

Multicultural Peak Bodies Review Consultation Report

Background

Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT) and Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia (MCSCA) provide a range of programs and services to individuals, families and communities from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, which play a role in delivering key services and support to encourage participation, social inclusion and cohesion in the community. Both organisations receive core operational funding from the Multicultural Grants Program (MGP) administered by the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (the Department) through the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) to cover staff, operational expenses and projects.

In November 2022, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs advised MCNT and MCSCA that a review of multicultural peak bodies would be undertaken. The review would consider both needs and gaps in service delivery to families and individuals from migrant and refugee backgrounds against MCNT and MCSCA's core business activities, objectives and strategic business plans. The findings of the review would inform and provide guidance regarding focus areas and funding for both the MCNT and MCSCA in order to achieve better results for multicultural communities in the Northern Territory.

The review was undertaken by OMA and included a desktop review of documents, consultation with peak body boards and staff, and a community survey. The survey was made available from 12 December 2023 to 4 February 2024 through the Northern Territory Government's *Have Your Say* website. The review garnered survey responses and submissions from multicultural community organisations, individuals and service organisations.

Summary of findings

The findings and recommendations of this review consider the existing operations and activities of MCNT and MCSCA; feedback to the surveys, which attracted 30 responses on MCNT and 18 responses on MCSCA; along with reports and meetings with stakeholders.

The recommendations aim to improve policy, funding allocations, and governance and reporting arrangements to better meet the needs of our multicultural communities in the Northern Territory.

Policy

The Multicultural Policy for the Northern Territory 2020-25 (the Policy) sets the priorities of the Northern Territory Government in supporting our multicultural communities. The Policy will be reviewed later this year, and key consideration should be given on identifying priority areas that need extra support, including those in regional and remote locations. While already acknowledged by OMA that gaps existed in supporting multicultural communities across the Territory, this was further highlighted through the survey results.

Proposed new funding structure

The review found that funding is needed to deliver both appropriate peak body functions and multicultural services and programs to meet the needs of our multicultural communities and organisations across the Territory.

One of the recommended outcomes of the review is to review the allocation of the funding pool that is currently directed to these peak bodies, and determine the appropriate split between peak body functions and multicultural services and programs, and advertise these through an open grants process. It is planned that this would achieve the following:

- Key organisations within the sector would be encouraged to do a self-assessment of their objectives, priorities and capabilities.
- Allow competition to encourage genuine community engagement, research, consultation, innovation and the development of responsive approaches to emerging issues.
- Allow for more flexibility to address changing needs and priorities.
- Encourage organisations to explore diversified funding opportunities including partnerships and fee for service opportunities (e.g. cross-cultural awareness training).

Based on the feedback gathered through the review, OMA proposes for the new structure to fund the following activities for peak body functions and multicultural services and programs:

Peak body functions

- Promote multiculturalism, community understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity.
- Engage regularly with the multicultural community and conduct or support research on migrant and refugee experiences to inform policies, services and programs.
- Provide a forum and space where multicultural communities can participate in a range of activities, including information sharing and consultations.
- Engage and collaborate with service providers to develop programs and projects responding to identified emerging needs.
- Organise or partner with relevant groups to deliver multicultural celebrations.
- Represent and provide leadership in addressing multicultural issues, including through participating in forums such as MACMA and advocating on behalf of multicultural communities.
- Empower diverse cultural groups to form and effectively manage community organisations.

Multicultural services and programs

The aim of the grant stream would be to assist not-for-profit organisations by providing funds towards innovative projects addressing emerging issues in the multicultural community such as education and skills development, employment, and other such issues. Multicultural service and program providers would:

- Develop programs or projects responding to identified emerging needs.
- Provide direct services and support to people from CALD backgrounds.
- Deliver programs and services to ensure the successful settlement and full participation of people from CALD backgrounds in the NT's cultural, economic, social, political and civic life.

Under the new structure, organisations will have the option to apply for either or both streams of funding.

Reporting of peak body activities

A review of the current reporting format found that when the peak bodies reported to the Department on their funded activities, there was a tendency of over-reporting on operational details and under-reporting on outcomes. This was due to the reporting requirements set out in funding agreements.

It is important for government to understand the outcomes this funding achieves to ensure it is value for the Territory. Recommendations in relation to improving reporting requirements would provide the Department with a better understanding on how this funding is supporting the multicultural community.

Feedback to peak bodies

The review also identified key strengths and areas of improvement for both MCNT and MCSCA that were broadly summarised in the table below. More detailed feedback has been provided to MCNT and MCSCA to inform their future planning and direction.

Organisation	Key strengths	Main areas of improvement
MCNT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of services tailored to the needs of migrants and refugees • Long history and a structure that provides for diverse and grassroots representation • Stable source of funding and office space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance and management • Community perception of change in priorities and strategic focus • Lack of the type of community engagement expected of a peak body • Concerns regarding how funding is prioritised and lack of reporting on outcomes
MCSCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long history with strong connections and partnerships in the community • Experienced and hardworking staff • Depth of community impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for additional funding and the expansion of services, including outside Alice Springs • Clarifying the organisation's objectives • Increasing visibility and stakeholder engagement

Recommendations

Policy

The Multicultural Policy for the Northern Territory 2020-25 is due to be reviewed at the beginning of the 2024-25 financial year. In preparation for this exercise, it is recommended that the NT Government:

1. Consider identifying priority areas that need extra support, allowing for a substantive need/gap analysis to be undertaken in Tennant Creek, Yulara and in other regional and remote locations

Funding

It is recommended that, from January 2025, the NT Government:

2. Develop grant funding guidelines for the delivery of multicultural community peak body functions,¹ and services and programs.
3. Review funding allocations under the MGP to better meet the increasing needs of multicultural communities, particularly in locations outside of the Darwin/Palmerston area.
4. Advertise for the delivery of multicultural peak body services, and for multicultural services and programs, through an open grants process² for a variable term (2 to 5 years) under the new grant funding guidelines.

Reporting

The current reporting requirements against the funding agreements opens itself to a tendency of over-reporting unnecessary operational detail while under-reporting outcomes. It is recommended that OMA:

5. Require specific Key Performance Indicators accounting for both measurable and qualitative outcomes in funding agreements.
6. Require the regular reporting of feedback from community members in funding agreements, including any observed trends and emerging issues.

Feedback to peak bodies

Based on the findings of this report, MCNT and MCSCA are encouraged to:

7. Reflect on and clarify their organisation's objectives and priorities.
8. Undertake an independent review of their respective constitutions, in consultation with members.
9. Invest in active community engagement, regional outreach, and research to develop innovative and responsive approaches to identified emerging issues.
10. Explore diversified funding opportunities including partnerships and fee for service opportunities (e.g. cross-cultural awareness training).

¹ This would also include previously excluded activities that are essential functions for a multicultural peak body such as advocacy and support for the self-governance of community organisations.

² The process would allow organisations to apply for either or both categories of funding