



SCOA Submission to DSS on SGP, December 2013

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Social Services about the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) and opportunities presented by the shift in program management from Department of Immigration (DIAC) to the Department of Social Services (DSS). SCOA represents over 80 agencies in the settlement sector, which comprise the majority of agencies involved in funded settlement programs including SGP, Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Complex Case Support (CCS). SCOA members also receive a wide range of funding from other government departments at federal, state and local levels, as well as grant funding from philanthropic foundations.

In examining the opportunities presented by the machinery of government (MOG) changes there are clear areas where existing settlement programs can benefit from the connections and links to programs and operating processes that currently exist within DSS. While SCOA desires to capitalise on the opportunities presented there are also areas where care and consideration will need to be taken to ensure that the unique strengths and experience of the settlement sector are maintained in the new environment.

This submission will look at:

- Opportunities presented by the machinery of government changes – cutting costs and minimising duplication
- Existing strengths of the SGP - why SGP is important to the integration agenda
- Existing efficiencies within the SGP - strong integration outcomes
- The value for money offered within the SGP – strong community leveraging through community development

Opportunities:

Opportunities presented by the MOG include:

- Cutting red tape through streamlined reporting;
- Closer connections to other funded services within DSS;
- Services oriented to population cohorts rather than visa classes; and
- Capacity to provide services oriented to need for recently arrived migrants and people of refugee background, with less focus on length of time in Australia.

Cutting red tape:

The reporting within the SGP is focused on quarterly reports and an online reporting database, OSCAR. There are clear and easy reductions in red tape available through shifting to a six-monthly reporting cycle and streamlining the online reporting database (which has not been significantly improved or updated for approximately three years). There is also the potential to move to an

annual qualitative reporting cycle supported by more regular quantitative reporting through an online database, particularly for agencies that are well known and have good internal governance.

Additional reductions in red tape can be found at the level of organisation reporting. With the diversity of funding bodies that SCOA members report to the move towards streamlining reporting to government through the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) red tape reductions are welcomed by the settlement sector. We acknowledge the reductions are still a 'work in progress' however they mark a positive trend towards simplifying and streamlining information collection.

SGP services have the capacity to triage to other specialised streams of services, at both a federal and state services level. Through well connected services which minimise duplication streamlined assistance can be provided to newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background. The local connections of SGP link people into services through strong relationships and warm referrals.

The SGP can also offer intelligence in informing policy in housing and a host of other areas, which SCOA can collate and forward through the appropriate networks nationally.

Service oriented cost cutting may be possible within some programs. For instance, elements of the CCS services may be better integrated within the HSS and SGP and within the rest of the DSS framework of services. This could utilise referrals to specialist disability and other services which could save considerable costs.

Closer connections to funded services within DSS:

While SCOA is yet to understand the full detail of funded services within the DSS mandate, there are specific and obvious connections between two portfolio areas, housing and disability.

Housing and ensuring access to affordable, secure and appropriately located accommodation has been an area of concern within the settlement sector for some time. Although we recognise this is not an issue unique to newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background, accommodation remains a critical settlement milestone which strengthens other settlement factors such as community links and social cohesion. We recognise the need for housing services to be provided within the appropriate frameworks; however, there are opportunities to improve results through improved cultural sensitivity and linking housing providers to SGP and settlement services.

Provision of services to clients with a disability from CALD backgrounds is an area where settlement agencies with their strong links to a wide range of ethnic communities presents obvious synergies between DSS and the settlement sector. Given the NDIS is still in its early stages it is worth ensuring that the service frameworks that develop within the program are culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive, both of which the settlement sector can readily contribute to.

Settlement services being able to compete for other DSS funding to add value to SGP through the one grant would also save costs and not duplicate services for those who are not ready to be integrated into the mainstream.

Services oriented to population cohorts rather than visa classes:

Orienting settlement and related community development support services to population cohorts, while acknowledging and understanding the differences represented by visa categories provides an opportunity to target services more tightly, for example to youth, women, seniors and families. In particular, the area of services to women there are likely to be unique gains made in aligning services for women at risk (204) visa holders with services for women provided within the DSS. SCOA recently completed a discussion paper on family violence (also attached in email) which contains a range of recommendations which may be pertinent, specifically the recommendations around education on prevention and community campaigns. It is critically important however that settlement services are funded to assist this pathway and to support cultural competence and capacity building of the broader women's sector.

Through the orientation components of settlement services, within the SGP and critically within the HSS, a positive approach to gaining familiarity and understanding of Australian cultural practice and norms is provided, particularly around education and family life. Strengthening understanding and promoting healthy relationships relating to child protection and family violence is an outcome of the SGP that provides opportunities to other programs and policy areas within the broader DSS environment.

Capacity to provide services oriented to need:

Settlement services have traditionally been provided primarily oriented around particular visa categories, taking into account the likely specific needs of each group. Within a needs based analysis framework, services have focussed on providing a coherent service and settlement pathways as people move along their respective settlement journeys. This generates strong outcomes for clients and the community. Reporting within the SGP and research in settlement can be strengthened through a stronger orientation to outcomes which reflects the strong qualitative outcomes of settlement support and can be challenging to quantify. Yet these are one of the key strengths of the program.

There are opportunities within the current suite of service changes to focus more closely on client need within the specialist support that settlement provides. Easing the time restrictions to service provision while retaining the defined support for orientation and settlement, which is essential for newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background, will provide an early intervention approach which invests in the future success of people while providing the needed orientation support.

Currently there are a range of services, particularly through the HSS provided within the first six months to 12 months of arrival. SGP services are generally available for up to five years complementing the HSS services. While many clients can navigate the mainstream at their HSS exit there is a considerable group of clients who need longer term settlement through SGP. For example,

women at risk, sole adults, people with various disabilities, people who cannot speak English and people who come from very rural environments may have difficulties. This is very critical in regional areas where the broader supports are not available. As clients exit one set of services they are referred to the next set of services.

Within a more comprehensive DSS framework which is oriented to specific client cohorts (rather than visa classes) there are potential savings available through a greater emphasis on client need that is not time limited. This may eliminate the requirement to exit and refer clients on as they progress through settlement. While existing services are definitely concerned with client need the time restrictions can create artificial barriers and cause confusion for clients. There is also potential for savings in the other mainstream areas, where mainstream programs mirror settlement services. NAYS is one example in this regard.

The investment in early intervention and access to services for migrants and people of refugee background has significant flow on benefits, particularly through increased community connections and stronger settlement outcomes in key areas such as employment and broader community capacity building which needs to be redefined with every new cohort of new arrivals. The social, civic and economic contributions of migrants and people of refugee background are well documented and provide a clear case for provision of early accessible support leading to independence and engagement in the wider community.

Settlement services can be successfully more specifically oriented to providing services oriented to employment, including career pathways, support for skills recognition and linking newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background to local networks. This is an area where early investment will drive strong dividends for individuals and the community at large.

Existing strengths of the SGP:

The SGP program has a range of strengths which will be important to retain in the event there are changes to the structure or organisation of the SGP program. The SGP program has evolved and been refined over many years resulting in a robust grants program that is closely aligned to client needs and which successfully leverages the strong connections agencies have within their communities. The specialist knowledge of agencies and staff has been built up over time resulting in settlement agencies generating significant expertise in program delivery and risk management.

The SGP program has developed within an environment where client demographics and needs change considerably over time. Flexibility and responsiveness has been built into the application and grant structure enabling both settlement agencies and the Government to respond to new cohorts of migrants and refugees as they arrive in Australia and cater to the needs of a wide variety of cultural and demographic groups. More flexibility needs to be built into the grants structure with respect to negotiating workplans to ensure quick responses to new locations, new cohorts and new needs.

The SGP and settlement agencies have developed strong community links, including direct community consultations which provide evidenced based service development and improvement. Agencies and staff have developed significant language and cultural competence to cater for a

variety of ethno specific cultural groups. Organisations have developed links and community connections with mainstream and ethno-specific groups. Many agencies have large volunteer programs which contribute to program outcomes and provide a practical way to foster social inclusion and cohesion for newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background. The SGP has also developed strong links to a range of related settlement oriented services such as the AMEP, building networks of services and support around newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background which are tailored to helping establish successful new lives.

Volunteering is a strength of the SGP. Settlement agencies and SGP programs have developed a specialist suite of services producing sustainable outcomes in volunteering, education, employment, social cohesion and community harmony. Many SGP workers establish volunteer programs providing mentoring and support to newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background, providing people the opportunity to become familiar with local workplaces, improve their English skills and promote social inclusion.

Settlement agencies have also been instrumental in building the capacity of and engaging new arrivals with the mainstream. SGP programs assist in the development of partnerships and collaborations with agencies that do not have strong cultural competence or are not directly involved in the settlement space, for example local councils, police, state and federal government agencies, service clubs, and sports clubs. The SGP has benefited immeasurably from the wide range of connections settlement agencies have developed which can be seen in particular from the diversity of funding sources settlement agencies access in developing and delivering programs.

The SGP program is governed by clear workplans, which have historically been delivered to a high standard by settlement agencies. The excellent and proven direct quantifiable and qualitative outcomes within funded workplans have had important flow on outcomes including:

- Strong support for community cohesion,
- Pathways for community governance,
- Opportunities for mentoring within a broad range of communities,
- A general focus on community empowerment which has contributed to successful, settlement and community inclusion,
- Increased volunteering opportunities, and
- Fostering work experience opportunities and improving job pathways.

Additionally SGP remains a necessary pathway for many vulnerable clients from HSS to other funded programs. The referral and casework components of the SGP are an important safety net in the wider set of settlement services. The SGP provides the necessary and broader supports for the client, their family and community to further HSS's initial settlement assistance by engaging generic and specific services and community supports. It fills in gaps where there is a lack of services and community supports which is particularly relevant in some locations such as regional rural settlement areas.

Efficiencies and effectiveness of SGP program

The SGP has particular efficiencies, including:

- Targeted nature of the program,
- Efficient provision of community development, and
- Long term benefits of investment in settlement.

Targeted nature of the program

The targeted nature of the SGP means it can respond to shifts in policy and demography as required. With the mobility of migrants and recently arrived people from refugee background this has historically been a key feature which has enabled agencies to respond as communities take up opportunities offered in regional areas in particular.

Efficient provision of community development

The SGP program is also an efficient delivery mechanism for community development support to what otherwise may be marginalised groups. Recently arrived migrants and people of refugee background can encounter issues in accessing the full range of government services and support and the SGP program provides an effective way to link newly arrived communities to mainstream services and through those links provide cultural capacity building to mainstream agencies.

SGP can be an important component of hubs where SGP funding reinforces existing programs providing the necessary glue to connect services which may otherwise be disconnected from each other and from newly arrived migrants and people of refugee background.

Long term benefits of investment in settlement

Investment in settlement support through programs such as the SGP can usefully be viewed as an investment in future Australians. There are significant early intervention benefits which flow from robust effective support in the early stages of settlement including:

- Fostering links to the wider Australian community;
- Avoiding ghettoization within newly arrived migrant communities;
- Strengthening social cohesion; and
- Strengthened employment outcomes through specialist culturally competent support.

There is a growing body of literature about the contribution of migrants and people of refugee background to Australia which in turn highlights the gains which can be made by effective early support.

Value for money

The SGP grants program is also good value for money. As a competitive program agencies have had to focus on efficient cost effective methods of service delivery refining and improving how services are delivered through successive grants rounds.

As mentioned above the SGP program is successful at leveraging community links and volunteer expertise, particularly in relation to:

- Program management, with significant involvement of volunteer management on boards.
- Program delivery, through volunteer programs and volunteer participation, and
- Mainstream capacity building and ownership.

Conclusion:

We want to work with the department to improve SGP, other DSS programs and other department services to our client groups. We are very conscious of the budget constraints and pressures on programs; however, we are also equally aware of the strong gains that flow from early investment in settlement support for migrants and people of refugee background.

The settlement sector, and the SGP as one of its primary programs, has demonstrated strong organisational strengths coupled with an outcomes focus for clients which foster:

- Employment pathways,
- Productive diversity, and
- Alignment with other programs.

SCOA and the settlement sector are committed to continuing to provide high quality settlement support and better services for our clients. We are conscious of the opportunities to identify future areas of support for settlement, fostering the productive inclusion of migrants and people of refugee background in all aspects of the Australian community.

We remain committed to supporting whole of government approaches to settlement, as articulated in the draft Settlement Framework, and look forward to exploring this important area with DSS further.

Attachments – in email:

- Family violence discussion paper
- Employment discussion paper
- SCOA Submission to DEEWR on JSA