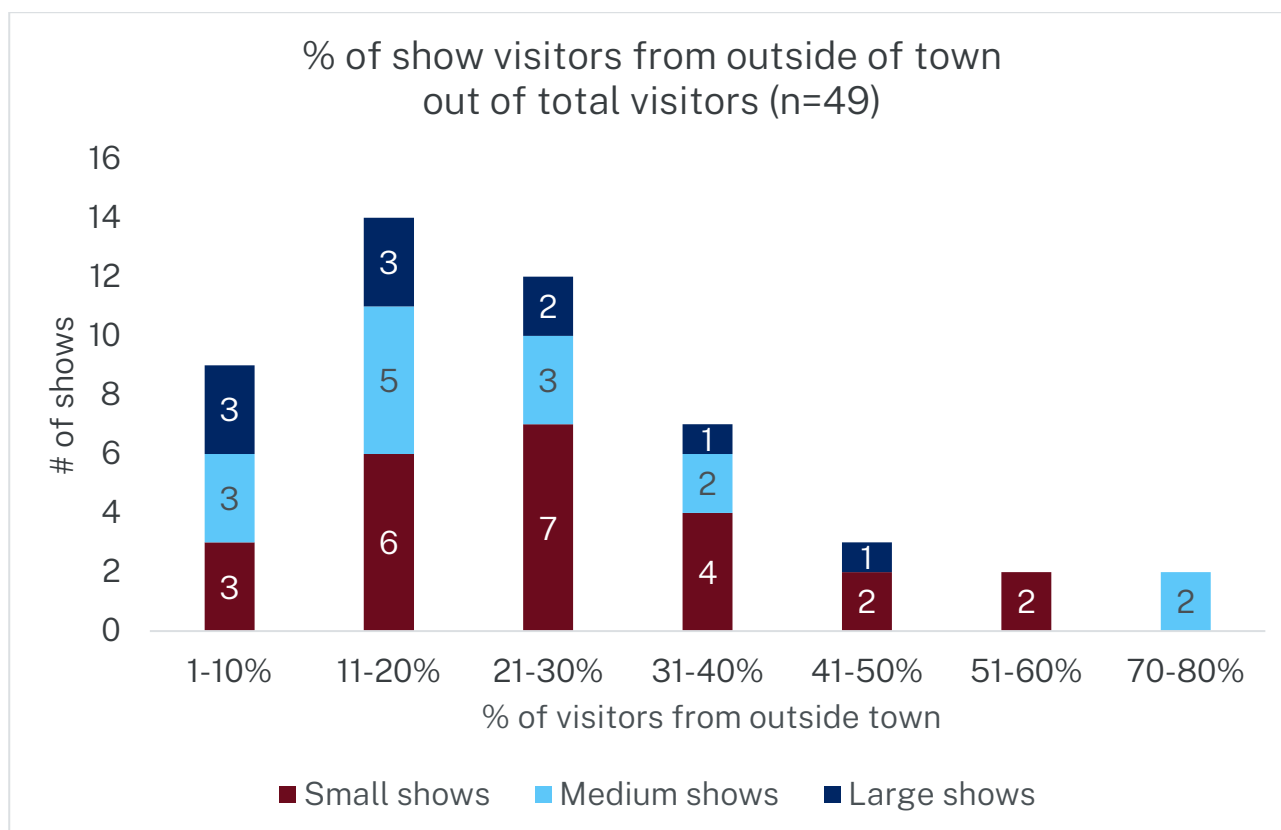
Shows contributed to community connectedness & wellbeing

Perspectives shared by grantees during stakeholder consultation indicates that shows enhance community members' enjoyment of their local township and provide a space to connect and feel a sense of belonging.

General manager of Sydney's Royal Easter Show, Murray Wilton, said local agricultural shows play a "vital role in bringing people together" and the economic benefit they bring to regional communities is significant. "They are the largest social gathering for many in regional and rural areas, providing a much-needed break from the property, a chance to catch up with old friends and a strong sense of community,"

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[64] Responses that were left blank were filtered out

The Guardian, September 20, 2022

The quote from this newspaper article echoes the perspectives of CSSP grantees that were communicated in completion forms, surveys and interviews. All of the grantees that were interviewed noted the importance of country shows as a platform for their community to meet in person and connect.

"...the core of what the shows and most of the shows across our area are doing is just making sure that in that community there's somewhere that they can all come together once a year."

Grantee interview

One interview respondent explained that the CSSP grant allowed their show to go on over multiple days, which had an additional positive effect on community connectedness.

"Shows provide a major community connection for people to come together. If a show can afford entertainment and especially extend over multiple days, they can extend the program, and this means you keep people there and connected. It results in more conversations; people also speak with local politicians that come and set up at the show and engage with the community rather than visitors just popping in for an hour and leaving again."

Grantee interview

Other respondents highlighted the role that the show played in wellbeing and mental health during community recovery from disasters:

"Strengthening organisations [that have local connection in the community] is so important for post disaster resilience. We need better investment to support annual shows or events as they really do work in post disaster situations. Key to country shows is that they represent all aspects and all age groups in the community. It caters for everybody. They say 'You've got to have boots on the ground' – and on show day you get a lot of boots on the ground! Lots of people come through, if you offer them services and resources on the day out this is a great way to engage, so it also offers a platform for community recovery."

Grantee interview

The important role of the shows in community wellbeing was also noted in completion form responses:

"This socialisation and participation provided repair and respite from these recent challenges and could only have contributed positively to the mental health of the local community."

Grantee Completion Form

"Mental, emotional and financial benefits abound from just one annual event."

Grantee Completion Form

"After having such a horrid couple of years with the drought, bushfires COVID and then floods we have been able to come together as a community and start to rebuild and heal."

Grantee Completion Form

CSSP supported long term investments

In addition to the CSSP grant supporting bigger and better shows after years of COVID restrictions, grantees expressed the added value of being able to use the grant for investments which benefit show societies and community groups that use shared infrastructure.

"We actually used a fair bit of our money for infrastructure at the showground. So that really helped the whole community... We've been improving the community really for everybody.

> We're really happy to do that because our show ground is used by 5 user groups as well as us so it's good to be able to. We actually used a bit of money on some watering points for the horse area. So that was something that the show people had actually brought up, but that will benefit everybody. We also used some money for some safety fencing."

Grantee interview

Other examples of long-term investments and their benefits were mentioned in completion survey responses:

> "The support package has had a significant impact on infrastructure that we can now use to improve the services, and activities offered at our show. The upgrade to the dining hall has meant that food services can be offered throughout our show, including a display of the country style cooking provided by the Country Women's Association. The upgrade facilities now offer a safe place for children's discos, and a useable area for committee meetings"'

Grantee completion survey

> "[The grant] enabled us to provide entertainment and, on the day, help as well as allowing us to purchase items which will benefit our show in years to come. We were able to provide our volunteers and show patrons with an assurance that the show would be run with the best possible safeguards against COVID 19 and entertainment for our 2022 show as well as allow us to purchase items which will help us put on future shows."

Grantee completion survey

Shows provide a platform for community collaboration

Stakeholder feedback indicates that the shows provide a platform for increased community participation. During interviews, several grantees mentioned that their local country show provides a platform for community volunteering and collaboration. Research shows that volunteering can have a positive impact on well-being of volunteers and provides a sense of belonging and a network of support which can be used in times of need.[65] The CSSP funding indirectly supported community connection and wellbeing by financing the shows that engaged a variety of community volunteers.

> "Lots of people volunteer for our show, it gives them a great sense of community and wellbeing to volunteer and to help."

Grantee Interview

> "The show...provides an opportunity for people to volunteer their time and interact with people who they may not necessarily come into contact within their day to day lives."

Grantee completion form

Grantees shared that many groups in the community are involved in their local show in some way. Some listed an array of community organisations as examples:

> "The show involved approximately 270 volunteers; the local business community; local community groups at an organisational level or as participants / exhibitors eg [the] Garden Club, Botanical Designers Group, Lions Club, sewing / handicraft groups, wool, beef cattle and sheep growers, Photography Club, Poultry Club, Pony Club, Working Dogs, Shearers; The show brought a sense of belonging, inclusion, achievement, and improved self-worth which brings increased confidence and an increased ability to cope and be resilient"

Grantee completion form

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[65] Paylor, J. (2011) Volunteering and Health: evidence and implications for policy and practice. Institute for Volunteering Research, UK. https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~/media/bl/global/social-welfare/pdfs/non-secure/v/o/l/volunteering-and-health-evidence-of-impact.pdf

"After not being able to hold a show for 2 years, the community got right behind us. A lot of families in the area have a long and strong association with [the] show and they all supported us as either Exhibitors, volunteers or stewards. We had business owners and farmers bring their tractors, bobcats etc, they helped with slashing paddocks for parking, picking up woodchips and in the main arena. We had the local cricket club, football club, hockey club and AFL club manning the gates, picking up rubbish and assisting with parking."

Grantee completion form

In addition to adult volunteers and participants, some grantees specifically mentioned the involvement of children and young people:

"Local schools were highly involved with students participating in cattle parading and horse events, dance performance and entering competitions showcasing their creative talents. Many of their artworks were then used post-show in displays in local businesses to continue promotion of community events."

Grantee completion form

"It was planned as a family day and over 400 of the exhibits in the pavilion were from children under 10 years old."

Grantee completion form

"We also encourage local groups like the scouts to involve themselves (and we provide free entry for them along with meals) we had a couple of young ladies doing their Duke of Edinburgh challenge and the same applied to them."

Grantee completion form

One grantee described the engagement of incarcerated people from a local prison to support the Show:

"For the past 4 years we have also engaged in a program where inmates of the [local prison] who come out and assist putting up the panels for the dog trialling event. They whipper snip and provide a much-needed extra set of hands. It does them a lot of good to engage in a community event and we also make sure they know they are appreciated in various ways be doing lunch through a home cooked meal and a letter of appreciation back to their senior supervisor."

Grantee completion form

A grantee succinctly summarised that they "…truly think that you would struggle to find more than a handful of people that aren't involved in some capacity either as volunteers, stewards, committee members, attendees, exhibitors, competitors."

Grantee completion form

Appendix A: Document Review

Key Evaluation Question (KEQ)	Documents reviewed
Overview of Results What happened?	Applications Acquittal and Completion Reports
Program design: Was the program design appropriate?	Design documentation Approval briefing
Program administration: Was the program set up for success?	Project plan Communications plan Risk register
Program Application Process: Was the application process fit-for-purpose?	Program guidelines Program documentation Application template Admin Forms
Application Assessment & funding deed Process: Were applications assessed appropriately and transparently?	Assessment guidelines Assessment forms
Monitoring and Evaluation: Can the program be effectively evaluated?	PMEP Combined Application/ funding deeds Completion Report Templates Data collected by grantees
Project Delivery: Have projects been delivered as intended?	Completion reports Variation data on SmartyGrants
Effectiveness: To what extent did the program achieve its intended outcomes?	Completion reports

Appendix B: Staff and applicant surveys and interviews

Stakeholder	Name
Program Team	Manager and 4 staff
Program Executive	(Former) Director Growth Programs
Grant Management Office & Compliance and Delivery	Manager, 2 staff
Agricultural Show Representatives	2 staff
Survey of grantees - post completion	73 responses (27 February 2023)
Grantees and applicants	15 grantees

Appendix C: Eligibility

Eligible applicants were NSW Show Organising Committees recognised by the Agricultural Societies Council of NSW Ltd.

To be eligible for funding the applicants had to meet the following criteria:

- Applications were limited to one Country Show Support Package grant request per show.
- Applications for funding had to be submitted before the 2022 show took place. Applications submitted after the show had been held were ineligible.
- Applicants had to have current Public Liability Insurance cover for a minimum of $5 million.
- Shows that had received other NSW Government funding for 2022 were not eligible.

Eligible Costs included:

- development, review, or update of COVID-19 Safety plans
- costs related to implementation of COVID-19 Safety plans (e.g., purchase of equipment and supplies, or security services)
- subsidised stall fees for locally based community organisations and local businesses
- locally incurred expenses (e.g., hiring of equipment and other services)
- marketing and promotion material for the show (using local suppliers only)
- costs associated with supporting locally based arts, culture, and musical offerings
- contributions to awards and prizes for competitions
- costs to support show exhibits and events
- upgrades or maintenance to facilities that are deemed critical for the Show.

Other expenses were considered if it could be demonstrated that the expenditure was incurred locally. The majority of the funding was to be allocated towards locally incurred expenditure.

Costs had to be made between submitting the application and 30 days after the show.

Ineligible Costs included:

- fees and charges that were already covered by other sources or contributors
- subsidised stall fees for non-local businesses (e.g. showbag stalls or rides from outside the local area)
- significant non-local based overheads and expenses (e.g. insurance premiums)
- rent or hire fees for showgrounds and/or facilities
- activities associated with alcohol consumption or gambling
- wages and associated costs (including superannuation) and bonuses
- retrospective costs, incurred before an application is submitted.

Appendix D: Process and Outcomes Indicators

The following table provides the relevant indicators for the Process component of the evaluation.

Process stage	Indicator	Measurement
Program establishment (Program area)	Successful Applicant satisfaction with guideline clarity	Feedback in 15 grantee interviews was overwhelmingly positive
Application process	% of grant applications assessed within publicly communicated timelines (PPM)	100%
	Ratio of application value to available funding	$ 4,195,593.32/$ 4,725,000= 89%
	Application to award ratio	$ 4,195,593.32/$ 4,195,593.32= 100%
	Ineligible application volume and ratio	4 - 4/169= 2% of applications submitted
	Geographic spread of applications and awards	91 LGAs with minimum 1 grantee
	% of eligible applicants submitting an application	86%
	% of applicants satisfied with the overall application process	97% Satisfied or Very Satisfied
Funding Deed negotiation (GMO)	Average time taken for finalisation of funding contracts (business days) (PPM)	21
	% of approved grant funding contracted in the financial year that supports the state outcome of strong and cohesive communities and economies	100%
Project Delivery (GMO)	% of funded projects that are delivered according to funding deed (PPM)	84% 101 completion forms submitted at time of writing. 16 with either time variation or changes in activities funded.
	Grant recipient satisfaction with contract management process and support	72.4% Very Satisfied, 18.8% Somewhat Satisfied
	$ value of funding provided for projects delivered that improve community programs, services, amenity and infrastructure in regional NSW	$4,195,593.32

The table below provides the relevant indicators for inclusion to measure the outputs and outcomes listed in the program logic.

Direct revenue provided to local businesses from the grant (E1)

Tourist numbers and expenditure increases (E4) *

Local Attendance (S2)

While the program logic maps the mid to long term outcomes of CSSP for Community satisfaction (S5) and Community connection (S6), these will be in scope for this evaluation, but may be more comprehensively addressed as part of the RRP strategic evaluation.

Unlike other grant programs under the RRP such as REAF, CSSP is not designed as an NSW Visitor Economy stimulus fund and so aggregated income from visitor expenditure does not factor into the economic outcomes for the evaluation. As such, indicator E4 is used exclusively for local visitor calculations and comparisons to previous country shows.

Output	Indicators	Data source
Shows are delivered in 2022	Show size by tier Show location by LGA Number of Shows completed in 2022	Monitoring Program data • Application form – Planned Show size • Completion & Acquittal form – Actual Show size
Shows are delivered in 2023	Show size by tier Show location by LGA Number of Shows completed in 2022	Monitoring Program data • Application form – Planned Show size • Completion & Acquittal form – Actual Show size • Variation agreements

Short term outcome	Indicators	Data source
Local businesses deliver elements of the project, increasing revenue (E1)	Number of local businesses directly contracted to deliver the project $ value of investment allocated to each local business Number of local businesses that participated in the Show	Monitoring Program data • Completion & Acquittal form • Completed Show expenditure
Tourist numbers and expenditure increases (E4)	Number of visitors from local community compared to outside local community towns participating in events Number of visitors this year compared to previous show	Monitoring Program data • Completion & Acquittal form – Number of visitors, Number of attendees to show, number of attendees in past show, number of attendees from outside local community, (where this data is available to the evaluation) question on promotion of Show
Increased community participation in sport, recreation, arts and culture (S2)	Number of local community members participating in the event Show supported by the program	Monitoring Program data • Completion & Acquittal form – Number of visitors, number of attendees from outside local community

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