



The Ian Potter Foundation

Grantee Key Learnings

Community Wellbeing

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Key learnings from Community Wellbeing grant recipients

Introduction

This document is intended for future applicants and grantees in the Community Wellbeing program area. It contains the summarised learnings of all Community Wellbeing grantees over the past seven years.

The information documented here has been taken from the final reports of Community Wellbeing grantees, which were submitted to The Ian Potter Foundation following the completion of their projects. As such, the views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of The Ian Potter Foundation.

At-risk participants

True of any type of project, but worth reiterating: community consultation is essential. This is of particular importance when working with vulnerable people, to ensure they are given a voice (especially given they're often used to not being heard) in the project process and outcomes.

Community consultation can also help overcome participant reticence, owing to the perception that programs 'come and go' without making any substantive difference. For example, one grantee found that certain parts of the community were reluctant to participate in their drug and alcohol education forums due to the perception that it was just 'another drug lecture'. The grantee reported that groundwork and persistence were required to overcome these perceptions.

Building relationships with participants takes time, persistence and patience. Consistency of care (i.e. same caseworker working with participants for program duration) is particularly important to build trust and rapport with vulnerable individuals. It is a good idea to have strategies in place (and salaries, etc. accounted for in the budget) for staff/volunteer retention to ensure consistency of care.

Bigger is not necessarily better. Sometimes the smaller the group, the greater the results.

Youth

Smaller class sizes lead to easier behaviour management. Moreover, smaller age differences between participants is preferred when facilitating groups, especially when discussing personal experiences (i.e. 12–14 years is better than 12–16 years).

Consider the fact that youth may have varied needs. One grantee found that a handful of high-needs children disrupted workshops for the other students in attendance. Going forward, they plan to develop a specialised program for these children with a much lower staff/volunteer to children ratio (2:1).

Young people value being acknowledged as young adults and something as simple as a handshake from a mentor can be an empowering gesture for them.

Consider 'young' modes of communication; one grantee found that text messages and social media were effective ways for mentors to communicate with students.

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Don't underestimate the complexities of working with young people from traumatised backgrounds. This can involve children having learning difficulties, problems managing anger, low self-esteem and ADHD or similar behaviour disorders. Consider utilising financial and informed trauma-based response and providing support pathways for families and/or carers.

It can be difficult to get in touch with vulnerable young people. One grantee found that despite staff actively attempting to place children in their program, the families were often barriers in and of themselves.

Be sure program facilitators are able to work well with both parents and adolescents, as the two modes require different skills and approaches.

Have referral pathways in place to provide youth with on-going support post program. For more information on referral pathways, see [Collaboration > Case management and referral pathways](#).

OOHC transitions

Working with young people transitioning out of Out of Home Care (OOHC) with the most complex needs requires:

- person-centred, intensive support
- assertive engagement
- assistance to navigate the fragmented service system
- flexible brokerage
- empowerment
- program breadth
- particular focus on housing (see [Homelessness programs](#))
- a step up, step down approach
- working across regional boundaries.

There is a need for standardised cultural competence training in the out of home care sector. For more information on cultural competence, see [Diverse populations](#).

Women and children

In terms of engaging women in situations of domestic violence, consider how you market your services. One grantee found that promoting the education tools their service provided (e.g. financial capability coaching), rather than emphasising the fact that it was for women experiencing family violence, led to higher engagement with women from a broader range of backgrounds.

If working with new mothers and babies, factor feeding and sleep times into the schedule, and be prepared for interruptions due to infant sickness, tiredness, etc. Flexibility is essential, especially regarding attendance; consider allocating a time at the beginning of classes for those that could not attend the week before to catch up on activities or lessons.

Collaboration

Working with government

Federal programs are not always appropriate in rural/regional areas, as meeting government requirements and working within government frameworks can cause unnecessary delays and challenges – consider management by community organisations, such as the local Shire.

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If a proposal relies on international law or principles (for example, UN Conventions) check that Australia has ratified and/or adopted said principles.

Sector collaboration

It can be difficult to engage sector leaders in a collaborative project over the long term without financial support for those organisations to participate.

If attempting a state-wide response to an issue, expect that some regions will be more receptive than others to collaboration.

Be mindful that organisations are not always upfront with their plans. As such, it is essential to be adaptable and be willing to depart from project plans where necessary.

Collective Impact as a framework, as well as collaboration in general, requires a flexibility of approach that enables the group to progress without being curtailed by stringent rules and processes, and allows for differences in views and approaches. For example, one grantee's initial plans to establish a national framework changed to a series of place-based responses, as their understanding of what constitutes a successful collective impact intervention evolved.

Case management and referral pathways

As a rule, successful programs are achieved through multi-tiered, close engagement with participants, partner agencies and the community sector more broadly.

A collaborative approach to case management is always important, especially when working with individuals and families who have complex needs. Some things to keep in mind:

- Importance of developing partnerships and working collaboratively with agencies, e.g., health care providers, housing providers.
- Ongoing relationship development with other agencies can also be an effective way to establish your program as an accepted provider of quality support, and to identify opportunities to provide services.
- Be prepared for issues to arise for participants during programs. For instance, one grantee noted that it became apparent that participants in their training program required counselling. It is therefore imperative that facilitators/volunteers are equipped to refer participants on to the necessary services/agencies.
- Without training, volunteers and/or emergency relief workers are sometimes less likely to make referrals onto other services and lack confidence in addressing the needs of complex clients. It's therefore imperative to provide these training/professional development opportunities.
- If sharing a space with other service providers, develop protocols around the use of the space by each party.

Diverse populations

Consider the intersection of diversity. For instance, one grantee organised for two Indigenous mentors to support a group of Indigenous university students, but didn't take into account gender (they engaged two male Indigenous mentors, which created a barrier for some female students).

Indigenous

In remote communities, there are many challenges in a child's life that can interrupt formal western-style learning. Flexibility is therefore important.

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When engaging Indigenous youth, it is crucial to develop positive relationships with community elders, as the quality of these relationships often determine the quality of relationships with youth. One grantee noted that some elders were reluctant to participate in the grantee's support groups in the absence of an Indigenous-specific model.

Providing a safe environment is important in order to encourage cultural inclusion, especially in communities that are highly monitored and socially controlled, and which may have a visible police presence. One grantee reported that providing an informal drop-in space for local (and travelling) Aboriginal community members to connect with others, seek information and relax in a safe environment enhanced social inclusion, community safety and services coordination.

CALD/Refugee/Migrant

Differentiate between language and cultural diversity. One project targeting the parents from a Chinese-speaking background assumed a common culture, however, Chinese-speaking parents were from different countries such as China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam; and therefore values, culture and social rules varied.

One grantee reported that the most needed resources for carers in terms of cultural competence were:

- Information sheets
- Telephone support
- Cultural competence training.

If something isn't working, don't force it. Be flexible. One grantee found that they had to pitch their program to a slightly-more-settled refugee population as working with a particular group of very recently arrived refugees proved too difficult.

It is a good idea to recruit group leaders and project facilitators from the CALD, migrant or refugee community. This makes the process of building trust and rapport between project facilitators and communities easier.

People with a disability

Maintaining the self-confidence and morale of participants with a disability can be challenging. One grantee reported that it was difficult to boost morale of attendees of their financial literacy program as many struggled with short attention spans, low self-esteem and negative peer pressure.

Employment programs

In general, training programs are more successful when provided alongside employment and engagement pathways.

If providing education or training, consider getting your program accredited. For instance, to become a Registered Training Organisation, the first step is to register with Adult & Further Education (ACFE) as a 'Learn Local' provider.

If your proposal is dependent upon TAFE or government programs, have contingency plans in place. One grantee's program was affected by changes to TAFE fee structures.

Engaging jobseekers

Know your target audience. For example, flexibility in training and work pathways is attractive to youth and more likely to lead to ongoing participation.

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Consult with participants prior to program development; and respect their experience. Treating unemployed jobseekers as experts provided one grantee with insight into user behaviour of a particular web-based platform, which led to the development of a more effective and successful program.

Conduct a needs assessment. One organisation had to cancel its pre-employment workshop due to difficulty with recruiting participants; job agencies didn't promote the workshop as they ran their own workshops.

Employers and employment service providers

Begin fostering relationships with local employers early. Don't assume participants will want to travel to pursue employment opportunities (especially interstate).

Have a rigorous employer engagement strategy in place, as the process of getting employers to sign up can be long and complex. In some instances, employers may want to start small and only make a bigger commitment once they see the program is working. For one grantee this led to additional work and levels of complexity as start dates with multiple employers were staggered across the life of the project. However, the upside was that the employers became very much invested in the success of the program.

Many employers require participants with formal qualifications/training for entry-level positions; it is therefore essential to provide participants with as much training and work experience as possible.

Consider the way you market your service; for one grantee, a new marketing approach led to business engagement surpassing the readiness of clients to take up opportunities.

High-end businesses that can afford the fee-for-service job placements prefer to financially engage as a donation and require more highly trained, specialised candidates for paid employment.

Likewise, it is important to build strong relationships with employment service providers, as they will be able to recommend jobseekers onto your program. This is also a good way to avoid duplication of services.

Employment service providers may lack knowledge around the complex needs of some jobseekers. One grantee is looking to develop an education tool to improve understanding of individuals with alcohol brain impairment among disability employment service providers.

Outcomes

It is important to delegate responsibilities to participants gradually in order to grow their confidence.

If upskilling participants through volunteer work, be prepared for attrition due to volunteers finding employment.

While jobseekers attaining any form of employment is great, often they enter the casualised workforce, which of course comes with less job and financial security. It is therefore important that they continue to have support systems in place.

Sustained programs (>12months) are more likely to produce consistent outcomes for individuals with alcohol or other substance brain impairment.

Incorporating short-term, outcome-focused projects into training programs can allow participants to build up skills and see tangible outcomes relatively quickly, encouraging a positive attitude to education and training in the longer-term.

Evaluation

If a proposal primarily involves monitoring or evaluating a program, consider outsourcing. One grantee found this was an efficient and more cost-effective approach than internal resourcing.

Consider benchmarking against Federal standards in order to clearly define organisational purpose and add credibility when communicating program outcomes and impact.

Data collection

Follow-up data collection is much more accessible using online survey tools.

Maintaining contact with program participants for the purposes of evaluation is not always easy. Participants, especially those with complex needs, can be difficult to follow up with due to changes in housing circumstances, for example. It is important to have practices in place (Facebook groups, friends' mobile numbers) to allow for comprehensive follow-up information to be collected.

In some cases it may be necessary to verify qualitative data provided in interviews. For instance, one grantee had to implement processes that would allow searches to be conducted of court records and criminal histories in order to corroborate information provided by their clients, which included informing clients of these processes at the initial interview and including information in the sign-up agreement.

Collecting data can be time consuming, especially when it is protected by confidentiality and privacy laws. Consider requesting the client's consent for this data to be kept on file, once obtained, in order to circumvent protracted procedures for future evaluations.

Anticipate variance in the application of evaluation processes when dealing with multiple organisations or agencies. To achieve as much consistency as possible, evaluation tools should be straight-forward, plain-English and easy-to-use. This is especially important if relying on volunteers to collect data. Where possible, consider assigning evaluation activity to a staff member, rather than relying on volunteers.

Homelessness programs

Join people in situ, on the street or in their community spaces, rather than expecting them to come to you. Outreach is a particularly effective way of engaging participants, especially if they have other pressures, e.g. families with children.

Not all participants will want to engage in group training and skills development opportunities. One grantee found that participants preferred to undertake learning one-on-one within 6–12 months of a crisis affecting their housing and livelihood.

Be prepared for participants to require post-program support; at the very least you should have referral pathways in place for participants to seek support elsewhere.

Don't underestimate how long it will take participants to find accommodation. One grantee found that clients stayed in their shelter for longer than was anticipated due to lack of external accommodation. This lower than expected turnover led them to have remaining funds, so they offered additional material support to clients who had recently found accommodation.

Homelessness is a complex issue that intersects with a variety of other social problems. For more specific information regarding women and children, OOHC leavers, and at-risk youth, please see **At-risk participants**.

Collaborative approaches

Whether working with individuals who are already homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or have recently been homeless, coordination with local services is vital. Many vulnerable individuals are unaware of services available, and it is often extremely difficult for them to navigate the public and private system, particularly if new to homelessness.

The public health system can be particularly complicated and difficult to access. One grantee found that despite receiving assistance, challenges still existed for some clients who were unable to access/receive the medical help they required.

In addition to health care providers, it is important to identify and nurture relationships with boarding house managers and accommodation providers, so they can refer individuals at the right time, allowing early intervention.

One grantee also began discussions with housing providers, the housing peak body, service clubs and corporates about increasing access to affordable housing for OOHC leavers. A collaborative, sector-wide approach is necessary in order to help vulnerable individuals in general (not just OOHC leavers) to find and maintain suitable accommodation, which is perennially difficult.

This collaborative approach to case management should continue after housing has been provided, to ensure individuals have the necessary support to maintain stable accommodation permanently. For more information on collaborative approaches to case management, see **External organisations > Case management and referral pathways**.

Justice system programs

Staging programs in prisons involved a number of challenges. Anticipate delays in gaining access (due to security requirements) as well as interruptions to classes. High prison turnover can mean few participants are able to attend for the full program duration and reap the full benefits. Don't assume participants will return post-release to engage in programs, as this is often impractical and/or unrealistic.

One grantee's legal clinic could only facilitate six prisoners at any one time, which created a risk that prisoners might be released or relocated prior to seeing a lawyer. The grantee addressed this issue by scheduling more telephone appointments for urgent matters.

There is a difference between sentenced prisoners versus prisoners on remand. One grantee did not anticipate the high rate of prisoners on remand compared to sentenced prisoners, which made it difficult to maintain contact with clients and provide ongoing legal assistance, as prisoners on remand often exit or move to other prisons without notice.

In general, it can be difficult for individuals involved in the justice system to maintain ongoing participation, due to incarceration, transfers, court dates, etc. Likewise it can be difficult to follow up with participants following court hearings for evaluation purposes, as many change their residential address and housing circumstances frequently. Therefore, consider budgeting for additional staffing hours to facilitate ongoing participation in the face of these difficulties.

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Cultural competence is required when working with individuals involved in the justice system. One grantee had to adapt their program, which supported children affected by parental incarceration, to address the needs of children from Vietnamese and Chinese families (the population of the prison they were working with was comprised of approximately 25% Vietnamese and Chinese women). For more information regarding cultural competence, see **Diverse populations**.

Scaling up/social enterprise

The following factors support successful scaling and growth ventures:

- Streamlined and efficient systems and processes (such as workforce model and systems, customer service approach, sales acumen and competitive pricing models)
- Strong and stable foundations (positive demonstrated/predicted cash flow, reliable customer base)
- Strategic partnerships and relationships (one grantee successfully leveraged the contacts of one of its supporting partners).

When scaling up and/or growing the capacity of an organisation, a comprehensive business plan is essential (with steps to get the business operational as well as capacity building elements to ensure sustainability).

If a proposal involves fees for services, make sure the organisation has:

- adequate staffing capacity
- partnered with relevant agencies who will promote those services.

Consider seeking funding specifically for capacity building.

Program expansion to new locations

Factor in time zones and geographical distance when rolling out programs in new locations.

One grantee found that the support of the local government authority made the roll-out of their program in two regional centres move more quickly, as did being able to undertake site visits to existing program centres.

Local business donors favour donating locally and need to be engaged as early as possible.

If your service involves coordination with local agencies, the earlier relationships are established and the more intensive they are, the better.

It can be difficult to secure new funding for a program in a new location. It is a good idea only to proceed with further feasibility studies if having already secured at least part of the funding necessary to establish and run the pilot program.

When rolling out a program in a new location, there will always be specific local issues that need to be addressed differently. For example, in a regional location like Shepparton, mentors and participants do not experience the same level of anonymity that exists in inner-city Melbourne. Therefore, privacy and confidentiality are more of an issue in a regional setting.

Technology programs

Technology programs can refer to website and database upgrades, client management systems, telephone and video outreach services, as well as general use of tablet and laptop technology.

Do your research. Know your software and IT options; ensure you're receiving the best possible services.

It is crucial to test websites and programs with the end-user as early as possible, to avoid having to make changes at a later date and incurring substantial costs in the process.

If your project is reliant on external networks or services, be sure to test this early in the planning process. One grantee's project was dependent upon free city Wi-Fi, which as it turned out did not actually extend to the apartments of some program participants.

Be prepared for ongoing IT costs. One grantee did not anticipate that ongoing cost of monthly connections to Telco services. Another did not anticipate the ongoing expense of maintaining a website and renewing website content.

Consider appropriate leadership for tech-based projects. It can be challenging if you don't have internal expertise, especially when it comes to managing external IT vendors. One grantee made use of an 'IT Board' to guide their decision-making. Another found that working remotely on software projects with offshore providers was challenging, and that although such work may be slower and more expensive to complete in-house, it may actually work better.

When upgrading CMS systems and databases, ensure all staff receive training in the program prior to rollout. One grantee found that bringing together management staff from all states was an effective way to ensure that they understood the requirements of the new system and could communicate this to their own staff.

Participants with complex needs may also need patience and support to overcome their hesitation in using technology.

Tablet, mobile or laptop?

Consider the best form of device for your particular project. If unsure, consult participants and do your research. One grantee's initial proposal involved using donated personal computers and offering them to participants via a rent-to-buy scheme. Subsequent consultation indicated this would not benefit those with the highest need or be desirable for most participants. Instead, tablet devices were purchased and loaned as an incentive for engagement in study/development programs.

Some things to consider about tablet technology:

- Making sure tablets (and keyboards) are charged can be an issue.
- Consider using wireless charging docks to ensure tablets are charged (though not all tablets support this feature).
- If managing a significant number of tablets, consider the need for tablet management software to track, secure and backup tablets.

One grantee found that their Clinical Management Software (which was web browser based) was not very well optimised for use with a tablet in comparison to a laptop. The tablet allowed information to be displayed, but made it difficult to enter complex data, unless connected to a

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laptop. Adding a physical keyboard did help but then made the tablet less useful in a mobile environment (i.e. to be used in one hand efficiently).

Outreach

There are a number of things to consider when providing outreach services via technology.

IT-based outreach is often used to provide services to regional and rural communities. Keep in mind that regional and remote community organisations may require assistance with setting up and using the required technology. Furthermore, regional participants may have limited access to the internet. As a rule, longer timelines are required to promote services in rural areas.

If using Skype or other video technology, consider having a telephone service as backup in case of unstable connectivity. This is especially true of video-based counselling services. One grantee planned to develop a fully integrated video conferencing platform, which would decrease the chances of session 'drop-out' that was common when using Skype.

Training and information sessions are generally required to assist program facilitators to transition to new service modalities such as video, web-chat and virtual action learning. In the case of overseeing chat rooms and online learning groups, facilitators may also require training in group facilitation.

One grantee found that virtual action learning sessions held in regional centres were not as effective as face-to-face action learning sessions held as part of capital city programs.

Volunteer programs

Recruitment & engagement

Flexibility is important in terms of attracting volunteers and maintaining engagement. One grantee initially only had their clinic opened two days per week, but decided to open on other days and be flexible with opening and closing hours in order to accommodate volunteer availability.

It is important to give volunteers a sense of ownership in their day-to-day activities as well as the broader activities of the service. This can be achieved by diversifying volunteer roles to include administration, fundraising and events, or by specifying roles, for example, supporting pregnancy and early parenting.

Offering a mix of volunteer roles can be attractive to corporate partners, who are seeking opportunities to suit a variety of employees.

Be realistic about recruiting volunteers, especially for niche roles. One grantee found it hard to find volunteers who were physically able to help set up some of the outdoor structures necessary for their program.

Consider surveying volunteers to understand why they wanted to volunteer in order to recruit others.

Training

Be prepared for volunteers' capabilities to be quite varied. Some volunteers will be limited in their capacity to develop stronger skills in certain areas of their volunteer roles.

One grantee found that training was necessary to increase the confidence of emergency relief volunteers, especially in regards to making referrals to other services and addressing the needs of

complex clients. Without training, volunteers were more likely to make a general referral to a website/intake service than engage with the client around their needs.

Another grantee found that their specifically recruited and highly trained volunteers in non-crisis support roles provided suitable support to individuals with complex backgrounds, challenging the assumption that only experienced and trained case workers can do so. This 'dignity of risk' in volunteering was also important in attracting further volunteers to their program.

Appropriately trained and resourced volunteers can successfully facilitate peer support groups, and provide much needed support particularly in regional and rural areas.

Young volunteers

Anticipate that it will take young volunteers longer to build confidence in leading and facilitating activities, compared to older volunteers.

Generally, young volunteers will require some degree of supervision. One grantee found that organising structured supervision sessions, at least once a term, was a good way to provide support and development opportunities to the high school students volunteering in their homework club program. It's a good idea to rotate student volunteers.

Another grantee found that young volunteers required a high level of supervision and support in the context of volunteering in remote Australia, to prepare them for issues including farmers under stress, unfamiliar driving conditions and isolation. This took the form of an induction period, which involved a high level of logistical support and limited numbers of up to 30 per trip, which included the professional supervisors as well as the youth volunteers.

Volunteer support

It is a good idea to provide volunteers with as much support as possible. This can take the form of a handbook or pamphlet that volunteers can refer to, or even a dedicated page or portal on a website.

A volunteer coordinator or supervisor is important, especially when volunteer mentors are assisting individuals with complex needs and incidents arise that are beyond a volunteer's experience and role. A coordinator can arrange for swift re-referral to crisis case management. For example, in the case of homeless individuals, this early intervention can stop the unnecessary relinquishment of permanent housing.

Creative use of information technology is essential in supplementing and expanding the support provided to volunteers, especially in rural and regional areas.