Assessor Manual

Updated: December 2023

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Introduction

This manual has been prepared to assist new members of the CBF Assessor team to understand their role and responsibilities within the broader operation of the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF). In particular it aims to assist you to understand, and participate effectively in, the processes associated with CBF grants assessment.

Should you have further questions about the CBF's processes, policies or procedures, please contact the Grants Support Team Volunteer Manager .

About the CBF

The Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) is a proud champion of community media – Australia's largest independent media sector.

Our funding supports organisations to enrich people's lives with a diversity of choice in our media. We help to produce local stories, news and cultural content reflecting the many perspectives, people and communities that make up Australia; to ensure community broadcasting is at the heart of every community. Our funding helps connect people, including more than five million Australians* who tune in to their local radio station weekly.

Across the CBF, we are united by our vision and beliefs, and common values are the cornerstone of our community-based organisation, informing our decision-making.

*CBAA Community Radio Listener Survey, 2022.

CBF Volunteer statement
Volunteers sit at the heart of the CBF. Their knowledge, expertise and passion for community media is central to our decision-making, ensuring our grants reflect the many perspectives, people and communities our sector serves.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of community media. Over 31,000+ volunteers ensure 450+ community media organisations around Australia inspire, inform and connect people in their communities – 24-hours a day, seven days per week. These dedicated volunteers are creative, innovative, resilient and, most importantly, driven by their desire for making a difference in their communities.

Volunteers are valued members of the CBF team. We are committed to investing in their skills, ensuring their work is purposeful and valued. We provide meaningful opportunities for our volunteers to contribute to our organisation and the sector.

Our volunteer Grant Assessors, grants advisory committees and Board generously share their expertise and time to support our decision making.

Our grant programs
We distribute three types of grants: Content (including Specialist Programming), Development & Operations, and Sector Investment).

The projects we fund range in size and scope, from nation-wide projects that enhance the impact of community media to local-level grants for equipment, capacity-building and governance.

Many of our grants also support the production of content that fosters discussion about local and national issues, provides information in community languages, amplifies local stories and voices, and highlights groups, services, musicians and artists in the community. These programs, series and segments are shared with audiences on-air or on-demand in communities across Australia.

Consultation & independence

We believe in the need to be independent and transparent in supporting a resilient sector for the long-term. Our independence is essential for fair and equitable grants processes.

Our grants review process is based on a peer-review model. Experienced community broadcasters and industry experts are central to how we operate. Together, our volunteers review almost 500 grant applications each year. Our volunteers contribute their insights and experience so that our grant programs respond and adapt to meet the changing needs of community media.
For more information on the work of the CBF visit www.cbf.org.au.

In line with the CBF's vision, volunteers sit at the heart of the CBF. Their knowledge, expertise and passion for community media is central to our decision-making, ensuring our grants reflect the many perspectives, people and communities our sector serves. By drawing membership of its Advisory Committees from the community broadcasting sector the CBF can incorporate peer group involvement in the conduct of its grants processes. As an Advisory Committee member your skills, experience and your knowledge of the community broadcasting sector greatly assists the work of the CBF.

The CBF is supported by the Australian Government principally through the Federal government. The government defines the broad funding conditions for each funding allocation received by the CBF in our Funding Deed. The wording employed determines the parameters within which the CBF must work in disbursing the funds through its grant processes.

Read our stories about how we are supporting community media through our grants.

Learn more about the history of the CBF and how we have been helping Australians share their stories through community media since 1984.

The CBF Annual Report details CBF activities for the year. The Strategic Plan outlines our goals and objectives over the coming years. The Sector Roadmap 2033 is a ten-year plan for community broadcasters to achieve greater impact in every Australian community.

Structure

The key structural elements of the CBF are:

- **Board of Directors –** Responsible for overall governance of the CBF, providing direction on organisational objectives, policy and practice.
- **Sector Investment Advisory Committee (SIAC)** – review and provide feedback on funding objectives, policy and practice, and make funding recommendations on Sector Investment grants
- **Development & Operations Grants Advisory Committee (DOGAC)** – review feedback from our grant assessors, make funding recommendations on Development & Operations Grants, and contribute to the formulation of funding policy.
- **Content Grants Advisory Committee (CGAC)** - review feedback from our grant assessors, make funding recommendations on Content Grants, and contribute to the formulation of funding policy.
- **Assessor Team** – Independently considers, scores and provides advice on Content and/or Development & Operations grant applications

Appointments are made by the CBF Board in accordance with a skills matrix and the CBF Diversity, Access & Equity Policy.

Appointments to the CBF Board are the responsibility of current Board members, supported by our Nominations Advisory Group. This group is comprised of national sector representative organisations.

Five Board members (the majority) are appointed from nominations provided by community media and sector organisations. Each organisation may nominate up to two candidates. Additionally, our Board may recruit up to three Independent Directors to optimise leadership and governance skills. Recruitment of these independent Directors is the responsibility of the CBF Board.

The CBF President is appointed by the Board from candidates nominated by the President Nomination Advisory Committee.

The CBF Board is advised by a number of volunteer committees that make grant recommendations and provide expert advice.

We are very fortunate to have many volunteers who willingly offer their time and expertise on our grants advisory committees. Appointed by our Board through a nomination process that prioritises our Diversity, Access and Equity Policy, as well as specific experience and skills (See Committee Roles and Responsibilities).

The CBF Assessor Team independently review, score and provide advice on grant applications to our Grants Advisory Committees. Appointed by the CBF Board through a nomination process, grant assessors are called on twice annually to review incoming applications. Their scores and comments about the merits of applications assist the Advisory Committees in making recommendations for grant allocations to the CBF Board.
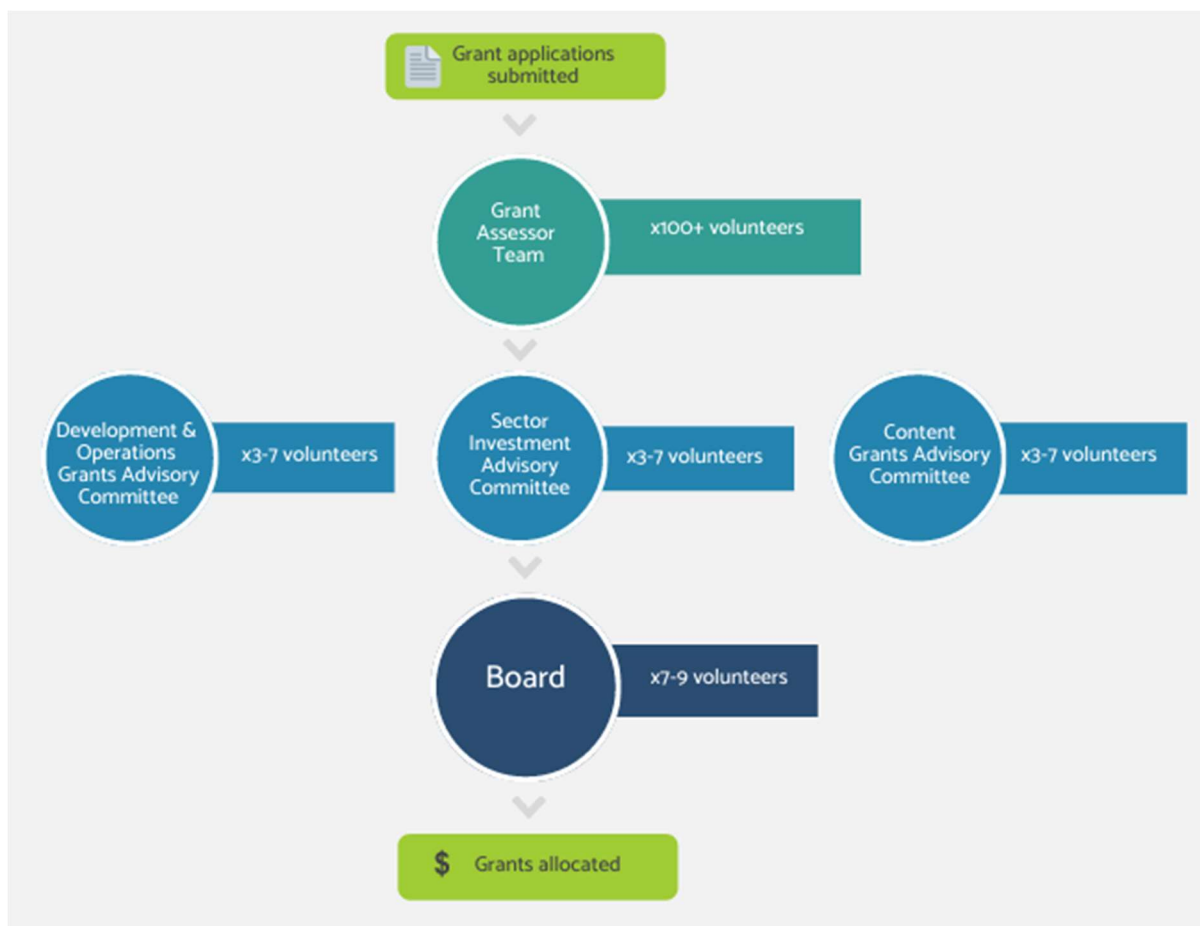
For more information about the structure of the CBF and the rules the organisation runs by, refer to the CBF Constitution.

Assessor Roles and Responsibilities

Members of the CBF Assessor Team independently consider, score and provide advice on Content and/or Development & Operations grant applications through our online grants management system, SmartyGrants.

Members of the Assessor Team are independent, expert advisors with the following responsibilities:

- participating (when available) in assessment rounds in March and September
- providing independent, informed assessment scores and feedback on a maximum of 25 grant applications within a three-week period
- suggesting suitable amendments to project budgets for the consideration of the relevant Grants Advisory Committee where necessary (i.e. budget doesn't meet grant guidelines, particular item requested seems unreasonably priced)
- providing comments on the application to assist the decision-making process of the Grants Advisory Committee
- providing feedback on the application to assist the applicant to improve their next application if it is partially funded or not funded
- abiding by the CBF Code of Conduct and the Conflict of Interest Policy
- remaining abreast of current and emerging community broadcasting issues, policy and practice relating to better practice in assessment, grant-making, sector development and any relevant broader industry developments.
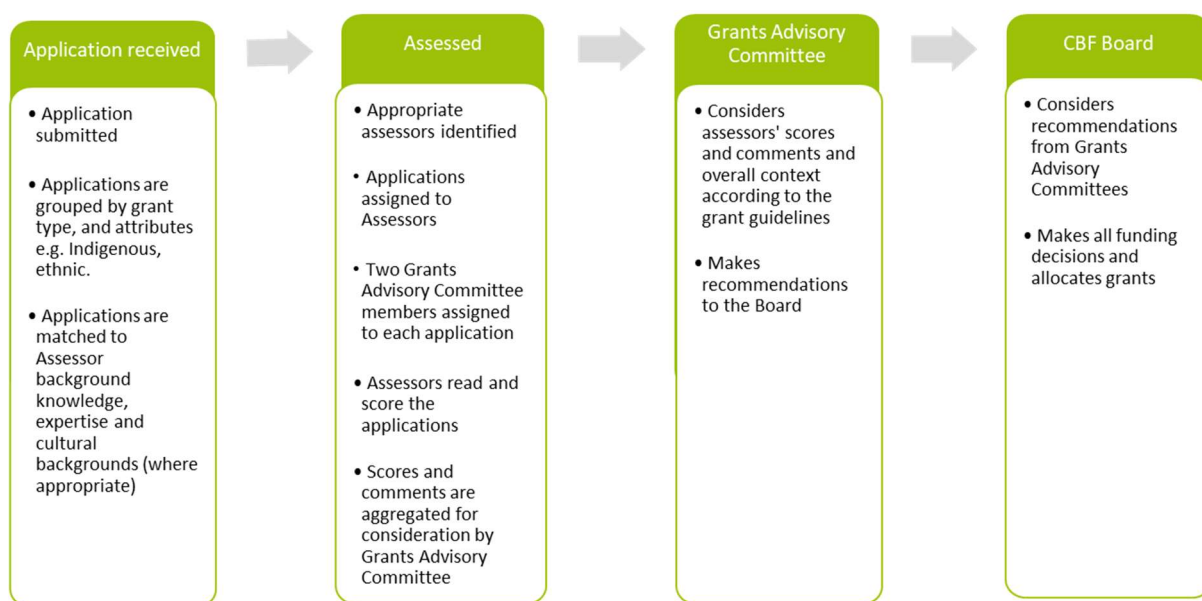
Assessor Workload and Expectations

- Participation in the March and September assessment rounds if available. This includes assessing a maximum of 25 grant applications within a three-week period.
- Approximately 12 hours of training.

Keep in mind that assessors are highly unlikely to assess all proposals within a grant round. As such, assessors might be disappointed if proposals that seemed worthy of funding might not be supported once they are compared with the other proposals being considered by the GAC. This is the nature of a competitive grant process. Due to the limited funds available and the high number of applicants, the process of grant allocations is usually highly competitive. Rest assured that the CBF's assessment process is designed with fairness in mind and in reference to best practice in order to achieve the best outcomes for community broadcasting as a whole.

If assessors have feedback that might improve the CBF's grant processes, please contact the Grants Support Team Volunteer Manager

Grant assessment process

Application received	Assessed	Grants Advisory Committee	CBF Board
• Application submitted • Applications are grouped by grant type, and attributes e.g. Indigenous, ethnic. • Applications are matched to Assessor background knowledge, expertise and cultural backgrounds (where appropriate)	• Appropriate assessors identified • Applications assigned to Assessors • Two Grants Advisory Committee members assigned to each application • Assessors read and score the applications • Scores and comments are aggregated for consideration by Grants Advisory Committee	• Considers assessors' scores and comments and overall context according to the grant guidelines • Makes recommendations to the Board	• Considers recommendations from Grants Advisory Committees • Makes all funding decisions and allocates grants

The CBF Support Team

The day to day operations of the CBF are undertaken by the CBF Support Team. The Support Team includes the CEO, Executive Officer, Finance Manager, Strategic Communications Manager, Administrative Officer and the Grants Support Team.

The role of the Grants Support Team

Working with the wider CBF team including the CBF Board and volunteer Grants Advisory Committees, the Grants Support Team works collaboratively to ensure our grant programs are

implemented and managed effectively, applicants are supported through the grants process, and our committees and volunteer grant assessors have what they need to make decisions. The GST is responsible for the efficient administration and management of grants and projects that support community media broadcasters.

The Grants Support Team has three key roles in relation to Advisory Committees:

- An administrative support role:
    - drafting and compiling meeting agendas, discussion papers and Board reports
    - following up actions and supporting Committee communication between meetings
- A record keeper:
    - recording minutes of meetings and grant decision-making outcomes
    - maintaining Grants Advisory Committee policy registers and evaluation frameworks
- An advisor:
    - Supporting GAC members – in particular Chairs in managing meetings.
    - guiding and advising on policy development and compliance
    - reminding Committee members of the parameters within which they operate, such as the CBF constitution or CBF policy

The Volunteer Manager (Grants Support Team) is responsible for managing and supporting all CBF volunteers and will be your main point of contact with the CBF in your role as an Assessor. THe responsibilities of this role include:

- Managing the appointment and induction processes of CBF Volunteers (on and off boarding) - in conjunction with the Executive Assistant in the case of Board members
- Developing, monitoring and managing the CBF Volunteer Management Plan and associated Volunteer policies including Recruitment/ Retention/ Recognition/ Performance/ Professional development strategies
- Sourcing, developing and managing volunteer training and development plans including Cultural Competency requirements
- Undertaking due diligence checks on new Volunteers – particularly new Board members
- Setting and monitoring Volunteer skills and diversity targets
- Ensuring the CBF Volunteer Management plan maintains best practice principles

Grants

The following section is intended to familiarise you with the CBF's grant processes and your role in grant assessment and monitoring. A diagram of the grants process is overleaf. The CBF uses an online grant management system called *SmartyGrants*. Instructions on using the system for grant assessing will be distributed with your assigned assessments. If you would like further clarification of any aspect of this material please contact CBF Grants Support Team (Volunteer Manager).

All competitive applications are assessed on their merits.

Competitive grant applications take the following journey:

1. Application prepared and submitted
2. Application processed by Grants Support Team to ensure eligibility

3. Application assessed against the following assessment criteria by at least five assessors, including at least three members of our Grant Assessor Team and two members of the relevant Grants Advisory Committee
4. The Volunteer Manager (Grants Support Team) reviews all assessments to ensure minimum number completed for each application, check for inappropriate comments related to either conscious or unconscious bias or misunderstanding of the assessment criteria, and to identify any incidents of harsh or easy marking.
5. The GAC will consider priority weightings applied to average score, scores and comments, and make funding recommendations to our Board
6. Funding allocations finalised by the CBF Board.
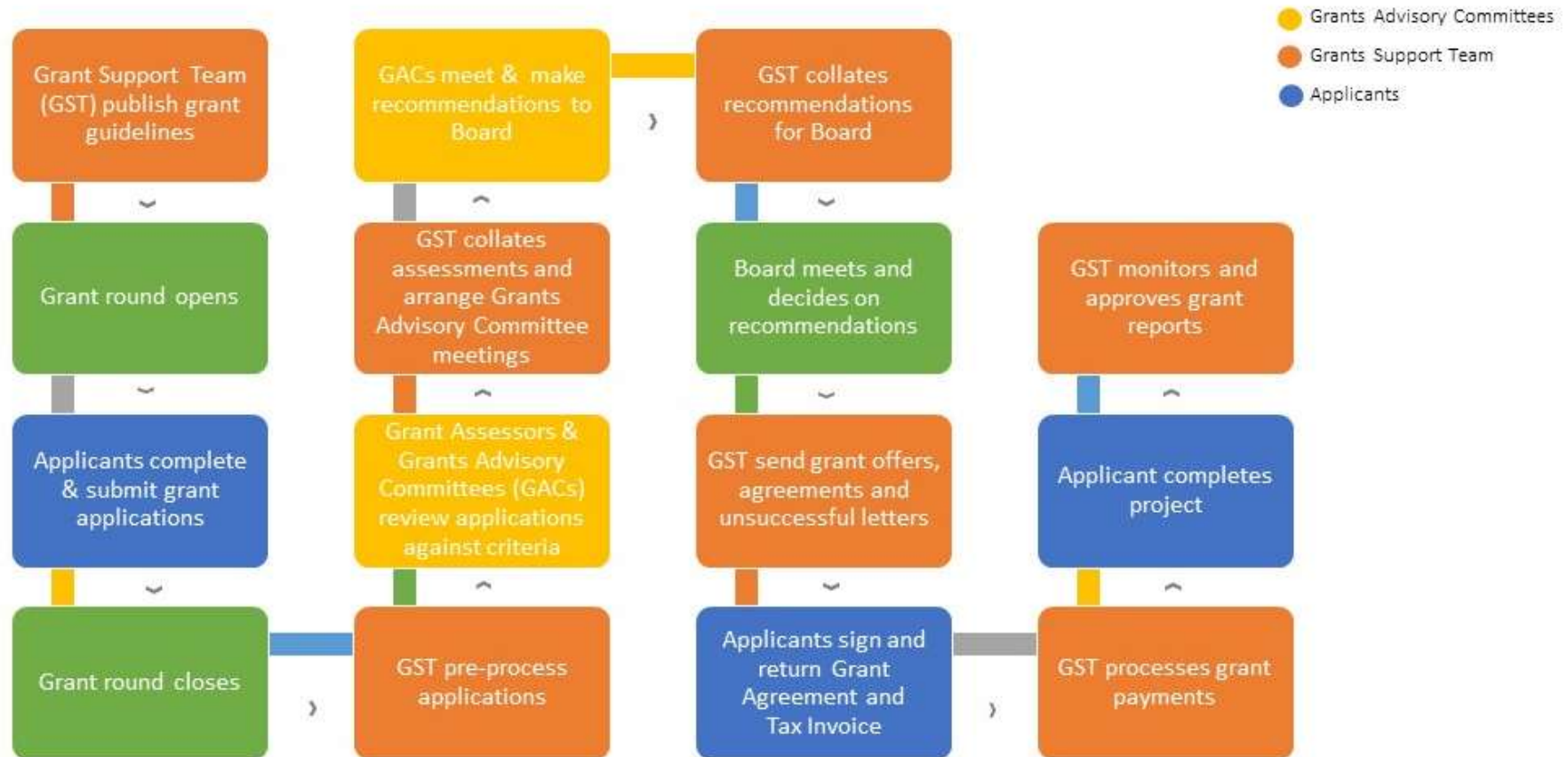7. Grants Support Team advises applicants of funding decisions

At least half of the assessors of applications for and by First Nations people, groups and organisations will be First Nations assessors. Applicants may also recommend that assessors with particular skills or perspectives read and score your application (e.g. technicians to assess transmission equipment and women to assess a women's training project).

All assessments are collated by the GST onto a master ranking sheet that is provided to the GAC meeting. It is important that all GAC members are familiar with the process for assessing competitive grants, particularly because much of the work of assessing grants takes place prior to the GAC meeting.

Whether an eligible applicant is successful will depend upon the ranking they achieve, the quality of all applications received and the amount of funding available.

Grants Process

Legend:
- Grants Advisory Committees (yellow)
- Grants Support Team (orange)
- Applicants (blue)

Process flow:

1. Grant Support Team (GST) publish grant guidelines
2. Grant round opens
3. Applicants complete & submit grant applications
4. Grant round closes
5. GST pre-process applications
6. Grant Assessors & Grants Advisory Committees (GACs) review applications against criteria
7. GST collates assessments and arrange Grants Advisory Committee meetings
8. GACs meet & make recommendations to Board
9. GST collates recommendations for Board
10. Board meets and decides on recommendations
11. GST send grant offers, agreements and unsuccessful letters
12. Applicants sign and return Grant Agreement and Tax Invoice
13. GST processes grant payments
14. Applicant completes project
15. GST monitors and approves grant reports

Grant Guidelines

Grant guidelines are drafted by the GST (as a result of the GAC Evaluation Frameworks), reviewed by the GAC and approved by the Board. Guidelines are aligned with funding objectives set out in the Government Funding Deed but are developed by the GACs to produce greater outcomes for these grant categories.

Assessment Criteria

As a matter of transparency and better practice the CBF uses a consistent set of assessment criteria in evaluating competitive grant applications. The assessment criteria, their weighting and their relationship to questions on the grant application form are published within the grant guidelines.

Application Forms

Application forms for CBF grants programs are based on a formal standard application template in accordance with the required compliance, eligibility and assessment criteria for each category. Applications for grants provide:

- Organisation details
- Project summary
- Responses to grant criteria:
    - Capacity (D&O only)
    - Idea(s)
    - Impact(s)
    - Planning and budget

Grant application forms are developed to determine eligibility and to ensure that relevant and sufficiently detailed information is provided by applicants to allow assessors to assess each application against the established grant criteria. The questions on grant application forms are framed in a manner that is aimed to draw information from applicants relevant to the published grant assessment criteria.

Assessing Grants

Assessment forms

Assessors and GAC members assess each application allocated to them for assessment using an Assessment Form in SmartyGrants. Assessment forms must be submitted within the timeframes advised so the scores can be aggregated and a ranking prepared for the GAC's consideration at the meeting.

The Assessment form includes:

- Comments from the Grants Support Team highlighting information you need to know prior to assessing the application
- A Rating Scale and single-choice question for a score (0-3) for each criterion (half-points are permitted)
- A single-choice question where you can identify whether you suggest full, partial or no funding for the application
- A question where you can provide advice to the GAC about the application

- A question where you can provide constructive feedback to the applicant in the event their application is not supported

Rating Scales describe what each score for each criterion means, and help assessors give fair scores to help the GAC make clear and consistent decisions.

Example Rating Scales

Criteria:	Idea	Impact	Planning
Weighting:	40%	30%	30%
3 points	Provides clear evidence demonstrating a need for the content in the community. Convincingly outlines how the idea will support self-representation by diverse community groups.	Clear and appropriate measures of success and targets to increase diversity and lead to long term outcomes.	The people involved are clearly the best people for the project. Clear and realistic estimated timeframes. A clear budget demonstrating good value for money.
2 points	Provides some evidence demonstrating a need for the content in the community. Clearly outlines how it will support participation by diverse community groups.	Measures of success will increase diversity and lead to long term outcomes.	The people involved could make this project a success. Some clear timeframes provided. Budget demonstrates reasonable value for money.
1 point	Provides minimal evidence demonstrating a need for the content in the community. There is little evidence that the proposal will increase community participation or diversity.	Limited impact and outcomes for diverse communities.	Few experienced people involved in the project. Timelines are lacking or unclear. Budget isn't very clear.

Assessment moderation process

The Volunteer Manager (Grants Support Team) undertakes a due diligence check on all assessor forms submitted. This is to ensure the minimum number have been completed for each application, to check for inappropriate comments related to either conscious or unconscious bias or misunderstanding of the assessment criteria, and to identify any incidents of harsh or easy marking.

Such instances may be brought to the attention of the GAC at their meeting (while maintaining anonymity of assessors) and the broader issues around assessor performance are also addressed by providing specific feedback to individual assessors following each round. Such assessors are invited to attend Assessor Skills Workshops or provided with one-on-one training.

A more general feedback email goes out to the whole team (even those who didn't assess) to provide advice on common areas of concern (e.g. a reticence to support salaries or a lack of explanation when selecting partial funding for an application etc.)

Assessors are encouraged to get in touch with the Volunteer Manager to discuss any feedback given or receive more specific feedback on their assessments at any time.

Key concepts:

- **Assessment criteria**
  - The **assessment criteria** are listed in the **grant guidelines**. We use the criteria to score the applications. Assessors apply scores out of 3 (i.e. 0.5, 1, 2 or 3) in relation to each criterion. Half points are also permitted. These scores are entered into *SmartyGrants* prior to the GAC meeting. Weighting is then calculated by the Grants Support Team. The applications are then ranked in order of score (by percentage) on a master summary spreadsheet. Scores are to be provided to the Grants Support Team by a specified date so the scores can be aggregated and a ranking prepared for the GAC's consideration at the meeting.
  - The GAC can review where the 'cut off' point will be – usually determined by the level of funds available to disburse – and discuss applications or parts of applications that are ranked close to the cut off point. GACs may take the opportunity to discuss these applications in greater detail, and adjust scores based on the outcomes from that discussion. The comments provided in your assessment forms will be important for those discussions to help GAC members understand why you have given projects the scores provided.
- **Assessment matrix**
  - The **assessment matrix** is an *internal* document that GAC members set to help assessors to score a proposal against each assessment criteria.
  - The matrix is a table that describes what each score for each criterion means.
  - For example for the "Idea" criterion in a competitive category the matrix might describe the points as follows:
    - **3 points**: Provides clear evidence demonstrating a need for the content in the community. Convincingly outlines how the idea will support self-representation by diverse community groups.
    - **2 points:** Provides some evidence demonstrating a need for the content in the community. Clearly outlines how it will support participation by diverse community groups.
    - **1 point:** Provides minimal evidence demonstrating a need for the content in the community. There is little evidence that the proposal will increase community participation or diversity.

Conflicts of Interest

All Assessor team members are required to read and complete the Conflict of Interest Declaration that forms part of their nomination form within Smartygrants. All Assessor team members should be familiar with the procedures outlined in the CBF Code of Conduct.

It is an essential principle of CBF operation that any Assessor who has a conflict of interest in an application should not participate in assessment of that application. If you are assigned an application which you have a conflict of interest with, please notify the Grants Support Team (Volunteer Manager).

Risk management systems are in place to identify, assess and respond to risks relating to your volunteer involvement at the CBF such as the Code of conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy. Any risks related to CBF volunteer involvement are listed in the CBF Risk Register overseen by the CBF Audit & Risk Management Committee.

Confidentiality

Grant applications and meeting papers may include information that is considered commercial-in-confidence or otherwise sensitive. All CBF grant applications, and all information gleaned from their consideration, should be treated as confidential and not circulated, discussed or otherwise utilised outside the processes of the CBF.

Checklist for new Assessor Team members

On your appointment into the CBF Assessor team, you will be provided with a range of Induction materials. This checklist summarises the things you should read before your first assessment round:

- ☐ The **Volunteer Resources** section of the CBF website.

    Required reading:
    Induction materials, Policies & forms, Training opportunities.

    Optional reading:
    About us, About community media, Research & reports, About grantmaking & assessment.

    There's a lot to take in so take your time to soak up all the info and take note of any questions you might have or further information we can provide.