

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA

WORKPLAN TASK 2

Principles and Priorities: Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program



**Response Prepared by:
Area Consultative Committee Tasmania**

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Executive Summary

The following recommendations are provided to Government in relation to the development of a new regional funding program:

- A new funding program is to be flexible enough for all communities and organisations, including commercial organisations, to be eligible
- Projects are to be assessed on their individual merits according to local and/or regional need
- Application assessments are to be delegated and far more efficient and timely than previous programs
- A new program is to be flexible enough to assist a broad range of community projects that are part of, or separate to, regional strategic plans
- A partnership approach to funding is desirable, but not mandatory
- A continuous application time-frame is preferable to having closed funding rounds
- There is a strong capacity within communities to deliver projects, but less capacity to identify project partners and work through the development/application processes

Further, a funding program is to be flexible and available to applicants from all communities and regions, provided sufficient need and outcomes are demonstrated.

RLCIP funding should be distributed through a discretionary, individual merit-based system where projects are assessed on demonstrated need, outcome, and value for money.

A new funding program delivering regional and local community benefits must be flexible to allow applicants from a range of organisations. Eligible applicants should include commercial organisations, providing the commercial projects can demonstrate strong community benefits.

Tasmanian communities have identified a need for assistance in a broad range of projects. These kinds of projects include both tangible and intangible development. Support for community capacity building would also be valuable, as would mentoring and supporting a range of community development programs. Other types of projects include:

- research and development, seed funding, and feasibility projects;
- funding for people/human capital, such as project managers;
- projects that encourage economic development.

There should be a partnership approach to funding in the RLCIP. The program should be flexible in its recognition of partnerships, and should include cash, in-kind and project delivery contributors. These contributions should be given equal importance and relevance in the assessment of applications.

While stakeholders believe that in-kind value is as important as cash value, the RLCIP will need to provide clear definitions and guidelines to applicants for the calculation and allocation of genuine and costed in-kind contributions.

The Tasmanian community's expectations for RLCIP are extremely high, particularly in light of there being no regional funding program available since November 2007. Clearly, there are elements of the previous funding program (Regional Partnerships) that sit well with stakeholders, but the overriding message is that RLCIP must be flexible in its recognition of

partnership funding, community and regional need, types of projects to be funded, eligible applicants and delegated assessment procedures.

In delivering such a flexible program, Government must ensure its application and assessment processes are transparent, that's its objectives and eligibility criterion are clear and that it provides some form of on-ground support and assistance to the very communities who will benefit most from applying to the Program. The Tasmanian community is of the general opinion that that support should be provided by RDA.

Finally, in providing this advice to the Australian Government we acknowledge the findings of the Australian National Audit Office report in relation to the former Regional Partnerships Program, particularly with respect to the application decision making process, the broad nature of the program and the continuous application time frame (as opposed to rounds). Our community feedback confirms the previous decision-making process as one which requires significant improvement; however, it also suggests that the broadness of the program and the continuous application process were both extremely successful aspects of Regional Partnerships, and should be retained in a new program. ACCT also recognises that some of the information provided by the Department and the Parliamentary Secretary to date does not align with some of the advice from the Tasmanian community.

1. Introduction

ACCT is the consultative committee for all of Tasmania. In providing responses to the Government about Regional Development Australia, the new Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, and local infrastructure that could encourage economic development, ACCT has sought feedback from stakeholders and communities across the state from April to September 2008.

This report has been collated from stakeholder and community representatives and serves as accurate and authentic advice to Government on the desired principles and priorities of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program (RLCIP).

The following key points need to be considered by Government when developing a new regional funding program:

- A new funding program is to be flexible enough for all communities and organisations, including commercial organisations, to be eligible
- Projects are to be assessed on their individual merits according to local and/or regional need
- Application assessments are to be delegated and far more efficient and timely than previous programs
- A new program is to be flexible enough to assist a broad range of community projects that are part of, or separate to, regional strategic plans
- A partnership approach to funding is desirable, but not mandatory
- A continuous application time-frame is preferable to having closed funding rounds
- There is a strong capacity within communities to deliver projects, but less capacity to identify project partners and work through the development/application processes

2. Stakeholder Consultation

2.1 Process

In collating feedback and advice for this task, the Tasmanian consultation process included:

- An on-line survey, linked to the ACCT webpage, with questions extrapolated from the *“Preparing A Response to RDA Workplan Task 2”* template provided by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

320 responses were made between August 26th and September 8th, 2008.

- Four externally-facilitated forums/workshops in the major regional areas of the State - in Burnie (North West), Launceston (North/North East), and two in Hobart (South Metro, South Regional).

The five-hour workshops were held on July 24, 25, 29 and 30.

The final stage of each of these forums involved individual participants completing a survey on the principles and priorities of the new program (RLCIP).

72 responses were manually entered without alteration into the ACCT's online survey. (Included in 320 total)

- Two internally-facilitated regional meetings – in St Helens (East Coast) and Queenstown (West Coast).

These meetings were conducted on August 5th and 18th, respectively. They focused on the role of Regional Development Australia and the principles and priorities of a new community infrastructure funding program.

Participants were asked to complete a survey regarding the new RLCIP as part of the meetings' agendas

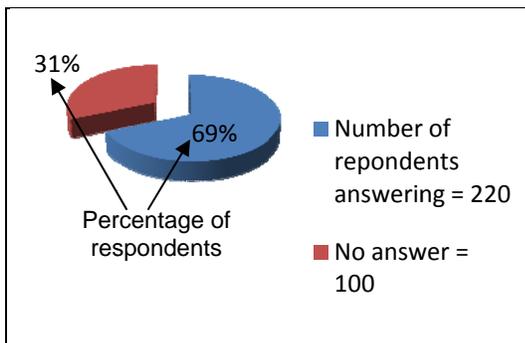
18 responses were received. (Included in 320 total)

2.2 Presentation of Data

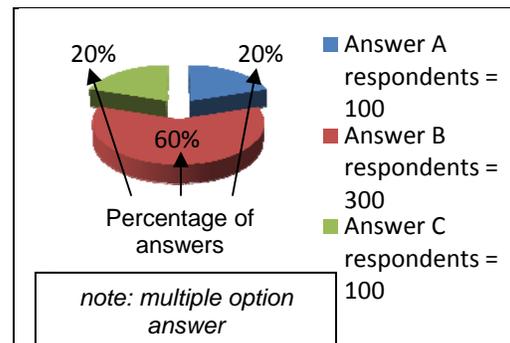
All stakeholder feedback in this report is presented via a series of pie charts. The legend of each chart shows the option and the number of respondents who selected this option. The data label in each chart shows this number of respondents converted to a percentage. (See Example 1 below)

Note that some questions were presented with the ability to select multiple answers. These charts are labeled accordingly, and while the number of respondents remains in the legend, the percentage that appears on the data labels is a percentage of the total number of answers, not the total number of respondents. (See Example 2 below)

Example 1: Single answer questions

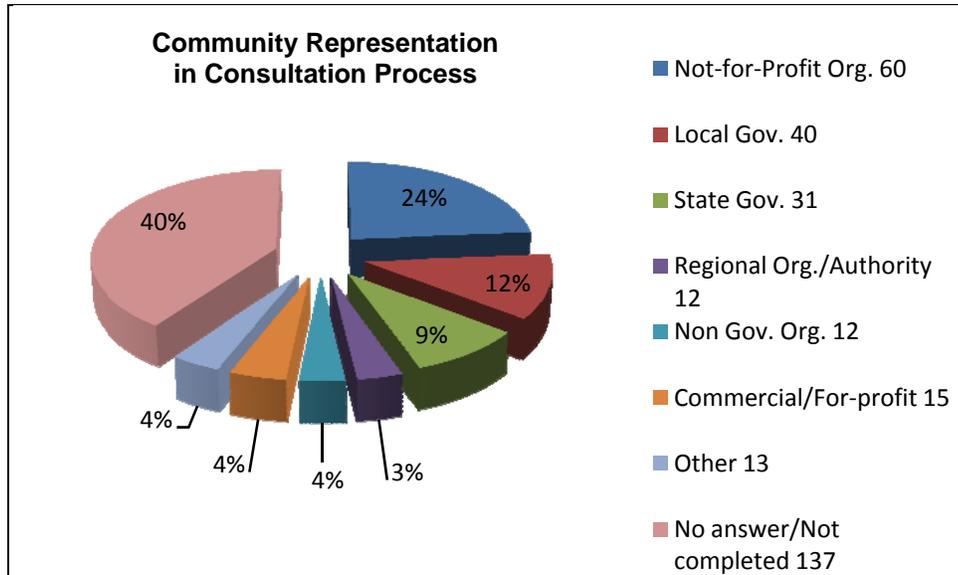


Example 2: Multiple answer questions



2.3 Stakeholder Representation

The following sectors were represented by survey respondents:



Stakeholders selecting the 'Other' option include representatives from community banks, volunteering, arts organisations, potential applicants, community houses and educational institutions.

Note: A significant proportion of participants did not complete this question. 56 chose not to supply their organisation in the on-line survey, while 81 came from the community forums, where this question was not actually asked. The total number of respondents to this question was 183, or 60% of total survey respondents.

3. Response and Advice from Community

The information presented in this report is drawn entirely from the feedback provided by community to ACCT and serves as advice to the Department on the desired principles and priorities of a new funding program. Our response is presented in relation to the following issues:

- Regional definition
- Targeted communities
- Program eligibility
- Funding allocation / distribution
- Decision making / assessment procedures
- Determining project priority
- Partnerships
- Closed / Open application timelines
- Community capacity
- Recognition of regional issues in Canberra
- General expectations of a new program

3.1 Regional Definition

Advice to Government: In Tasmania, there are three recognised geographical regions. A new funding program must be flexible to support projects in small towns, Local Government Areas, the three recognised regions, and the whole state.

Stakeholders were asked to nominate how best to define the term 'region' in relation to Tasmania. It is the view of the majority of our stakeholders that the term 'region':

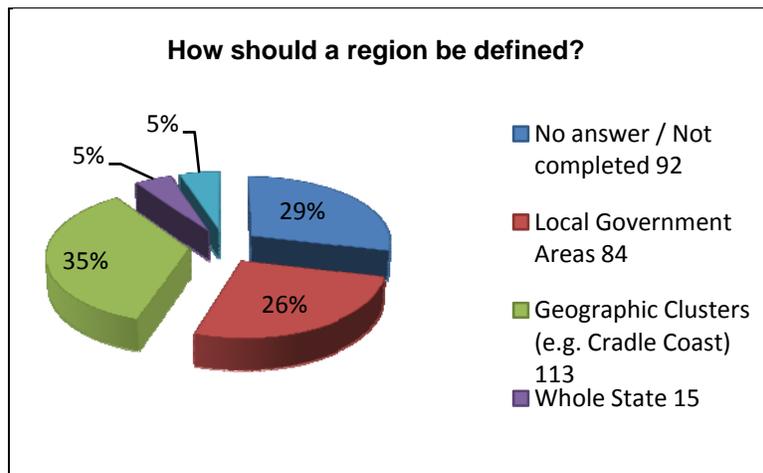
- Means an area larger than a local government area, but smaller than the State;
- Allows small areas to combine and work with other areas to achieve better development outcomes for more people and communities
- Includes, in the case of Tasmania and perhaps other states, the 'metropolitan' areas (Hobart, Launceston, Burnie, Devonport)
- Is not restricted to remote and rural communities

There is a common acceptance that Tasmania has three recognised regions: North and North East, North West and West, and South. These regions are readily nominated by stakeholders, largely because there are established regional authorities in each of them, funded primarily by geographic clusters of local councils.

Northern Tasmania Development (North/North East), the Cradle Coast Authority (North West/West) and Southern Tasmanian Councils (South), focus their efforts on different aspects of regional development and their structures, outputs, goals and resources vary. Some Local Government representatives argue these authorities deliver outcomes to the regions to varying degrees of success; however, there is common agreement that they do represent established regions.

Survey respondents were asked to select one of the following geographic definitions of 'region':

- Local Government Area
- Geographic Clusters (eg Cradle Coast area)
- The whole state



While Tasmania is a small state in terms of its geographical size and population, communities do not tend to recognise the whole state as one region. They recognise economic, geographic, agricultural, transport, historical, cultural and social needs as fairly distinctly aligned to three separate regions.

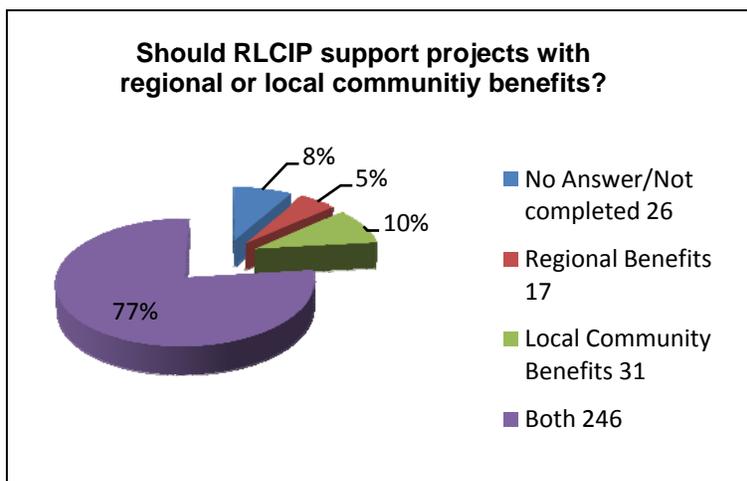
Having said that, a significant number of respondents see their own local government area as being one region. This tends to be the case in smaller, isolated LGA's as they believe they can miss out on some of the 'bigger picture' issues. An example of this was presented to ACCT during one regional meeting, when the statistics of isolated, disadvantaged communities are used to attract regional funding, but the majority of funding goes to the more urban, advantaged areas, which in turn leaves the small communities needing more. This may be a common occurrence, or it may be a localised perception; whichever the case, it demonstrates the need for a funding program to cater for all communities.

'Other' ways of defining regions in terms of a new funding program have also been raised:

- Let the region be guided by the project or activity, and by the applicant / community;
- Define the regions in line with
 - police and health districts
 - telephone districts;
- Define a region based on communities of similar social and economic needs and common points of interest;
- A geographic area, no matter how small, that has points of differentiation from other areas;
- Smaller than the current three regions, but larger than current LGA's;
- A community or town;
- A region may reflect, and interchange, boundaries pertinent to the purpose of funding.

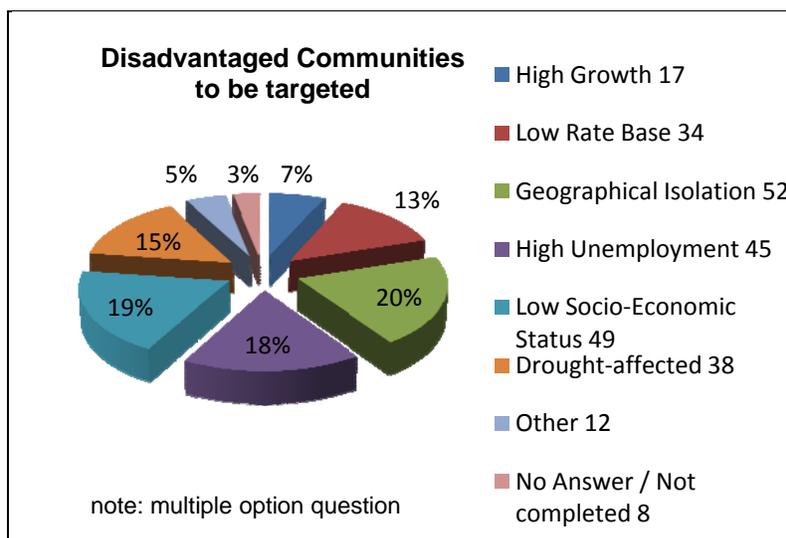
3.2 Which communities or regions should be targeted?

The majority of stakeholders (77%) believe a new program should be flexible enough to support projects that benefit both individual communities and regions.



Respondents were asked if the new program should be limited to projects in disadvantaged communities/regions. 236 (74%) believe a new program should not be limited to disadvantaged areas but be flexible, and support projects based on individual need and merit.

Of the respondents (49 / 14%) who believe a new program should only support disadvantaged areas, the following types of disadvantaged communities were identified:



'Other' disadvantaged areas/communities identified by respondents included:

- Emerging communities;
- Communities with poor infrastructure;
- Dependent groups (eg disabilities);
- Communities that show the ability to grow a regional focus in business, especially with the expected opportunities flowing on from climate change;
- Small communities / 'end-of-the-road' suburbs.

Advice to Government: A funding program is to be flexible and available to applicants from all communities and regions, provided sufficient need and outcomes are demonstrated.

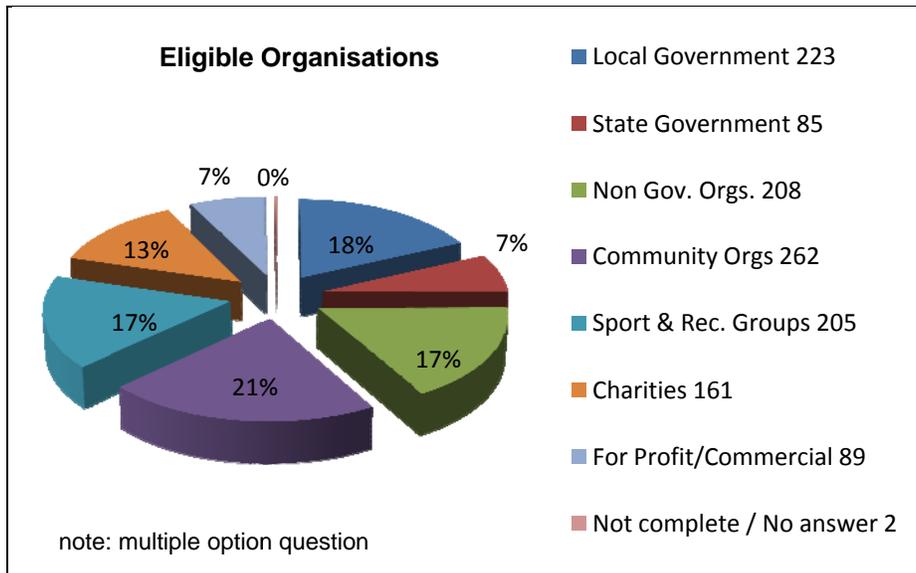
3.3 Applicant eligibility

Respondents were asked to identify which organisations should be eligible to apply to a new regional development funding program. Clearly, there is a strong belief that local government and a range of not-for-profit groups should be eligible to apply for project funding. However, there is also an indication that commercial organisations should be eligible for Federal Government funding. Evidence suggests that the commercial projects must clearly demonstrate community need and community outcomes to be eligible to apply, but there is an understanding by our stakeholders that commercial businesses are often best placed to work with community to provide the best outcomes, and therefore they should not be excluded from seeking funding.

Under previous funding programs such as Regional Partnerships, there have been a number of very successful projects that were driven by private enterprise, but had significant whole-

community outcomes. ACCT explained some of these projects in Work Plan 1. It is our experience and advice that some communities will be disadvantaged should businesses be ineligible for funding to develop social and economic opportunities for the communities in which they operate.

As in past programs, a criterion for assessment of applications should include the notion of cost-shifting. Provided an applicant is not seeking funds to complete a project that would otherwise be expected to be the responsibility of themselves or their partners, the program should be flexible enough to allow the full range of organisational eligibility.



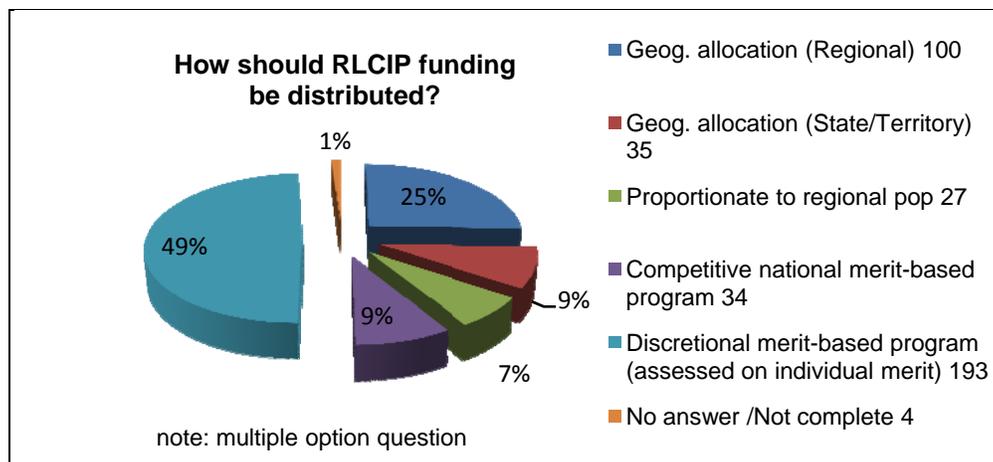
Advice to Government: A new funding program delivering regional and local community benefits must be flexible to allow applicants from a range of organisations. Eligible applicants should include commercial organisations, providing the commercial projects can demonstrate strong community benefits.

3.4 Funding distribution

3.4.1 Allocation of Program funds

Survey respondents were asked to nominate the best method(s) of distributing program funding. Respondents could select one or more options from the following:

- Via a regional geographical allocation
- Via a state/territory allocation
- Proportionate to regional population
- Through a competitive national merit-based program
- Through a discretionary merit based program, where projects are assessed on their individual merits

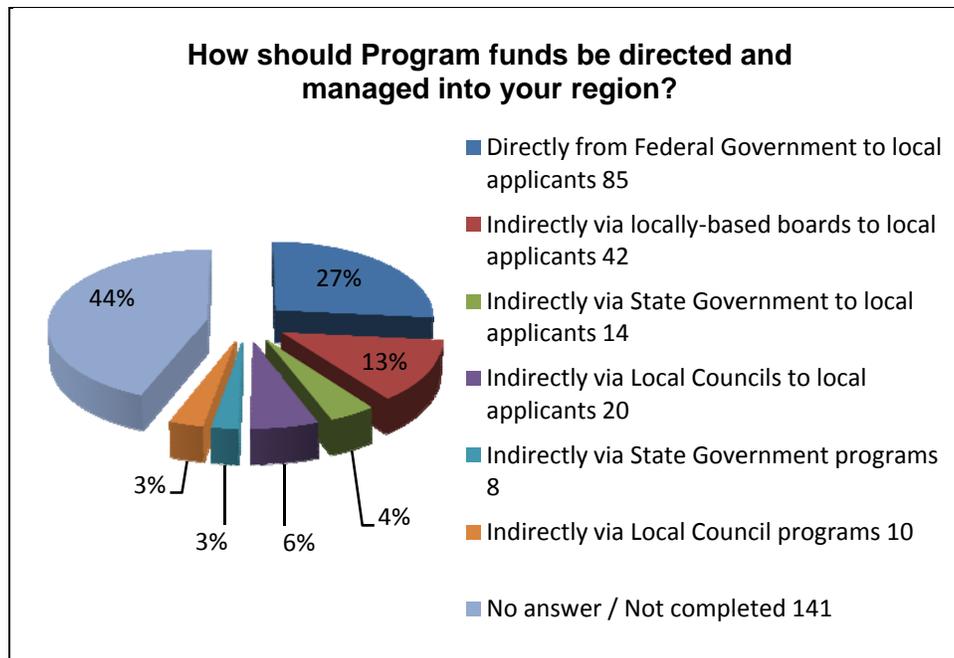


The majority of the respondents to this question indicate that the best method of distributing funds is through a project by project, merit-based system. Of the 193 respondents who favour this method, 62 of them also see value in the use of a Regional Geographical Allocation (100 in total) from the Government. Should the new program's assessment process be delegated (see section 3.5), a combination of regional allocation and discretionary individual merit-based funding may be an effective model.

Advice to Government: RLCIP funding should be distributed through a discretionary, individual merit-based system where projects are assessed on demonstrated need, outcome, and value for money.

3.4.2 Funding distribution and management for projects

Respondents were asked to select the best method for distributing RLCIP funds into regions. 179 or 56% of community stakeholders give clear feedback regarding effective and ineffective methods of distributing funds.



Direct funding to applicants is selected as the most preferable method. Should the Government decide to distribute funds indirectly through a third party, a locally based board (for example RDA) is the most nominated method. Indirect distribution of funds through Local and State Governments (and their respective programs) has limited support (or 8-20 respondents).

Advice to Government: The most effective method for RLCIP funds to be distributed and managed into regions is directly through applicant organisations.

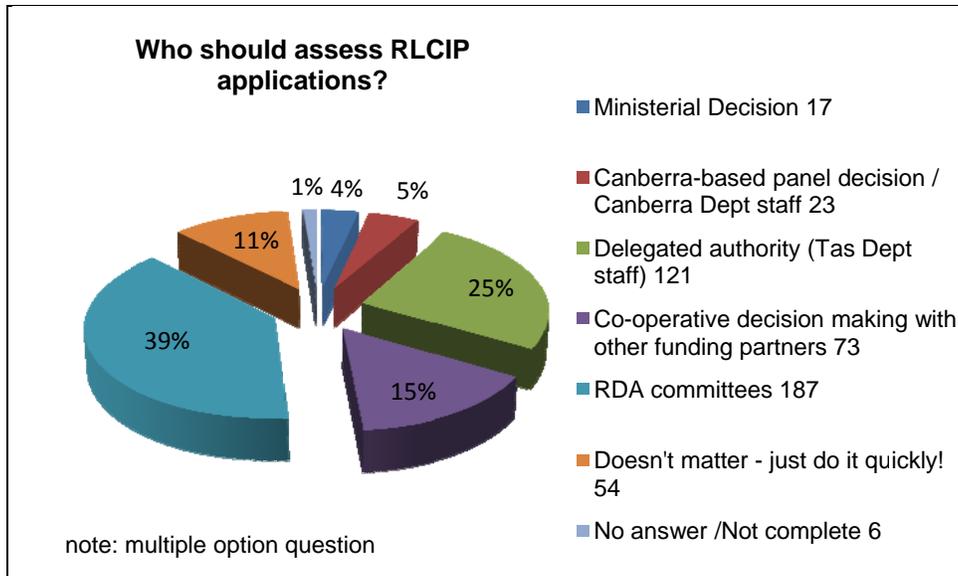
3.5 Assessment process

3.5.1 Who should assess applications?

As a result of the lengthy consultation process undertaken by ACCT there are two very strong messages emerging regarding the assessment process of a new funding program.

Firstly; applicants have been frustrated by the lengthy delays and political pork-barreling of assessments under previous programs (note the 54 respondents who don't really care what the process is; they just want it to be more efficient). The time issues can be resolved and projects can be authentically assessed on their merits by removing a ministerial decision from the process. Only 17 of 320 respondents believe there is a role for ministerial decision making in a new program.

Secondly; stakeholders believe that any authentic assessment of an application and how it can realistically meet a community's needs, and deliver strong outcomes, should be assessed at a local level. To that end, more than 58% or 187 survey respondents indicate the best process of assessment should be conducted by RDA, followed by a delegated Government authority of Regional Departmental Staff (121 respondents, or 38%).



78 respondents believe the assessment should be a collaborative approach between RDA and Departmental staff at the Regional level. This process may be the most effective, authentic and resourceful method of assessment that ensures a balance of project and community understanding, as well as Departmental accountability. Clearly, though, whichever process is adopted, the Tasmanian community believes there should be some form of local knowledge and understanding called upon to evaluate the authenticity of projects.

Our consultation process also revealed that significant numbers want the new funding program to be flexible enough to allow for cooperative decision making. An example is a project that seeks both State and Federal funding, where the State Government program closes and assesses the merits of the project. There is scope for the RLCIP assessment, then, to take into account several elements of a successful application.

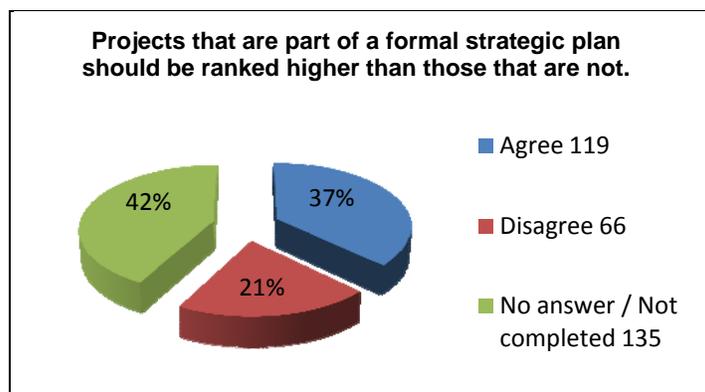
Advice to Government: Although the message from Canberra has consistently been that RDA would have no involvement in the delivery of a new funding program, the message from the Tasmanian community has consistently been that RDA must be involved in application assessments, at the very least. There is also a strong message that RLCIP assessments should be delegated to the Regional Departmental level.

Our advice is to use a combination of RDA and Regional Departmental Staff to assess projects up to, say, \$500,000, and a combination of RDA and Canberra Departmental staff to assess projects over, say, \$500,000. A new program must be flexible enough to have at least part of the assessment conducted at the local level, and to have RDA playing a meaningful role in this.

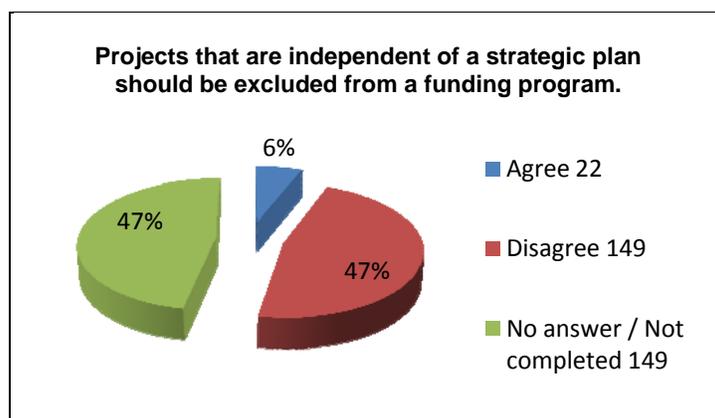
3.5.2 What decision making processes should be considered in the assessment of applications?

Respondents were asked if projects that are part of a formal strategic plan (Regional, or otherwise) should be ranked higher in a RLCIP assessment process than projects that do not form part of a strategic plan. A significant number of respondents did not complete this question.

However, 58% or 185 did complete the question and 37% of respondents agree that a project with a link to a strategic plan should be prioritised at a higher level than those applications that do not.



While 37% of respondents agree that projects should have a higher priority in terms of assessment if they are linked with a strategic plan, this does not mean that projects independent of a plan should be excluded from a new funding program.

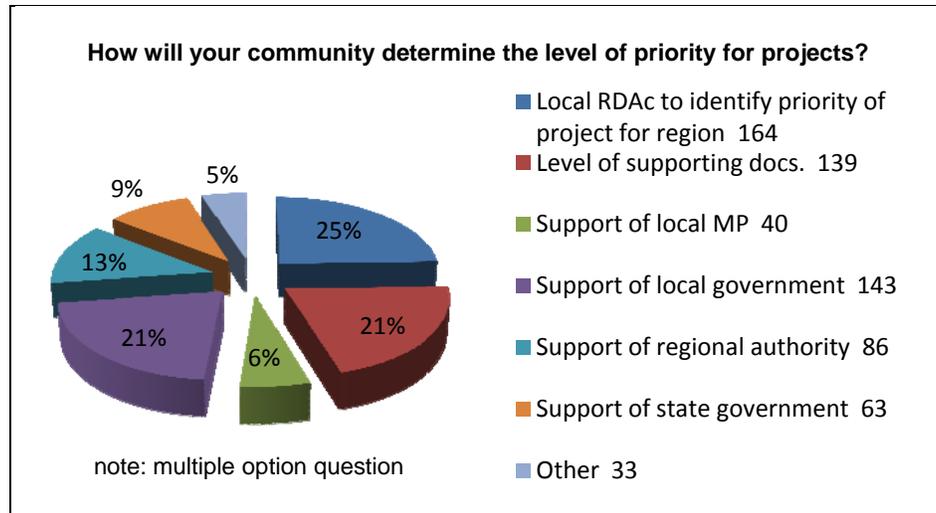


Stakeholders and community believe that there is certainly merit in developing applications from projects that are part of a bigger picture at a local, regional, state or national level. However, strategic plans are mid-long term in their vision, and there are regularly projects and needs within communities that fall outside of the scope of such a plan for a range of reasons (for example, an unexpected opportunity presents itself, or limited financial resources at the time of preparing the plan). To that end, projects that are independent of such strategic plans should not be excluded from the new RLCIP, but should be assessed on the demonstrated need and potential outcomes for the relative community.

Advice to Government: RLCIP may prioritise projects more highly if they form part of a Local Government, Regional or State strategic plan; however the new program must be flexible enough to recognise (and assess accordingly) projects independent of strategic plans that demonstrate need and potential benefit within the community.

3.5.3 Determining project priority within communities

Respondents were asked to select one or more ways of determining a project's priority within their communities.



The responses from community stakeholders demonstrate a preference for RDA to be involved in determining project priority (164 respondents, or 51%, selected this option). This may be best achieved using the Regional Partnerships model of ACC involvement in project development and evaluation.

There is also a preference for projects to provide evidence of local support, particularly from local government. The level of supporting documentation is seen as an integral part of an application, and respondents nominate specific forms of this kind of documentation in the 'Other' category, as:

- Evidence of support from local community, partners and local businesses if applicable;
- Evidence of transparent 'consultation' processes demonstrating authentic community need.

It is clear from the community stakeholder feedback that the prioritisation of a RLCIP project should not lay solely in the support of the local Federal Member, with 40 respondents, or 12%, selecting this as a preferable method for determining priority of projects.

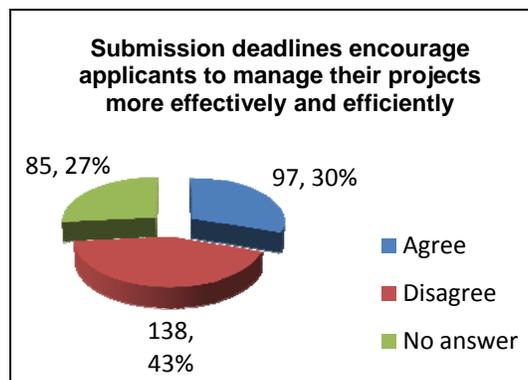
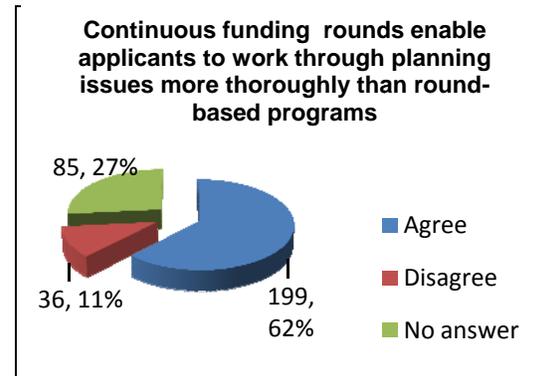
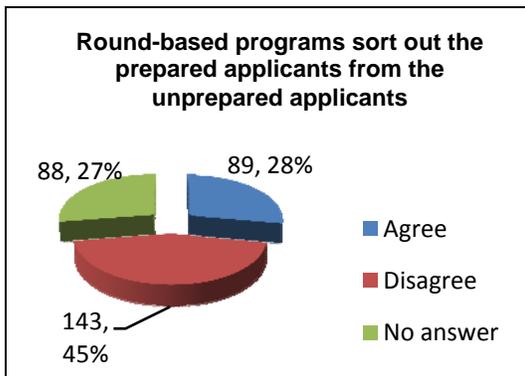
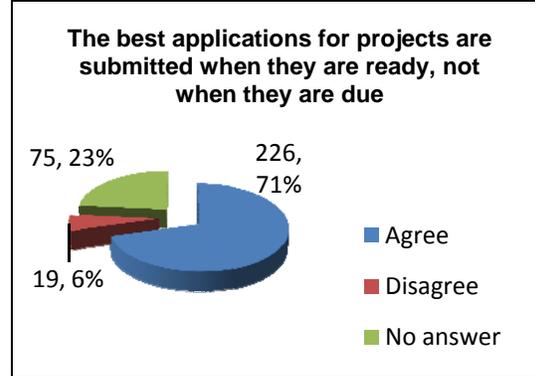
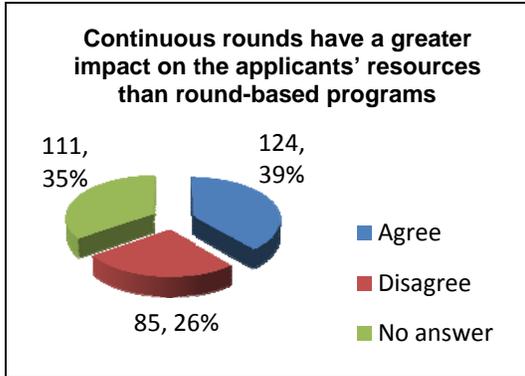
Advice to Government: Supporting documentation from a range of local, regional and state sources may be required (project-dependent) to determine a project's priority; however, community has also clearly indicated that there is a critical role for RDA in identifying the priority of a project for funding.

3.6 Funding rounds vs. a continuous application process

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions in relation to the merits of funding rounds versus a continuous application process. The questions focused on two themes; the Project and application preparation, and Program management and efficiency.

3.6.1 Project and application preparation

A significant number of survey respondents (between 23% and 37%) did not answer these questions. However, from those that did respond to the questions it is clear that a continuous application process is favoured.

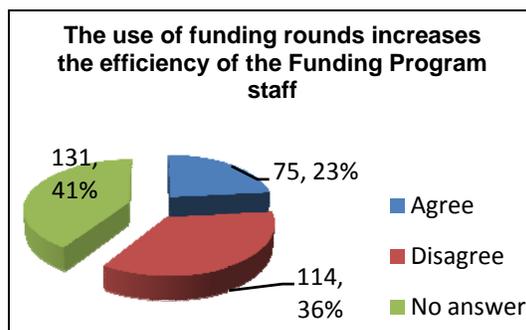
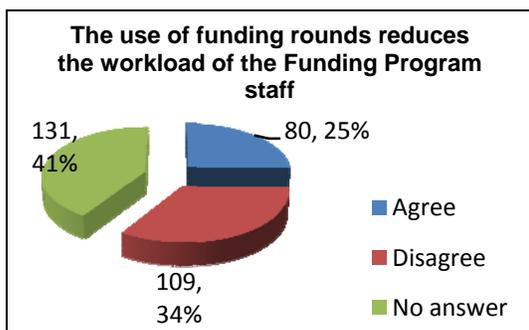


The majority of stakeholder feedback suggests that funding rounds do not necessarily result in well-prepared applications or projects, nor do round-based processes distinguish good applicants and projects from poor applicants and projects.

Stakeholder feedback also indicates that while there may be less demand on applicants' human resources in round-based programs, the best projects are those that are well-planned and thorough, and that an open application process allows applicants to develop such projects and submit the best possible application for assessment.

3.6.2 Program management and efficiency

A significant number of survey respondents (41%) did not answer these questions. However, from those that did respond to the questions it is evident that funding rounds do not necessarily ensure greater efficiency in program management.

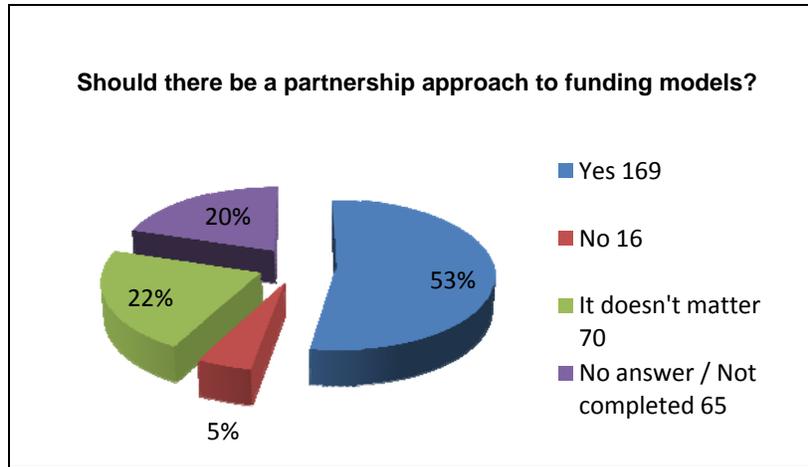


Stakeholder feedback consistently shows a preference for a continuous application process, and that such a process allows for the right projects to get the right evaluation. There has been a great deal of dissatisfaction with the timing of project assessments in the past; however, our stakeholders believe that implementing a rounds-based model will not improve Departmental efficiency in terms of program management. Alternative models for assessment, designed to increase efficiency and accountability, have been advised in section 3.5.

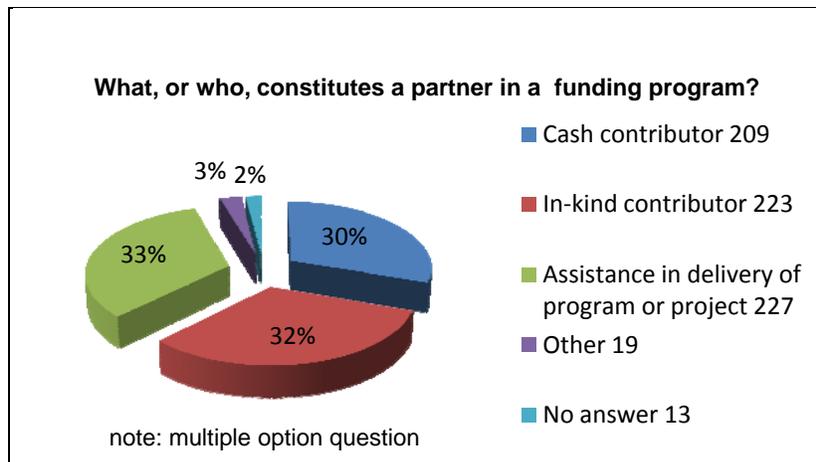
Advice to Government: Stakeholders have demonstrated a preference for a continuous application process for the new RLCIP. In terms of developing strong projects and applications, and the efficient management of the Program, a continuous application process is desired.

3.7 Partnerships

Stakeholders were asked to consider their preferences regarding funding partnerships, as well as what kinds of contribution should be considered as formal partnership arrangements.



While 20% of survey respondents did not provide an answer to the question about partnership approaches to funding, a significant number of stakeholders (53%) prefer a partnership approach. 22% suggest that a partnership approach does not matter and only 5% indicated partnerships would not be preferred.



Stakeholders indicate that in a new funding program, a range of contributors should be considered partners. In-kind, cash and project delivery contributions have been selected by respondents relatively evenly which indicates a preference for flexibility in determining valued and constructive partnerships in a new funding program. 'Other' contributors identified that should be considered partners are:

- Those who assist in application preparation (relevant to Assistance in delivery of program or project);
- Business and commercial investors (relevant to Cash Contributor);

- Other grant providers (relevant to Cash Contributor);
- Volunteers from community (relevant to In-kind contributor);
- Media;
- Anyone with constructive involvement;
- Anyone breaking down the 'silo' mentality in programs.

Advice to Government: There should be a partnership approach to funding in the RLCIP. The program should be flexible in its recognition of partnerships, and should include cash, in-kind and project delivery contributors. These contributions should be given equal importance and relevance in the assessment of applications.

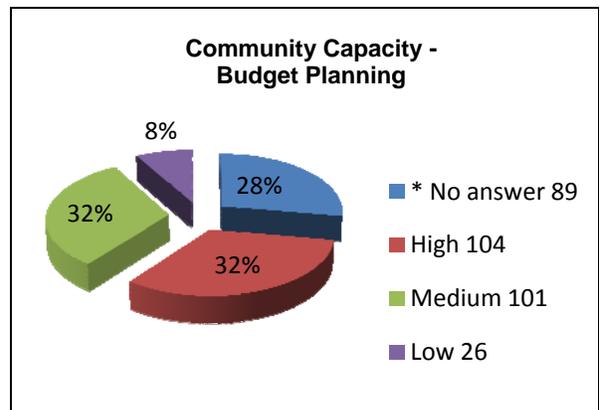
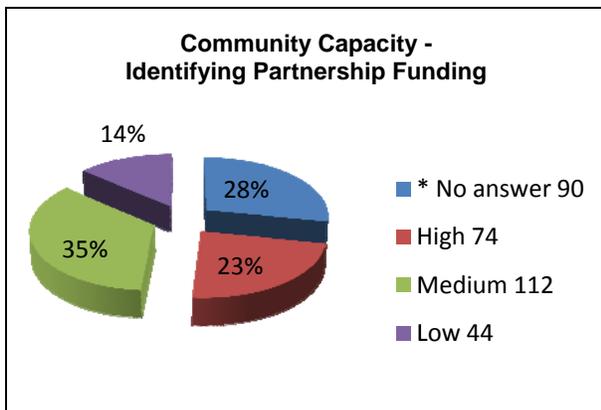
While stakeholders believe that in-kind value is as important as cash value, the RLCIP will need to provide clear definitions and guidelines to applicants for the calculation and allocation of genuine and costed in-kind contributions.

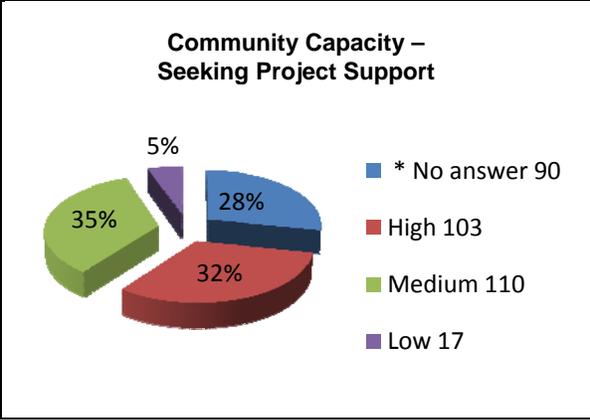
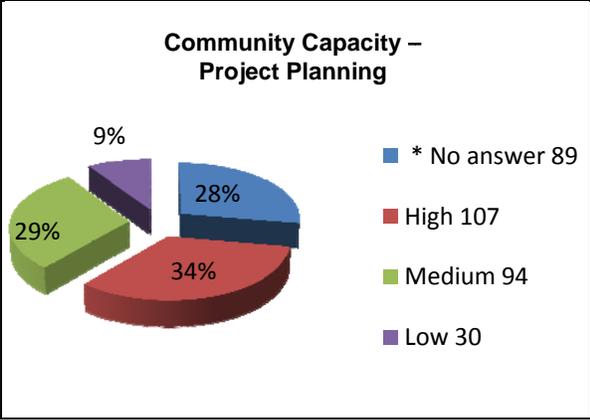
3.8 Community capacity

Stakeholders were asked to rate their own community's capacity to be involved in different stages of the RLCIP. There were three stages of project development respondents were asked to rate:

- Identifying funding and project planning;
- Developing applications;
- Implementing and delivering projects.

3.8.1 Capacity to identify funding and plan projects



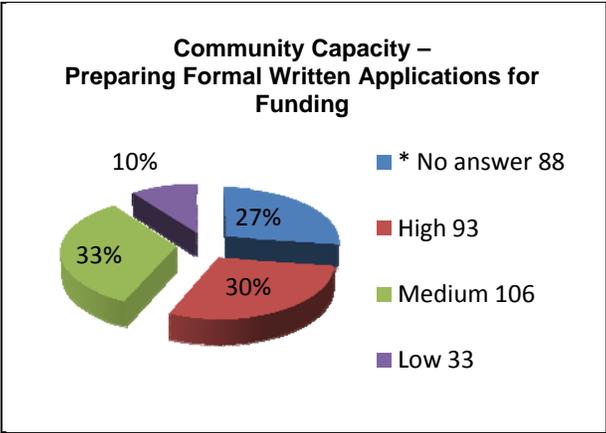


* Note that there is a significant number (28%) of survey respondents who did not provide answers to these questions. Data and respondent analysis reveals that ‘no answer’ was provided across all questions by the same survey respondents (ie 89-90 people left all of these questions blank). One reason for such a significant number of non-responses may lie in the type of representation of the stakeholders. For example, respondents who represent the State Government, or Regional Authorities, or other such bodies that stretch across one ‘community’ may have seen this question as irrelevant to them. This was certainly the anecdotal feedback received from survey respondents when it was administered during workshops and forums.

Despite a significant ‘no answer’ count in these questions, however, the stakeholder feedback that was received shows respondents rate their communities as having a typically ‘medium’ or ‘high’ capacity to plan projects. The area of project development that tends to be rated ‘medium’ to ‘low’ is that of identifying partnership funding.

3.8.2 Developing Applications

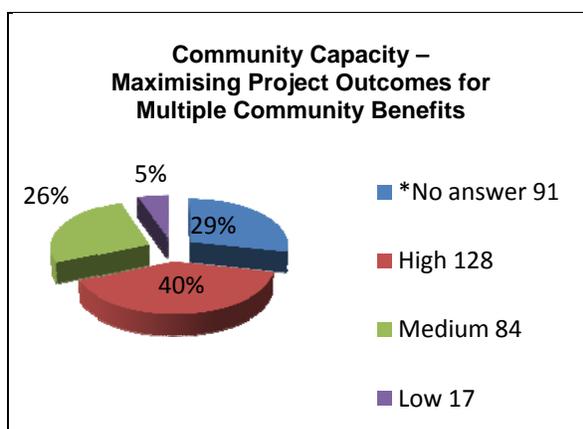
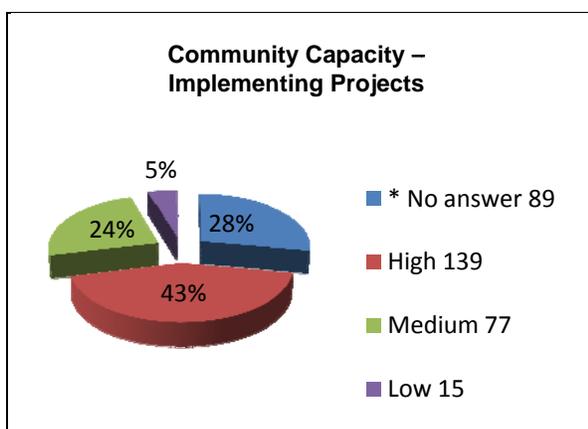
* Again, note the significant number of non-responses to this question. After data and respondent analysis, it is evident that the same people chose not to answer this question as those who left other community capacity questions. Our conclusions relating to non respondents of previous capacity questions in section 3.8.2 can be applied to this question.



Feedback that was received in relation to preparing applications for funding shows there is a range of capacity within communities, although most respondents suggest their communities have a 'medium' or 'high' capacity to work through this stage of a project's development. In the ACCT's experience of working with applicants in the past, we would suggest that a significant proportion of applicants have needed a range of support, from strategic or step-by-step guidance, down to intensive assistance in formulating answers that directly address the selection criterion.

3.8.3 Implementing and delivering projects

* Again, note the significant number of non-responses to this question. After data and respondent analysis, our conclusions relating to non-respondents of previous questions in sections 3.8.1 and 3.8.2 can also be applied to these questions.



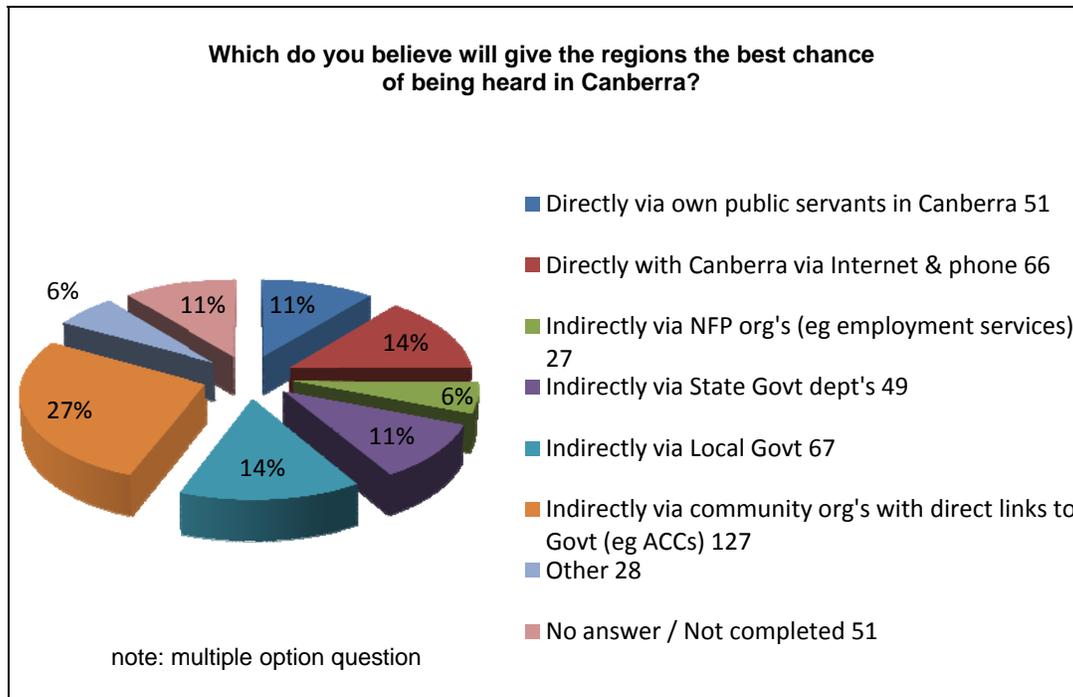
Feedback that was received in relation to implementing and delivering projects which have strong outcomes shows that communities have a typically 'high' level of capacity. While there is also some level of 'medium' capacity identified, more stakeholders believe that this stage of developing a project – actually doing it – is strong. Only 5% of respondents rate their communities as having a 'low' capacity for delivering projects with multiple community benefits.

Advice to Government: Stakeholders generally rate their communities as being very capable of implementing good projects with strong outcomes. They also rate their communities as capable of planning projects and completing funding application forms.

Some communities, however, have a low capacity for identifying funding sources, planning projects, and completing formal written applications. This would suggest there is scope for the RLCIP to provide on-ground assistance and support for community groups in planning for, and applying to, the new program. Our advice is that this is a role for RDA, as stakeholder feedback has previously indicated that RDA should be involved in identifying, prioritising and assessing RLCIP projects.

3.9 Government and local community relationships

Survey respondents were asked to select one or more methods of communication that would give the regions the best chance of being heard in Canberra, thus nurturing strong relationships between the Federal Government and local communities.



While respondents selected a range of methods for the regions to achieve the best communication with Canberra, the most commonly selected method (127 or 40% of respondents) was indirectly through community organisations, such as the Area Consultative Committees/ RDAs, with direct links to Government. ACCs are viewed as unbiased and without political agendas, with strong connections and networks, and there is clear feedback to suggest that the RDA network is best placed to provide the Government with regional advice in the future, concerning project prioritisation and community needs.

Some commonly identified 'other' methods of being heard in Canberra include:

- Indirectly through established Regional Authorities (5 respondents);
- Directly through well-informed local Members of Parliament who lobby Ministers (7);
- Indirectly through regional Departmental Offices (2);
- Directly through Ministerial-facilitated community forums such as 2020 (4).

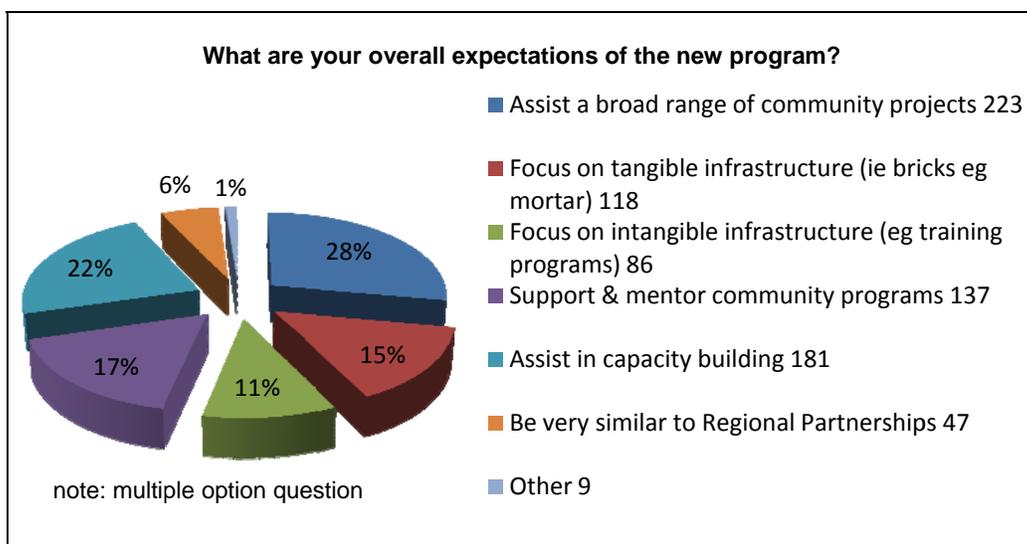
A small number of respondents (6) commented in this question that there can be no effective ongoing communication between the regions and Canberra, as processes are haphazard: they either last only for the term of Government, or are dependent upon strong lobbyists within individual regions, or are only effective in marginal electorates. These respondents believe that politics regularly stands in the way of authentic regional development and legitimate and effective communication of regional needs to Canberra. Conclusions may be drawn between these comments and the number of respondents (51) who selected the option 'Directly via their

own Public Servants in Canberra’ and the 7 respondents who identified their local MP as their best avenue of being heard. These numbers, however, equate to around 16% of total survey respondents, and the majority of respondents have selected methods that can develop positive lines of communications between their regions and the Federal Government.

Advice to Government: Community consultation and stakeholder feedback suggest that the regions are looking for strong and authentic lines of communication with Canberra. They nominate a range of processes by which they can be heard most effectively by the Government; however, there is scope for communities to work with organisations such as ACC’s/RDA in providing advice to Canberra – providing there is a willing, listening and active ‘recipient’ of that advice in Canberra.

3.10 Overall expectations of a new funding Program

Survey respondents were asked to select one or more categories for this question, which was designed to gain a sense of community expectation for the kinds of projects that would be eligible for RLCIP.



The majority of survey respondents (223 or 70%) give a clear indication that RLCIP must be flexible enough to assist a broad range of community projects. These kinds of projects must include both tangible and intangible infrastructure. Support for community capacity building must also be an objective of the new program, as should mentoring and supporting a range of community programs.

While only 6% of responses to this question expect a new program to be very similar to the Regional Partnerships Program, it must be noted that 93% of responses show that a new program should:

- Assist a broad range of community projects;
- Focus on tangible infrastructure;
- Focus on intangible infrastructure;

- Support and mentor community programs; and
- Assist in capacity building.

It is important to consider that the above preferences nominated by stakeholders were, indeed, integral and successful components of the Regional Partnerships Program.

A small number of respondents identify 'other' expectations for RLCIP, which include:

- There must be on-ground assistance in preparing projects and applications;
- There must be flexibility in the program to allow eligibility of projects in individual communities;
- It should assist research and development, seed funding, and feasibility projects;
- It should include funding for people/human capital, such as project managers;
- It should focus on projects that encourage economic development;
- It must be free from political interference.

Anecdotal feedback from the community consultation process, regarding the overall expectations of the new RLCIP, can be summarised as such -

A new funding program is to:

- Be flexible;
- Include on the ground support for project and application development;
- Require demonstrated partners (without a prescriptive quota);
- Allow for rolling and carried forward funding;
- Have pre-defined and efficient assessment periods;
- Involve delegation of decision-making (through RDA or Regional DITRD LG office staff);
- Recognise the significance and authenticity of local knowledge and advice;
- Adopt simplified and open processes;
- Match funds according to need/merit (as opposed to a prescribed percentage of total project cost).

***Advice to Government:** The community's expectations for RLCIP are extremely high, particularly in light of there being no regional funding program available since November 2007. Clearly, there are elements of the previous funding program (Regional Partnerships) that sit well with stakeholders, but the overriding message is that RLCIP must be flexible in its recognition of partnership funding, community and regional need, types of infrastructure to be funded, eligible applicants and delegated assessment procedures. In delivering such a flexible program, Government must ensure its application and assessment processes are transparent, that's its objectives and eligibility criterion are clear and that it provides some form of on-ground support and assistance to the very communities who will benefit most from applying to the Program.*

4. Conclusion

Following a lengthy community consultation process from April to September 2008, which included meetings, forums, surveys and interviews with over 320 individual stakeholders, Area Consultative Committee Tasmania considers this response to Work Plan 2 to be a thorough,

and valid document that provides an accurate representation of the Tasmanian community's advice on the principles and priorities of a new funding program.

ACCT acknowledges the findings of the Australian National Audit Office report in relation to the former Regional Partnerships Program. For example, community feedback confirms the previous decision-making process as somewhat of a farce that requires significant improvement; however, it also suggests that the broadness of the program and the continuous application process were both extremely successful aspects of Regional Partnerships, and should be retained in a new program. ACCT also recognises that some of the information provided by the Department and the Parliamentary Secretary to date does not align with some of the advice from the Tasmanian community. Still, these are the recommendations from the community, and should serve as considered advice to Government.

In summary, advice to the Government regarding the principles and priorities of a new funding program is as follows:

1. In Tasmania, there are three recognised geographical regions. However, a new funding program must be flexible to support projects in small towns, Local Government Areas, the three recognised regions, and the state as a whole.
2. A funding program is to be flexible and available to applicants from all communities and regions, provided sufficient need and outcomes are demonstrated.
3. A new funding program delivering regional and local community benefits must be flexible enough to allow applicants from a range of organisations. Eligible applicants should include Commercial organisations, providing the commercial projects can demonstrate strong community benefits.
4. RLCIP funding should be distributed through a discretionary, individual merit-based system where projects are assessed on demonstrated need, outcome, and value for money.
5. The most effective method for RLCIP funds to be distributed and managed into regions is directly through applicant organisations.
6. Although the message from Canberra has consistently been that RDA would have no involvement in the delivery of a new funding program, the message from the Tasmanian community has consistently been that RDA must be involved in application assessments, at the very least. There is also a strong message that RLCIP assessments should be delegated to the Regional Departmental level.

Our advice is to use a combination of RDA and Regional Departmental Staff to assess projects up to, say, \$500,000, and a combination of RDA and Canberra Departmental staff to assess projects over, say, \$500,000. A new program must be flexible enough to have at least part of the assessment conducted at the local level, and to have RDA playing a meaningful role in this.

7. RLCIP may prioritise projects more highly if they form part of a Local Government, Regional or State strategic plan; however the new program must be flexible enough to recognise (and assess accordingly) projects independent of strategic plans that demonstrate need and potential benefit within the community.

8. Supporting documentation from a range of local, regional and state sources may be required (project-dependent) to determine a project's priority; however, the Tasmanian community has also clearly indicated that there is a critical role for RDA in identifying the priority of a project for funding.
9. Stakeholders have demonstrated a preference for a continuous application process for the new RLCIP. In terms of developing strong projects and applications, and the efficient management of the Program, a continuous application process is desired.
10. There should be a partnership approach to funding in the RLCIP. The program should be flexible in its recognition of partnerships, and should include cash, in-kind and project delivery contributors. These contributions should be given equal importance and relevance in the assessment of applications.

While stakeholders believe that in-kind value is as important as cash value, the RLCIP will need to provide clear definitions and guidelines to applicants for the calculation and allocation of genuine and accurately costed in-kind contributions.

11. Stakeholders generally rate their communities as being very capable of implementing good projects with strong outcomes. They also rate their communities as capable of planning projects and completing funding application forms.

Some communities, however, have a low capacity for identifying funding sources, planning projects, and completing formal written applications. This would suggest there is scope for the RLCIP to provide on-ground assistance and support for community groups in planning for, and applying to, the new program. Our advice is that this is a role for RDA, as stakeholder feedback has previously indicated that RDA should be involved in identifying, prioritising and assessing RLCIP projects.

12. Community consultation and stakeholder feedback suggest that the regions are looking for strong and authentic lines of communication with Canberra. They nominate a range of processes by which they can be heard most effectively by the Government, including scope for communities to work with organisations such as ACC's/RDA in providing advice to Canberra – providing there is a willing, listening and active 'recipient' of that advice in Canberra.
13. The community's expectations for RLCIP are extremely high, particularly in light of there being no regional funding program available since November 2007. Clearly, there are elements of the previous funding program (Regional Partnerships) that sit well with stakeholders, but the overriding message is that RLCIP must be flexible in its recognition of partnership funding, community and regional need, types of infrastructure to be funded, eligible applicants and delegated assessment procedures.

In delivering such a flexible program, Government must ensure its application and assessment processes are transparent, that its objectives and eligibility criterion are clear and that it provides some form of on-ground support and assistance to the very communities who will benefit most from applying to the Program. The Tasmanian community is of the general opinion that that support should be provided by RDA.