The Goldilocks Zone:
A practical guide for grants standardisation

An Institute of Grants Management White Paper



SmartyGrants
Software, data science & grantmaking intelligence

INSTITUTE OF
GRANTS MANAGEMENT

The Goldilocks Zone
A practical guide for grants standardisation teams

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The Institute of Grants Management (IGM) is part of the Our Community group of enterprises.

Our Community is the engine room for creating and disseminating practical, affordable training, leadership and technological solutions that allow not-for-profit and grantmaking organisations to get on with the crucial work of building stronger communities.

Through the Institute of Grants Management (IGM), we are distilling and disseminating all we've learnt about best practice grants management over more than two decades of tracking grants and working alongside grantmakers and their grantees.

One of the ways we do this is by embedding these lessons into Smarty Grants, a sibling enterprise of the IGM and the favourite tech tool of grantmakers.



Acknowledgements and thanks:

The authors are indebted to Fiona Dempster and Barry Smith for their work in helping us understand and conceptualise the grantmaking lifecycle via the original IGM/SmartyGrants *Grantmaking Toolkit*. We also acknowledge the many hundreds of grantmakers and grant applicants who have patiently shaped and tested our grantmaking knowledge base over many years; and the Our Community team members who have empathetically worked alongside them and contributed to our body of knowledge.

The Goldilocks Zone: A practical guide for grants standardisation teams

1. Introduction

Each year, around $125 billion in grants is distributed across Australia (and billions more across the world) – most of it coming from central government coffers. It's a massive and massively important ecosystem; however, too often it is impeded by poor IT systems and poorly conceived or imperfectly implemented policies and practices.

Standardisation initiatives offer an opportunity to achieve massive efficiencies and improve grant-making outcomes, providing huge value for money for those who invest in transformation, and the people, businesses and communities they seek to serve.

When done well, standardised funding practices can also improve transparency, compliance and quality assurance, as well as reducing the administrative burden for grantees.

Finding the Goldilocks Zone

Standardisation efforts stand (or fall) on their ability to achieve the right balance of flexibility and rigidity. Defining and enforcing standardisation rules allows you to keep data neat, comparable and aggregable. At the same time, acknowledging exceptions and making allowances for unique situations ensures that the process remains fair and relevant. We call this "the Goldilocks Zone": not too strict, not too loose, just right.

This report explores what we've learned about how funders can reach the Goldilocks Zone, drawing on our experience of helping to scope and execute multiple standardisation projects, big and small, over two decades. It also examines data from SmartyGrants and reveals associated insights from grantmaking professionals.

By examining real-world practices and perceptions (ours and others') we aim to provide practical insights to help organisations that are working to standardise their own grantmaking practices.

Gathering inputs for this report

This report rests on three main inputs:

1) our own experience
2) the real-world practices of our software users (derived through SmartyGrants database)
3) a client survey.

Our experience

Since SmartyGrants was launched in 2009, we have been involved in numerous big and small standardisation projects, working with our clients to apply best practice principles to the real-world realities of grants management.

We have worked alongside hundreds of grantmakers, and thousands of grantees, and we have read (and in some cases contributed to) dozens of reports by auditors.

All of that knowledge is woven through this white paper.

SmartyGrants is our "benevolent Trojan horse" for spearheading grantmaking reform and automation – for nearly two decades we have translated all we have learned about how to do grantmaking well into a user-friendly, cost-efficient grants management solution that has become the most widely used system in Australia and New Zealand, and is now rolling out in the UK and Europe, and across the world.

Analysis of the SmartyGrants database

In 2024, the SmartyGrants **Innovation Lab** team undertook a detailed analysis of 776 instances (accounts) and 10,490 programs in the SmartyGrants database.

The aim of the analysis was to learn more about the degree to which existing SmartyGrants standardisation tools were being employed by Manage Users (administrators within SmartyGrants) to standardise their grantmaking practices.

Grantmaking survey

In May–June 2024, we conducted a survey of grantmakers to learn about the how, what, where, when and why of their grantmaking standardisation practices.

The survey sought to learn more about how respondents were standardising their grantmaking practice, and how they were finding their own Goldilocks Zone.

The survey opened on May 15 and closed on June 23, 2024.

Why we care about standardisation

We are a social-purpose enterprise at heart, motivated not by profit (though that's nice, of course) but by a desire to play a part in building something useful.

We don't profess to have the answers to every grantmaking problem, and we don't believe any standardisation project will be easy (in fact, we know they never are).

We offer this report in the spirit of sharing what we've learned because we believe it can help grantmakers of all types and sizes avoid some of the mistakes of the past, while enabling an important shift that will deliver manifold benefits for government, citizens, grantees, beneficiaries and the people and organisations charged with administering public and private funds through grants.

Come and talk to us

This report was written by staff at Our Community's SmartyGrants division (chiefly, Josh Presser from the Managed Services team and Kathy Richardson, our executive director and resident "grant nerd"), with data work by the data science team's Michael McLellan.

We love talking about grants – and there's far more we can share on standardisation than we can cover in this document.

We're always open to conversations with grantmakers anywhere in the world. You can reach us through our contact page: **https://www.smartygrants.com/about/contact-us**

2. The grants context

What do we mean when we talk about standardisation in the context of grants administration? Standardisation can be applied to a variety of grants functions for a multiplicity of purposes. Here are the most common ways in which grants standardisation practices are applied:

- **Application forms:** Designing a standardised application form helps gather essential information consistently from all applicants. It ensures that the necessary details are provided, making the evaluation process easier and more objective. Various parts of an application form can be standardised to create efficiencies and promote fairness, predictability, consistency and better reporting options. These parts include:
  - grant/project budgets (e.g. project income and expenditure)
  - question text
  - choice options (including use of taxonomies such as **CLASSIE**, the **Philanthropy Classification System**, the **360Giving Data Standard** and the **National Standard Chart of Accounts**)
  - data fields.
- **Eligibility criteria:** Clear definitions of eligibility criteria for applicants, specifying who can apply and who cannot, prevent ineligible applicants from wasting time and resources, streamlining the process for both applicants and reviewers.
- **Assessment criteria:** Establishing a set of standardised assessment criteria to evaluate grant applications is an essential feature of a fair, transparent decision-making process. These criteria should align with the organisation's goals and priorities, allowing reviewers to assess all applications consistently.
- **Scoring system:** Most grantmakers implement a standardised scoring system to evaluate grant applications objectively. Assigning specific weights to different sections of the application based on their importance ensures a fair and balanced assessment.
- **Assessor guidelines:** Providing clear guidelines to reviewers on how to evaluate grant applications ensures a common understanding of the evaluation process and minimises subjectivity.
- **Reporting requirements:** Standardising reporting requirements for grantees helps ensure they provide consistent and relevant information about their progress and impact.
- **Timelines:** A grantmaker may establish standardised timelines for the application process, review period, and notification of results. This helps applicants plan their submissions and aligns the grantmaking process with the organisation's schedule.
- **Feedback mechanism:** Constructive feedback can help unsuccessful applicants understand areas for improvement and encourage reapplication in the future. Feedback mechanisms can be standardised to ensure all applicants have a consistent experience.
- **Due diligence processes:** Developing a standardised approach to verifying applicant information, financials, progress against milestones and legal compliance helps promote constant learning and improvement, thereby reducing risk.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Standardisation of monitoring and evaluation frameworks and processes can help the grantmaking organisation understand how well it is progressing towards its outcome goals, and provide insights into what's working and why.
- **Legal documentation:** Many grantmaking organisations develop standard legal agreements and contracts for grant recipients, outlining the terms and conditions of the grant. This ensures consistency in legal requirements and protects both the grantmaker and grantee. Standard legal documents can be "right-sized" to suit the level of risk and capacities of the grantees. The Australian Government's Finance Department hosts a range of standard agreement templates.

By implementing standardised practices, grantmaking organisations can create a more efficient and equitable process for both applicants and reviewers, ultimately leading to better outcomes and greater impact.

SmartyGrants standardisation tools

Since launching the SmartyGrants platform in 2009 (following a decade of research about and support for the emerging field of grantmaking), we have built a range of standardisation tools into our platform; these include:

- **default standard fields and standard sections,** which have become industry-standard for collecting data from grant applicants in Australia and New Zealand (we also allow customers to create and maintain their own suite of standard fields and sections)
- **Outcomes Engine –** providing the ability to track bespoke outcomes within a defined framework (domains, outcomes, metrics, etc)
- **default choice lists –** e.g. Australian states and territories, income/expense types, yes/no, and recommendations; we also allow customers to create and maintain their own standard lists to use across their account
- **taxonomies –** SmartyGrants currently includes Australian and New Zealand subject and population/beneficiary lists
- **reportable systems fields –** e.g. funding decision labels, stage names, application and round statuses
- **template forms,** containing standard fields and standardised contact fields, that can be easily amended, depending on each funder's requirements
- **report and dashboard templates and snapshot reports** that provide instant insights if funders use the SmartyGrants standardised fields
- **customisable boilerplate content** for key landing pages and emails
- **advanced standardisation tools** for organisations adopting whole-of-government-style solutions, including:
    - **SmartyCentral –** allowing centralised control of financial periods, forms, fields, choice lists and workflow templates
    - **SmartyHQ –** facilitating centralised visibility of aggregate grant activity across departments (according to defined permissions and data fields).

As you can see, in developing and rolling out our standardisation tools we have kept the Goldilocks principle in mind – standardising where we can while allowing customisation where feasible.

3. Why standardise?

There are many positive outcomes that can be achieved through taking a standardised approach to grantmaking. Standardisation allows you to:

- **improve your standing as a responsible grants administrator by promoting efficiency, transparency, and fairness.** "Pork barrelling" (the practice of allocating government funds to gain political favour) is a national sport in Australia and other parts of the world; but against this backdrop, auditors and media outlets represent and give voice to a growing wave of disappointment and anger over eroding standards in grants management. The public expects and deserves better than it's getting currently
- **encourage and embed good grants management practices,** making money go further and reassuring stakeholders (including ministers, auditors, media, citizens and taxpayers) that government funds are being managed responsibly
- **define and assess/audit adherence to minimum and recommended standards,** such as those contained in the Australian Government's **Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles** and the UK Government's **Grants Hub**, and state-based and devolved equivalents like the **NSW Grants Administration Guide** and the **WA Grants Administration Guidelines**
- **define a central data schema,** which can be used in reporting to:
  - improve visibility of funding patterns
  - uncover and highlight significant funding patterns
  - reduce duplication
  - identify and mitigate risks
  - inform better decision making on allocation of funding and other resources
- **build capacity and create efficiencies for grant managers,** who
  - do not have to start from scratch each time they start a new program or round
  - can have greater confidence that their forms and processes adhere to guidelines
  - can reuse data in multiple ways (e.g. publication to public or internal websites)
- **make your grants easier to find.** Adhering to standard fields makes it easier for details to be published on grant portals
- **create greater clarity and efficiencies for grant applicants and grantees,** and a common, predictable applicant experience, through standardisation of forms, language and processes
- **take advantage of external tools** that can validate grantee credentials – e.g.
  - Australia: **Australian Business Register**, **Australian Charities Commission**
  - New Zealand: **New Zealand Companies Register**, **New Zealand Charities Register**
  - UK: **Companies House Register**, **UK, Scotland and North Ireland Charities Commissions**
- **learn and share lessons about funding outcomes –** what works to create positive social, economic and environmental change – to provide more value for money and accelerate the pace of change.

4. What are the barriers?

Standardisation of grantmaking processes can be challenging. These are the main barriers:

- **Diverse objectives:** Goals and focus areas differ across teams, business areas, organisations or sectors. Standardisation of processes under these circumstances can be difficult, as each organisation has different drivers and priorities.
- **Organisational culture:** The existing culture within each organisation (or even each division or team within each organisation) is also likely to vary. Some teams may be resistant to change. Different teams or departments might have established their own practices, making it challenging to implement uniform processes.
- **Resource constraints:** Standardisation efforts often require investment in technology, training, and process redesign. Small organisations or those with limited resources may find it difficult to allocate time and funds for such initiatives. Investment is likely to be significant at the outset of such a project but ongoing investment is also crucial to ensure adequate oversight and ongoing maintenance of standardisation initiatives.
- **Legal and regulatory requirements:** Different organisations operate under various legal and regulatory frameworks, which can pose barriers to standardisation. What's crucial in one arena may be optional or even undesirable in another. Compliance with different laws and regulations may thus limit the flexibility to standardise certain aspects of the grantmaking process.
- **Stakeholder resistance:** Stakeholders, including staff, grantees and decision-makers, might resist standardisation because of concerns about potential loss of flexibility or increased bureaucracy. Transparency can also be very threatening to some operators.
- **Complexity:** Almost all grant programs operate within a context of nuance and complexity – that's hard enough to navigate within one program but piling complexity on complexity amplifies the headaches. Many standardisation efforts flounder in the face of this challenge.
- **Cultural and geographical differences:** Grant recipients and applicants may come from diverse cultural backgrounds or geographical regions, making it challenging to create a one-size-fits-all approach.
- **Technology compatibility:** Legacy systems or a lack of technological infrastructure or sophistication can hinder the implementation of standardisation processes.
- **Loss of productivity:** Standardisation efforts may require staff training and adjustment periods. During this time, there could be a temporary dip in productivity as teams adapt to the new processes.
- **Fantasy-land design:** A common feature of failed standardisation projects is that design of the central system has occurred without any reference to reality. Creating change is hard and grantmaking is inherently, unavoidably messy. You must therefore allow for some mess within your designs, and the best way to do so is to stress-test your assumptions against people working at the coalface of grantmaking to see where they're likely to start colouring outside the lines. Avoid going down the path of mandating adherence to rules (our experience has shown this never works because exceptions abound in grantmaking) – see **Appendix B** for more information about this. Instead, consider what data you really need and build for those outcomes.

5. Who standardises?

Grants standardisation can occur at a small or grand scale, within or across sectors. In this section we describe some examples of standardisation projects SmartyGrants has been involved with or observed.

At the small end of the scale, many funders standardise data and processes across their own programs – defining standard questions and choice lists, standard forms (or sections of forms), standard contracts, and perhaps a common outcomes framework.

A smaller number of grantmakers move beyond the parameters of cross-program standardisation and seek to chart (and in some cases enforce) standards that jump organisational boundaries. Cross-division projects are more difficult because the context varies (sometimes vastly) from account to account. The greater the variation, the harder it is to standardise.

SmartyGrants has been involved in a number of these projects. In one recent example, Bendigo and Adelaide Bank partnered with SmartyGrants to create the Community Impact Hub, a streamlined, cost-effective platform for managing grants, scholarships, and sponsorships. The system standardises processes, reduces the administrative burden, improves reporting, and is now rolling out across the entire Community Bank network (comprising hundreds of entities). Another project (some years ago now) involved SmartyGrants working with a cluster of local authorities in western Sydney to standardise form fields to facilitate cross-council data sharing.

Rarer still are efforts to standardise grants administration at whole-of-government level. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has done this very successfully, operating a grants mini-hub in Canberra. From here, a handful of staff oversee standards across 45 DFAT SmartyGrants accounts.

The NSW Government's transformational OneGMS whole-of-government project provides another example. The objective of this project is to enhance the grants administration process for government grants administrators, and their applicants/grantees (customers) across all participating NSW Government departments and agencies. Government research had indicated that customers wanted greater visibility of and access to available grants, more streamlined processes, and the ability to track grant progress. Agencies delivering grants were seeking a user-friendly system that would reduce administration and duplication, enhance reporting, and support their adherence to the NSW Government's mandated **Grants Administration Guide**. And central government agencies and legislators sought access to better data about grants, and grants management, across all agencies and departments.

The delivery of the whole-of-government grants project began in March 2023, and by June 2025, 50 NSW Government agencies had transitioned to OneGMS. Today, OneGMS provides NSW government grantmakers with a cloud-based, user-friendly grants administration system that allows them to handle the entire grants lifecycle, from development and planning, through application, approval and monitoring, to closure and evaluation. The system is valued by grant administrators, grant applicants and central government representatives for its success in streamlining the grants process and providing access to enhanced aggregated reporting.

All the successful examples provided above have something in common, and that is adherence to the Goldilocks principles we talked about earlier: achieving the right balance between structure and configurability.

Moving towards universal standardisation

Industry-wide standardisation efforts are somewhat common, although they often prove difficult to execute and sustain. Examples include:

- Candid's **Foundation Maps** project (and its **Australian equivalent**), which entails sharing mapped grants data
- The **"Fix the Form" movement**, through which 130-plus US foundations shared their forms (which led to the discovery that 40% of those forms were essentially the same)
- **Project Streamline** – a project spearheaded by PEAK Grantmaking in the US and designed to "reduce the burden of grantmaking requirements, so grants management professionals can obtain the information they need to make good grantmaking decisions and help their organisations and their grantseekers dedicate more time to mission-based work"

- **Philanthropy Data Commons** – a collaborative project focused on the collection, standardisation and integration of grants data
- **Funders Together**, in the UK, includes a range of collaboration initiatives, including **360Giving**, which publishes open, standardised grants data, as well as **London Funders**, **Collaboration Circle**, and the **Place Based Giving Resource Hub**. SmartyGrants will soon include 360Giving-compatible form fields and reports, making data upload fast and seamless.
- **The Yorkshire Funders Task Force** has developed a Common Application Form (CAF) and a Common End of Report Form (CRF), an initiative designed to save both applicants and funders time, money and energy. Templates for both the form and the report are available for any UK funder through SmartyGrants.

Such projects are generally underpinned by a desire to facilitate data sharing and reduce administrative burden.

Where standardisation is not possible or too difficult, data mapping can help deliver similar outcomes. Modern data tools can assist with these efforts.

For example, SmartyGrants has developed the CLASSIEfier tool, which allows grantmakers to automatically categorise their grants in alignment with the **CLASSIE subject and population taxonomies**. Because a central schema is used, this tool facilitates cross-agency and whole-of-government aggregation of data. SmartyGrants will soon launch a CLASSIEfier variant that allows grantmakers to create a bespoke data schema and auto-classify their grants accordingly – this is still standardisation, but within an account, rather than across many accounts.

At a 2022 conference in the US, SmartyGrants staff heard leaders in philanthropic grantmaking describe the quest for data mapping: "Where one grantmaker asks for 'Project start date' and the other asks for 'Initiation date' we need to know they are the same thing. We need the mapping. That's our Rosetta Stone," one leader said. "Input once; use often – that's our moonshot," said another.

An aggregated view – Australian grantmaking practices

Results of our examination of SmartyGrants user behaviour and our 2024 survey reveal that many standardisation efforts are afoot in Australia.

We found:

- **widespread adoption with room to grow.** Many grantmakers use SmartyGrants' standardisation tools, but there remains significant potential for broader and deeper implementation.
- **high uptake of the decision tab and stages.** Eighty-three per cent of programs use the decision tab to record decisions in a standardised way (the options are undecided, withdrawn, approved and declined) and most instances (accounts) use common stage names across programs, suggesting process standardisation is happening or within reach for most grantmakers.
- **efficiency and grantee support are primary motivators.** Sixty-one per cent of survey respondents cited improved efficiency as a reason for standardisation, while 71% noted benefits to grantees, including clearer processes and reduced administrative burden.
- **sectoral differences.** Local and state/territory government grantmakers lead the way in using default standard fields, while philanthropic foundations have the lowest uptake of these fields, suggesting opportunities for improved collaboration in this sector.
- **barriers.** The most frequently cited impediments to standardisation were resource constraints (57% of respondents), divergent stakeholder priorities (50%), and complexity (33%).
- **progress Is promising.** Half of respondents rated their standardisation efforts at seven or higher on a 10-point scale, which may be attributable to the high levels of grantmaking expertise in the sample.

6. Analysis of SmartyGrants data

Overview

The SmartyGrants Innovation Lab reviewed 776 SmartyGrants grantmaker instances (accounts), containing 10,490 separate programs. On average, grantmakers run six programs per instance.

The number of programs within a SmartyGrants instance is an indicator of the potential scope of standardisation.

Standardisation can be resource intensive, so for grantmakers with a large number of programs, a broad approach to standardisation can increase the potential return on investment as economies of scale come into play. (For example, more powerful reporting, or greater efficiencies across more programs.)

On the other hand, standardising across a greater number of programs can also increase complexity and make reaching consensus on standardisation initiatives more challenging. This is because as standardisation efforts broaden, there are more stakeholders to bring to the table.

Smaller grantmakers with fewer programs may be able to realise the benefits of standardisation more easily because of the relatively lower levels of complexity involved in standardising across a small number of programs.

When we broke the SmartyGrants data down by organisation type, we saw that local government typically has the most programs per instance. This was expected, considering the broad remit of most local government agencies across a diverse range of portfolio areas, and our long-standing experience with this sector.

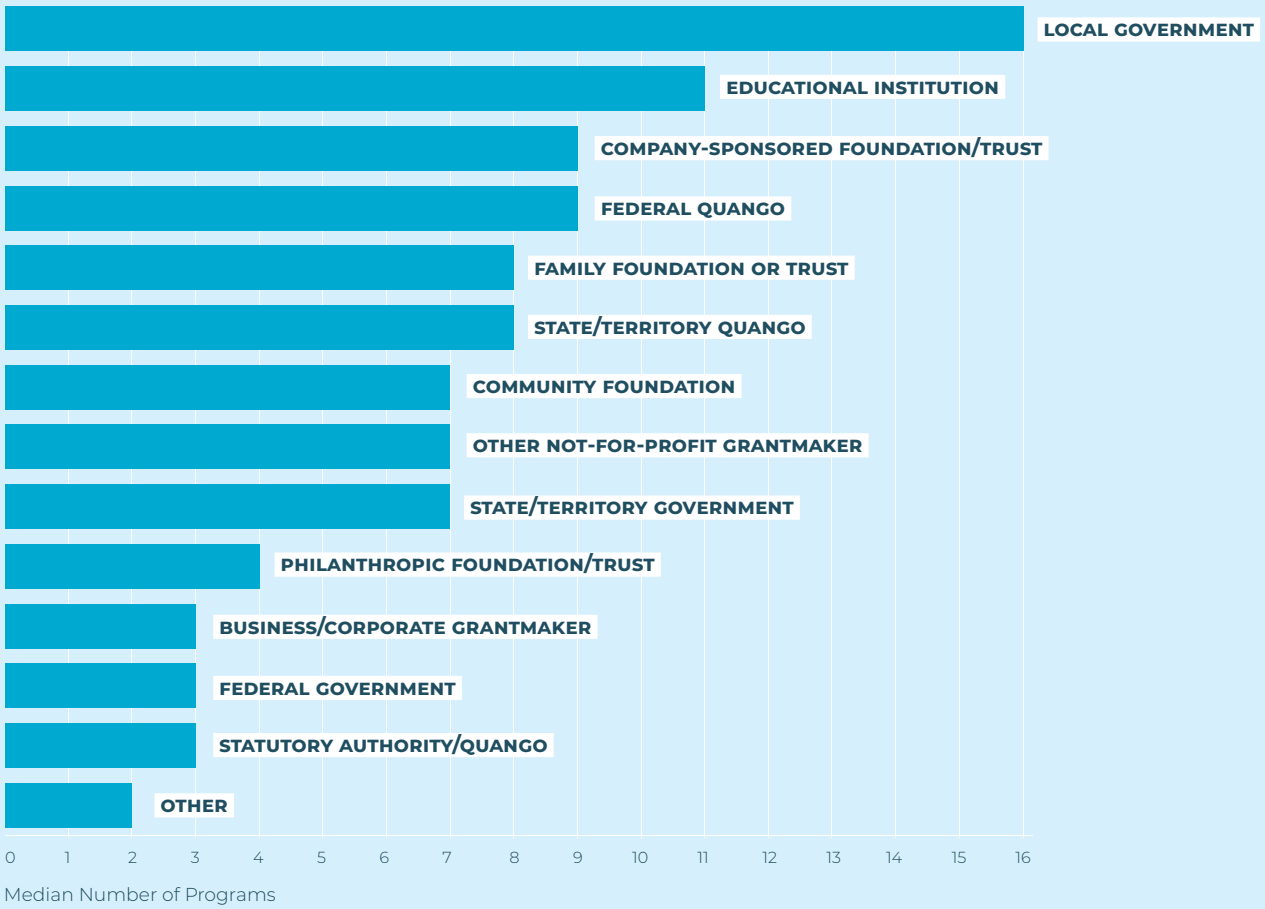

Figure 1: *Median number of programs per SmartyGrants instance, by organisation type.*

Default standard fields

Standard fields allow grantmakers to standardise the collection of data across applications, irrespective of the programs or forms used to capture that information. In SmartyGrants, standard fields provide grantmakers with a means of developing a common data schema for the information they capture in SmartyGrants.

SmartyGrants comes pre-loaded with a suite of default standard fields , a selection of commonly used fields that together provide a common data schema that can be used by any grantmaker using SmartyGrants.

As default standard fields are set to collect information the same way across all SmartyGrants instances (accounts), the use of these fields allows grantmakers to share and compare data. This has the potential to increase grantmakers' individual and collective impact, as it facilitates cooperation, allowing grantmakers to coordinate their efforts, better target areas that are underfunded, and avoid duplication. It also unlocks the power of standardised reports and dashboards.

The Innovation Lab analysed usage of default standard fields across SmartyGrants programs. While the data shows reasonable use of default standard fields by SmartyGrants users, there is scope for increased uptake. The top default field (Project Title) was in use in 64% of programs, with Brief Project Description (56%), Total Amount Requested (53%), Project Start Date (51%) and Project End Date (51%) rounding out the top five.

The **CLASSIE** questions (Project Beneficiaries and Project Subject) were in use in 17% and 13% of programs respectively.

The recent release of SmartyGrants 9.0 saw the introduction of Australasia's first **AI-powered automatic grants classification tool**. This powerful new feature helps grantmakers to instantly categorise both historical and incoming grant applications using CLASSIE (Classification of Social Sector Initiatives and Entities).

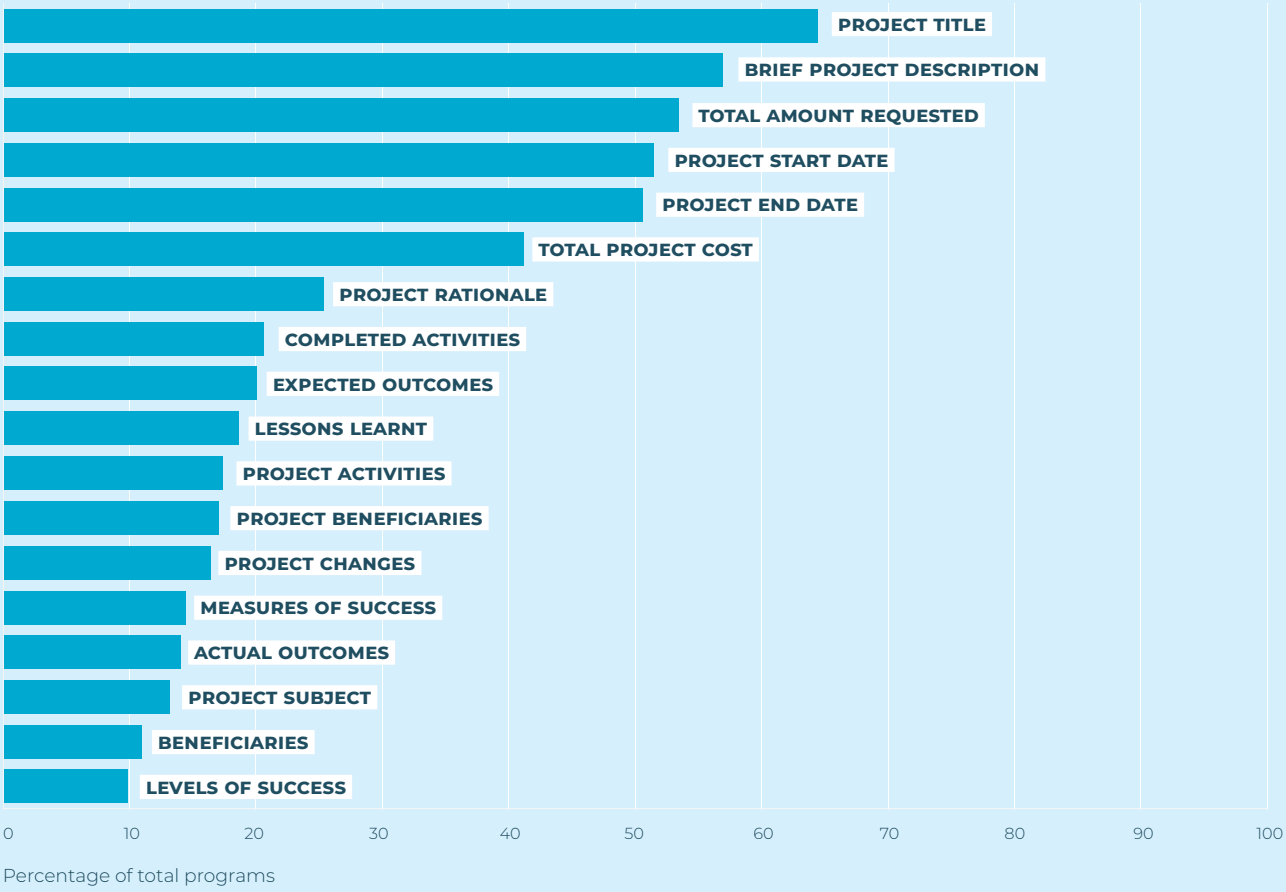

Figure 2: *Standard field usage as a percentage of the total number of programs. (A standard field was considered to be in use when it had been added to a form(s) in a program. The standard field is counted only once per program.)*

We analysed the use of default standard fields by sector to ascertain whether some sectors are better placed to benefit from standardisation efforts than others.

When we look at the five most commonly used default standard fields by grantmaker type, we can see that local government and state / territory government grantmakers are the highest overall users of default standard fields.

The higher state/territory government usage may be attributable to the NSW Government's grants standardisation agenda, which includes the adoption of SmartyGrants as a whole-of-government grant management platform, and of templated forms that mandate the use of certain default standard fields.

The high usage of default standard fields across the local government sector is encouraging, and it highlights the potential for data sharing and collaboration across the sector.

At the other end of the spectrum, philanthropic foundations use default standard fields less, indicating an opportunity for improved cross-sector collaboration in this sector.

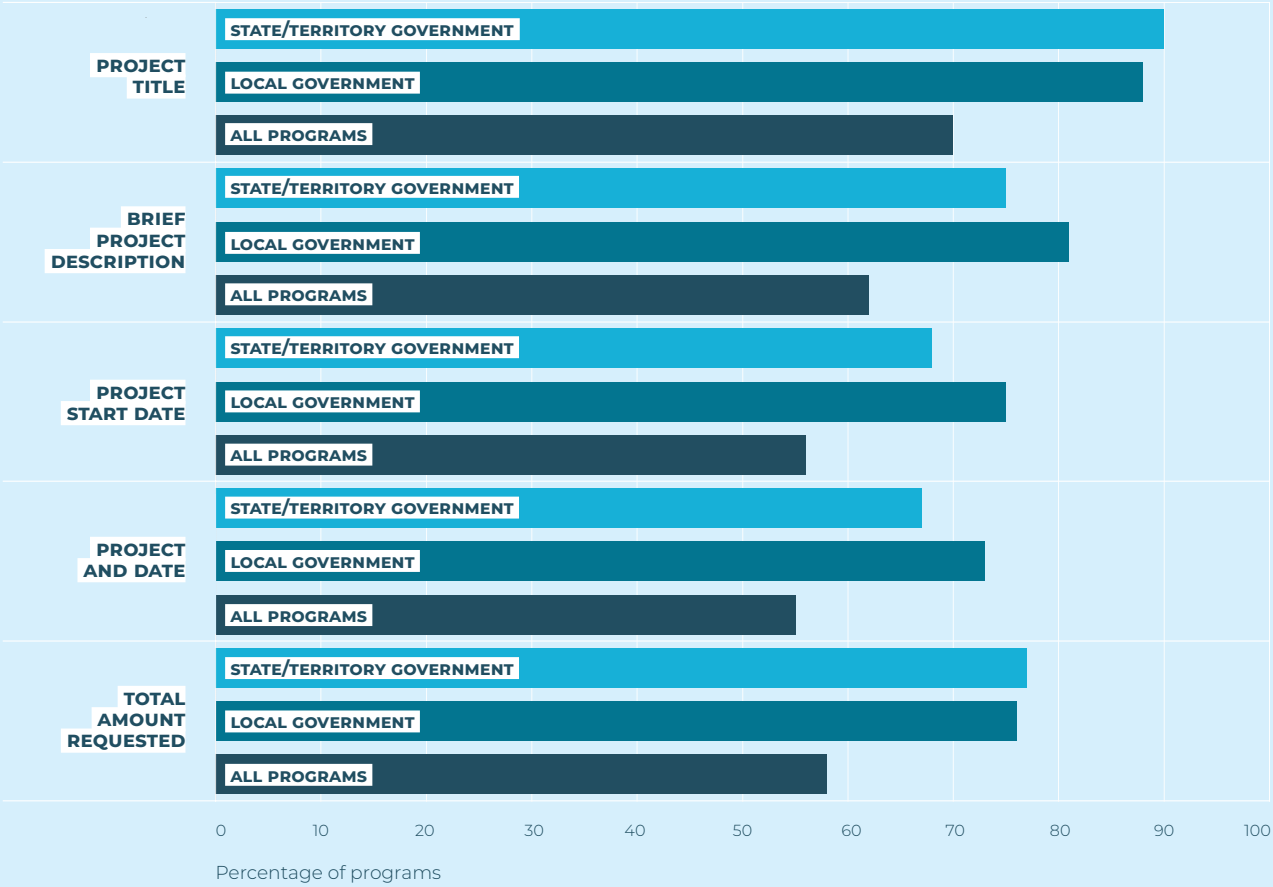

Figure 3: *State/territory and local government usage of the top five default standard fields compared to usage rates for all sectors.*

Custom standard fields

Users can create custom standard fields within SmartyGrants if the questions specific to a grantmaker's organisation or grant programs are not included in the list of default standard fields provided.

At the time of writing there were 70,244 unique custom standard field labels within SmartyGrants.

The Innovation Lab analysed the most used custom standard field labels and the number of times they had been used in a SmartyGrants instance.

While this exposed some trends (explored below), with some fields being used in many instances, none was used so often as to justify the creation of additional default standard fields.

It appears from the data that some of the most common custom standard fields may be specific to the education sector; for example, Student ID (349), Type of Degree (223) and Award Title (201). While this wouldn't justify the creation of additional default standard fields, it could indicate existing cross-sector standardisation initiatives within the education sector.

While it's not possible to know why particular custom standard fields were created, some appear to capture data that could be captured in SmartyGrants by other means.

For example:

- Organisation Name (330) would usually be captured as a contact field, which would enable the details to be stored in the contact database to enable mailouts and contact-based reporting.
- Local Government Area (298) could easily be captured using the LGA lookup field.
- Special Conditions (213) and Declined Comments (196) could be captured using the internal and external comments fields in the decision tab.
- Remaining Funds (199) could be captured and reported on using SmartyGrants budgets.

These custom fields may indicate a need for training for some SmartyGrants users to ensure they understand the most efficient, effective and standardised ways to capture data.

The Innovation Lab also analysed the similarities between custom standard fields and default standard fields.

There are many legitimate reasons why grantmakers may create custom standard fields that are like default standard fields. However, these fields may represent missed opportunities for standardisation or (if duplicated within a single account) indicate poor data governance.

Project Title is the most used default standard field, so it's perhaps not surprising that it had the most custom standard fields resembling it – at 113, more than any other default standard field.

It's not possible to know the use case for these custom fields, but some of the similar labels appear to be to have been created to cater for multiple projects (e.g. Project Title 2 or Sub-project 3 title)

Some fields appeared to be duplicates (e.g. Project Name), while others appeared to have been added to capture updates to the field (e.g. Project Title Amendment or Project Title Update). These may not have been necessary because SmartyGrants allows the question text of a standard field to be updated to cater for a wording preference, or on subsequent forms to reflect changed context. This may indicate a gap in some users' knowledge of the functionality and usage of standard fields.

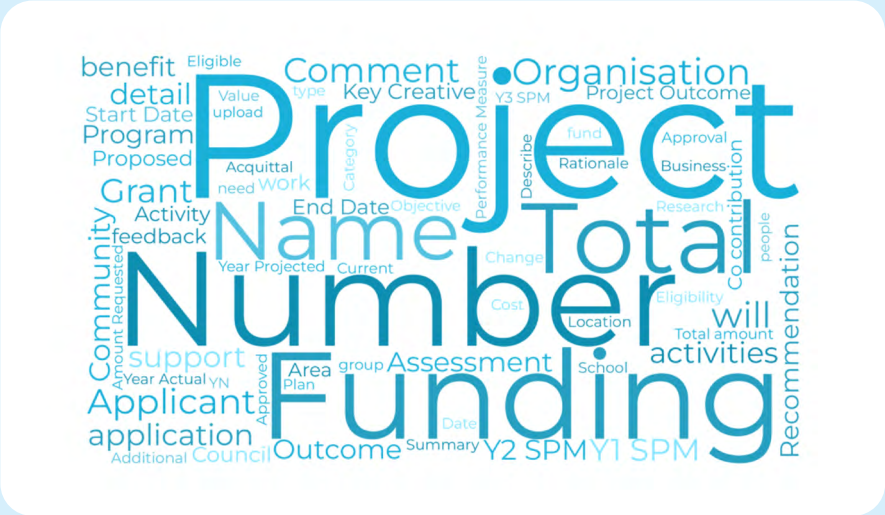

Figure 4: *A word cloud of custom standard field labels used in SmartyGrants, with label size indicating frequency.*

Standard sections

Standard sections allow a repeatable section or grid to be defined as standard. This gives the section the properties of a standard field, meaning it can be edited via the standard field tab in the application, and the responses can flow across forms, and are available for multi-program reporting.

Three standard sections are provided (income, expenditure and milestones), enabling grantmakers to take a standardised and sophisticated approach to collecting this data within SmartyGrants.

Outcomes Engine

The **Outcomes Engine** is designed to help grantmakers collect, report and learn about the outcomes and impacts of their grants, in partnership with grantees. It allows grantmakers to see which grantees and which funded projects are having the most success at helping them make progress towards their overall outcomes goals.

The Outcomes Engine consists of

- an outcomes framework, which is uploaded into SmartyGrants to track outcomes and their associated metrics across programs and rounds
- a series of default standard sections and fields which enable a standardised approach to collecting outcomes data against the uploaded framework.

The Outcomes Engine is now included free as part of a standard SmartyGrants subscription. However, when this analysis took place, the Outcomes Engine was an optional add-on (at extra cost), with 181 instances (or about 21%) of SmartyGrants accounts subscribed to, but not necessarily using, the Outcomes Engine.

Of the users with the Outcomes Engine switched on, 95% were using the outcomes standard section, with fewer using grantmaker metrics (35%) and grantseeker metrics (33%) standard sections.

Outcomes measurement isn't something that grantmakers can do unilaterally; it must be undertaken in partnership in with grantees, whose capacity builds over time. The difference in usage between the outcomes standard section and the other Outcomes Engine standard sections may be attributable to grantmakers 'starting slowly' with their grantees on their outcomes journey.

Standardising outcomes measurement with shared outcomes frameworks helps grantmakers align their efforts, track collective impact and increase program effectiveness.

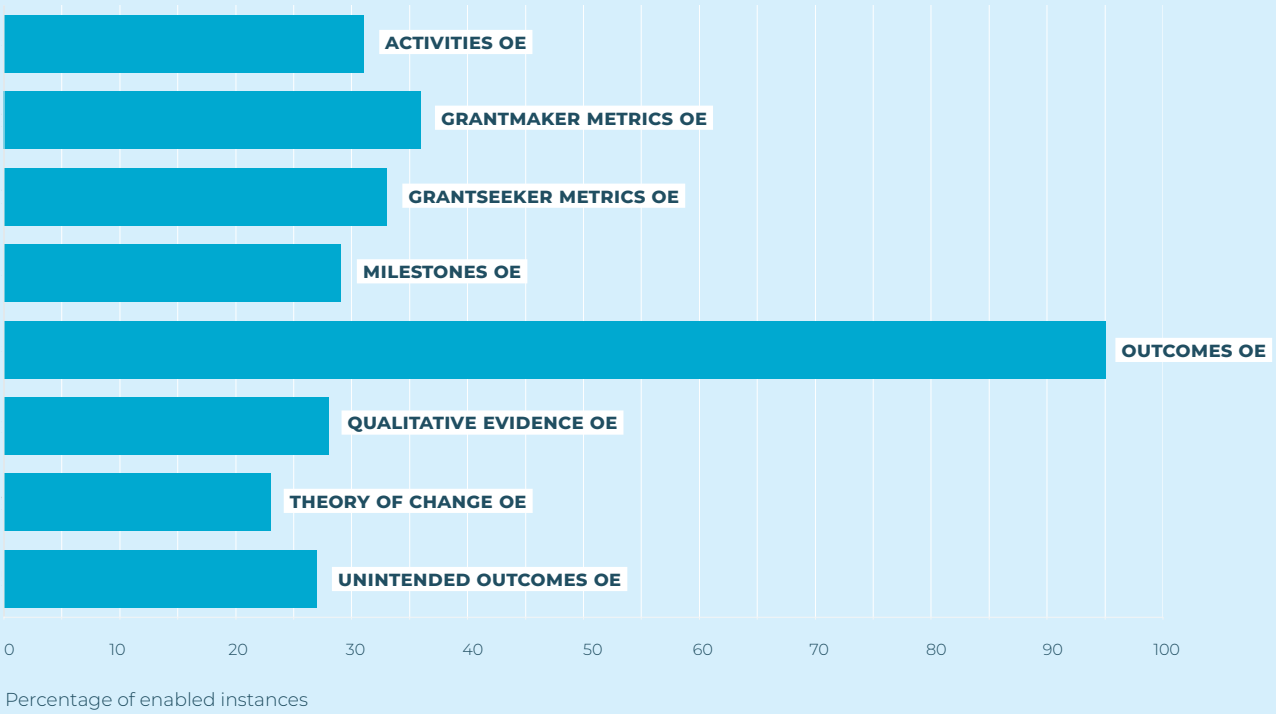

Figure 5: *Outcomes Engine standard sections in use as a proportion of the total number of instances with the Outcomes Engine enabled.*

The Innovation Lab reviewed the outcomes frameworks uploaded into the system, looking for similarities in their names to see whether any grantmakers were using shared or similarly named frameworks.

This might have signified potential for further collaboration. However, there was insufficient data to draw any definitive conclusions. Framework names were either very specific to the name of a program or instance, or too generic to enable the team to determine the nature of the framework (e.g. Outcomes 2022).

Choice lists

Standard choice lists are predefined lists of choices that can be used in either multiple or single choice standard fields. SmartyGrants comes pre-loaded with a suite of default standard choice lists. The survey data showed that default standard choice lists were in use in 79% of SmartyGrants instances and 31% of programs.

The top 10 default standard choice lists are shown in Figure 6, below.

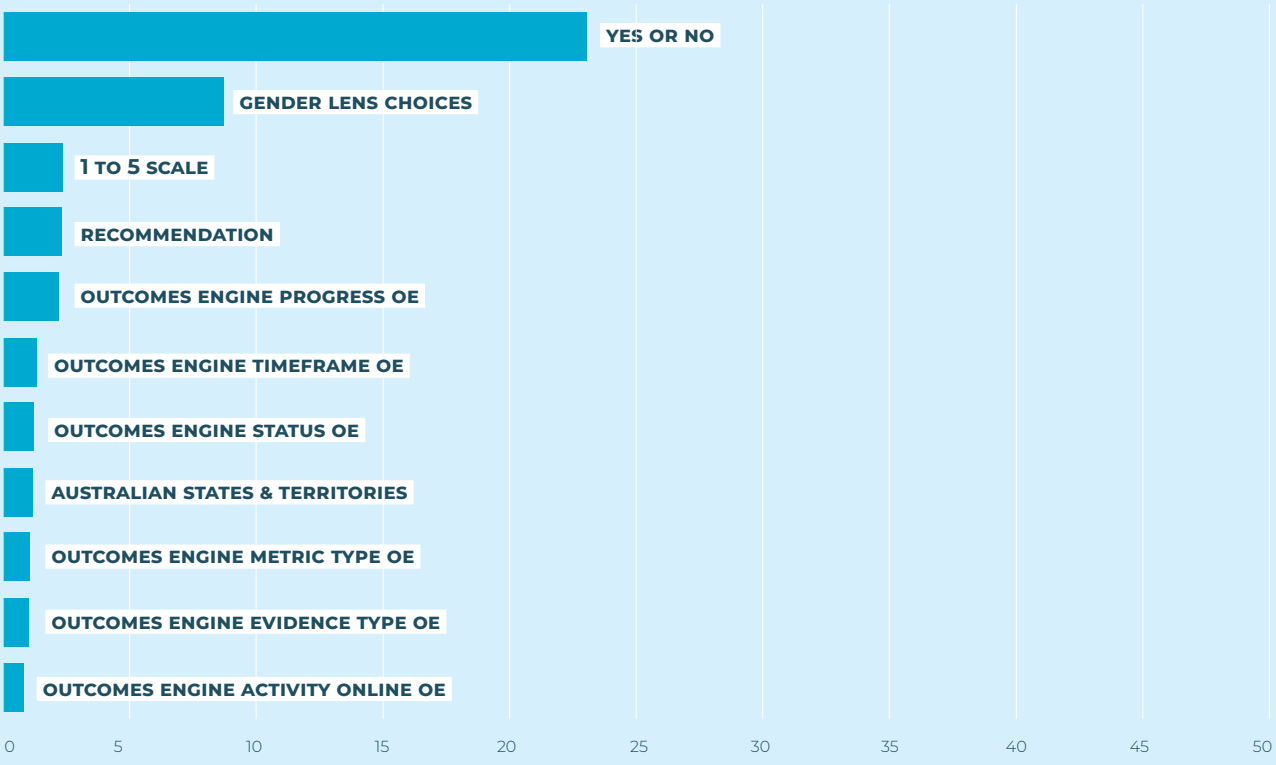

Figure 6: *Top 10 default standard choice lists by percentage of total programs using choice list.*

Decision tab

The SmartyGrants decision tab provides a standardised approach to recording decisions, adding funding allocations and recording payments. From a standardisation perspective, using the decision tab allows grantmakers to report on application status and manage budgets across programs. For grantmakers undertaking broader standardisation initiatives (e.g. cross-sector collaboration), using the decision tab to record decisions allows easy benchmarking (for example, approval rates or time to decision).

SmartyGrants data showed that 83% of programs and 79% of rounds within SmartyGrants were using the decision tab.

Stages

Fundamentally, most grants programs have the same lifecycle, even when program designs vary (e.g. one-stage vs two-stage application process, competitive, targeted or demand driven). This is why many grantmakers are standardising their business processes.

Stages are one way that SmartyGrants helps grantmakers to manage workflow throughout their business process. A stage is generally referred to as a status or takes the form of a folder that can be used to sort applications as they move through the process.

The Innovation Lab team analysed the use of stages within the SmartyGrants database. At the time of writing, the database contained 91,797 stages, of which 48,637 were unique. The average number of stages per program was 12.

As part of its analysis, the Innovation Lab looked for stage names that were used across multiple programs within the same instance, indicating a level of standardisation at the instance level. The team found that 96% of instances used common stage names across their programs. On average, 17% of stage names that were unique within instances were used in multiple programs.

Where stage names were used across multiple programs in an instance, the Innovation Lab also looked at their frequency of use across all instances in the dataset. The team found that stages used for common processes such as assessment were the most common. The data also showed that stages are commonly used as 'check points' for applications (e.g. unsuccessful, approved, declined, ineligible).

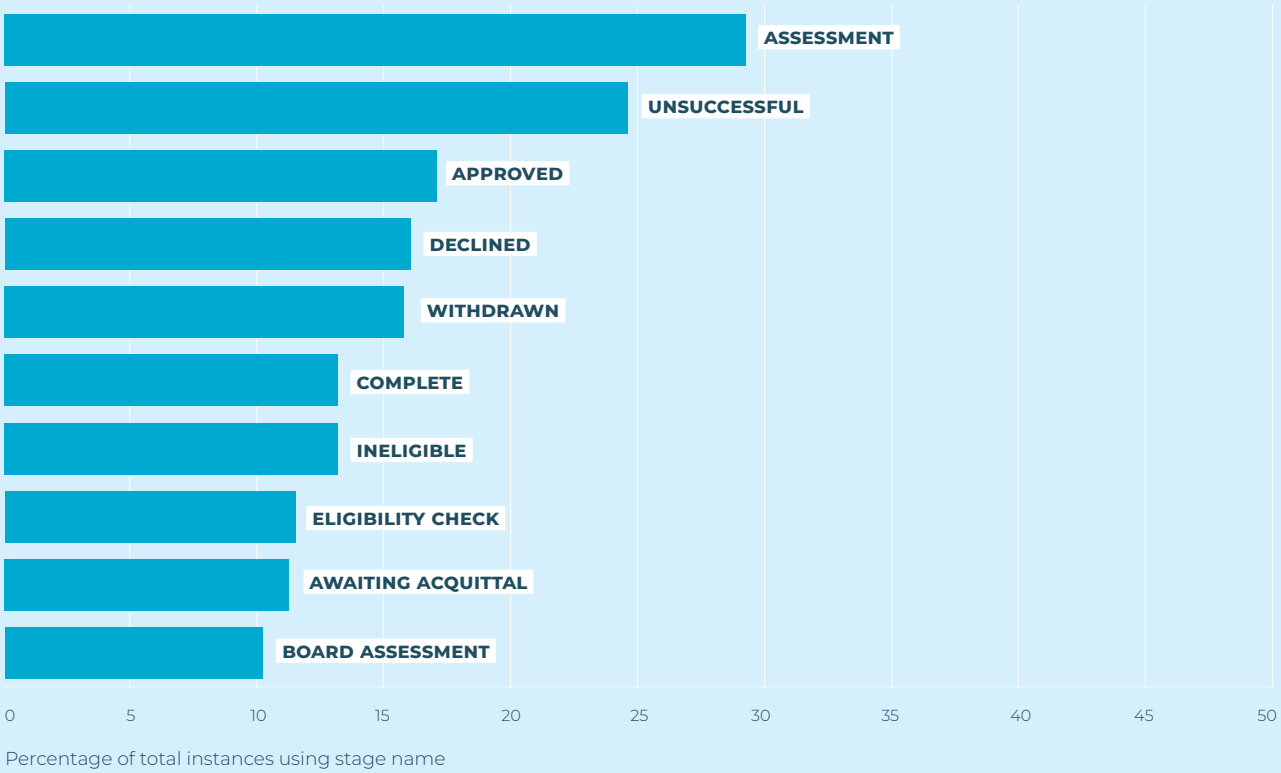

Figure 7: *Frequency of top 10 most common stage names.*

To understand the extent to which grantmakers use similar business processes, the Innovation Lab team compared the names of workflow stages by breaking them down into smaller components (tokens) and analysing their similarities.

This approach helped to identify stages with similar functions even if their names were slightly different.

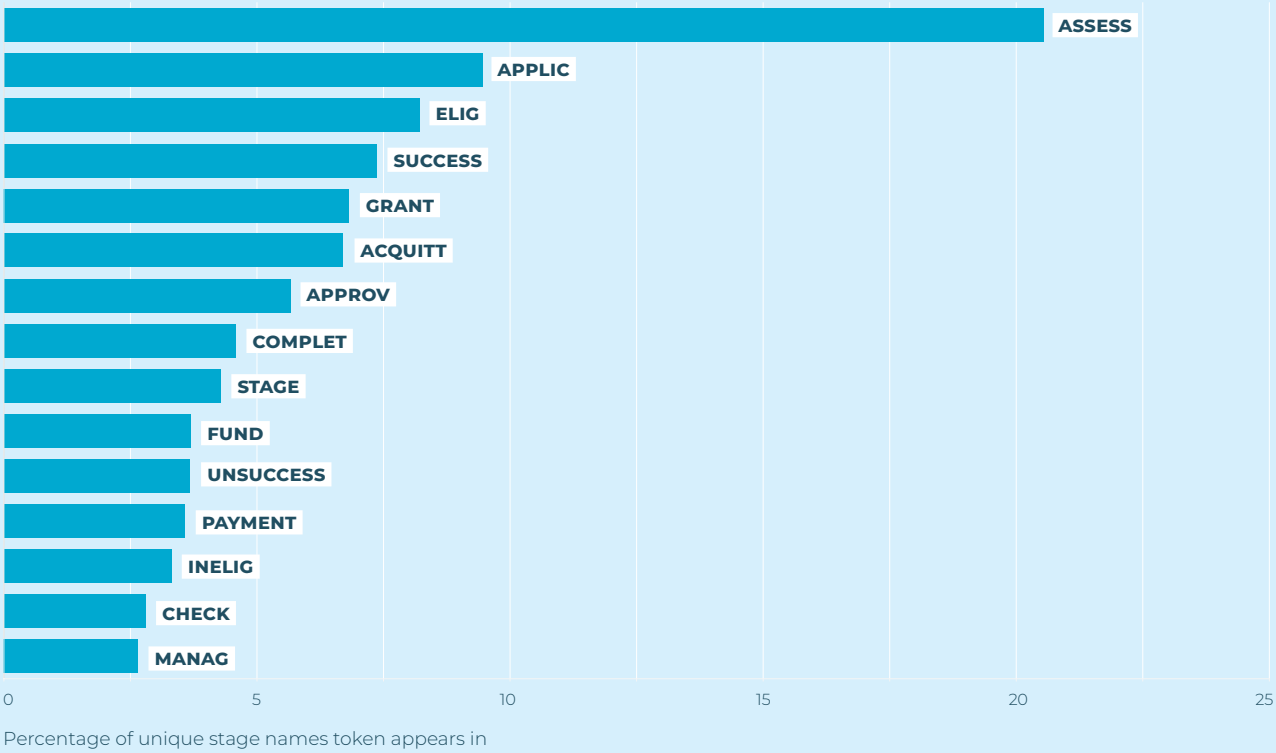

Figure 8: *Frequency of stage name tokens.*

Allowing for variation in naming, assessment appears to be the most common stage, with the token 'Assess' appearing in 20% of unique stage names. This aligns with the data behind the previous chart, which shows that 'Assessment' is the most frequently used stage name, appearing in 29% of instances.

The data suggests that while there will always be some degree of variability to cater for specific program needs, process standardisation is within reach of most grantmakers.

The words most commonly used in stage names are shown below, with those used more commonly appearing larger than those that are less commonly used.



Figure 9: *The most common stage name words and their frequency in programs.*

7. Grantmaking survey

Overview

In May–June 2024, we conducted a survey of mainly Australian and New Zealand grantmakers to learn more about attitudes towards standardisation.

The survey opened on May 15 and closed on June 23, 2024.

Survey sample

Organisation types

A total of 46 grantmakers responded to our survey, representing a broad range of sectors, including not-for profit grantmaking and philanthropy. Grantmakers from state and territory governments made up the largest group of respondents, followed closely by local government grantmakers.

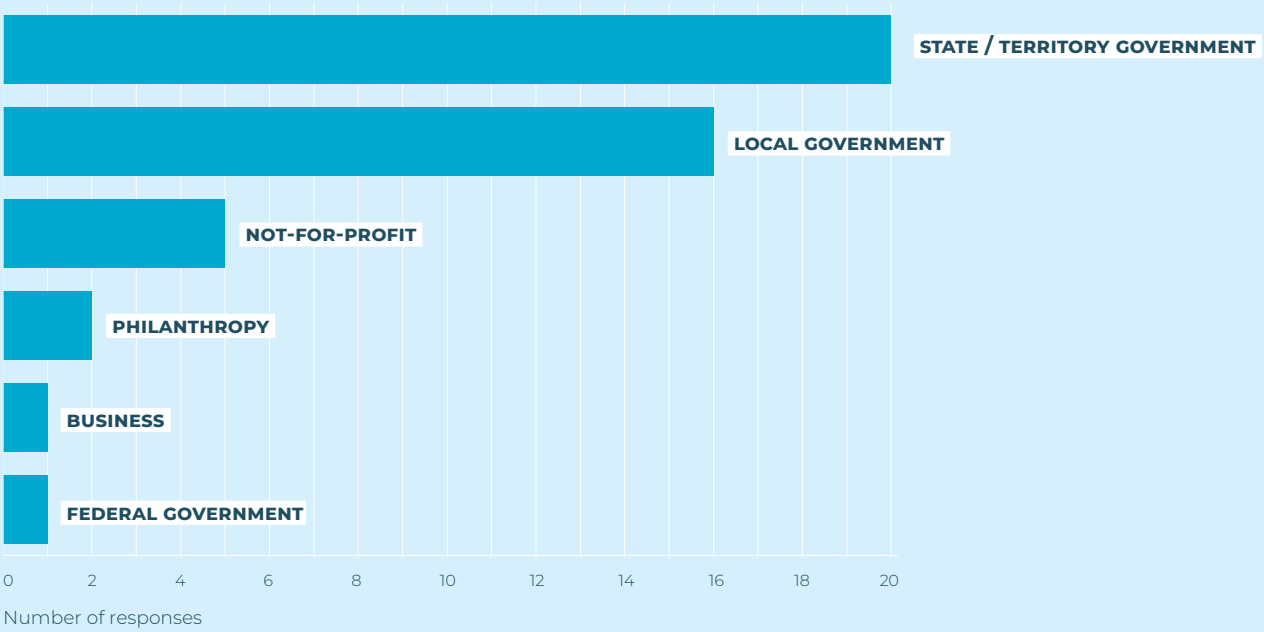

Figure 10: *Number of survey respondents by organisation type.*

Funded locations

Respondents providing funding in Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia dominated the sample, but responses were received from grantmakers delivering funding in all Australian states and territories. Respondents from across the Tasman were also well represented, with four respondents (9% of the sample) reporting providing funding in New Zealand. One respondent reported providing funding in Thailand.



Figure 11: *Percentage of responses by location of funding.*

Primary areas of focus

Respondents indicated a broad range of focus areas for their funding, with a majority of grantmakers reporting multiple focus areas.

The most reported areas of focus were community development (12%), economic development (10%), environment (10%), arts and culture (10%), and sport and recreation (9%).

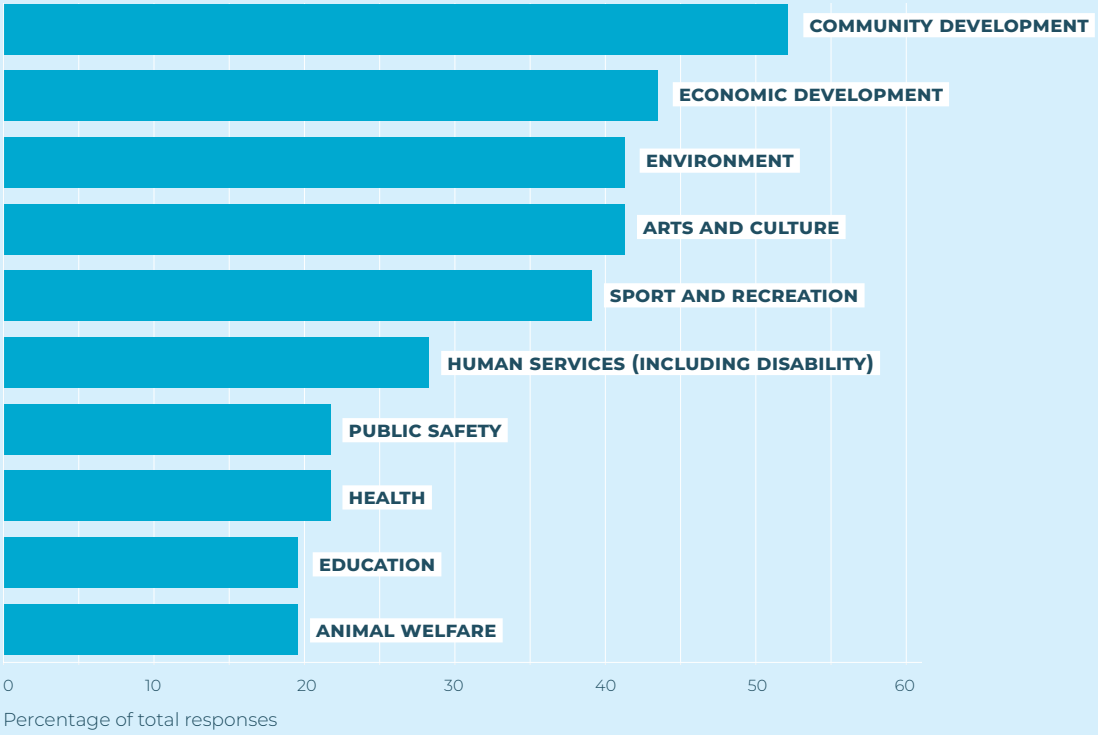

Figure 12: *Percentage of respondents who selected each focus area.*

Annual grants distribution

Respondents reported a range of distribution amounts. Several respondents reported granting less than $30,000 a year, while some reported disbursing more than $250 million a year. The majority (53%) of respondents could be characterised as medium sized grantmakers, distributing between $0.5 million and $10 million per annum.

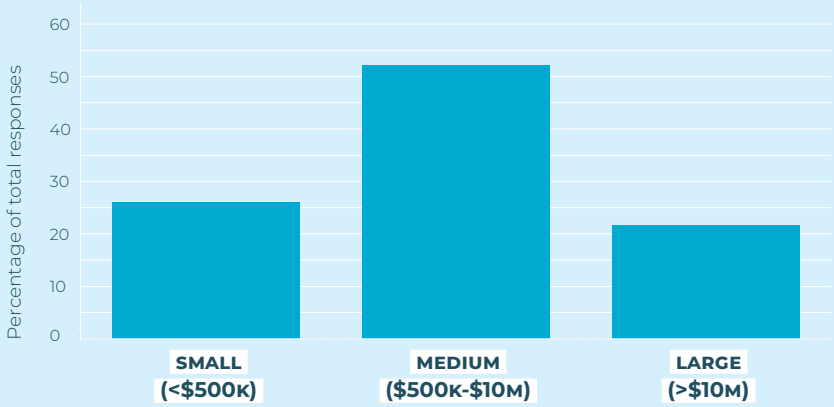

Figure 13: *Percentage of all grantmakers in survey by distribution category.*

Number of discrete grant programs administered in 2023–24

As mentioned previously, the number of programs included within a SmartyGrants instance (account) is an indicator of the potential breadth of standardisation for that instance. The number of discrete grant programs reported by respondents varied greatly, from just one through to 100 programs. The median number of programs per instance in our sample was 10.

Grantmaking duration

Most respondents to our survey are members of mature grantmaking organisations, with 27 respondents in our sample (59%) indicating that their organisation had been administering grants for 10 years or more.

Only four respondents (9%) said their organisation had been administering grants for one to five years.

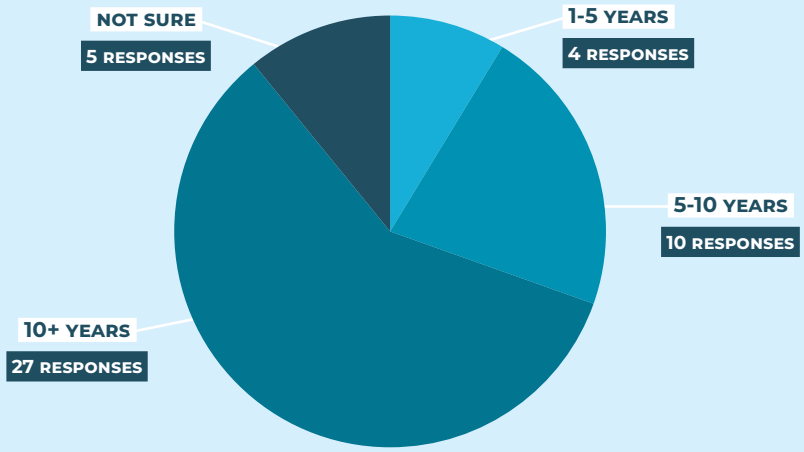

Figure 14: *Years of grantmaking experience by number of survey respondents.*

Grantmaking expertise

When asked about their level of grantmaking expertise, 25 respondents in our sample (54%) described their organisation as 'advanced', or having several staff members with one to five years of grantmaking experience. Eleven respondents (24%) described their organisation as 'expert' in grantmaking, having many staff members with significant experience (five years or more) in grantmaking. At the other end of the spectrum, 10 grantmakers (22%) characterised themselves as beginner or intermediate level grantmakers.

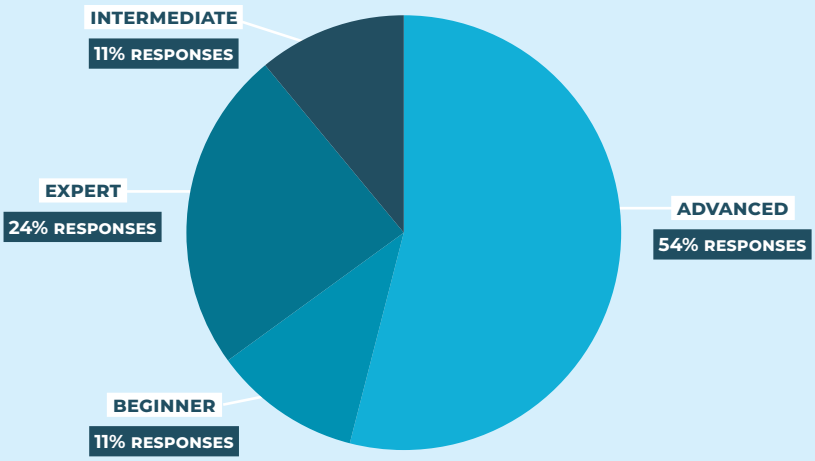

Figure 15: *Grantmaking expertise by number of survey respondents.*

Many respondents in our sample indicated they had been administering grants for many years, and that their organisations had a high level of grantmaking expertise. However, staff turnover and loss of specialised expertise is an ever-present risk for grantmakers. Standardisation of grantmaking practice can serve to mitigate this risk, safeguarding corporate knowledge and enabling faster upskilling of new grantmaking staff within an organisation when experienced staff members move on.

Depth of application of standardisation principles in organisations

Standardisation projects can be undertaken at various levels, from the divisional level (across programs within a single business unit) to all of government or across sectors.

As the scope of standardisation broadens, the potential benefits increase, but so too does the level of complexity.

When asked at which levels they were applying standardisation principles to their grantmaking, 11 respondents in our sample (24%) indicated that they were undertaking standardisation initiatives at more than one level.

The number of respondents who reported that they were conducting standardisation at the divisional level (across programs but within a single business unit) was 24 (52%). This majority number is unsurprising, given that this is the most straightforward level at which to standardise.

Fifteen respondents (33%) indicated that they were undertaking standardisation initiatives at a whole-of-organisation, cluster or agency level. The high response rate for this higher level of standardisation may be attributable to the high levels of grantmaking experience and expertise reported in our sample.

Eleven respondents (24%) said they were standardising some elements of their grantmaking at a cross-divisional level (across business units within a single instance or organisation), and six respondents (13%) indicated they were undertaking standardisation at a whole-of-government or cross-sector level.

Seven respondents (15%) said they weren't currently undertaking any standardisation initiatives.

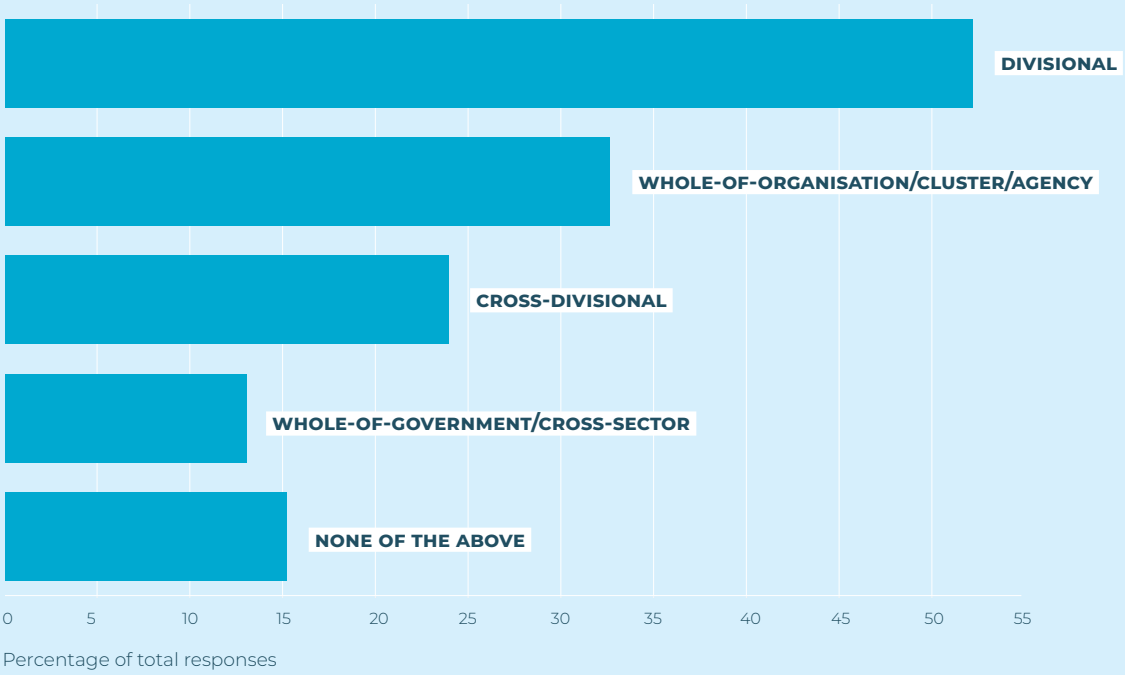

Figure 16: *Levels of standardisation by percentage of survey responses.*

Standardisation initiatives across all levels

In the grantmaking context, standardisation can be applied to a variety of functions across the grantmaking lifecycle, for a variety of purposes. In the survey, respondents were presented with a non-exhaustive list of areas where standardisation initiatives are typically undertaken and asked to select those in use in their organisation.

Overall, the most common responses were program design and approval processes (39 responses), internal grants policies (35), eligibility criteria (34), grant opportunity guidelines (33), and reporting requirements (32).

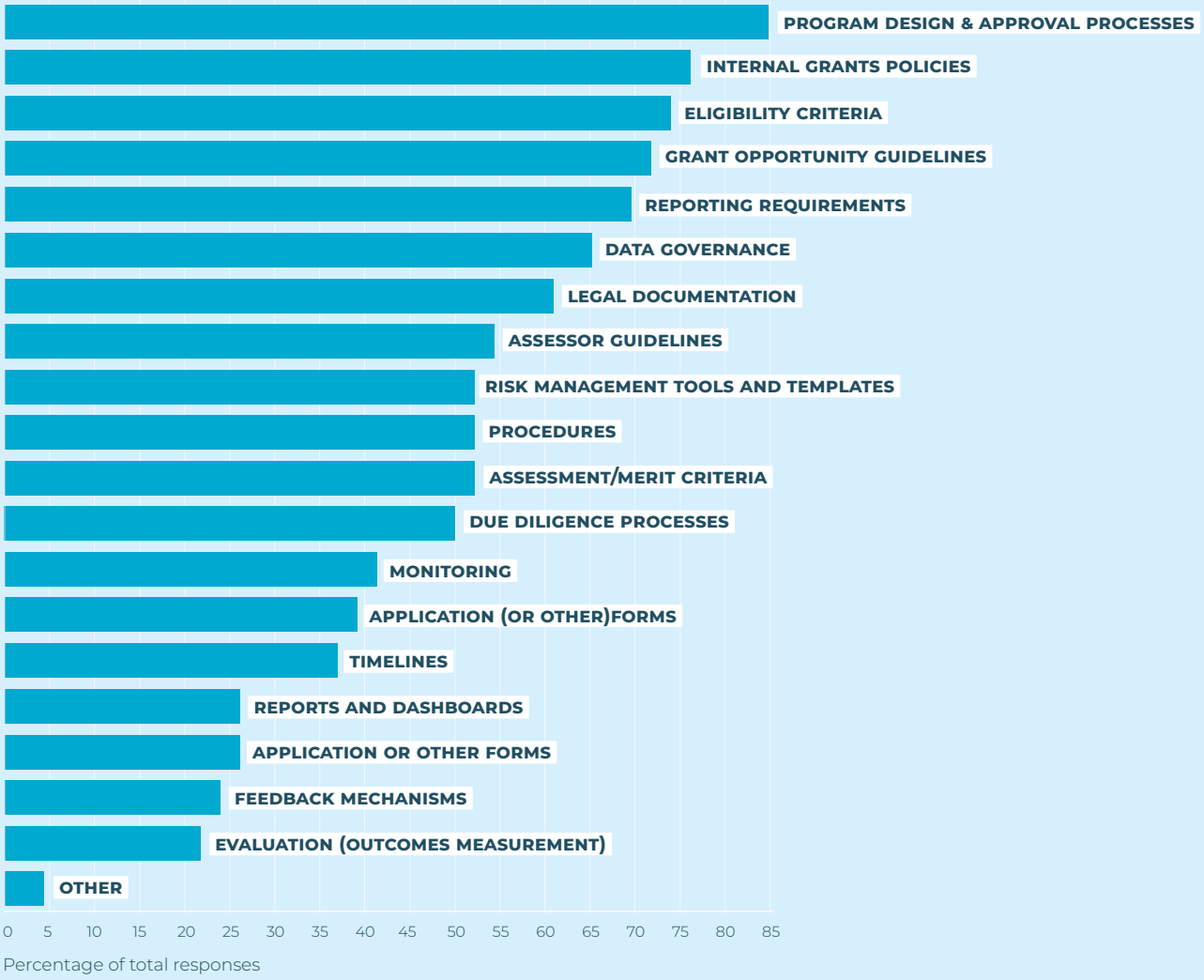

Figure 17: *Standardisation initiatives across all levels as percentage of responses.*

Standardisation initiatives at the divisional level

Looking only at respondents who reported standardising at the divisional level, we can see a high rate of standardisation across all functions. This is likely due to the relative ease of implementing standardisation initiatives within a narrow scope.

Most respondents (79%) indicated they were standardising their eligibility criteria. Other commonly reported areas of standardisation were application (or other) forms (75%), internal grants policies (75%), program design and approval processes (71%), and assessment/merit criteria (71%).

Standardised grantmaking functions at the divisional level: selected quotes from respondents

"The entity criteria is standard across most programs including entity type, and the applicant organisation must hold an ABN. Programs could amend the eligibility criteria if needed, but the range is currently wide open to include non-for-profit entities (including incorporated associations, companies, co-operative, ATIS corporations), Local Governments, state School P&C associations, QLD Universities and charitable institutions established through legislation (churches etc)."

"New program design and approval follows a similar procedure to round launch, with a brief to the Minister seeking approval of the approach and draft Guidelines. We customise for specific requirements in each Program/round."

"We have [a] standardised template, and we use archetype form[s]...Many elements of forms can be standardised for language, question text, budgets, choice options. We have ... the program follow a high standard of form templates. And the efficiency and consistency of data must be maximized. But we still provide enough flexibility to meet the needs of each program."

"Council's Community Grants Policy is the single head of power for all grants (for which the budget is owned by the Community Services, Sport & Rec Dept.). This includes public facing grant program and those offered through private rounds... The policy has recently been updated to be more high level. This will allow greater flexibility (including changes to the guidelines) necessary when programs need to change or new programs need to be implemented at short notice (e.g., emergency grants)."

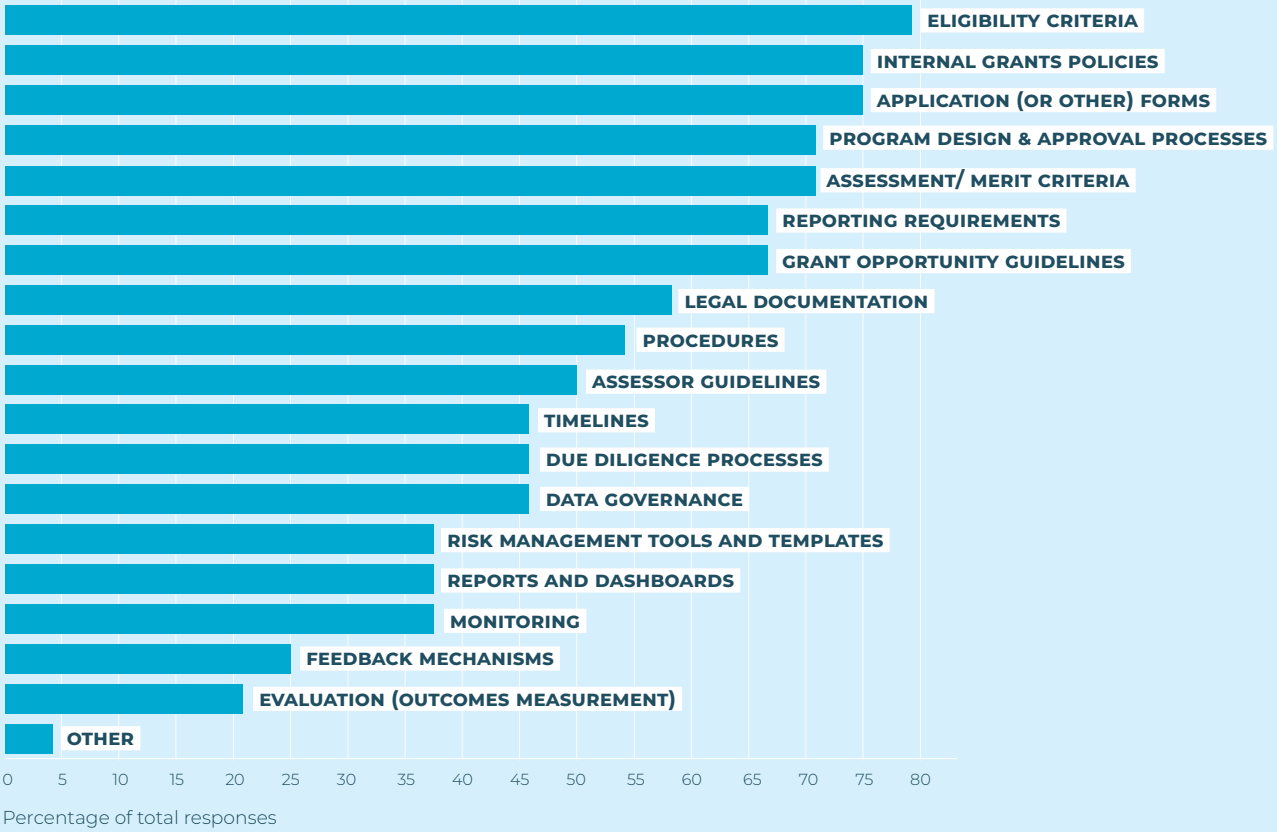

Figure 18: *Standardisation initiatives by percentage of responses from the 24 respondents who reported standardising at the divisional level.*

Standardisation initiatives at the cross-divisional level

Of the 11 respondents who said they were standardising some elements of their grantmaking at a cross-divisional level (across business units within a single instance [account] or organisation), 64% said they were standardising program design and approval processes, while 55% said they were standardising risk management tools and templates, data governance and/or internal grants policies. Five respondents (45%) indicated they were standardising eligibility criteria at this level.

Standardised grantmaking functions at the cross-divisional level: selected quotes from respondents

"Best practice templates and guidelines are available for all stages of grant management from application to acquittal. Due to the complexity of grant giving – most templates and guidelines are recommended best practice and not mandated."

"Internal grant support team which provides templates for operational frameworks; input to the final design; approval of the framework prior to the program being implemented on SmartyGrants. Frameworks are less rigid than strict tools & guidelines; many different schemes of assistance (grants) across the organisation; staff input ensures that internal requirements are met but not at the expense of the grant design."

"One grants policy for Council. And a separate policy for large event grants. Incorporated legislative requirements and best practice e.g. Gender equity, Access and Inclusion."

"A core fields document has been developed and the team ensures that appropriate data is collected over the life of the program. Data collection exercise is organisation wide with allowance for flexibility at the round / program level."

"The guidelines template is provided to the program manager seeking to use the system along with governance framework template, which covers all requirements... [The] template is kept current to meet changing requirements."

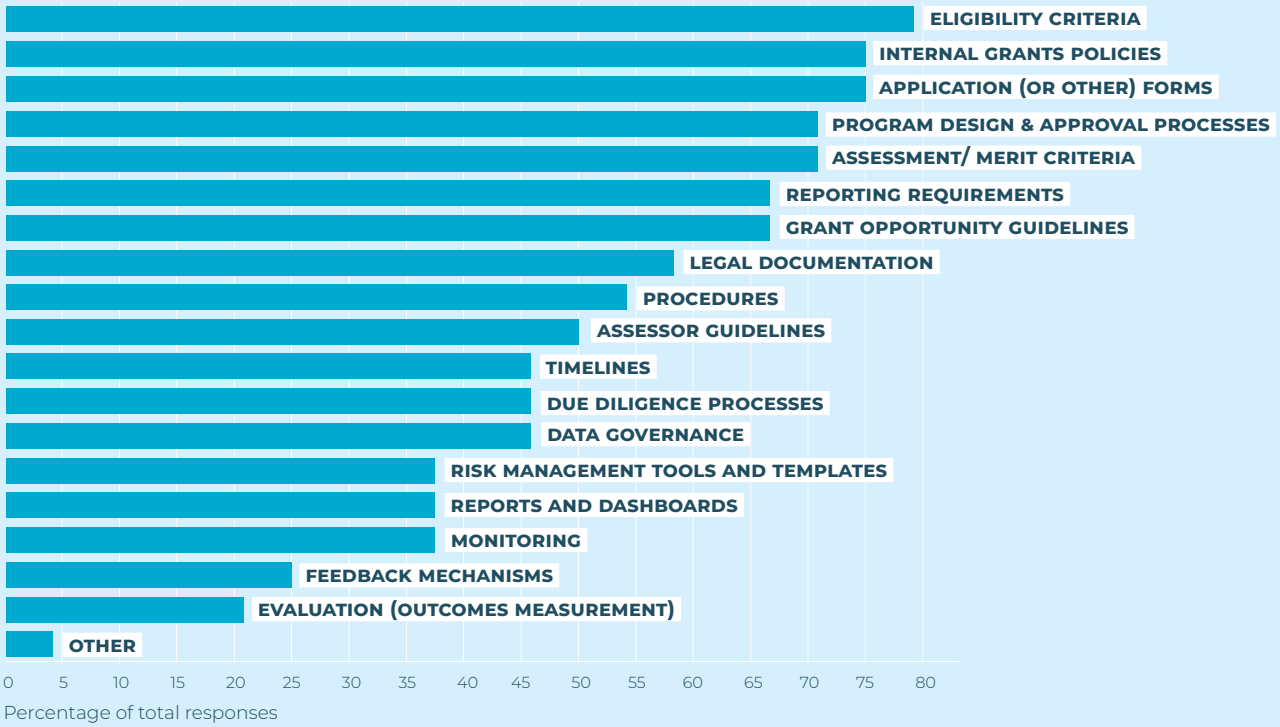

Figure 19: *Standardisation initiatives by percentage of responses from the 11 respondents who reported standardising at the cross-divisional level.*

Standardisation initiatives at the whole-of-organisation, cluster or agency level

Of the 15 respondents who indicated they were undertaking standardisation initiatives at the whole-of-organisation, cluster or agency level, the most often-standardised functions were program design and approval processes (73%), reporting requirements (73%), data governance (67%) and internal grants policies (67%). Sixty per cent of respondents reported standardising their grant opportunity guidelines, application forms or other forms at this level.

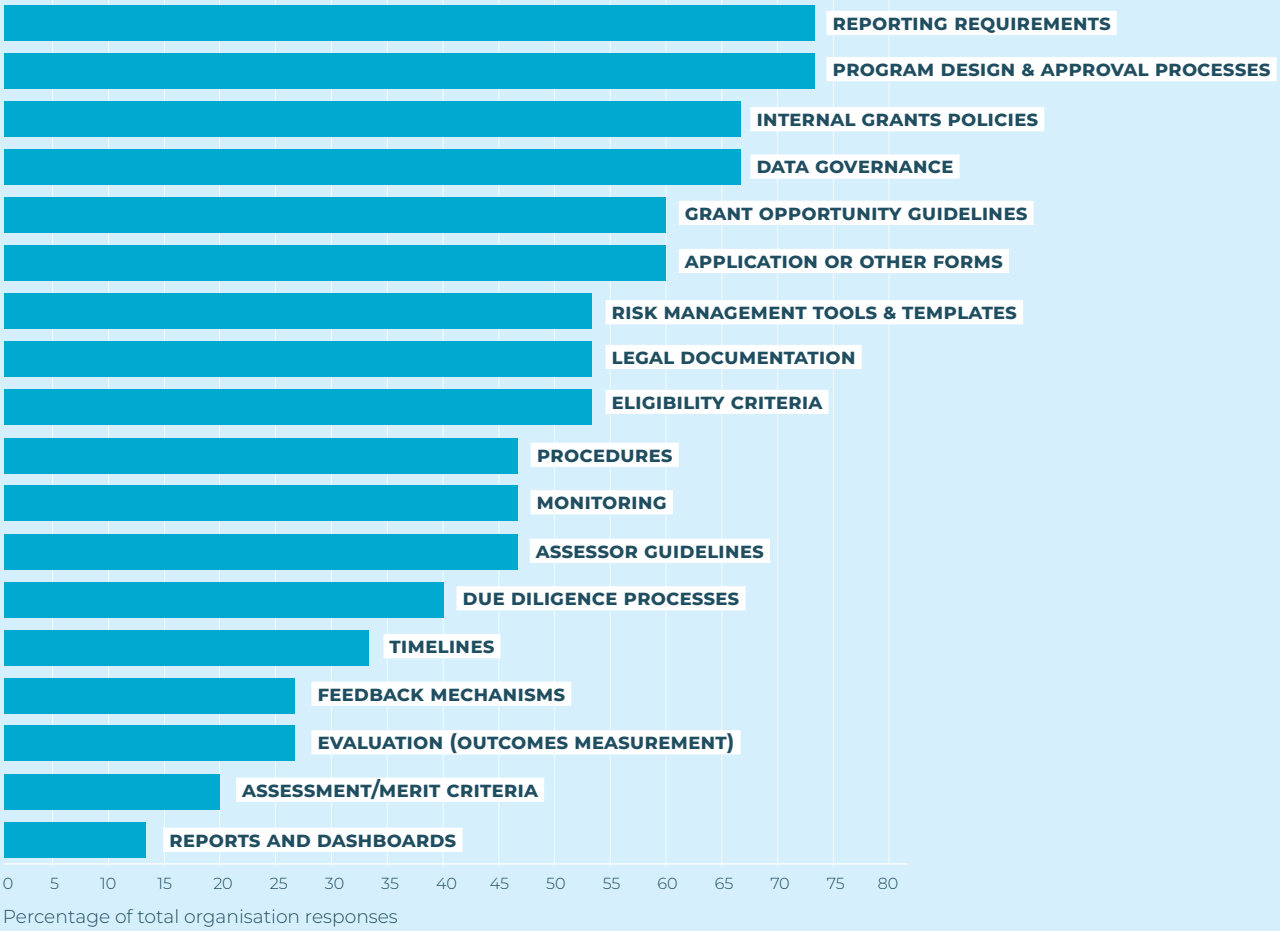

Figure 20: *Standardisation initiatives by percentage of responses from the 15 respondents who reported standardising at the whole-of-organisation, cluster or agency level.*

Standardised grantmaking functions at the whole-of-organisation, cluster or agency level: selected quotes from respondents

"[Guidelines] are developed and based on the grant administration guidelines. A similar template, look and feel as well as order of information provide ease of use across granters and grantees. Similarly, these are developed to be read in conjunction (internally) with the Governance and Operational framework to inform not only what is being offered, but how it is to be delivered. These are semi-customisable with some sections able to be deleted if not applicable."

Standardised grantmaking functions at the whole-of-organisation, cluster or agency level: selected quotes from respondents

"We have one Grants Policy that applies to our whole organisation. The policy is rigid but allows flexibility of each funding stream through the grant guidelines."

"We have a Design & Delivery [D&D] Guide that is developed for the overall Fund, with a D&D Plan specific to funding round and describes the intent, governance, risk and delivery of the round; this is endorsed by our Authority & approved by the Minister prior to the round launching live..."

"Victorian Government grantmakers are required to follow the principles of the 'Better Grants By Design Guide', and the Standing Directions 2018 under the Financial Management Act 1994 issued by the Department of Treasury & Finance. Our Authority undertakes internal Audits of the grant round to identify critical risks and areas for improvement."

"Any potential scheme owner is required to meet with the Grants Systems team and discuss what they are proposing with the main emphasis on what it is that they wish to ultimately achieve. The team will assist in identifying the options available and outline the recommendation for mechanism to be used as well as implications of each choice. A standard guidelines and operational framework are used to articulate this clearly with assistance from the team to develop this. Once approved, a series of standardised templates has been created for use by form builders, and the requirement for all forms to be reviewed and quality assurance to be undertaken by the Grants Systems team. The guidelines and framework are tailorable to meet the complexity and level of risk associated with the program. There are a couple of templated versions of these documents aimed at different risk levels to assist new scheme owners in the requirements and considerations for their development."

"We have a funding policy and framework, and all contestable grants are managed through the SmartyGrants system. The framework allows for flexibility in criteria and forms etc."

"[SmartyGrants] Administrators are restricted to the Grant Systems team who have worked over the past year to review and standardise standard fields. Identifying which ones can be replaced and those which will be archived after a scheme has completed. A guide is in development of how to utilise each standard field and the standard 'set' they belong under. There is a set of 'core data' that is required for all schemes that are common to each. There are then additional sets to this if applicable. The Grants system team map each round to determine what core data is likely to be applicable and where this is best captured (type of form or data set)."

"We have best practice [form] templates for different mechanisms such as vouchers, reimbursements, simple grant schemes, EOIs, non-competitive grants etc. We also populate the test Sandpit with examples of forms and rounds so users can see how the scheme appears from a manager and user perspective. Forms are somewhat customisable with inclusion of standard fields encouraged where applicable. Liaison with the grants systems team and monitoring of test sandpit and program activity allows oversight into current practices and allows the right data to be collected in the appropriate manner."

"Our reporting requirements are standardized across programs within our department. The frequency of the report is set at least 6 months/time, and the annual report closes the project...The program should not deviate from the reporting frequency requirements."

"We have standardized due diligence processes based on the assessed level of risk."

Standardisation initiatives at the whole-of-government or cross-sector level

When we look at the six respondents who indicated they were undertaking standardisation at a whole-of-government or cross-sector level, the most often- standardised function was program design and approval processes (67%), followed by grant opportunity guidelines, eligibility criteria, assessor guidelines, due diligence processes, and legal documentation, all reported by 50% of respondents.

Many of these reported standardisation initiatives correspond to whole-of-government standardisation initiatives. For example, the NSW government has mandated standardised program design and approval process in its **Grants Administration Guide**. Likewise, at the Commonwealth level, the Department of Finance has standardised grantmaking **tools and templates** that Commonwealth agencies can use. These include Grant Opportunity Guidelines and legal documentation.

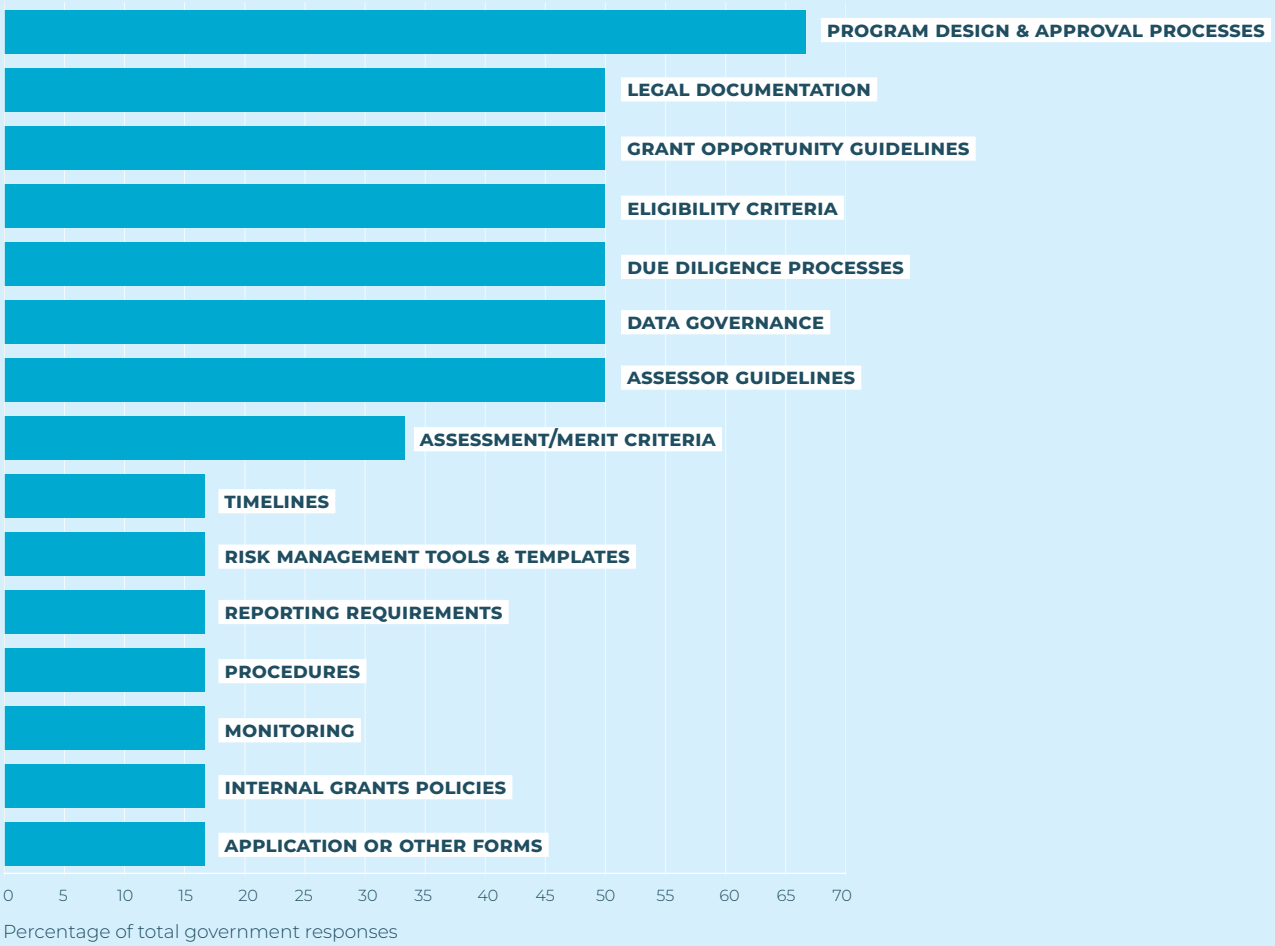

Figure 21: *Standardisation initiatives by percentage of responses from the six respondents who reported standardising at the whole of government or cross-sector level.*

Standardised grantmaking functions at the whole of government or cross-sector level: selected quotes from respondents

"The Design & Delivery Plan, Grant Guidelines, Governance Plan and Probity Conduct Plan are reviewed and endorsed internally and then by our CEO. The docs are then progressed to the relevant Minister for approval. [The] Approval process does not differ."

"We are now using OneGMS and we adhere to requirements of the NSW Government Grants Administration Guide."

"Privacy requirements, requirement to save to Objective (equivalent to TRIM)"

"The use of the Victorian Common Funding Agreement [VCFA] issued by the Department of Treasury & Finance is the basis of our Funding Agreement. There is both a long and short-form version of the VCFA based on the level of risk for the funding round. A clause bank is available for inclusion of specific legal requirements relating to the grant type."

Benefits and challenges of standardisation

Perceived benefits

When grant program managers or policymakers can find the right balance between flexibility and rigidity (aka the Goldilocks Zone), standardisation has the potential to unlock myriad benefits.

Survey respondents were presented with a non-exhaustive list of common standardisation benefits and asked to select the top three reasons their organisation was seeking to standardise grantmaking.

The reason most commonly cited by respondents was "improve efficiency", with 61% of respondents selecting this reason. This isn't surprising, as the efficiency dividends of standardisation can be significant, allowing new programs to be quickly rolled out, and continuously improved, without the need to reinvent the wheel each time.

Interestingly, 71% of respondents cited some kind of grantee benefit as one of the main reasons they were standardising their grantmaking, with 39% standardising to improve transparency and fairness, and 32% to achieve create greater clarity and efficiencies for their grantees.

35% of respondents indicated that they were seeking to define a consistent and centralised data schema to enable standardised reporting, and 26% were standardising to ensure compliance with minimum standards.

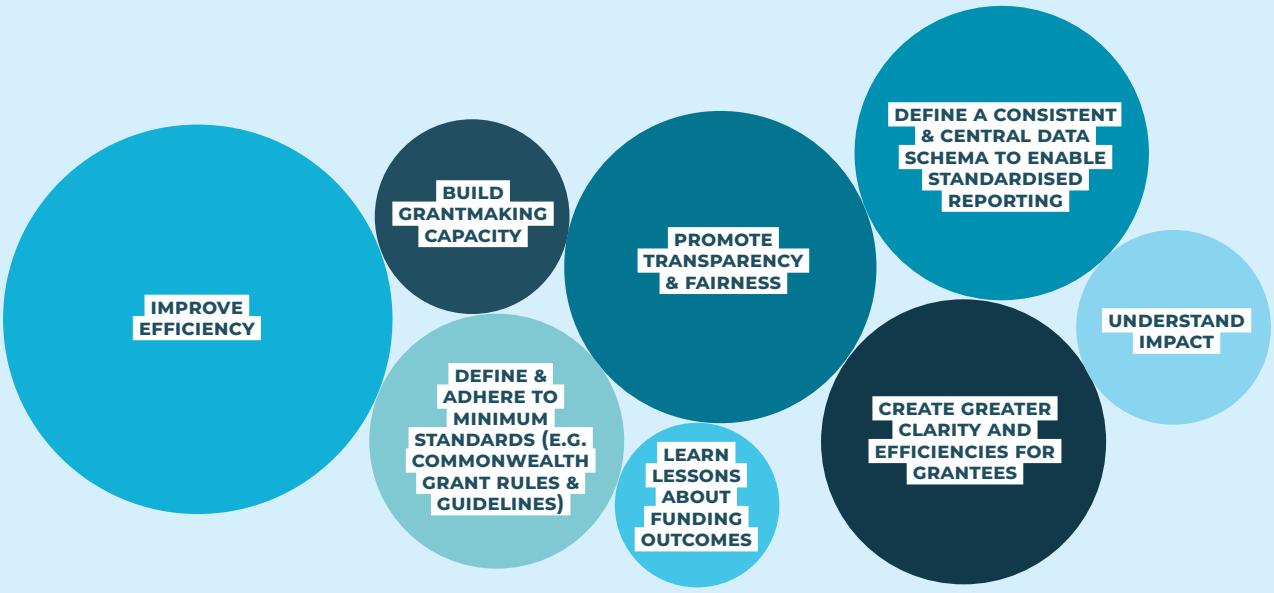

Figure 22: *Perceived standardisation benefits by percentage of responses.*

Respondents who indicated they were standardising their grantmaking to ensure compliance with minimum standards were asked to provide more information about the specific standards they were required to adhere to. Respondents cited these standards and documents:

- *Grants Administration Guide* (NSW)
- *Local Government Act 2020* (Victoria)
- Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) audit recommendations
- Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines 2017 (CGRGs)*
- Departmental grant policies and guidelines (South Australia)
- Treasurer's Instructions 8 and 15 (South Australia)
- Western Australian Grants Administration Guidelines 2022 (WAGAGs 2022).

*The CGRCs were replaced in October 2024 by the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024 (CGRPs).

Standardisation benefits: selected respondent comments

"We are currently working in a very reactive way out of necessity. Standardisation is a significant tool that will greatly improve our efficiency and free up capacity for higher value activities (e.g., measurement, applicant capacity building, educating managers and other internal stakeholders)."

"Historically [our] grant making was piecemeal and inconsistent. We are pulling it all into SmartyGrants so we can build an overall picture of what our organisation does and who benefits."

"Better governance and transparency; moving towards central data schema for better reporting and evaluation; easier process for new programs."

"Consistency for grant applicants is the main factor, but also we want to better understand impact, create efficiencies, and ensure we have transparency and fairness."

Standardisation challenges

Whilst standardisation can yield many benefits for grantmakers and grantees, it's not without its challenges. Survey respondents were presented with a non-exhaustive list of common standardisation challenges and asked to select the top three barriers or challenges they've faced either implementing standardisation initiatives or achieving their standardisation goals.

Standardisation isn't just "set and forget". Without adequate ongoing resourcing to ensure oversight, maintenance and continuous improvement, standardisation initiatives will quickly fall into disrepair. Therefore, it's not surprising that resource constraints were cited as the biggest barrier to standardisation by respondents, with 26 respondents (57%) citing this as one of their top three issues.

Standardisation requires consensus and compromise, which can be challenging, particularly when there is a divergence of objectives and priorities across business areas. Diverse objectives, drivers and priorities were chosen as a key challenge by 23 respondents (50%).

Standardisation of grantmaking involves grappling with complexity, which was listed as a key challenge by 15 respondents (33%).

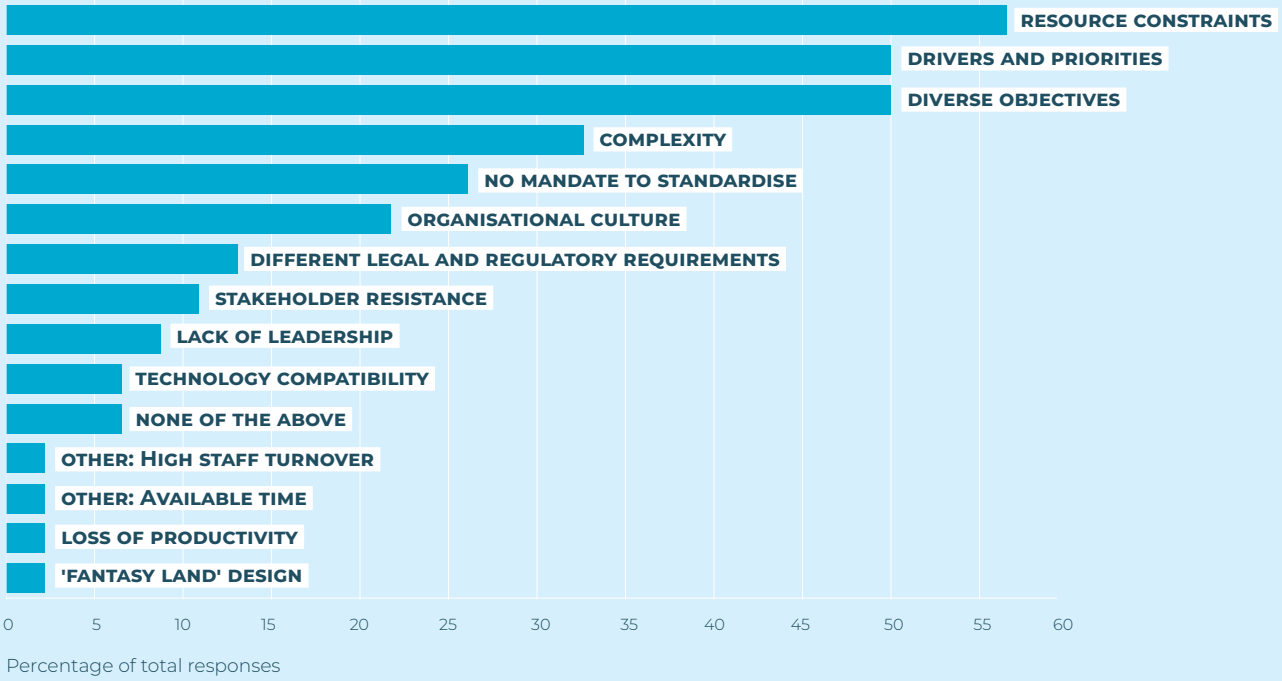

Figure 23: *Standardisation challenges, from most common to least common.*

Standardisation challenges: selected respondent comments

"Too many cooks spoil the broth sometimes – keeping the level of complexity within acceptable parameters."

"Not all aspects of department mandates, program objectives, stakeholder groups and organisations or program designs are the same – standardisation has in some ways sucked some life, creativity and flexibility (real worldness) based on place based and cohort need out of programs, making them bureaucratic and unclear in wording."

"We are so time-poor already that anything new, even if it has long term efficiencies, is difficult to implement. You have to learn new things and think about it differently."

"We have no mandate to standardise – have to convince our colleagues it makes sense."

"Outside of the grants team, this is not a priority. Manager and internal stakeholder do not understand grants well enough to know where efficiencies can be made and what that would look like for them. They are very risk/change averse while not seeing the much bigger existing risks of our current practises."

"Resource constraints and complexity are the greatest challenges. We recognise the ability of SmartyGrants to produce more complex reporting, but we are too busy administering programs to investigate those possibilities."

"Standardisation is being managed through a very small team which set the agenda; there is a lack of understanding on the complexity of some grants; the culture is still very siloed; rapid changeover of key staff has hindered progress; specific teams are much more sophisticated in their use of SmartyGrants but the standardisation process is aimed at the lowest common denominator."

Standardisation challenges: selected respondent comments

"The standardisation of data and procedures has been led by myself for clean and consistent data and using guidelines to train up additional staff. Previously we had no written procedures or instructions, with the exception of program guidelines. It has been a struggle to engage management and educate them on the benefits of standardisation as they are hands-off."

"No time to standardise beyond what we have already achieved. Lack of clarity on what good/success looks like for each grants stream, and how to measure this."

Standardisation progress

Respondents were asked to rate their progress on their grantmaking standardisation journey on a scale from one to 10 where a score of one was "What's standardisation?", and 10 was "We're nailing it."

Overall, our respondents think they're doing well, with 50% of respondents scoring themselves a seven or above, and just 22% of respondents scoring themselves below five.

The higher-scoring self-assessments may be attributable to the high level of grantmaking experience and expertise within the group of respondents.

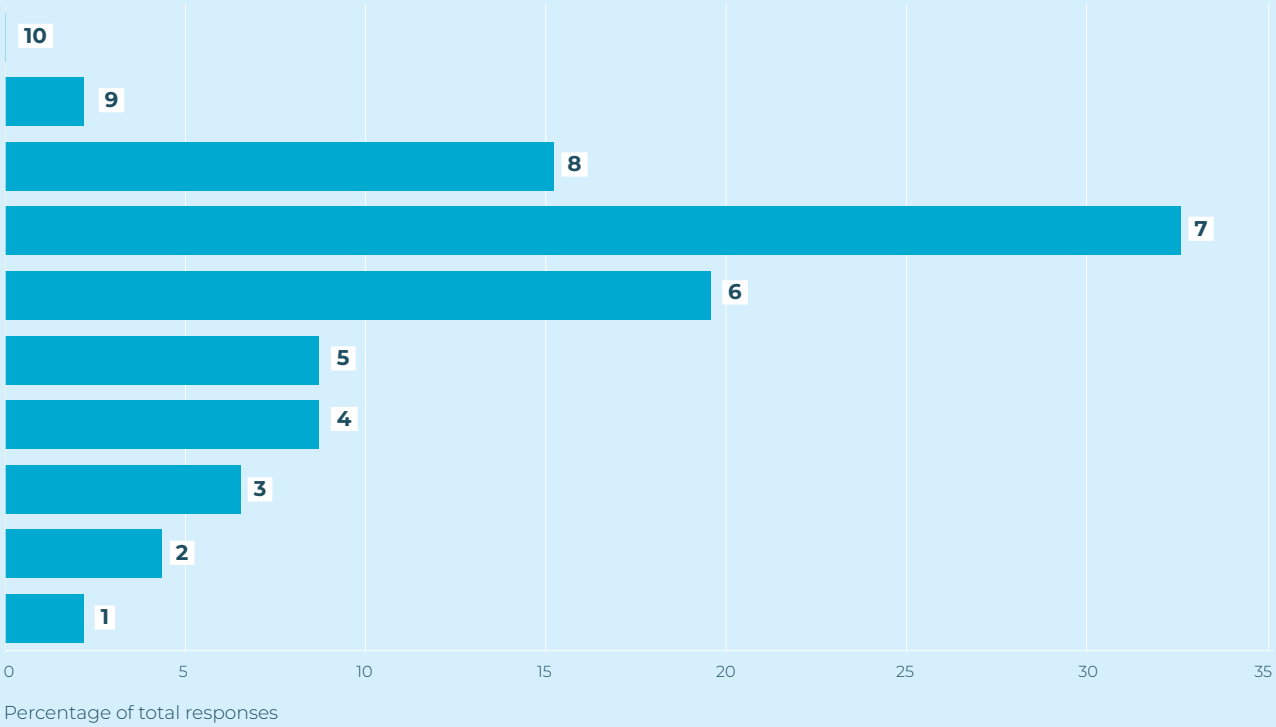

Figure 24: *Grantmakers' self-assessment of their standardisation progress on a scale of 1 to 10.*

Standardisation progress: selected respondent comments

"No one ever has it perfect – no round or program is perfect, which is why you reflect and make adjustments between rounds as experience informed improvements based on what worked and what didn't."

"Standardised questions and other aspects takes out the ability to adapt and change based on changing program, cohort, stakeholder and place-based needs...".

"I think we are doing well, we have a framework, using the same system and have the same contracts."

"[Grantmaker Name] offers one main grants program. Occasionally (e.g: during COVID) other grants programs were offered. These were mostly not standardised as created by other officers with limited grants experience. They referred to the main Grants Program for guidance, but still developed their own program/ assessment criteria/guidelines etc."

"We have used standard templates and published a couple of rounds through the system now, so we are becoming familiar with the quirks."

"Just starting – long way to go."

"Significant work has been put in place to provide education to the department on best practice in grant making and standardisation of processes around this. There is still room for improvement in more presence of grant specialists within the agency and understanding of standardised processes."

"Very early in the journey but making steps already."

"Early in the journey; will need substantial resources and time to get it right."

"We have a lot further to go until I believe we are standard across programs. We have no data dictionaries or policies, and it is all self-driven. We are also overworked and struggle to manage the programs and have no support to develop written data dictionaries and policies."

"I think that we have done some of the standardization within our application and assessment forms, but it's likely that there is more that we can be doing. I think we need the time and support to do this."

Standardisation success factors

As a final question, respondents were asked what they saw as the most important factors influencing the success of an organisation in achieving its standardisation goals.

A selection of quotes is listed below; however, the key themes that emerged were consistent with good practice principles for any significant organisational change initiative:

- clarity of purpose and a common vision
- clear communication, including resources (e.g. process guides, FAQs) to facilitate shared understanding
- shared understanding of tangible and visible benefits of standardisation initiatives
- strong leadership and management buy-in
- appropriate resourcing.

Standardisation success factors: selected respondent comments

"Standardisation should be a reflection of the purpose of the organisation.

In our instance, the grants are a mechanism to support, strengthen and enhance healthy, safe and sustainable local communities. This directly reflects the [organisation's] objectives... These objectives reflect the basis of the Business & Investment Case through which, primarily to establish the program of works for our [organisation]..."

"Clarity of purpose and common visions. And a happy workforce that believes we make a difference..."

"Consistency across all programs, understood by all, succession plan in place."

"Clearer and better communications..."

"Attitude of staff, support of staff time required by managers."

"Big improvements in efficiency, applicant satisfaction (with Council funding programs) and risk minimisation."

"Buy in from leadership; mandating of requirements and/or incentivisation of compliance; education and engagement."

"Patience, persistence, buy-in from all levels."

"1. Management/Executive buy-in, 2. allocation of human and other resources to making it happen, 3. smaller successes along the way that demonstrate to both grant administrators/managers and senior management/ executive staff the benefits of the realisation of the ultimate goal"

"Good leadership willing to engage with all grant makers across the organisation; proactive engagement with grant makers to understand their barriers; better understanding of the data needed by the department to set up central data schema."

"Have an appropriate budget to support..."

"We require support and resources to develop standardisation. The staff with the knowledge and experience are tied up in program and grant management and don't have capacity to implement the required tools and systems."

"Having a dedicated grant making resource with authority to ensure consistency. Having an approved policy and procedure. Having one central system (e.g. SmartyGrants) to manage all grants."

Appendix A:

Standardised grantmaking functions at each level of standardisation: quotes from respondents

Survey respondents were asked about the levels at which they were implementing standardisation initiatives. For each level selected, respondents were then presented with a non-exhaustive list of functions which are typically standardised and asked to select those being undertaken in their organisation at that level.

For each function selected, respondents were given the opportunity to provide more information about:

a) how they standardise that function, and

b) how they ensure the correct balance of flexibility and rigidity for that function (the Goldilocks Zone).

Listed in this appendix are de-identified responses organised by the level of standardisation and grantmaking functions selected.

Only applicants who explicitly consented to having their responses published have been included in this report. Quotes have been edited to ensure anonymity.

Divisional level

Program design and approval processes

"New program design and approval follows a similar procedure to round launch, with a brief to the Minister seeking approval of the approach and draft Guidelines...We customise for specific requirements in each Program/round"

"We use the same Grant Application, Assessment tool, and Panel meeting for one of our Grants each time we use it (with slight updates each year). And our other Grants uses a very similar process... We only have 2 grants so all of our policies and procedures are the same for both grants."

"Template framework for grant structure and approval process adopted.... Robust process to develop framework including signoff from key stakeholders i.e. legal, accounting, communications with clear objectives outline."

"Program approval emphasis should be placed on new processes and should consider continuing approval of (old) programs that are necessary for further program development.... We must allow different approvals based on program risk, and must discuss and solve problems together."

Internal grants policies

"Council's Community Grants Policy is the single head of power for all grants (for which the budget is owned by the Community Services, Sport & Rec Dept.). This includes public facing grant program and those offered through private rounds... The policy has recently been updated to be more high level. This will allow greater flexibility (including changes to the guidelines) necessary when programs need to change or new programs need to be implemented at short notice (e.g., emergency grants)."

"Adherence to the Grants Administration Guide which requires standardisation of many processes including Guidelines, probity documentation and also use of OneGMS which standardises the publication of a grant round... Customise processes/ forms for different program requirements"

"Grant handbook developed covering all applicable processes/policies in the grant administration process...Processes are locked down with escalation procedures in place for issues management"

"We have a policy template, everything is locked down, but if there is a problem we can customize it according to suitability of the program/ organization together."

Risk management tools and templates

"We are a small team of two full time staff and a part time assistant – so we standardise everything to make our lives easier and we are now using OneGMS"

"There is a requirement to complete a list of documents for probity purposes including a risk register... Documents are customised according to each program / round"

"The tools and templates are standardized. Must have enterprise risk frameworks and the risk record of program... If necessary some tools can be customized, but we need to consult together to find a solution."

Data governance

"We are a small team of two full time staff and a part time assistant – so we standardise everything to make our lives easier and we are now using OneGMS"

Grant opportunity guidelines

"Criteria like 1:1 funding provision, applicant type, benefits to industry/environment... been using customisable application form – up to the grant manager to ensure correct. Similar between programs, but not exactly the same"

"The comms team, informed by product development and implementation teams deliver standardised delivery. SMG systems control is separate to this but informs standard program delivery."

"template structure – standard sections in some areas but custom in others based on need... a compromise between the two – core bones, but the flesh is different based on funding and program and community need"

"Guidelines adhere to the Grant Administration Guide... Tailored according to the program and round"

"Standardised [Guidelines] template... Template is customisable with optional clauses/information. Guidelines require legal/governance signoff."

"We have standardized guideline templates which all programs must use.... Everything is locked down. If we have a problem we can compromise."

"We use a standard template and/or copy guidelines across programs and modify... to suit each individual program as we have a mix of low value low risk grants as well as high value (for us) and high risk. We try to have the right balance..."

Application and other forms

"Mirroring each other across a couple of programs in terms of format and information required to complete... one program is for small funding amount, the other is a scale above, so needs more oversight. Up to the grant manager to determine appropriateness"

"some core questions but otherwise need to customize based on program and information needs, and the sorts of projects we aim to receive/fund – application is a compromise blend – assessment based on type of program and criteria – based on risk and ranking needs – acquittal – custom based on program and data needs, and the types of projects funded... look for the balance between core needs versus program and project and community needs – consider what is efficient and effective and valuable. Some standardized questions have lost the ability to be flexible (structure and wording etc) which is proving to be a challenge so programs and projects are being forced into structure that isn't quite working – change process is proving ok in some areas, a real loss and pain in others. A lot of our programs were already very advanced and well developed, so we have had to either take on additional burden (in forms, data collection and guidelines etc), wear a loss of form and functionality, or restructure what and how we do something and wear the cost to flexibility and function."

"We are a small team of two full time staff and a part time assistant – so we standardise everything to make our lives easier and we are now using OneGMS"

"This is currently a work in progress. We have historically been chasing our tails in this regard i.e., scrambling to make form updates (including the implementation of standardised features) in the window of opportunity between funding rounds. Definitely not ideal... We haven't reached the right balance yet."

"We use the same basic form with a few adjusted questions for our two grants... We update each year. People can also email us additional information."

"We have standardised template and we use archetype form"

"Many elements of forms can be standardised for language, question text, budgets, choice options... We have to follow a high standard of form templates. And the efficiency and consistency of data must be maximized. But we still provide enough flexibility to meet the needs of each program."

"Funding Hub - one team preparing all of the application forms"

"We have started using a standard template and try to have the same questions/flow across programs... Each individual program has its own reporting requirements so maintaining a balance between the need for its specific data as well as trying to ensure only related data is captured"

Eligibility criteria

"Mirroring each other across a couple of programs in terms of format and information required to complete.... one program is for small funding amount, the other is a scale above, so needs more oversight. Up to the grant manager to determine appropriateness"

"[Eligibility] based on program purpose and funding parameters – needs to be relevant as one size fits all does not work, some funding based on source

is not available to certain locations, types of orgs, activities or projects – clear articulation in the program guidelines in a set template structure – bones (template) the same – but content/wording and requirements (the flesh) can vary."

"Applicant eligibility is determined at policy level – this ensures standardisation across the 15+ individual grants which sit under the Community Grants Policy. Project eligibility is different from grant to grant however there is some consistency as all grant funded projects are intended to align with Council's long-term strategies. Ensuring, and being able to demonstrate, this alignment is something we're working on at the moment.... We're not in the Goldilocks zone with this yet."

"Eligibility requirements are compared between programs... This is reviewed after each round. If a change is proposed, Ministerial approval is sought."

"Grants are only offered to registered not-for-profits or government entities....No flexibility is provided"

"We have minimum eligibility criteria for all programs...The standardisation of who can and can't apply for our grants, and/or what our will / won't fund."

"The entity criteria is standard across most programs including entity type, and the applicant organisation must hold an ABN... Programs could amend the eligibility criteria if needed, but the range is currently wide open to include non-for-profit entities (including incorporated associations, companies, co-operative, ATIS corporations), Local Governments, state School P&C associations, QLD Universities and charitable institutions established through legislation (churches etc)."

"We have clear eligibility criteria across all our grant programmes. For example, all must be a registered charity or incorporated society... Our two main grant programmes are fairly rigid, and this is the mechanism for the majority of our grant distribution. The remaining programmes that are invitation only are more flexible that allows us to get specific information from these applicants."

Assessment/merit criteria

"Mirroring each other across a couple of programs in terms of format and information required to complete... one program is for small funding amount, the other is a scale above, so needs more oversight. Up to the grant manager to determine appropriateness."

"PDI and various grant teams coordinate activity"

"Depends on program purpose – value for money common but not mandatory depends on the funding process – competitive versus direct allocation, the criteria can differ. Based on types of projects or intent of program or how the program is structured (funding streams or types of projects in the one round) – the criteria can differ based on the objectives a project is responding to. Programs in my area don't tend to have weighted criteria – have used them in the past for certain programs or types of projects, but not standard. More often the criteria are equally weighted.... Consider types of projects, funding structure, intent of the program – ongoing program with recurrent funding versus one off. How flexible are the projects to be submitted for consideration or are they all putting forward for the same thing. One criteria might be for all project applications regardless – but based on the objectives or types of projects the criteria might then start to be 'clustered' – if this is the case we structure our assessment panel process accordingly for consistency."

"Often the criteria are flexible based on program need – but applied to all applications. Program need first before standardised when it comes to criteria."

"Merit assessment criteria is same for all our grants ie., need, benefit, value for money, capacity to deliver. Higher value programs are weighted (need and benefit being higher) partly to reflect that this is a higher priority for Council, but also to try and spread the range of scores. We have an assessment rubric (list of things to consider when assessing each criteria) for each program... The weighting and the rubric work well but for programs that fund a broad range of projects (equipment, community events, small facility improvements, social services initiative and intervention) rigidity and consistency of assessments is a real challenge."

"Some standardised and some other assessment criteria. Standardised includes value for money, organisational capacity, outcomes, relevance and evidence. All have equal weighting... Programs can add additional assessment criteria."

"Standard assessment criteria used for all programs (when merit based) i.e. value for money, ability to deliver, meeting objectives of funding round"

"We have minimum/ standard assessment criteria for all programs... Standardisation of the criteria by which grant applications are assessed relative to other applications, alignment with program outcomes, value for money and applicant capability."

Assessor guidelines

"Consistent guide and documentation for assessors, consistent form layout and design based on program need... consider consistent headings and some content – probity and confidentiality and COI... Customise otherwise the language and scoring based on program needs"

"We don't have assessor guidelines – perhaps it's something we should consider. Our merit assessors work with the program guidelines and the relevant assessment rubric (for the program they're assessing)... While there's definitely room for improvement this process works well enough. Our biggest headache in the merit assessment space is trying to assess applications for very different projects (eg, purchase of a fridge v's a series of DV workshops) with the same criteria. This situation makes standardisation really difficult."

"Assessor guidance templates are shared but not mandatory. For efficiency, they tend to be very similar across programs... These can be adapted for program specifics."

"We have standardised assessor guidance templates which all programs must use... Our assessor guidelines template include mandatory sections, headings, probity, confidentiality requirements and use of standardised & customisable language."

Reporting requirements

"Mirroring each other across a couple of programs in terms of format and information required to complete... one program is for small funding amount, the other is a scale above, so needs more oversight. Up to the grant manager to determine appropriateness"

"All programs collect a level of data at different stages – core data points and calculations – however depending on timing and scale of program and implementation of projects – not all programs may need to do progress reporting. All do completion report. Progress and completion reporting however is structured based on program need and types of projects funded. Frequency will depend on program needs.... Consider program needs first, and impact on funded projects. Consider balance between prepopulated lists and only ask for free text when relevant. Not all programs or projects can collect or report on the same data."

"Reporting frequency is noted in the Funding Agreement and is quarterly but not necessarily written, a quarterly report can take the form of a meeting."

"We have different reporting requirements depending on which funder gave us the funding to give out. But they are all pretty similar... Always flexible but provide required info."

"Reporting requirements are set by legal/ governance... Reporting based on need to for data."

"Reports and dashboards."

"Not really standardised, we have not had enough time and resources to develop the dashboard and some of the data we would like to see is not yet available..."

"We do this separately but are hoping to use SmartyGrants more in the future."

Timelines

"Our grants fall into two delivery types – competitive rounds and quick response. This allows us to have standard timelines for each delivery type. These are mostly dictated by timeframes required to do the relevant admin for each delivery type. Competitive rounds (which require 2 merit assessors, moderation, delegate approval and Councillor notification period etc) take about 7 weeks between close of round and notification. The quick response grants (1 merit assessor, delegate approval) are 10 – 15 business days...We periodically review these timelines. Various circumstances (natural disasters, lack of availability of delegates etc) has demonstrated that these timelines are flexible where circumstances justify."

"Standard service requirements for grant cycle i.e. responding to emails, assessing applications and advising of outcomes."

"We have standardized service standards for responding to email queries, undertaking assessments and notification of assessment outcomes... The individual programs able to set their own timelines by the program circumstances by clearly specifying the application period. The deadline for evaluating applications and notifying the results is within 3 months."

Procedures

"As above, our long running established program is used to copy procedures, business practices, stages and tasks. This is because the first program was established in SmartyGrants and so subsequently when the other programs are established or move to be managed in SmartyGrants, the business process, stages, tasks and workflows are copied across so they are standardised... The programs are only standardised for ease of use and have no strict process and workflow procedures."

Feedback mechanisms

"Our feedback mechanism is a standardized process for delivering standardized grant evaluation results and communication. Complete with letter and email templates... We allow individual programs to deviate from standardized feedback channels/communication templates. as appropriate to the feedback."

"All feedback mechanisms are standardised across programs only due to procedure and ease of use... There is scope for deviation however the process is only standardised to ensure all essential tasks are completed."

Due diligence processes

"We use search engine, public registers to verify information as needed. We consider program historical or departmental records where relevant... We consider what is verifiable based on risk and types of programs and projects being funded"

Monitoring

"[We] find a balance between documentation and processes and resources that are available. A blend of formal and informal monitoring, online and face to face if needed, site visits if needed, informal check in, etc. [We] consider the needs of the projects and programs, scale of projects funded, stakeholders involved, types of projects funded. All projects have the same things for some programs, but not all programs have the same mix. Try to find the mix between form, function and practicality based on resources."

"We will follow up with progress reports and steps for visiting the place and use of assessment tools. We have standardized due diligence processes based on the assessed level of risk"

"As above, our long running established program is used to copy procedures, business practices, stages and tasks. All programs have 6 monthly reporting and monitoring timelines with the exception of a low-risk low value program which only acquits on completion of the funded event... I would say that we do not have strict due diligence processes, and we need to develop a lot of written policies and procedures"

Evaluation (outcomes measurement)

"Standardisation of evaluation. Must use outcomes framework including outcome and metric. (Our ability to achieve alignment with strategic objectives must be balanced with ensuring) outcomes measurement is proportionate to the size and complexity of the grants."

Legal documentation

"We have a standard funding agreement/contract, focused on keeping them clear, simple, plain English, but may have attachments based on program need or types of projects. We try to not have it overly complex. Variations don't always require deeds, email / correspondence exchanges documenting agreement to proposed variations is often sufficient... consider risk and scale – standard T&C but attachments and fillable sections can vary. Legal approval only where standard T&C may need to change."

"Standard agreement templates are used... Legal approval required to make amendments to documentation."

"... standardization of contracts and funding agreements including the deeds of variation... If the program needs to be changed in using the budget or change program activities, we can be flexible but the program must always request approval from the funding organization first."

"Legal Team have developed templates that are used across the organisation."

Cross-divisional level

Program design and approval processes

"Best practice templates and guidelines are available for all stages of grant management from application to acquittal... Due to the complexity of grant giving – most templates and guidelines are recommended best practice and not mandated"

"Internal grant support team which provides templates for operational frameworks; input to the final design; approval of the framework prior to the program being implemented on SmartyGrants... Frameworks are less rigid than strict tools & guidelines; many different schemes of assistance (grants) across the organisation; staff input ensures that internal requirements are met but not at the expense of the grant design"

Internal grants policies

"The only thing I can think of is the use of SmartyGrants for grant administration through all stages... Make templates available and provide recommendations to drafts before implementation."

"One grants policy for Council and a separate policy for large event grants. Incorporated legislative requirements and best practice e.g. Gender equity, Access and Inclusion"

"Program design and approvals follow a set of guidelines and financial delegations. Teams have the opportunity to build the grant that meets stakeholder requirements within the framework for program design and approvals"

Risk management tools and templates

"[Undertaken] as required in the Grants Administration Guide... Customised for program requirements"

Data governance

"A core fields document has been developed and the team ensures that appropriate data is collected over the life of the program. Date collection exercise is organisation wide with allowance for flexibility at the round / program level."

Grant opportunity guidelines

"The guidelines template is provided to the program manager seeking to use the system along with governance framework template, which covers all requirements. The guidelines template is provide to the program manager seeking to use the system along with governance framework template, which covers all requirements"

Assessor guidelines

"The assessor guideline consists of workflow that is articulated in the governance framework. [We] make templates available and provide recommendations to drafts before implementation"

Procedures

"What is mandatory and what is flexible is detailed as instructions in the template. [We] make templates available and provide recommendations to drafts before implementation"

Legal documentation

"Standard agreement clauses are used and applied as needed, depending on the grant type. There are a variety of different clauses for agreements which can be applied"

Other

"In the initial stages of the Outcomes Engine journey. Form templates, best practice guidelines and frameworks. Make templates available and provide recommendations to drafts before implementation."

Whole-of-organisation, cluster or agency level

Program design and approval processes

"We have a Design & Delivery Guide that is developed for the overall Fund, with a D&D Plan specific to funding round and describes the intent, governance, risk and delivery of the round; this is endorsed by our Authority & approved by the Minister prior to the round launching live"

"In the Design and Deliver Plan, supporting documentation required from applicants, governance and reporting requirements. Vic Gov grantmakers are required to follow the principles of the 'Better Grants By Design Guide', and the Standing Directions 2018 under the Financial Management Act 1994 issued by the Department of Treasury & Finance. Our Authority undertakes internal Audits of the grant round to identify critical risks and areas for improvement."

"Letters of Offer & Funding Agreements (Based on the Victorian Common Funding Agreements) are issued to successful grantees, with an embargo on public announcement by grantees until authorised by our Authority. Our Strategic Communications & Engagement Team supports the announcement by our Minister of the successful grantees, with the successful grant recipients then published on our external facing webpage."

"Any potential scheme owner is required to meet with the Grants Systems team and discuss what they are proposing with the main emphasis on what it is that they wish to ultimately achieve. The team will assist in identifying the options available and outline the recommendation for mechanism to be used as well as implications of each choice. A standard guidelines and operational framework are used to articulate this clearly with assistance from the team to develop this. Once approved, a series of standardised templates has been created for use by form builders, and the requirement for all forms to be reviewed and quality assurance to be undertaken by the Grants Systems team.. The guidelines and framework are tailorable to meet the complexity and level of risk associate with the program. There are a couple of templated versions of these documents aimed at different risk levels to assist new scheme owners in the requirements and considerations for their development."

"Program approval emphasis should be placed on new processes. and should consider continuing approval of (old) programs that are necessary for further program development. We must allow

different approvals based on program risk and must discuss and solve problems together."

"Our Grants team oversees all the organisation's grants and is responsible for the policy, procedures, systems and reporting. The Grants team administer around half of the grants, but the rest are administered by other teams (subject matter experts), with the support of the Grants team... A robust policy, sound procedures, and a dedicated Grants Advisor role responsible for co-ordination and support of grant making."

Internal grants policies

"Vic Gov grantmakers are required to follow the principles of the 'Better Grants By Design Guide', and the Standing Directions 2018 under the Financial Management Act 1994 issued by the Department of Treasury & Finance.... Whilst there are common community grants funding themes across government departments/authorities, the Design & Delivery plan for each unique grant program is tailored to meet the objectives and outcomes for the specific D&D Plan"

"This was considered through the policy development process. There is an inverse scale in terms of value of the grant and application and accountability requirements. This is through our community funding policy. It defined what is covered and what isn't (e.g. economic development funding). The policy provides the broad brush. As administrators we review our application forms each year to ensure that they strike the right balance e.g. not asking information that is not used in decision making."

"We have a funding policy and framework and all contestable grants are managed through the SmartyGrants system... The framework allows for flexibility in criteria and forms etc"

"Requirement for all grant programs to be coordinated through a centralised grant systems team (doesn't always happen). Ensuring all grant processes are scalable and appropriate for the level of risk and scale of grant program."

"We have a policy template and everything is locked down, but if there is a problem we can customize it according to suitability of the program/ organization together."

"We have one Grants Policy that applies to our whole organisation... The policy is rigid, but allows flexibility of each funding stream through the grant guidelines."

Risk management tools and templates

"The risks associated with [our] grants have been defined with support from our Corporate Risk Team and are loaded in and reported against a risk management platform. Our grants team have created a progress report SG acquittal template & process that assists in the early identification of risks that may impede the delivery of the funded project such as permit requirements, expenditure blow-outs and end date variation requirements. The final reporting acquittal template requests evidence of progress completion and expenditure of the funded amount. The risk management platform will have the risks associated with the delivery of infrastructure in the next few months.

The SG acquittal templates will be designed specifically for the requirements of the round type – small, low risk grants versus larger, medium to high risk infrastructure grants."

"Probity documents (risk register, assessment plan, eligibility log) are standardised"

Data governance

"This has been a learning on the run process. The initial guidelines and grant application form were designed without forethought to capture useable and measurable data. The team has been retrospectively applying standard fields and manually capturing data from our first round that will be comparable with future community support grants rounds. We have periodically reviewed our choice lists, standard fields and templates to ensure that unused information is archived. As we only have one round live and have been working on the development of the 2nd round, it has been fairly simple to ensure that the development of standardised choice lists/fields/ questions is consistent, and will be applied across future programs. The team is small (3), and we are constantly working together to ensure that our development of new data capture is consistent with the objectives of the [organisation] and able to demonstrate measurable outcomes & objectives. We have formed a Community of Practice with 2 other departments delivering similar community grants and have considered their 'lessons learnt' in the development of our data governance. We have also considered how the data from a community support round and that from an infrastructure round could be captured consistently using the same choice lists/fields but tailoring the questions to meet the objectives of the round."

"Administrators are restricted to the Grant Systems team who have worked over the past year to review and standardise standard fields. Identifying which ones can be replaced and those which will be archived after a scheme has completed. A guide is in development of how to utilise each standard field and the standard 'section' they belong under. There is a set of 'core data' that is required for all schemes that are common to each. There are then additional sets to this if applicable. The Grants system team map each round to determine what core data is likely to be applicable and where this is best captured (type of form or data set)."

"We have best practice [form] templates for different mechanisms such as vouchers, reimbursements, simple grant schemes, EOIs, non-competitive grants etc. We also populate the test Sandpit with examples of forms and rounds so users can see how the scheme appears from a manager and user perspective...Forms are somewhat customisable with inclusion of standard fields encouraged where applicable. Liaison with the grants systems team and monitoring of test sandpit and program activity allows oversight into current practices and allows the right data to be collected in the appropriate manner."

Grant opportunity guidelines

"We have modelled our guidelines based on 2 similar funding related projects that we CoP with, but tailored to ensure the requirements of our grant fund are reflected appropriately. There is no template for the guidelines, rather review and adjustment of the previous round's guidelines with reflection on lessons learnt from that round."

"Our framework is clear that all grant opportunities need to be made public via our website and SG pages."

"[Guidelines] are developed and based on the grant administration guidelines. A similar template, look and feel as well as order of information provide ease of use across granters and grantees. Similarly, these are developed to be read in conjunction (internally) with the Governance and Operational framework to inform not only what is being offered, but how it is to be delivered. These are semi-customisable with some sections able to be deleted if not applicable."

"We have a standardized guideline templates which all programs must to use.... everything locked down, if we have problem we can [have a]meeting for compromise."

"One template for all grant guidelines, so they all have the same look and feel, the same headings etc. In line with our Grants Policy all guidelines must be approved by Council too. This ensures consistency. The template allows flexibility within the different sections and headings. For example, under eligibility this can be tailored to the specific grant stream."

Application and other forms

"As we have only run one round, we have considered the lessons learnt from Round 1 to inform the development of the new application form. The [Large] rounds application will of course be tailored to capture the appropriate information for that type of grant but will still contain standardised questions and use of the Outcomes Engine to begin the benefits realisation of capture and reporting. The Design and Delivery Plan for each round will prescribe the purpose and requirements, and the development of the application will be tailored to the round type but still maintain consistent data capture."

"We all use the same system and groups should see similarities across forms"

"We have best practice templates for different mechanisms such as vouchers, reimbursements, simple grant schemes, EOIs, non-competitive grants etc. We also populate the test Sandpit with examples of forms and rounds so users can see how the scheme appears from a manager and user perspective. Forms are somewhat customisable with inclusion of standard fields encouraged where applicable. Liaison with the grants systems team and monitoring of test sandpit and program activity allows oversight into current practices and allows the right data to be collected in the appropriate manner."

"We have standardised template, and we use archetype form. Many elements of forms can be standardised for language, question text, budgets, choice options. We have to follow a high standard of form templates. And the efficiency and consistency of data must be maximized. But we still provide enough flexibility to meet the needs of each program."

"All forms are through SmartyGrants and the Grants Advisor provides guidance and support to the grants officers to ensure consistency of the forms. We allow the grants officers to create the forms for their own grant stream, with support from the Grants Advisor as required."

Eligibility criteria

"We have modelled our eligibility criteria based on 2 similar funding related projects that we CoP with, but tailored to ensure the requirements of our grant fund are reflected appropriately. There would be no flexibility from the standard criteria unless lessons learnt from the next funding round indicate that we still have not met the mark."

"It's in the policy- I feel this strikes the right balance"

Assessment/merit criteria

"The assessment criteria will remain constant across funding rounds for community projects and infrastructure rounds unless lessons learnt indicate a review is required. There would be no flexibility from the assessment criteria unless lessons learnt from the next funding round indicate that we still have not met the mark."

Assessor guidelines

"The assessor guidelines will be reviewed for each funding round with consideration of lessons learnt from previous rounds. For infrastructure rounds, we seek input from other State Government departments who have run similar rounds. There would be no flexibility from the assessor guidelines unless lessons learnt from the next funding round indicate that we still have not met the mark."

"Our framework states that a minimum of 3 people need to be on any assessment or decision committee"

"We have standardised assessor guidance templates which all programs must use…Our assessor guidelines template include mandatory sections, headings, probity, confidentiality requirements and use of standardised & customisable language."

Reporting requirements

"As a relatively new agency, and the reporting requirements for the grants still being established, standardisation has not yet been established. However, the use of standard fields data to export to a PowerBI dashboard will inform the future direction of our reporting, and stakeholders seeking information."

"There is different reporting requirements for different programs. Multi-year partnership agreements- funding is six months and structured. Match Fund (small grant) - it's a photo and paragraph. [Standardisation of reporting requirements] is largely left to our judgement."

"All grants need to be reported on, as these are all funding via council rates this is in our finance policy"

"Data from grants that have reached agreement is extracted from agreements (mainly manual paper-based form at this stage) and warehoused in Smartsheet as part of our register. Significant work has been undertaken to try and capture similar information in SmartyGrants and work is progressing towards this goal".

"Our reporting requirements are standardized across programs within our department.

The frequency of the report is set at least 6 months/ time and the annual report closes the project…The program should not deviate from the reporting frequency requirements."

Reports and dashboards

"The Grants Advisor (who sits within the Grants team) is responsible for all grants reporting, collating the information from grants officers and from SmartyGrants. There is no flexibility. Our reporting is centralised for consistency/accuracy."

"Our reports and dashboards are standardised across the whole-of-organisation about standardised metrics and reports across grant programs. We have standardised reports/ dashboards that must be used across all programs, with minimum requirements."

Timelines

"We have standardized service standards for responding to email queries, undertaking assessments and notification of assessment outcomes… The individual programs able to set their own timelines by the program circumstances by clearly specifying the application period. The deadline for evaluating applications and notifying the results is within 3 months."

"All grants open in July annually. Those with an open and close date all close at the same time as well. There is no flexibility. Our grant timelines are consistent to make it easier for our customers to navigate."

Procedures

"The development of stages and tasks is still being standardised; ensuring the team understand the implications of introducing new standards & how these would be used. Our team have developed a delivery manual that reflects our Authority's

standard procedures and business processes, and this also contains 'templates' for internal and external communication."

"Have developed a User Guide with considerations of how SmartyGrants (SG) can be used and provision of best practice options. This assists in processes and procedures that relate to SG Help Hub, Standard Field standardisation and is aligned with departmental processes and policies. Work is underway on a risk tool to assist scheme owners, and the grant system team identify the most appropriate mechanism and requirements (standardised options) to be able to meet the variety of programs and workflows necessary that complement the reporting requirements."

"We have a menu of pre-defined process and workflow options for different pre-defined programs. The programs should not deviate from standardized [options]."

"While we have one Grants Procedure that applies to our whole organisation, there is enough flexibility that grants officers can adapt the process for their grants stream as necessary. For example, a grant assessment panel could be made up of community members or of staff and elected members."

Feedback mechanisms

"We have one survey that is conducted annually for ALL grant applicants. This is managed centrally by the Grants Advisor (within the Grants team). We acknowledge that grants officers may also receive feedback from customers and have feedback of their own. The Grants Advisor actively seeks out this feedback to include with the centralised survey."

Due diligence processes

"Applicant verification – certificate of incorporation, ABN check, applicant org type not-for-profit status. Financial verification – vendor details template completed by applicant and forwarded to our central Vendor Management Team for entry. This team will raise if information is invalid. Given the applicant type for our first grants round, the evidentiary requirements for project completion have often required support and guidance from the grants team to ensure we are satisfied that the project has been completed. The lesson learnt from Round 1 is that we need to be more diligent in ensuring that adequate information relating to the deliverables of the application, and the budget tables are well developed, is captured at time of application."

Monitoring

"Monitoring and evaluation plans are encouraged across the breadth of grant schemes. The standard templates for framework also include sections on monitoring. The delivery and reporting of these is however up to the discretion of scheme owners/ managers."

"We will follow up with progress reports and steps for visiting the place along with use of assessment tools. We have standardized due diligence processes based on the assessed level of risk."

"The Grants Advisor monitors SmartyGrants and will follow up with grants officers if things are not in order. For example, we had a grant stream that had outstanding acquittals that had not been followed up, so the Grants Advisor addressed this with the relevant team. We expect grants officers to do their own monitoring and manage their own grant streams, but the Grants Advisor still has oversight and can provide support as needed."

Evaluation (outcomes measurement)

"This is still a learning process, and at this point is minimal. We have had the Outcomes Engine added to our licence, however as we have not yet run our next round, outcomes measurement is currently non-existent. The development of our Outcomes Framework has been reviewed within our immediate work area, but as all Round 2 documentation is yet to reviewed more broadly, its design may yet change before final approval for use."

"This has in the past been ad-hoc and dependent on a program adopting this. Since the Outcomes Engine uptake the department is working towards developing frameworks for schemes with the view to having a tiered outcome framework for the department."

"Standardisation of evaluation - must use outcomes framework including outcome and metric.... (Our ability to achieve alignment with strategic objectives must be balanced with ensuring) outcomes measurement is proportionate to the size and complexity of the grants."

"A standardised grant agreement has been developed in collaboration with the legal team which essentially includes a large bank of clauses. The grants system team work with the scheme manager to develop an appropriate agreement based on the scheme guidelines and operational framework that is then vetted by the legal team

for appropriateness... Some components of the agreements are standardised and relate to obligations, legislative requirements and needs of the department."

Legal documentation

"The use of the Victorian Common Funding Agreement (VCFA) issued by the Department of Treasury & Finance is the basis of our Funding Agreement. There is both a long and short-form version of the VCFA based on the level of risk for the funding round. A clause bank is available for inclusion of specific legal requirements relating to the grant type."

"Our legal team has helped us develop templates for our letter of agreement and multi year grants. It's an ongoing process to refine these documents."

"A standardised grant agreement has been developed in collaboration with the legal team which essentially includes a large bank of clauses. The grants system team work with the scheme manager to develop an appropriate agreement based on the scheme guidelines and operational framework that is then vetted by the legal team for appropriateness. Some components of the agreements are standardised and relate to obligations, legislative requirements and needs of the department."

Whole-of-government or cross-sector level

Program design and approval processes

"The Design & Delivery Plan, Grant Guidelines, Governance Plan and Probity Conduct Plan are reviewed and endorsed internally and then by our CEO. The docs are then progressed to the relevant Minister for approval. [The] Approval process does not differ."

"We are now using OneGMS and we adhere to requirements of the NSW Government Grants Administration Guide."

Data governance

"We are now using OneGMS and we adhere to requirements of the NSW Government Grants Administration Guide, Privacy requirements, requirement to save to Objective (equivalent to TRIM)."

Legal documentation

"The use of the Victorian Common Funding Agreement [VCFA] issued by the Department of Treasury & Finance is the basis of our Funding Agreement. There is both a long and short-form version of the VCFA based on the level of risk for the funding round. A clause bank is available for inclusion of specific legal requirements relating to the grant type."

Appendix B: Grant classification exercise

Efforts to standardise grants often begin with classification: sorting them by size, type, or style, and then designing processes to match. The theory is straightforward – for example, a small, low-risk grant might warrant a shorter application form, lighter scrutiny, a simpler contract, and minimal reporting.

In practice, however, this approach is rarely so neat. Our experience over more than two decades shows that grant classifications quickly blur at the edges. Categories overlap, definitions vary, and exceptions abound. What appears efficient in theory often proves unworkable when tested against real-world grants.

The exercise below illustrates why rigid classification systems can be misleading. For each category listed, try to imagine the application, assessment, contracting, and monitoring processes you might attach. Then test these assumptions against a sample of actual grants – and see how difficult it is to fit them neatly into the boxes.

Possible classification dimensions

By transaction type

- Discretionary
- Matching
- Quick-response

By funding period

- One-off
- Recurrent
- Open-ended

By recipient type

- Place-based organisations
- Individuals
- Government entities (federal, state/territory, local)
- Businesses
- Not-for-profits (e.g. unincorporated/ incorporated associations, cooperatives, companies limited by guarantee, Indigenous corporations or associations, organisations created by legislation, trusts, consumer-operated organisations, charities, community groups)

By funded activity

- Core operating costs
- Project or program delivery
- Capacity building
- Capital works or infrastructure
- Equipment or vehicles
- Network building and collaboration
- Advocacy
- Fundraising costs
- Research and development
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Travel
- Legal costs

By funding size

- Small
- Medium
- Large

By risk profile

- Low
- Medium
- High

By workflow complexity

- Simple
- Moderate
- Complex

By subject area

- Agriculture, fisheries and forestry
- Animal welfare
- Arts and culture
- Community development
- Economic development
- Environment
- Health
- Human rights
- Information and communications
- International relations
- Public affairs
- Public safety

- Religion and spirituality
- Science
- Sport and recreation

By beneficiary (from CLASSIE: www.ourcommunity.com.au/classie)

Age groups

- Children and youth (age 0-17)
- Adults (people aged 18+)

Education status

- Preschool students
- Primary school students
- Secondary school students
- Tertiary education students

Ethnic and racial groups

- Indigenous peoples
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people
- Multiracial people
- People of African descent
- People of Asian descent
- People of Australian descent
- People of European descent
- People of Latin American descent
- People of Middle Eastern descent
- People of North American descent

Family and relationships

- Caregivers
- Families
- Children in care
- LGBTIQA+ families
- Parents and guardians
- Widows and widowers

Gender groups

- Gender diverse people
- Women
- Men

Health

- People with disabilities
- People with diseases and illnesses
- People with substance addictions
- Pregnant people

Living environment

- Place-based people or groups
- Rural/regional dwellers
- Urban/metropolitan dwellers
- Tenants/renters
- Homeowners

Religious groups

- Baha'is
- Buddhists
- Christians
- Confucists
- Hindus
- Indigenous religious and spiritual groups
- Interfaith groups
- Jewish people
- Muslims
- Secular groups
- Shintos
- Sikhs

LGBTIQA+ people

- LGBTIQA+ people

Social and economic status

- At-risk youth
- Economically disadvantaged people
- Immigrants and migrants
- Incarcerated people
- Nomadic people
- Victims/survivors and oppressed people

Work status and occupations

- Activists
- Artists and performers
- Defence personnel
- Domestic workers
- Emergency services personnel
- Farmers

- Professionals
- Researchers
- Retired people
- Self-employed people
- Sex workers
- Small business owners and operators
- Sports people
- Teachers
- Tradespeople
- Unemployed people
- Veterans

Other

- Animals
- Natural environment

ourcommunity.com.au
Where not-for-profits go for help

OurCommunity.com.au

Our Community is a world-leading social enterprise that provides advice, connections, training and easy-to-use tech tools for people and organisations working to build stronger communities.

The Our Community group of enterprises are:

CommunityDirectors.com.au

The Institute of Community Directors Australia is the leading governance and leadership network for members of Australian not-for-profit and government boards, and their senior staff.

Succession Media

A news service for Australia's not-for-profit sector including *The Community Advocate*.

OCHouse.com.au

Our Community House is a green and creative co-working space for the social sector in Melbourne, Victoria.

GiveNow.com.au

GiveNow is Australia's first and best giving platform, providing donations, ticketing and membership services for Australian not-for-profits.

FundingCentre.com.au

The Funding Centre is Australia's smartest grants database and fundraising capacity building website.

SmartyGrants.com.au

SmartyGrants delivers software, data science and grantmaking intelligence for funders.

SmartyFile.com.au

SmartyFile is a red tape-busting data-storage and data-sharing tool for not-for-profits and other grant applicants.

Institute of Grants Management

A hub for tools, research, innovation, and professional development for grantmakers.

Our Community International

Taking the Australian-born grantmaking revolution to the UK, Europe and beyond.