

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Program/Agency: 1.7 National Security and Criminal Justice

Question No. SBE16/138

Senator Pratt asked the following question at the hearing on 12 December 2016:

Questions for the department:

The Application Process

The ANAO points out that the “processes through which applications were selected and subsequently awarded funding were flawed in significant respects” [page 7]. In particular, the ANAO notes that there were “... a number of departures from the published programme guidelines” [page 9].

1. What response has the Department taken in response to this finding?
2. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that this does not happen for future applications?

The ANAO notes that many applications failed to comply with the application requirements because they failed to attach a letter of support, or referee details [page 32]. Even where applicants did provide referee details, the ANAO report found that “the department did not follow up referees who were unable to answer the initial phone call. The department also decided not to contact some referees.” [page 40].

3. Why did the Department fail to ensure the applications contained referee details or letters of support?
4. Why did the Department fail to contact referees?
5. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that this does not happen for future applications?

The ANAO report also found that 10% of applications granted were ‘proposed services aimed at groups or communities more generally’, which was an area that AGD said would not be considered for funding under this project.

6. Why did the AGD decide accept applications that Department said would not be considered for funding?
7. Will the AGD accept future applications for these types of services?

Money

8. How much money was awarded under this program?

The ANAO report found that “Only 21 of the 42 recommended and approved applications should have been successful...” [page 7]. The ANAO estimates that this represents around \$1 million of the \$1.9 million awarded [page 7]

9. Does the Department agree with the ANAO’s finding that 1 million of the 1.9 million awarded went to applications that did not fulfil the Department’s criteria?
10. How much money has been spent improving the systems for this programme, including the application process?

The ANAO report also found "...a key shortcoming in the programme guidelines was that AGD had not made clear enough to applicants that a key purpose of awarding grants was to have funding recipients register for the Countering Violent Extremism Directory." [page 8]

11. How many recipients registered for the CVE Directory?

12. What steps has the Department taken to encourage further organisations to sign up to the CVE Directory?

13. What measures will the Department put in place to ensure that future recipients register for the CVE Directory?

Further improvement

The ANAO in its report acknowledges the AGD's submission that you have made improvements since the report's proposal. However, the ANAO noted that there remained "considerable scope for improvement in AGD's administration of grant programmes." [page 8]

14. What steps has the Department taken since the ANAO report to improve the administration of this programme?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

1 - 2. The following is in response to questions 1 and 2.

The department has made the following progress to implement the ANAO's recommendations:

- The department has established a Grants Community of Practice, consisting of all staff working on a range of grants programmes, and chaired by a Deputy Secretary. The Community of Practice has met on seven occasions in the past year with a range of specialist presenters providing detailed grants briefings.
- The Countering Violent Extremism Centre (CVE Centre), the area responsible for the LST grants programme, has identified a series of improvements to grants eligibility and merit assessment, and the advice provided to decision makers about grant applications. The Deputy Coordinator of the CVE Centre has met with the department's Grants Community of Practice on three separate occasions to ensure that the lessons learned from the LST audit are understood broadly within the department.
- The department's Corporate Services Division has developed mandatory checklists and guidance material for grants staff. This material was circulated to the grants programme areas of the department by the Chief Financial Officer on 5 September 2016, and includes specific requirements in relation to briefing decision-makers. It is also available on the department's intranet.
- The Corporate Services Division is also developing 'Knowledge Test' questionnaires to educate programme officers about the department's Grants Administration Guide and the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines. Once finalised, all staff working in grants programme areas will be required to undertake the 'Knowledge Test' on a biannual basis. New starters will be required to do so following commencement in a grants management role.

On 26 October 2016, the department's Audit and Risk Management Committee was briefed on the actions taken as a result of the finding of the ANAO report. The Committee, which has an independent chair, two independent members and two senior executive departmental members, agreed that the department is satisfactorily addressing the recommendations of the audit.

3 – 7. The following is in response to questions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The objective of the LST grants programme was to support community-based, non-government and local government organisations to help individuals move away from violent extremism (either directly, or through their families/friends). Grants were designed to build the sustainable capacity of organisations to deliver new, innovative services, or to refocus existing services, to address radicalisation. All applications recommended for funding by the department are considered to have met the policy intent of the programme.

The LST grants programme comprised a single round of funding.

The department established an expert team to assess the applications which comprised of external contractors and experienced CVE centre policy staff. Taking a narrower technical approach would have ruled out several important projects that have proven to be valuable in building capacity to work directly with vulnerable young people, such as projects that:

- provide training and mentoring for employers so that they are better able to identify where young people might be vulnerable to radicalisation
- set up a network of accredited mentors to work with young people
- offer early intervention casework and counselling services for families and individuals
- work directly with vulnerable young people more effectively, by providing cultural awareness training for staff, case managers and volunteers.

For example, one project ruled as ineligible by the ANAO on grounds of failing to provide written letters of support with their application already had an extensive working relationship with the department and a strong history of delivering CVE projects.

As above, the department is reviewing its processes and the information provided to officers involved in designing grant guidelines to ensure that requirements are clearly stated.

8. \$1.9M (GST exclusive) in total was awarded to 41 recipients. Individual grants ranged from \$15,000 to \$76,500 per organisation (GST exclusive).

9. As above (answers to questions 3 to 7), all applications recommended for funding by the department are considered to have met the policy intent of the programme. Overall the programme is considered to have been successful in meeting its critical policy objective: to support community-based, non-government and local government organisations to develop new and innovative services to help individuals move away from violent extremism.

10. As the Living Safe Together Grants Programme was a single round, no further investment in systems related to this programme is required. However, the department has a policy of continuous improvement in relation to grants administration and has implemented several related initiatives following the release of the ANAO report (see answer to questions 1 and 2 above).

11. As at 31 January 2017, forty-seven organisations that can provide a range of support services, including counselling, mentoring, employment and vocational training and sports programmes are currently included on the Directory of Intervention Support Services. This includes 27 LST grant recipients. We are also working with the remaining grant recipients to

support their transition onto the Directory. Information about the organisations on the Directory is available to jurisdictions, who can then procure services directly as required.

12. The department continues to work with States and Territories, CVE practitioners, and community groups to identify additional support services that may assist at-risk or radicalised individuals to disengage from violent extremism and reintegrate back into their community. As these services are identified, we seek their agreement to be included on the Directory of Intervention Support Services.

13. The LST Grants programme was a single round of funding.

14. See answer to questions 1 and 2 above.