

OFFICIAL

CBDs Revitalisation Program

Process Evaluation

August 2022



Contents

1	Executive Summary	3
1.1	What this report is about	3
1.2	What was found	3
1.3	Key learnings	4
2	About this evaluation	5
2.1	Program overview	5
2.2	Evaluation purpose	6
2.3	Methodology and data sources	6
3	Evaluation findings	8
4	Conclusions	21
	Appendix A: Program logic	22
	Appendix B: Findings and learnings	23
	Appendix C: Interview guides	24

1 Executive Summary

1.1 What this report is about

This process evaluation reviews program implementation, process effectiveness and program reach for the CBDs Revitalisation Program (the Program) Rounds Two and Three.

The objective of the CBDs Revitalisation Program is to accelerate the economic and social recovery of Central Business Districts (CBDs) across Greater Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. To achieve this the Program has provided targeted support for events to attract people back to CBDs, and to increase their connectedness and engagement with these locations.

Across Rounds Two and Three, \$37.1 million of funding has been awarded for events and activations in 17 nominated CBDs across NSW.

1.2 What was found

Program activities were broadly implemented as planned, with assessment processes supporting decision making consistent with the aims of the Program. Some delays to program processes created delivery pressures for delivery partners.

- **Finding 1:** The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner and Program Delivery and Assurance teams successfully stood up Round Two and Round Three of the Program by the stipulated launch dates, despite tight deadlines and resourcing pressures. Some later Program processes took longer than originally planned.
- **Finding 2:** Delays in approvals and the execution of funding deeds increased delivery pressures for delivery partners and required extensions to the delivery window for funded projects. This may have a bearing on the achievement of the Program objective.
- **Finding 3:** Governance and probity arrangements were implemented as planned.
- **Finding 4:** Funding recommendations were transparent and consistent with eligibility and assessment criteria.
- **Finding 5:** Selection rationale was fully documented, and feedback was provided to unsuccessful applicants where requested.
- **Finding 6:** Resourcing challenges impacted the preparation of some internal program documentation at the program establishment stage.
- **Finding 7:** Delivery partners generally found their experience applying for the Program to be largely positive, straightforward, and similar to other grant application experiences.
- **Finding 8:** The Program received applications for a range of events and activation activities and delivery partners were generally satisfied with the information provided about the Program. Over half of the activation activities and events proposed were for the Sydney CBD.
- **Finding 9:** The Program was broadly promoted in line with the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team's Communications Plan.

1.3 Key learnings

Some opportunities for potential improvement were identified. These may be useful to consider in the design and implementation of future Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade programs.

- **Learning 1:** Clearer separation of duties in governance arrangements would reduce the risk of perceived conflicts of interest.
- **Learning 2:** Ensuring proportionate governance and delegations for approvals may improve timeliness of program processes.
- **Learning 3:** Commensurate resourcing and upfront investment in producing clear documentation on project roles and responsibilities and approval processes would better support program staff to perform their duties.
- **Learning 4:** Provision of complete and timely information on application elements, reporting, and acquittal requirements would reduce uncertainty for delivery partners and administrative burden for program staff.

2 About this evaluation

2.1 Program overview

The NSW Government committed \$50 million to the Program over three rounds. The objective of the Program is to accelerate the economic and social recovery of CBDs across Greater Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong.

The Program provides funding for events and activation activities to encourage people back into CBDs and to increase their connectedness and engagement with these locations. It is aimed at accelerating behavioural change as people adjust to living and working post COVID-19.

The Program was established to support a range of activities over three rounds including:

- the enhancement or promotion of cultural institutions
- increased promotion, marketing and events that attract people into CBDs
- live music and performances in restaurants and bars
- support for the arts, entertainment, and recreation sectors.

The Program was part of the NSW Government's Economic Recovery Strategy released in October 2021. Round One of the Program was established and administered by NSW Treasury and committed \$12.23 million to 6 projects delivered from late 2021.

Administration of the Program was subsequently transferred to the Investment NSW Program Delivery and Assurance and Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner teams.

Round One of the Program is out of scope for this process evaluation.

Round Two of the Program opened for applications on 17 December 2021 and closed on 17 January 2022, providing total support of \$15.8 million to 25 projects. The third and final round of the Program opened on 29 March 2022 and closed on 27 April 2022, providing \$21.3 million in support to 40 projects.

A summary of the number of applications for the Program is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of applications - CBDs Revitalisations Program. *Source: SmartyGrants data*

	Applicants	Ineligible	Unsuccessful	Approved	Withdrawn
Round Two	48	4	18	25	1
Round Three	60	3	16	40	1

Table 2 indicates progress of Round Two activities as of 31 July 2022. Round Three funding deeds were being negotiated when this evaluation was undertaken, hence are excluded from the table.

Table 2: Progress of Round Two – CBDs Revitalisations Program. Source: SmartyGrants data *to 31 July 2022

	Approved	Delivered	Outstanding	Final report submitted*
Round Two	25	18	6	12

2.2 Evaluation purpose

An evaluation plan was prepared for the Program by Investment NSW in line with the *NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines*¹. This provides a framework guiding all evaluation activities. Both a process and outcome evaluation were scoped for the Program.

This report presents the findings of the process evaluation, with the outcome evaluation scheduled to be completed in early 2023.

A process evaluation determines whether program activities have been implemented as intended and provides an assessment of the effectiveness of program design. It focusses on the activities and output components of the Program’s program logic (see **Appendix A**).

The findings of this process evaluation may help inform design, implementation and processes of future Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade programs.

2.3 Methodology and data sources

Table 3 below details the key evaluation questions for the process evaluation, as outlined in the Program’s evaluation plan.

Appendix B provides the alignment of the key evaluation questions to the findings and learnings of the process evaluation

Table 3: Key process evaluation questions - CBDs Revitalisation Program

Theme	Evaluation question
Implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have the program activities been implemented as intended? 2. Were funding recommendations transparent and in line with assessment guidelines and program planning?
Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Are there any barriers to program delivery? 4. If so, how can the program be improved?
Reach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To what extent did the program reach intended recipients?

¹ Department of Premier and Cabinet, “[NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines](#)”, 2016, accessed June 2022

Multiple lines of evidence were used to answer the key evaluation questions including:

1. **A review of program documentation.** This included examination of program management documents, probity and governance plans, program guidelines, assessment information (funding recommendations, methodology and meeting minutes) and briefings.
2. **Analysis of program data collated by the Program teams** as part of grant administration processes. This included review of completed applications, funding deeds, variation requests, acquittal documentation, communications, and other relevant information collected as part of monitoring and reporting processes hosted on the grant administration portal SmartyGrants.
3. **Interviews with Program staff and delivery partners. All delivery partners were successful applicants.** These were conducted to understand perspectives on the effectiveness of application, assessment, monitoring and reporting processes in practice. In total, **15 interviews** were conducted:
 - 6 interviews were completed with program staff across Program Delivery and Assurance and the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner teams
 - 9 interviews were completed with delivery partners (4 from Round Two and 5 from Round Three).

Interview guides were developed for both sets of interviews (see **Appendix C**).

3 Evaluation findings



Finding One: The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner and Program Delivery and Assurance teams successfully stood up Round Two and Round Three of the Program by the stipulated launch dates, despite tight deadlines and resourcing pressures. Some later Program processes took longer than originally planned.

Program funding was approved in 2021 with \$50 million to be disbursed across three funding rounds by the end of the 2021-22 financial year. The implementation timeline for each round of the Program included the application window, time for assessing applications, recommendations to the Minister for approval, and negotiation and execution of funding deeds by CEO Investment NSW.

Round One of the Program was established and administered by NSW Treasury before transfer of program administration to Investment NSW. Following this transfer, the Investment NSW Program Delivery and Assurance and the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner teams established program processes and documentation and successfully stood up Round Two of the Program by the stipulated launch date in December 2021.

An analysis of program documentation and interviews with program staff indicated that the team had to overcome a number of obstacles in standing up Round Two. These included challenges in setting up a program of this scale during the early stages of the establishment of Investment NSW as a new agency, as well as short lead times and limited resources. These factors created delivery pressures for both planning and implementation.

The application period for Round Two of the Program opened as planned on 17 December 2021, with the closing date extended by three days to 17 January 2022. The application period for Round Three operated as intended, opening on 29 March 2022 and closing on 27 April 2022. A review of documentation and correspondence on SmartyGrants indicated eligibility assessments were completed and applicants were notified of either progression to competitive assessment or ineligibility in line with established timeframes (late January 2022 for Round Two and early May 2022 for Round Three).

However, there were delays in the competitive assessment and subsequently in the endorsement and approvals processes for both rounds of the Program. An analysis of program data indicated that Round Two funding recommendations were approved, and delivery partners notified in late February 2022. This was approximately a two week after the intended timeframes as indicated in initial program planning documentation. Delivery partners in Round Three were notified approximately three weeks after the 25-business day timeframe indicated in the Round Three Program Guidelines for notification of the outcome of their application.

Funding deeds were executed for 15 Round Two delivery partners by the end of March 2022. Overall, 63 per cent of delivery partners that had their applications processed were notified of an outcome and had a funding deed executed within approximately a nine week window from the application closing date. Twelve projects were delivered prior to the 31 May delivery date. Remaining projects were granted extensions due to factors including delayed notification of application outcomes, weather impacts, and renegotiation with suppliers.

Negotiation and execution of Round Three funding deeds is ongoing (as of 31 July 2022).

Planned and delayed timeframes for implementation of Round Two and Round Three are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1: Planned (blue) and delayed implemented (red) timelines for Round Two - CBDs Revitalisation Program. Line markers represent weeks. *63 per cent of delivery partners. **extension of delivery date. Source: program documentation and SmartyGrants data

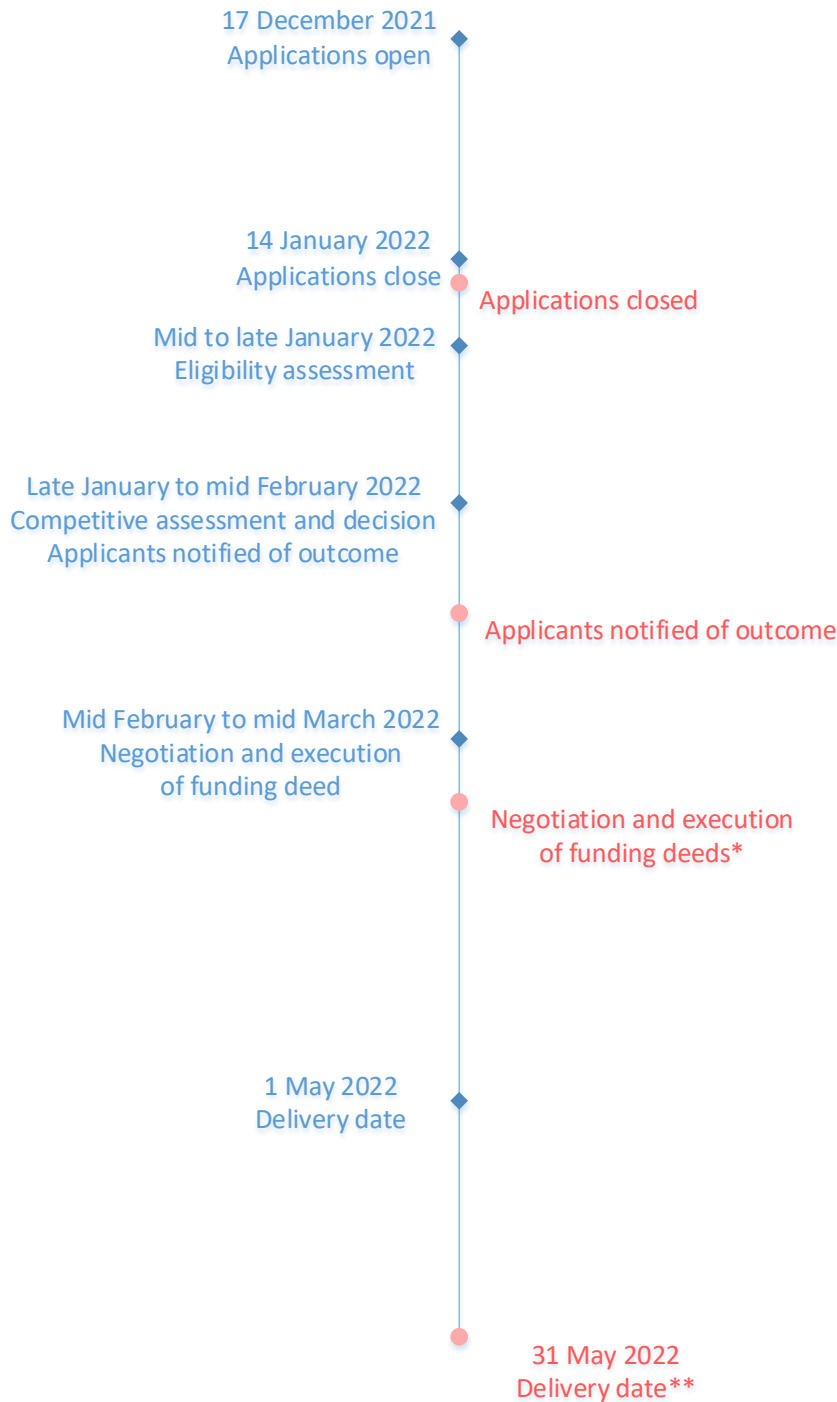
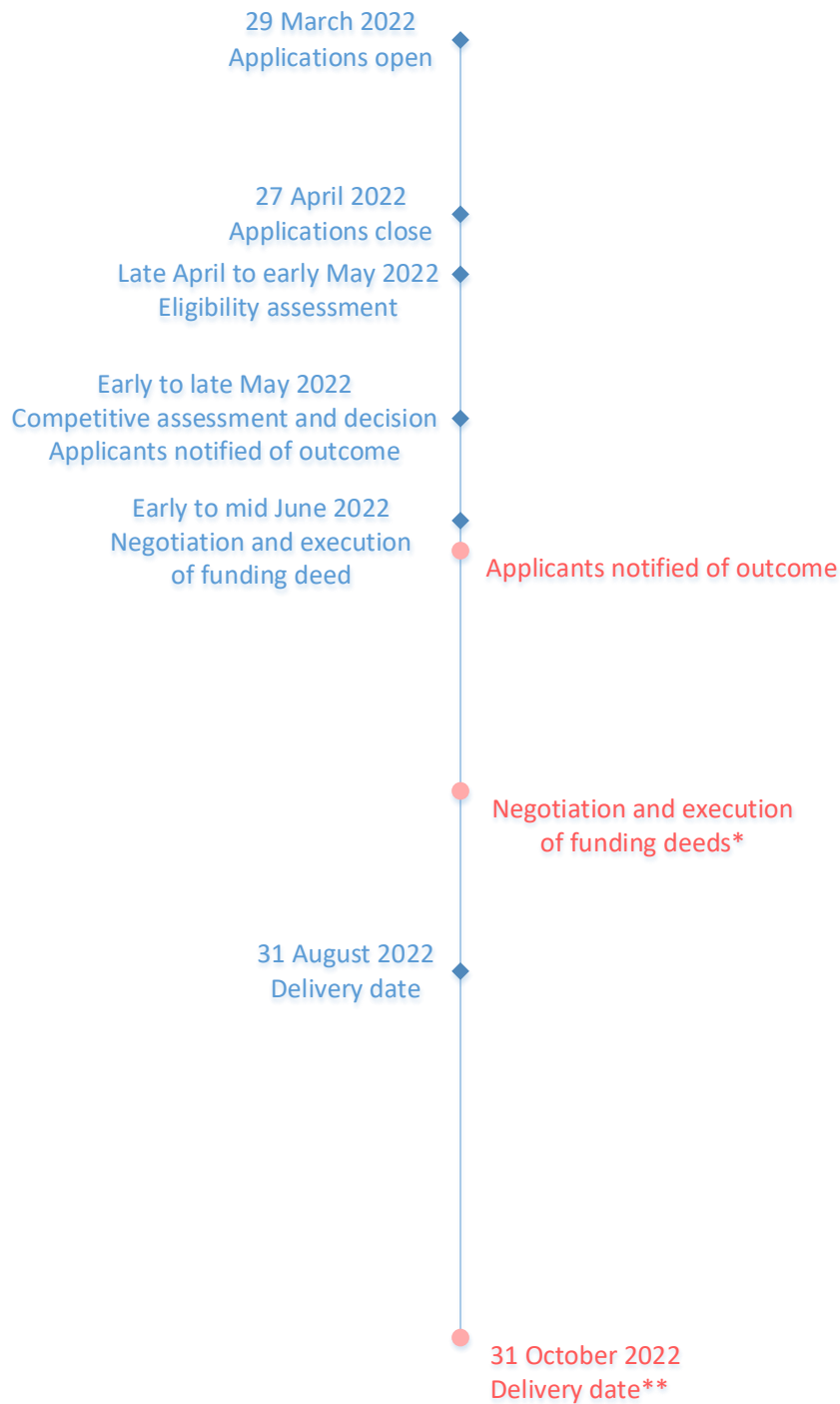


Figure 2: Planned (blue) and delayed implemented (red) timelines for Round Three - CBDs Revitalisation Program. Line markers represent weeks. *ongoing. **extension of delivery date. Source: program documentation and SmartyGrants data





Finding Two: Delays in approvals and the execution of funding deeds increased delivery pressures for delivery partners and required extensions to the delivery window for funded projects.

This may have a bearing on the achievement of the Program objective.

Tight timeframes reflected the time-sensitive nature of the Program. However, the lack of a buffer caused issues when unforeseen challenges were encountered.

Program staff noted that the timeliness of the competitive assessment process in Round Two was hindered by a range of factors including difficulties in scheduling meetings and the absence of application summaries to support deliberations. Staff noted that approval timeframes were further delayed due to insufficient time having been built in to accommodate the rigorous governance and approval arrangements in place (see Learning Two, p.15).

These delays had flow-on effects to funding deed preparation, negotiation, and execution and impacted some delivery partners' capacity to deliver events. This was particularly the case for Round Two delivery partners who had planned delivery in March and April 2022, with significantly contracted timeframes to deliver activation activities.

Delivery partners noted that the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team recognised this challenge and were proactive in prioritising time-sensitive applications to ensure funding deeds were executed as soon as practically possible. Delivery pressures were also lessened somewhat through the Minister extending delivery dates for funded projects in Rounds Two and Three to 31 May and 31 October respectively.

Nonetheless, delivery partner interviews and a review of a sample of variation requests indicated that delays caused impacts around both the availability of key locations for events and the capacity to procure resources to deliver scoped activities. In some instances, delivery partners had to incur up-front costs in order to secure locations, performers or other resources for events.

Given the Program's intention as a COVID-19 recovery measure, timeliness of project delivery to combat the stickiness of pandemic induced behaviour was a key element in program design. With delays to Round Two and further extensions of the delivery period for Round Three, there is a risk the Program's effectiveness as a targeted mechanism for COVID-19 recovery may be diminished.



Finding Three: Governance and probity arrangements were implemented as planned.

Governance arrangements for the Program were outlined in the CBDs Revitalisation Program Project Charter (the Charter) and CBDs Revitalisation Program Project Governance Plan. An overview of governance arrangements is provided in Figure 3.

A Program Steering Committee (the Steering Committee) consisting of senior executive staff from Investment NSW was established to approve key project documentation and manage operational issues. A review of project documentation indicated that appropriate records of decisions and the reasons for decisions were maintained. Meeting minutes recorded decisions on key project management issues, conflicts-of-interest, extensions and signoffs of functional requirements and approvals. This was managed in line with planned processes.

A separate CBDs Revitalisation Program Review Committee (the Review Committee) comprised representatives from the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, Destination NSW, Create NSW, Transport for NSW and, for Round Two only, the Department of Planning and Environment. The Review Committee was established to recommend projects for consideration consistent with the assessment criteria outlined in the CBDs Revitalisation Program Guidelines. These recommendations were then provided to the CEO of Investment NSW for endorsement and subsequently, to the Minister, for approval.

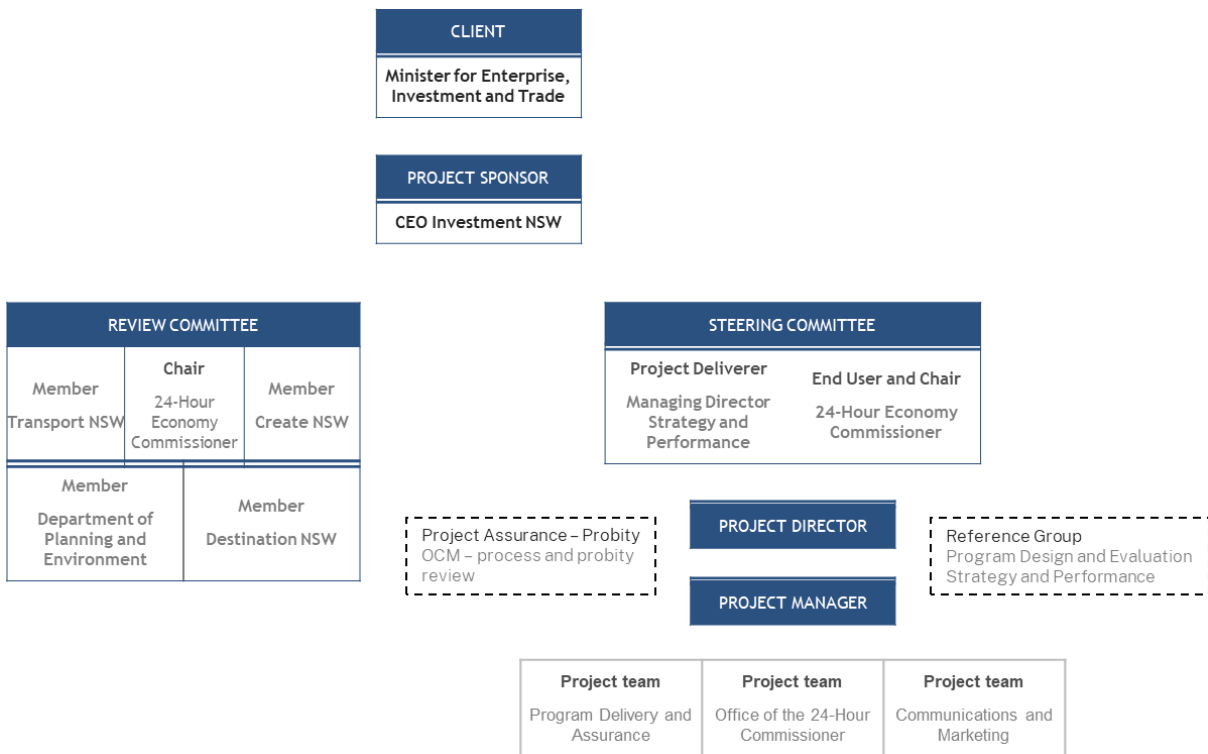
The Review Committee members and the Program Delivery and Assurance team members observing assessment proceedings signed Conflict of Interest declaration forms and Confidentiality Deeds.

Investment NSW engaged the services of O’Connor Marsden and Associates (OCM) to provide advice on probity and to monitor that activities were conducted in line with the CBDs Revitalisation Program Probity Plan. OCM was consulted on a range of issues including applicant requests and the granting of extensions for application deadlines, eligibility requirements, and perceived conflicts of interest.

OCM observed all Review Committee meetings. A probity certificate provided by OCM at the end of both Round Two and Round Three assessment periods states that OCM was “satisfied that the assessment has been conducted in a manner which did not breach the general principles of probity”.

Interviews with program staff suggested that there were no material probity issues identified throughout the Program’s administration and that advice was sought from OCM where potential issues could have arisen.

Figure 3: Governance arrangements – CBDs Revitalisations Program. *Note that the Department of Planning and Environment was not included in the Review Committee for Round Three.*





Learning One: Clearer separation of duties in governance arrangements would reduce the risk of perceived conflicts of interest.

The 24-Hour Economy Commissioner is the Program owner and chaired both the Steering and Review Committees. While execution of funding deeds originally sat with CEO Investment NSW in Round Two, this was subsequently delegated to the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner in Round Three to mitigate approval delays.

The recent *Review of Grants Administration in NSW Final Report² (the Review)* notes the composition of assessment committees can benefit from involving a mixture of external subject matter experts, non-officials, and officials who have not been part of the design of the grant opportunity. As a key subject matter expert, the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner was an appropriate chair for the Review Committee. However, the Commissioner being the Program owner and also the chair of the Steering Committee, creates the risk of a perceived conflict of interest.

The Review highlights the importance of clear separation of duties between entities that assess and provide funding recommendations, entities that approve funding decisions and entities that oversee project management and provide oversight functions. An arm's length relationship between 'client facing' officials, who may have relationships with potential applicants, and assessors avoids real – or reasonably perceived – conflicts of interests. This is recommended by the *Review* to foster public trust in grant administration processes.

While the Program's governance arrangements did not cause any observable issues in its administration, having key staff involved in design, assessment and oversight functions could result in perceived conflicts of interest. Having clearer separation of duties would reduce this risk and enhance confidence in program processes and decision-making.



Finding Four: Funding recommendations were transparent and consistent with eligibility and assessment criteria.

The application involved a single stage process for applicants.

Following the application period closure date, applications were first assessed for eligibility and completeness by the Program Delivery and Assurance team. A review of a sample of program documentation, including eligibility checklists compiled for each application on SmartyGrants, indicated selections were consistent with the eligibility criteria set out in the program guidelines.

Eligible applications then progressed to competitive assessment by the Review Committee. An analysis of application scoring sheets and meeting minutes revealed that Review Committee assessment and scoring was consistent with the assessment criteria in the program guidelines, as well as with the assessment methodology outlined in the CBDs Revitalisation Program Review Committee Assessment Guide.

Funding recommendations were subsequently provided to the CEO Investment NSW for endorsement and recommendation to the Minister for Enterprise, Investment and Trade. The

² NSW Treasury, "[Review of Grants Administration in NSW Final Report](#)", 2022, accessed August 2022

Minister reviewed recommendations and held final responsibility for funding decisions (see Figure 4).

All funding recommendations provided to the Minister for Enterprise, Investment and Trade were approved.

Figure 4: Assessment process – CBDs Revitalisation Program



Finding Five: Selection rationale was fully documented, and feedback was provided to unsuccessful applicants where requested.

The scores, recommendations and comments against each eligible application were outlined in the CBDs Revitalisation Program Review Committee scoring and recommendation sheet. Recommendations were made for full and partial funding for both rounds. An additional component was added for Round Three, where applications could be deemed meritorious but not recommended for funding. Proposed projects deemed to be meritorious were recognised as meeting the assessment criteria to the required standard but to a lesser degree than other applications. As such, meritorious projects could be re-considered if additional funding became available at a later time e.g. in the event a successful applicant declined an offer of funding.

An analysis of documentation found recommendations for funding were fully documented with reasoning for full, partial, meritorious (Round Three) and non-funding consistent with the assessment criteria. Recommendations were based on ranked aggregated committee scores. In instances where funding was recommended for applicants who ranked less highly, justification was provided noting the risk profile, range of activities and the geographical location of events.

Eligible applicants were notified of progression to competitive assessment and ineligible applicants were provided with reasons for ineligibility. Unsuccessful applicants were directed to contact the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner to seek feedback if required. Program staff interviews indicated that one unsuccessful applicant has so far requested, and was provided with, feedback.



Learning Two: Ensuring proportionate governance and delegations for approvals may improve timeliness of program processes.

Streamlining approval processes where possible would improve the efficiency of administrative processes and reduce the potential impact of delays for delivery partners.

While timelines for the assessment of applications and execution were necessarily lean due to the time-sensitive nature of the Program as a COVID-19 recovery measure, they were not commensurate with the rigorous project governance in place. The requirement of multiple levels of approval for execution of funding deeds and variations was one factor noted as contributing to delays in processes resulting in uncertainty and increased delivery pressures for delivery partners.

The *Review of Grants Administration in NSW Final Report* highlights considering time constraints, the extent of administrative work involved and potential conflicts of interest in selecting decision-makers for program processes. In situations like that faced by this Program, where there are acknowledged time pressures for delivery and a large number of applicants, the *Review* indicates it may not be practical for Ministers or heads of agencies to undertake decision-making functions.

In Round Three of the Program some changes were made to delegations, economising requirements for approvals. In Round Two, project variation requests were generally approved by the Program Steering Committee but extensions past the 31 May delivery date required Ministerial approval. In Round Three, authority for all variation requests was delegated to the Program Steering Committee. Similarly, there was a transfer in the execution of funding deeds between Rounds Two and Three, with this responsibility moving from CEO Investment NSW to the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner. It is likely that without these changes to governance arrangements program delivery may have been further delayed in Round Three.



Finding Six: Resourcing challenges impacted the preparation of some internal program documentation at the Program establishment stage.

Staffing levels across the Program Delivery and Assurance and the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team at program initiation were not commensurate with the Program's scale and timeframes. As a result of resourcing constraints during program establishment, program staff noted having to work additional hours to ensure tasks were completed.

Interviews with program staff suggested that a lack of dedicated staff for program planning impacted the preparation of internal documentation. They indicated a need to prioritise which documents they invested their limited time and resources in developing. This was corroborated by a review of program documentation with key program documents such as program guidelines, governance plans, the Charter and assessment criteria being developed and finalised. However, other program planning documents were initiated, including guidance on procedures, delegations and approvals, which were either not completed or not operationalised.

While separation of duties between the Program Delivery and Assurance and the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner teams was outlined in the Charter, resourcing

constraints combined with the practicalities of establishing and operating within a new partnership, and limited knowledge of responsibilities of each team in the early stages of the Program, impacted the creation and/or finalisation of further documentation that would have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

A majority of program staff interviewed noted some uncertainty, at least at the commencement of their role, around processes and procedures and lines of accountability. Some indicated a lack of clarity around governance arrangements, including who could approve certain program processes and documentation. This resulted in delays in work progression.

Both the Program Delivery and Assurance and the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team progressively increased staffing levels in January and February 2022 during the Round Two application and assessment periods. New staff joining the Program reflected that they were generally prepared for the role, but the limits to documentation outlined above presented some challenges for them in acquiring timely knowledge of program processes.



Learning Three: Commensurate resourcing and upfront investment in producing clear documentation on project roles and responsibilities and approval processes would better support program staff to perform their duties.

Incomplete detail for staff on responsibilities and approvals processes increased the risk of late inconsistent implementation of processes. Commensurate resourcing for planning during the early stages of the Program would enable more thorough development of program documentation and allow for consultation for quality assurance. It would also more generally ensure that staff are not overburdened.

Detailing roles and responsibilities and approval processes during program planning provides staff with certainty and confidence to execute tasks in a timely manner. Additionally, it allows new staff to better understand their roles and enables timely communication of any changes to responsibilities.

A review of a sample of program records indicated that documents clarifying roles and responsibilities were developed during the implementation of Round Two and continued to be iterated in Round Three.



Finding Seven: Applicants generally found their experience applying for the Program to be largely positive, straightforward, and similar to other grant application experiences.

The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team established an application process that asked applicants to apply through SmartyGrants. Applicants were asked to provide proof of eligibility, the details of the project and how it would be implemented, an outline of project risks, alignment with NSW Government strategies, evidence of delivering similar projects, confirmation of partnerships and co-contributions, and relevant financial records.

The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team provided mostly clear information to applicants. This included publishing eligibility and assessment criteria in program guidelines, offering further information on the CBDs Revitalisation Program website, and publishing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) in anticipation of common questions.

The degree of clarity in the information provided to applicants was reflected in the mainly positive feedback relating to the application process. Delivery partners reported eligibility and assessment criteria were clear to them, and on several occasions reflected on valuing the level of detail included in the program guidelines e.g., the provision of the CBDs boundary maps.

The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team ran information sessions ahead of the Program's launch. Applicants who had attended these sessions indicated they were very helpful in the context of the application process.

A contact email address was also provided to applicants should they require support with their applications. Some delivery partners indicated having been unaware of this contact option in Round Two or assumed staff would not be available to respond over the Christmas and New Year holiday period. This does not reflect on the Program team, but rather, the timing of the application process and assumptions made by some delivery partners.



Learning Four: Provision of complete and timely information on application elements, reporting and acquittal requirements would reduce uncertainty for delivery partners and administrative burden for program staff.

Despite a positive overall experience for delivery partners, there were a few areas where completeness of information could have been improved in Round Two program documentation.

A review of the Round Two Program Guidelines revealed applicants were not initially provided indicative timelines for notification of outcomes. Updates were made to the Program website and the FAQ documentation to include timeframes after the closing date for Round Two. Some delivery partners indicated experiencing uncertainty given the initial lack of information on timing. Program staff recognised this as a potential frustration for applicants and made changes to include this information in the Round Three Program Guidelines.

A further issue raised by delivery partners was that the Round Two Program Guidelines did not clarify whether grant funding was inclusive or exclusive of GST. A sample funding deed on the Program website indicated funding was inclusive of GST, although it is unclear whether and at what stage this information was accessed by applicants. Delivery partner interviews highlighted that some were surprised to discover grant funding was inclusive of GST when notified of their outcome. Some sought clarification from the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team, contributing to delays in processes.

Another suggestion raised by delivery partners was the provision of additional information about eligible costs. Although the Round Two program guidelines provided examples of some eligible and ineligible costs, a small number of delivery partners noted that more information about which costs were eligible would have better supported their application process and improved the efficiency of subsequent funding deed processes. This was corroborated by program staff who noted that negotiating eligible and ineligible costs contributed to delays in processing funding deeds.

Whilst the funding deed specified an audited statement of expenditure for acquittal of project activities, a few delivery partners reported the requirement of an external auditor was unclear to them. An auditing template was distributed to delivery partners, however, some noted that this occurred in close proximity to the reporting due date. More timely distribution

of this auditing template would have alleviated confusion amongst delivery partners. It may have also reduced costs for delivery partners, with some noting additional expenditure was required in order to undertake auditing activities in line with the audit template once released.

These uncertainties around acquittal requirements could have been mitigated by the development of clear and complete guidance documentation in program planning. While delivery partners who contacted program staff noted timely acknowledgement of their queries, staff did not always have full access to the information being sought. More thorough program documentation would have enabled timely and useful responses to enquiries. It would also allow program staff to independently access relevant information, reducing dependence on program personnel, a factor reported by program staff as delaying responses to applicants.

The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team implemented learnings from Round Two to develop the “Guide to your Grant” for Round Three. This document provides delivery partners and program staff further guidance on funding agreements, reporting requirements and key program processes.



Finding Eight: The Program received applications for a range of events and activation activities and applicants were generally satisfied with the publication of information about the Program.

Over half of the activation activities and events proposed were for the Sydney CBD.

Both rounds of the Program attracted a range of proposals for events and activations to engage local communities and attract visitors to CBDs in line with the Program objective. There was a greater response to Round Three with a 25 per cent increase in applications from Round Two (see Table 4).

The Program Guidelines stipulated 17 eligible CBDs for proposed activation activities. A review of applications indicated that over 50 per cent of proposed activities were located within the Sydney CBD (see Figure 5). The majority of applicants over both rounds of the Program were business entities (see Figure 6).

Figure 5: Locations of proposed activation activities in Rounds Two and Three - CBDs Revitalisation Program

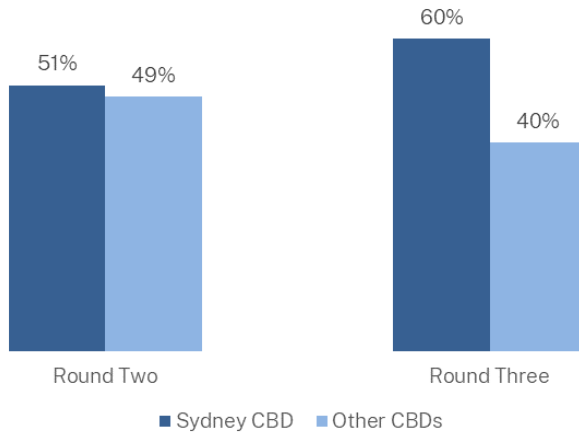
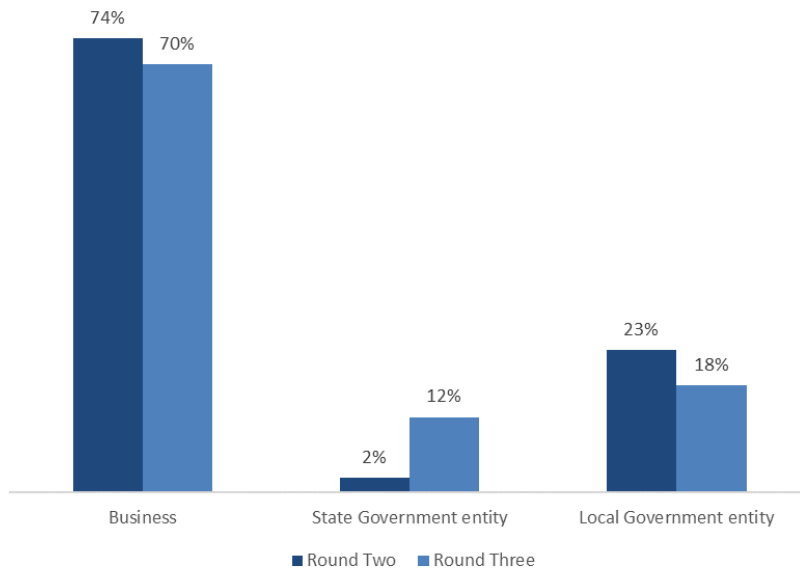


Figure 6: Applicant organisations Round Two and Three - CBDs Revitalisation Program



Information on the Program, including available funding, application process, eligibility and assessment criteria, key dates, successful projects, Program Guidelines and other relevant documentation were provided on the CBDs Revitalisation Program website. An internet search indicated a media release as well as online media articles promoted the Program. Information sessions were delivered prior to the launch of both rounds. Delivery partners noted the information provided both through the website and information sessions was relevant and useful.



Finding Nine: The Program was broadly promoted in line with the 24-Hour Economy Communications Plan.

The Program was broadly promoted in line with the 24-Hour Economy Communications Plan. The Communications Plan noted ensuring better use of owned digital channels to promote 24-Hour Economy programs and initiatives, outlined the key stakeholders and audiences and targeted proactive media coverage.

A review of program documentation found an early draft of a dedicated (i.e. Program specific) communications plan that included a pre-approved calendar for coordinated publishing of content across channels (website, social media etc.), as well as distribution to key stakeholders, partners, and relevant government agencies. This evaluation's review of program documents did not include confirming whether these promotional activities were undertaken as planned; however, feedback from delivery partners suggested discovering the program through a range of these channels. Some delivery partners indicated that earlier and greater promotion of the program may have allowed them to identify and prepare for the opportunity in a more timely manner.

The application period and timing of program launch may have impacted program reach. Several delivery partners indicated the application timelines falling over the Christmas holiday period impacted their ability to engage with stakeholders. This may have been a barrier preventing some interested proponents submitting an application. Interviews indicated that limited brand awareness of Investment NSW as a new group under the Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade may also have had an impact.

In terms of delivery partners' ability to promote their events, some mentioned that standard information on the process for inviting the Minister to activation activities would have been helpful. Other feedback indicated that providing a link to the NSW Government Branding Guidelines up front would have been of assistance in promoting activities. Some felt that delays to approvals and funding may have impacted the timely launch of their marketing campaigns, which could have had flow on effects for reach, engagement and participation.

4 Conclusions

The Program has been largely implemented as planned and assessment processes supported decision making consistent with the aims of the Program. Limitations in resourcing created challenges for program staff. Knock-on delays to planned timeframes created delivery pressures for delivery partners and may have implications for the extent to which the Program accelerated the economic and social recovery of the CBDs.

In summary:

1. **Program activities were broadly implemented as planned** with effective application processes, sufficient overall provision of information to applicants and governance and probity arrangements implemented as outlined in program planning documentation.
2. **Funding recommendations were transparent, documented and in line with eligibility and assessment criteria.** Feedback was provided to unsuccessful applicants as requested.
3. **Staffing and resourcing challenges** limited the preparation of program documentation and processes. This resulted in a lack of clarity at times for program staff around roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability and approval. It also resulted in some lack of clarity for delivery partners around certain project and reporting requirements.
4. **There were delays in timeframes** with assessment and approval periods taking longer than planned, which increased delivery pressures for delivery partners.

Appendix A: Program logic

Figure 7: program logic - CBDs Revitalisation Program

Program Objective: to accelerate the economic and social recovery of CBDs across Greater Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. To achieve this the Program will provide targeted support for events to attract people back to CBDs, and to increase their connectedness and engagement with these locations.

Issue or problem and cause	Target population	Activities	Outputs	Short term outcomes	Medium term outcomes	Long term outcomes
<p>The pandemic has presented both a public health and economic challenge to the State.</p> <p>In CBDs this economic challenge has been most acute due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the stickiness of pandemic-induced behaviour, which is resulting in a slower return to CBDs a perceived lack of events, or sense of connectedness and engagement with CBDs. 	<p>NSW population, interstate or international visitors that are willing to visit eligible CBDs however, have stopped visiting or are visiting less often.</p>	<p>Program information developed and grant applications sought</p> <p>Operational protocols developed</p> <p>Contracts executed</p>	<p>The following outputs are delivered across CBDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> additional offerings at cultural institutions special events live music or performance in venues arts, entertainment and recreation installations marketing of above events or offerings 	<p>The target population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are more connected and engaged with supported CBDs visit supported CBDs sooner or more often than they otherwise would have 	<p>The target population are more comfortable and less hesitant to visit CBDs and visit more frequently.</p> <p>The stickiness of short-term pandemic induced behaviour is eroded sooner. This results in: increased foot traffic and spend in CBDs.</p>	<p>The stimulus provided in response to this economic shock supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> less economic disruption to businesses in target CBDs faster return to the 'new normal' more jobs retained

Appendix B: Findings and learnings

Key evaluation question	Evaluation finding
1. Have the program activities been implemented as intended?	<p>Finding 1: The Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner and Program Delivery and Assurance teams successfully stood up Round Two and Round Three of the Program by the stipulated launch dates, despite tight deadlines and resourcing pressures. Some later Program processes took longer than originally planned.</p> <p>Finding 3: Governance and probity arrangements were implemented as planned.</p> <p>Finding 7: Delivery partners generally found their experience applying for the Program to be largely positive, straightforward, and similar to other grant application experiences.</p>
2. Were funding recommendations transparent and in line with assessment guidelines and program planning?	<p>Finding 4: Funding recommendations were transparent and consistent with eligibility and assessment criteria.</p> <p>Finding 5: Selection rationale was fully documented, and feedback was provided to unsuccessful applicants where requested.</p>
3. Are there any barriers to program delivery?	<p>Finding 2: Delays in approvals and the execution of funding deeds increased delivery pressures for delivery partners and required extensions to the delivery window for funded projects. This may have a bearing on the achievement of the Program objective.</p> <p>Finding 6: Resourcing challenges impacted the preparation of some internal program documentation at the program establishment stage.</p>
4. If so, how can the program be improved?	<p>Learning 1: Clearer separation of duties in governance arrangements would reduce the risk of perceived conflicts of interest.</p> <p>Learning 2: Ensuring proportionate governance and delegations for approvals may improve timeliness of program processes.</p> <p>Learning 3: Commensurate resourcing and upfront investment in producing clear documentation on project roles and responsibilities and approval processes would better support program staff to perform their duties.</p> <p>Learning 4: Provision of complete and timely information on application elements, reporting, and acquittal requirements would reduce uncertainty for delivery partners and administrative burden for program staff.</p>
5. To what extent did the program reach intended recipients?	<p>Finding 8: The Program received applications for a range of events and activation activities and delivery partners were generally satisfied with the information provided about the Program. Over half of the activation activities and events proposed were for the Sydney CBD.</p> <p>Finding 9: The Program was broadly promoted in line with the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner team's Communications Plan.</p>

Appendix C: Interview guides

Program staff interview guide

Introduction

Can you tell me a little about your role in delivering the CBDs Revitalisation Program?

How clearly did you understand your role?

If I was to transfer your opinion on how well prepared you were to play your role in the CBDs Revitalisation Program to a five-point scale where 1 is Very Poor, 2 is Poor, 3 is Adequate, 4 is Good and 5 is Very Good what rating would you give it?

Process evaluation question	Interview question	Response type
1. Have program activities been implemented as intended?	From your perspective, was the program delivery completed as planned? <i>Prompts: program implementation was completed within planned timeframes, on budget</i>	Open conversation
	From your perspective, how effectively was the program implemented, what would you do the same again, what might you do differently if you had your time again?	Open conversation
2. Were funding recommendations transparent and in line with assessment guidelines and program planning?	Did you ever have any concerns about whether grant decisions were consistent with the assessment criteria?	Open conversation
	How was record-keeping managed during the program?	Open conversation
	Was consistent record keeping undertaken that explained funding recommendations?	Open conversation
	Did you have any concerns in relation to the way unsuccessful applicants were provided feedback on why their applications were unsuccessful?	Open conversation
3. Are there any barriers to program delivery? If so, how can the program be improved?	Were there any requirements of the program that the applicants had trouble with? <i>Prompts: Eligibility information, The application processes or Project reporting requirements.</i>	Open conversation

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	<p>If applicants had queries about the requirements of the program, were these queries resolved by agency staff in a timely manner?</p>	<p>Yes, my queries were answered in a timely manner</p> <p>I did not have any queries</p> <p>No, my queries were not resolved in a timely manner</p> <p>Other, please specify</p>
	<p>From your perspective, were the eligibility requirements appropriate for attracting the best applicants? Why or why not?</p> <p><i>Prompt: the relevant eligibility criteria were ...</i></p>	<p>Open conversation</p>
	<p>To what extent were program delivery timeframes realistic and appropriate?</p> <p>How could these have been improved?</p> <p>Was there any pressure on program delivery (<i>prompt: timing, staffing changes, staffing capability organisation changes</i>)? If so, how did this affect the program?</p>	<p>Open conversation</p>
	<p>To what extent were lines of accountability clear to you?</p>	<p>Open conversation</p>
	<p>How was probity managed?</p> <p>Were there any probity issues? If so, how were these dealt with?</p>	<p>Open conversation</p>
<p>Final comments</p>	<p>Do you have any final comments or suggestions to improve the processes surrounding the grant?</p>	<p>Open conversation</p>

Delivery partner interview guide

Introduction

Can you tell me a little about your project that was supported by the CBDs Revitalisation Program?

The following questions ask you to reflect on your experiences with and to consider your perspectives on aspects of CBDs Revitalisation Program processes.

Interview question	Response type
Overall, to what extent were the requirements of the of the program effectively communicated to you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eligibility • information on the assessment process • project reporting requirements? [prompts: acquittals process, invoicing receipts, claiming expenses, monitoring and reporting requirements] 	Open conversation
Overall, to what extent did you find collating the information required for the application difficult?	Open conversation
[If applicable] To what extent did you find collating the information required for final project reporting difficult?	Open conversation
Were you aware that agency staff were available to answer your questions and provide information during the application process, through to final project reporting?	Yes - No
Did you reach out to agency staff with questions? If so when did you reach out?	Yes - No
Please provide some comments to help us understand your experience	Open conversation
How satisfied were you with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the time in which responses were provided • the usefulness of responses provided? 	Open conversation
From the time of your application, how many weeks did it take to be notified of an outcome?	Number of weeks
[If applicable] From the time you were notified of an outcome how many weeks did it take for you to receive your Funding Deed?	Number of weeks
[If applicable] Did the time to receive your Funding Deed impact your operation?	Open conversation
Did you request a variation to your Funding Deed?	Yes - No

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Please provide some context around your experience with this process	Open conversation
Final comments - Do you have any final comments or suggestions to improve aspects relating to the CBDs Revitalisation program?	Open conversation