



COMMUNITY
BROADCASTING
ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA

31 January 2023

Budget Policy Division
The Treasury
Langton Crescent
Parkes ACT 2600
Via email: PreBudgetSubmissions@treasury.gov.au

Dear Budget Policy Division,

2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission

CBAA welcomes the opportunity to provide a pre-budget submission.

Highlights

- Community Broadcasters help to achieve community impacts that align with Government priorities for news media diversity, regional journalism, supporting Australian arts and cultural policy objectives, creating community connection, and supporting community resilience in times of emergency.
- Increasing demand for community broadcasting services and increasing needs of stations for Government grant funding continues to be unmet by Government funding allocations.
- A Government-led review is underway to plan for the sector's long-term sustainability, with aims including: evaluating the adequacy of current funding delivered through the Community Broadcasting Program and examining the claim for additional funding to support a sustainable sector.
- The sector is supportive of this process and is eagerly awaiting the outcome of this review and, in conjunction, is undertaking sector-wide planning through preparation of a 10-year roadmap.
- The sector remains in need of financial relief and continues to request \$5m (pprox..) to be distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation's Development and Operations grants.

About the CBAA

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) is the peak body and national representative organisation for over 450 community media organisations. 90% of all radio licence holders are CBAA members. The CBAA exists to support strong and successful community broadcasters. We champion an independent and free media and provide a portfolio of programs aiming to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of community broadcasting organisations across Australia.

Introduction

This submission provides the details of our request that the community broadcasting sector's annual allocation (through the Government's Community Broadcasting Program) be increased to \$25.97m.

Our request is for an additional \$5m (pprox..) annually, ongoing and indexed, distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF). There remains a \$5-\$11m shortfall in the amount of CBF Development and Operations funding allocated and the amount requested by community radio stations.

The community broadcasting sector appreciates the support of the Australian Government providing funding to community broadcasters in the October 2023 Budget, which maintained the sector's base funding of \$16-17 million per year and applied annual indexation to this amount. In

addition, \$4 million per year is provided on a recurring basis. In total, the October 2022 Budget maintained funding levels at around \$20 million per year, consistent with previous years.

We note the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts has commenced a [Community Broadcasting Program Evaluation and Sustainability Review](#) that will provide advice on the adequacy of current funding delivered through the Program and an examination of the sector's claim for additional funding to support a sustainable sector. The sector supports this process. We look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the Department to support community broadcasters to serve communities across Australia. The CBAA is engaging with the Department to plan for the future of community broadcasting in Australia through a Government-led review of sector sustainability. The CBAA is also partnering with the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) to lead a process across the community broadcasting sector to prepare a 10-year roadmap.

In respect for this process, the sector would welcome additional funding in the 2023-24 Budget, with any further ongoing annual funding increase to be considered after the completion of the review process.

Many stations require financial relief now to support station operations and enable the sector to continue to achieve community outcomes in the coming year. The additional \$5m would help stations to increase their community impact across many areas of policy priority for Government including: fostering media diversity, providing local independent news and information (specifically in regional 'news deserts'), supporting Australian arts and cultural activity, creating community connection, building career pathways and supporting community resilience through emergencies.

Stations could use this funding to create and fund local employment opportunities; cover the cost of upgrades to ageing technology infrastructure; and increase local news reporting capacity (particularly in regional areas and other news deserts). It would assist stations to prepare for broadcasts during natural disasters and provide them with a strong base from which to adapt and innovate – supporting their communities when they need it most.

Over 5 million Australians listen to community radio each week

The 2022 [Community Radio Listener Survey](#)¹ of more than 16,000 Australians shows that over 5 million listeners aged 15+ across Australia tune in to community radio stations each week (23% of the Australian population 15+). Of these listeners, 670,000 listen exclusively to community radio (that is, they listen to community radio but not commercial radio or ABC/SBS radio).

The top reason listeners give for tuning in to community radio is to hear local information and news (50%). 36% tune in to hear music not available on other stations and 31% to hear local voices. 28% listen to hear independent voices free from commercial or government influence.

28% of Australians living outside of metropolitan areas tune in to community radio each week. 62% of non-metropolitan listeners tune in primarily for local information and news. Regional and remote community stations reflect the interests of their local communities – including music, sports, environment and arts – and connect people separated by hundreds of kilometres. In some regions, these stations are the only source of local news.

Community radio draws its audience from a wide cross section of the community and at least 20% of most demographic groups – across gender, age, location, employment and income – tune in to community radio during a typical week. Community radio listeners are more likely to identify as LGBTIQIA+, have a disability or reading difficulty, or hold a religious faith. One third (30%) of people who regularly speak a language other than English in their household listen to community

¹ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2022), Community Radio Listener Survey [online] Available at: <https://www.cbba.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets>

radio during a typical week. Four out of ten of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (38%) listen to community radio during a typical week.

Community Impact

Community radio is critical to Australian communities. The community broadcasting sector promotes the diverse identities of Australians that enrich the social, cultural and democratic fabric of Australian society. It plays a critical role in providing a voice for Australian communities that are underserved by mainstream media – including communities in regional and remote Australia, First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, faith-based communities, youth and seniors' communities, the LGBTIQ+ community, people with a disability, and diverse arts and music communities. It is Australia's largest independent media sector, recognised internationally as one of the most successful examples of grassroots media.

Community Connection

The investment of communities into their local radio station means that a community radio station can be of exponential value to its community. The commitment, passion and ingenuity of volunteers and staff drawn from the community the station serves sees innumerable examples of innovative and inspiring projects emerging to meet community needs. From programs sharing unheard stories, showcasing local arts and culture, or encouraging communities to get vaccinated; to projects that go beyond the studio to save local news outlets, coordinate emergency relief efforts, or deliver baskets of essentials to members of the community isolated through lockdowns. Community radio stations are not only media outlets, they are a point of connection around which people can rally to support and care for their communities.

News media diversity

Community radio showcases local content, news and alternative voices, fulfilling demand for independent, localised news and information, particularly in underserved regional and remote communities.

The top reason listeners give for tuning in to community radio is to hear local information and news (50%) nationwide and (62%) in non-metropolitan areas.²

It is well documented that audiences feel they cannot receive localised or community-specific information from other media sources. Local media provides content that caters to the needs and interests of their local communities and contributes to the connectedness and wellbeing of those communities.

Regional journalism

Community broadcasters are a critical pillar in our media industry and 80% of licenses are located in regional areas. The community radio sector is an important conduit for media skills, training and employment opportunities across a range of topic areas relevant to broadcasting. Volunteers and employees gain skills in broadcasting, management, marketing, media, networking, community building, governance and more. Many stations collaborate and share resources and journalists with hyperlocal online and print news publishers. First Nations stations have a particularly strong focus on training and development, launching the careers of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists.

² Community Radio Listeners Survey (July 2022) www.cbbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets

"I used to write for the local paper and then the local paper stopped, so I moved over to another little community magazine and then that stopped. Then we had nothing like that in Moranbah, so the community radio here 4RFM, they chose to pick up that gap and start their own monthly newsletter, so I started that." - Alaina Earl, Journalist at 4RFM, Moranbah QLD (Pop 9000)

[Regional Australia's media options are declining. This rock radio broadcaster is fighting back in coal country - ABC News](#)

Supporting Australia's cultural policy objectives

Community radio is a critical asset in Australia's cultural landscape and the values and impact of community broadcasting serve to achieve the priorities of Australia's new Cultural Policy.

5 Pillars of Australia's new Cultural Policy	Impact of Community Broadcasters
First Nations first: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.	<p>One third of community radio stations are First Nations Media with four out of ten people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander listening to community radio each week. First Nations media organisations are essential champions of First Nations language, music, stories and culture. They nurture and support First Nations artists and are a conduit for the production and a promotion of their work.</p> <p>Just over 30% of community broadcasters are First Nations media organisations and many support in-language broadcast. They provide access to First Nations arts and culture to around 320,000 First Nations people, including around 100,000 very hard to reach people in remote Indigenous communities, or nearly 50% of the First Nations population.³ Four out of ten people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (38%) listen to community radio during a typical week.⁴</p>
A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.	<p>Providing a place for every story is one of the guiding principles of community broadcasting. The sector gives voice to people, artists, musicians and creatives from communities that are underrepresented in the Australian cultural landscape – including First Nations Australians, communities in regional and remote Australia, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, faith-based communities, youth and seniors' communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with a disability, and diverse arts and music sub-cultures. In doing so it promotes the diverse and unique identities of Australians that enrich the social and cultural fabric of Australian society.</p>
The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.	<p>Community radio actively champions Australian music and contributes to the health and vitality of local music scenes.</p>

³ Above and Beyond Broadcasting: A Study of First Nations media and the COVID-19 pandemic (2022) [firstnationsmedia.org.au/sites/default/files/files/Submissions/Above_and_Beyond_Broadcasting%20\(1\).pdf](https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/sites/default/files/files/Submissions/Above_and_Beyond_Broadcasting%20(1).pdf)

⁴ Community Radio Listeners Survey (July 2022) www.cbba.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets

	35% of people tune in to community radio to hear music not available on other stations and 33% tune in to hear Australian music and local artists.
Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions – funded, philanthropic and commercial – which sustain our arts and culture.	450+ licensees deliver over 500 community radio services on AM, FM and DAB+. We broadcast nationwide to an audience of over five million people per week. Community broadcasting is powered by the efforts and dedication of approximately 688 full-time equivalent jobs and 22,200 volunteers. The sector generates a total annual income of \$125 million through a range of sources including sponsorships and subscriptions. Stations on average rely on CBF grant funding for less than 10% of total revenue. ⁵
Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the people at home and abroad.	Community radio plays a vital role in supporting and nurturing arts, music and creative industries, and provides an avenue for local musicians and artists to be broadcast on airwaves across the country and streamed online across the world. On average community radio stations broadcast 37% Australian music each week ⁶ , exceeding the 25% required under the Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice. Many stations well exceed this quota.

Supporting community resilience in times of emergency

In many areas, community radio is the only local media source. For many non-English speaking communities, community radio is the only source of information and news available in their language and delivered in a culturally relevant way. First Nations community radio stations and media organisations are also the fastest and most responsive conduits for getting information through to First Nations communities in a way that is culturally appropriate, accessible, in-language and timely. First Nations radio stations are the only radio services available in 89 regions across the country.

Community radio stations play a critical role in communities, particularly regional communities, during natural disasters and in the recovery, and during prolonged crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the pandemic community broadcasters have worked to provide community-specific COVID-19 updates; in-language health messages; and connect people most isolated through lockdowns. During the 2019/20 bushfire season over 80 community radio stations broadcast to fire-affected regions and undertook diverse activities to support local communities – providing locally-specific emergency broadcasts; acting as a catalyst for community dialogue; supporting and coordinating fundraising initiatives; and connecting people in regional Australia to critical services. Community broadcasters have also played a critical role in providing information throughout the widespread flooding experienced in many parts of the country throughout 2022 in the south and east and early 2023 in the northwest and Murray-Darling Basin.

⁵ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), State of the Sector Report [online] Available at: https://www.cbba.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019_4.pdf

⁶ Community Broadcasting Sector Programming & Technology Survey (2018) www.cbba.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20Programming%20Technology%20Survey%202018%20Report.pdf

Case Study: Braidwood FM (NSW)

Braidwood is a small town of about 1,600, 60km from Canberra. When a rapidly changing fire threatened the town in November 2019, local community radio station Braidwood FM provided 14 days of near continuous emergency coverage.

The studio was full of printouts of maps and station volunteers used their knowledge of the local area to keep the community up-to-date on the fire's movements. They broadcast hourly updates from the Rural Fire Service (RFS). Listeners called in to share warnings, becoming active eyes for the RFS. For some, the station was the only source of information and portable battery-powered radios sold out in town.

"There were people that had the radio on 24 hours a day every day just to hear what was happening. There was no on the ground local coverage from the ABC here. It's not like people here could turn on the ABC and know what was happening at Jinglemoney Lane."

-Gordon Waters, Braidwood FM

"When the 2020 bushfires blazed through the regions, community radio was a constant. Through the early hours of the morning and into the night, Braidwood FM was a conduit for crucial, urgent, local information. It broadcast the movements of the fire and helped the community stay safe during this devastating time. It's more than a community broadcaster – during the bushfires, Braidwood FM was a lifeline."

- Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland

Beyond Broadcasting, October 2022, [CBAA_BeyondBroadcasting.pdf](#) CBAA

Budget Request: Additional \$5m

The community broadcasting sector requests that the Australian Government's annual allocation through the CBF be increased to \$25.97m to support our sector's community impact.

The community radio sector is an efficient and low-cost, high impact sector. Community broadcasting is powered by the efforts and dedication of approximately 688 full-time equivalent jobs and 22,200 volunteers. The sector generates a total annual income of \$125 million through a range of sources including sponsorships and subscriptions. Stations on average rely on CBF grant funding for less than 10% of total revenue.⁷

Well-resourced stations have a strong base from which to explore new ways to serve their communities, many of which align with Government policy priorities. Australian Government funding is critical to support the sector's community impact. Government funding enables stations to develop relationships with sponsors; upgrade ageing infrastructure; build readiness and resilience for emergencies; and create employment and training opportunities.

An additional \$5m annually, ongoing and indexed, distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation's Development and Operations grants would enhance our sector's impact by providing stations with stability and dependability in their core operations and technology infrastructure, allowing them to innovate and adapt to serve and support their communities.

⁷ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), State of the Sector Report [online] Available at: https://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019_4.pdf

CBF Development and Operations Grants

Objectives

Development and Operations grants support community media organisations to build and develop sustainable practices and longer-term thinking that will ensure a thriving and resilient sector into the future.

- The objectives of Development and Operations grants are to support community media organisations to:
 - Deepen engagement with identified communities
 - Enhance capacity, capability and long-term viability
 - Strengthen governance policies and practices
 - Develop longer term thinking and planning practices
 - Expand partnerships to maximise opportunities
 - Increase resilience through preparations for unexpected change

Grant Uses

- Activities including strategic planning, updating policies and processes, training, business development, marketing, events
- Infrastructure – including production/transmission/administration equipment, website/ software development, solar panels, capital works
- Operations – including salaries, utilities, administration, professional development

Source: Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF)

The community broadcasting sector has grown rapidly over the past ten years. Station size and operational models have grown as well as the size of the sector itself. Since 2011-12, the community broadcasting sector has grown from 285 permanently licensed broadcasters to 358 as of 3 February 2022 – a 26% increase.

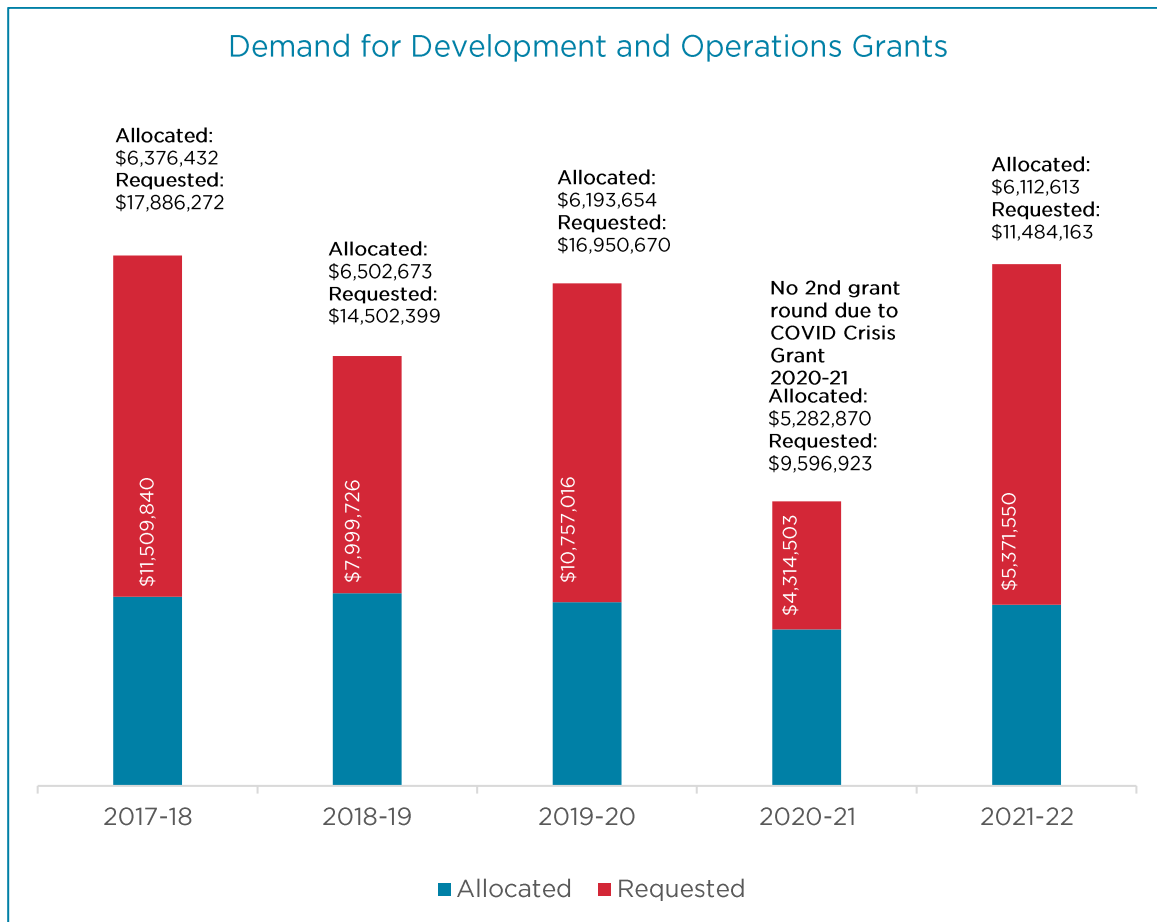
Operating costs for community radio stations have been rising, particularly for core costs such as transmission expenses. In the past decade, funding has failed to keep up with CPI as the cost of power, equipment, wages, copyright licence fees and other operational expenses has increased. For example, the operating costs of transmission sites (electricity and lease expenses) increased 49.6 per cent between 2011-12 and 2015-16 across the community broadcasting sector and continue to increase.³⁵

Listenership has grown by over a million weekly listeners, from 3.7 million in 2004 to over 5 million in 2022. The increased demand and need for community radio services has not been matched with an increase in Government funding. The sector's core funding is being stretched to meet the needs of more stations.

\$5-\$11m shortfall in development and operational funds for sector sustainability

The Community Broadcasting Foundation's general-purpose funding has not received an increase in Government funding since 2011. Just over \$6m is awarded in Development and Operations grants in an ordinary year with \$1.7m of the \$6m earmarked for radio transmission support, and around \$3.4m specifically and importantly earmarked for specialist services including First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse and RPH text-to-radio services for people with a print disability. The remainder, about \$1m, is the most oversubscribed funding segment and is the only available funding to hundreds of applicants. This funding shortfall restricts the ability of the sector to sustain essential services, with impacts felt most significantly across regional Australia – regional and remote community radio stations make up about 70% of potential applicants.

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Source: CBF

The difference between the amount of Development and Operations funding allocated and the amount requested is \$5-11m each year. The only exception was the 2020/21 figures, which are an anomaly because the grant structure was changed to meet the needs of stations across the sector struggling with the impacts of COVID-19 – meaning, there was only one grant round rather than the traditional two.

First Nations Media Funding

Just over 30% of community broadcasters are First Nations stations. Community broadcasting plays a vital role in strengthening First Nations communities. Commonwealth support is essential to allowing First Nations media organisations to maintain broadcast infrastructure, develop partnerships to generate their own income streams, provide training and career development opportunities, support their communities through crises like extreme weather events and the public health crisis, build organisational resilience and develop local content to connect and serve their communities.

Funding to First Nations media organisations from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) has remained static for over 10 years and has reduced in real terms due to inflation and the sector's growth. Increasingly, First Nations media organisations are applying for operational support to the CBF to meet the gap in their operational costs that is not being met by the NIAA funding. The CBF's First Nations Funding provision is already constrained however with an increase in applications from First Nations broadcasters via the non-competitive Specialist Radio Programming grants program.

The CBAA works closely with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) and supports their budget request for Commonwealth funding delivered through the National Indigenous Australians Agency to support the sector's capacity to provide essential information services, increase jobs and skills, and improve community-controlled sector sustainability. The CBF is experiencing an increase in applications from First Nations broadcasters. Funding to First Nations media organisations has remained static for over 10 years and has reduced in real terms due to inflation and the sector's growth. Increasingly, First Nations media organisations are applying for operational support to the CBF to meet the gap in their operational costs that is not being met by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) funding.

Conclusion

The CBAA thanks the Australian Government for increasing certainty for the community broadcasting sector in the October 2022 Budget by confirming multi-year, indexed funding will be maintained at around \$20m per year. This funding is the critical baseline to support community radio stations and sector-wide projects.

An additional \$5m is urgently needed to be distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation's Development and Operations pool. This would immediately enhance our sector's strong community impact. It would ensure stations can invest in their core operations and infrastructure, securing a base from which they can innovate – supporting news media diversity, the National Cultural Policy and connecting communities through emergencies.

The Government's [Community Broadcasting Program Evaluation and Sustainability Review](#) will soon provide advice on the adequacy of current funding delivered through the Community Broadcasting Program including an examination of the level of need for additional funding. The sector supports and respects this process. The CBAA will continue our close collaboration with the Department to plan for the sustainable future of community broadcasting in Australia.

In respect for this process the sector would, in the 2023-24 Budget, welcome additional funding on a one-off basis with any further ongoing annual funding increase to be considered after the completion of the review process.

Should you wish to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Reece Kinnane, CBAA's Head of Advocacy and Communications at reece.kinnane@cbaa.org.au or via 02 9310 2999.

Best regards,



Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer