

Regional Cultural Fund Feedback 15 Jan 2019

Create NSW provided feedback on the Old Bega Hospital RCF application by telephone on 15 January 2018. The feedback was delivered at a fairly rapid pace over an at times marginal phone line. These notes are taken from notes made during the feedback session and may contain errors and omissions. The session followed a set format: a general introduction, and then comments taken directly from the assessment panel's comments. There was a short period at the end for us to comment on the application process.

General introduction

General intro said the feedback would be against the 4 assessment criteria. It would not be exhaustive, there would be no comparisons with other applications, and no comments on other applications. The staff were very aware of the effort which went into the applications and this feedback session would be a courtesy to repay some of that work. Clearly being unsuccessful was not our desired outcome. It was extremely, extremely, competitive. There were 159 applications for \$147m. Available funding was \$47m so there were lots of unsuccessful applications, reflecting a backlog of projects in the regions. The skills of the assessment panel were regions, infrastructure, arts and culture. The panellists had all the application info. They made an initial assessments against the assessment criteria as 'met', 'partially met' or 'did not meet'. The application form was structured to provide the relevant info against each criterion in set places, and that was how it was presented to the panellists. After those individual panellist assessments had been made the panel met as a whole for three days to finalise their assessments. Those assessments went to the Minister for the Arts [Harwin], who, in consultation with the Deputy Premier [Barilaro], made the final decisions and advised the Department which advised the applicants.

In general, because it was so competitive, it was applications that had 'partially met' or 'did not meet' against some criteria that tended not to be recommended. The things taken into account were:

- exceptional case for change
- widespread community support
- secure cofunding
- resources
- tenure
- risk
- ongoing viability.

The panel said there were very strong projects that did not get into the \$47m cap. The feedback to the applicants was concentrated on the 'partially met' and 'did not meet' comments, not so much the positive comments, as that is probably what is useful to the applicants. Comments were against specific criteria first, and then there was a place for general comments from the panel.

Panel comments

Criterion 1, case for change. Really strong generally. Partially met on immediate and continuing need and not fully aligned to RCF objectives. Had well considered alternatives.

Criterion 2, capacity to deliver. Partially met roles, responsibilities and accountability. Schedules/milestones not fully set out. Contingency not fulsome enough, not fully demonstrated. Major risks only partially set out and mitigation strategies only partially set out. We explained that we had attached an early risk management strategy in error and had a better one, but only discovered that error too late to amend the application.

Criterion 3, value for money. All costs partially identified, partially validated, assumptions only partially articulated. Ongoing feasibility not adequately considered and shown to be viable. Staff said that comment was common and a downfall for many applications. Cofunding only partly maximised.

Criterion 4, engagement and reach. Community support not strongly demonstrated. Key stakeholders only partly identified and their inputs only partly included. Educational community benefits only partially demonstrated.

General comments. Lots of positives. Uncertainty of ongoing funding. Limited information on governance and stakeholder engagement. Needs further development. Some conflicting information.

Further comments

Criterion 1. Doubt re how it will be used. Doubt re urgency.

Criterion 2. Only nominated Public Works Advisory as manager, not how it would be managed. Needed more on governance into the future (post building stage) - 'not established'. A lot of people fell down on risk assessment, especially post construction risks.

Criterion 3. Some gaps on funding outside of RCF. Need more details on funding sources post building stage: didn't demonstrate that had enough money for contingencies: needs to be robust.

Criterion 4. Limited evidence of community engagement other than the open days. Need an engagement strategy. Minimal strategy development. Good variety of community. SEArts might be very good at helping with this.