# Modernising government grant management

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In this report, we analyse the current state of grants management in Australia and apply KPMG's customer-first lens to the processes at both levels of government. We identify opportunities to reduce fraud, improve the recipient experience and provide a holistic view of spending across a full portfolio.

The outcome of a modern grants management approach is an increase in public accountability standards, improved data quality and a more resilient program.

Government grants play a pivotal role in Australia's wellbeing, especially during times of crisis. But the rush to distribute funds quickly – along with ageing technology and siloed operations – can lead to flawed allocations, increased fraud, swollen administration costs and suboptimal recipient outcomes.

In an environment where expectations are high and public scrutiny is intense, how can governments streamline processes, cut through complexity and reduce the cost to serve?

This report explores the grant management landscape, unpacking the challenges and opportunities to define a new way forward.

# Contents

# 01

# The evolution of grant programs

The devastating combination of local bushfires and floods, the war in Ukraine and a global pandemic triggered an era of economic uncertainty in Australia. Grants, one of the main levers of government providing support for individuals and businesses, became part of the public conversation and with that came increased scrutiny.

## Grant programs fund a variety of activities

**1.** Ongoing service delivery, such as programs that support vulnerable families and children.

**2.** Supporting transition activities, such as industry or structural adjustment grants.

**3.** Supporting large-scale capital projects.

**4.** Responding to an emergency or crisis, such as natural disasters.

From design to execution and evaluation, the volume and urgency of grant programs required in recent years surfaced flaws and revealed questions about integrity and transparency. While many programs were rapidly introduced, they were also subject to high levels of fraud. The need and context for grants has changed and will continue to change, meaning how they're designed and implemented also needs to change.

All levels of government in Australia have a responsibility to define grant programs and deliver funding efficiently and fairly. Recipients can be individuals, not-for-profits or businesses.

Currently, it's difficult for administrators to have visibility of what grants are given, in which locations, to whom and for what reasons. These programs often have a highly manual and relatively high-cost operating model, thanks to outdated processes and technology. This hinders the ability of elected representatives, including mayors and ministers, and administrators to move at pace, work efficiently and minimise fraud and error. They can also prevent officials from having a clear understanding about the impact each grant program has for its recipients.

The inefficiencies from these outdated models also create high operating costs. There's an opportunity to reduce these costs so that ultimately more grant funding is available for recipients.

## The grants landscape

Almost

# $81 billion

was distributed through grants from the Commonwealth Government in Australia in the 2022–23 financial year.[1]

The Commonwealth Fraud Prevention Centre estimates between

# 3% and 5.95%

of total funds distributed can be attributed to fraud or payment errors.[2]

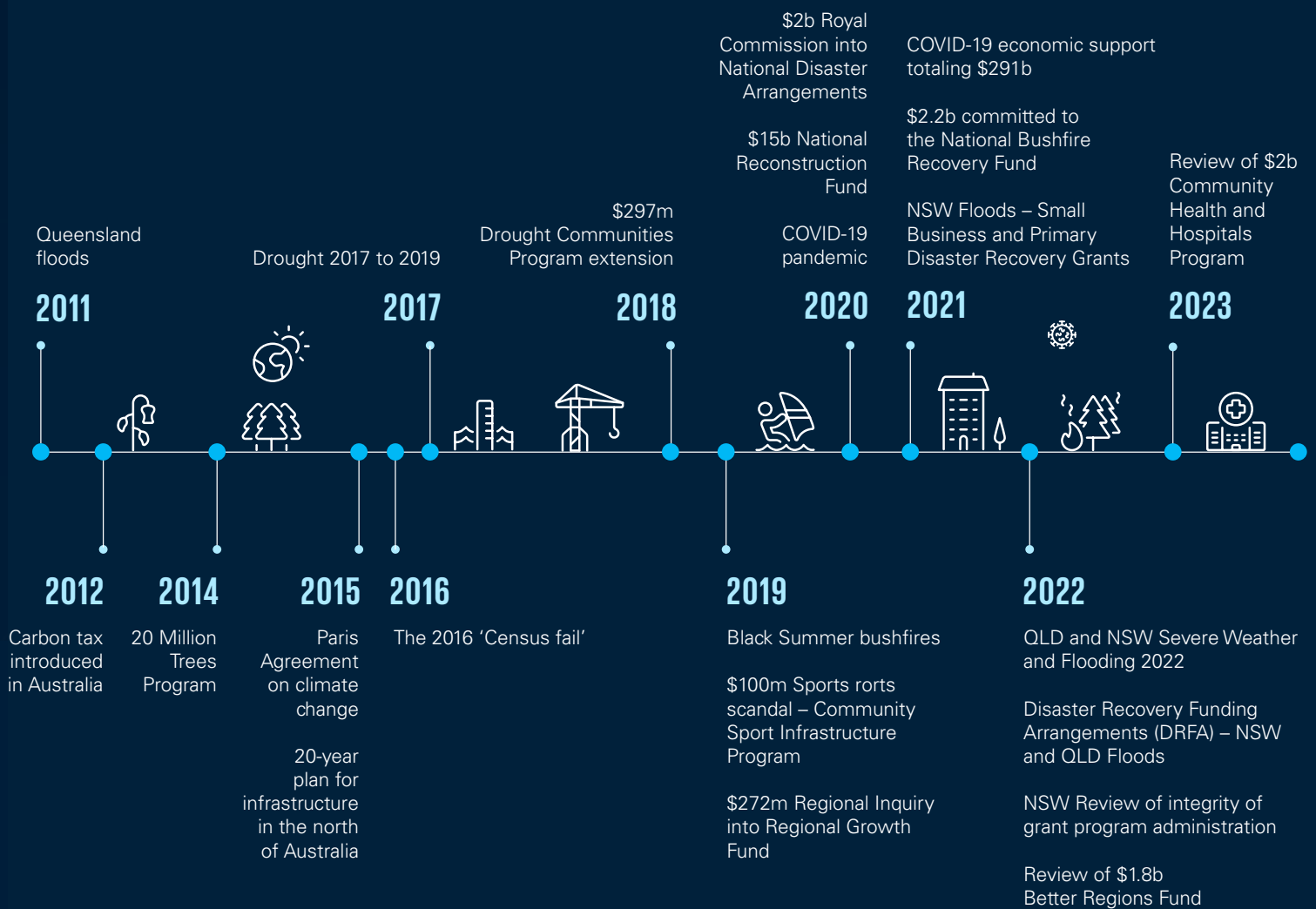| TOTAL COMMONWEALTH GRANT PAYMENTS BY SECTOR 2022–23 ($ MILLION)[3] | | |
|---|---|---|
| Health | $29,681 | 36% |
| Education | $27,708 | 34% |
| Skills and workforce development | $2,264 | 3% |
| Community services | $1,228 | 2% |
| Affordable housing | $2,477 | 3% |
| Infrastructure | $11,932 | 15% |
| Environment | $2,160 | 3% |
| Contingent payments | $1,550 | 2% |
| Other | $1,804 | 2% |
| **TOTAL** | **$80,803** | |

1   Commonwealth Government, 2022, Budget Paper 2 table 2.2, (source)

2   Commonwealth Fraud Prevention Centre, 2021, Understanding the Fraud Problem in Grants (source)

3   Commonwealth Government, 2022, Budget Paper 2 table 2.2, (source)

Over the past decade, we've seen an increase in the grants required for emergency situations such as natural disasters, when the timely distribution of government funds are essential to the recipients' survival and wellbeing.

Recent global events and natural disasters generated an extraordinary need for new, large-scale and urgent grants, and we see the need for that only increasing as the effects of climate change continues.



**2011** Queensland floods

**2012** Carbon tax introduced in Australia

**2014** 20 Million Trees Program

**2015** Paris Agreement on climate change

20-year plan for infrastructure in the north of Australia

**2016** The 2016 'Census fail'

**2017** Drought 2017 to 2019

**2018** $297m Drought Communities Program extension

**2019** Black Summer bushfires

$100m Sports rorts scandal – Community Sport Infrastructure Program

$272m Regional Inquiry into Regional Growth Fund

**2020** COVID-19 pandemic

$2b Royal Commission into National Disaster Arrangements

$15b National Reconstruction Fund

**2021** NSW Floods – Small Business and Primary Disaster Recovery Grants

COVID-19 economic support totaling $291b

$2.2b committed to the National Bushfire Recovery Fund

**2022** QLD and NSW Severe Weather and Flooding 2022

Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) – NSW and QLD Floods

NSW Review of integrity of grant program administration

Review of $1.8b Better Regions Fund

**2023** Review of $2b Community Health and Hospitals Program

## Types of grants

Grant programs at federal, state and council levels in Australia are either proactive or reactive.

A proactive grant program focuses on a specific goal and has a long-term strategic roadmap. They're often designed to incentivise new or changed behaviours, or to deliver an indented policy outcome. Reactive grants are typically in response to an unplanned event, such as a natural disaster, and are designed to provide immediate, short-term assistance to people and businesses who need it.

## Navigating negative perceptions

In the past three years, reactive grants schemes supported millions of individuals and organisations that had never previously needed government assistance thanks to catastrophic floods and bushfires, as well as the global pandemic. Fraud and waste in those grant programs have been the subject of much negative media coverage which has seen the erosion of trust in government.

Consequently, public expectations of both responsiveness and integrity from grants programs are higher than ever. That means the amount of government spending on grants and how they're delivered will remain in the spotlight for some time to come. Australians will continue to have high expectations for the efficiency and integrity of grants programs. We need to advance the approach to grant management in a way that balances speed and integrity, not demand trade-offs between them.

Federal grants funding increased 8% from the 2022–23 financial year to 2023–24.[4]

## Moving beyond the status quo

Many administrators have told us they believe current processes are efficient or that they can't move any faster because of the limitations with legacy technology and work practices. Others have told us that moving faster will compromise quality.

We believe there's an opportunity to modernise grants management to create better outcomes faster, improve transparency and reduce operating costs. A new approach could reduce administration costs, fraud, other wastage and provide ministers and public sector leaders with a full picture of their grant portfolios. It could also reduce the cost to serve and increase the overall experience for recipients. Collectively, these measures would contribute to improving trust in governments and grants programs.

This report will unpack three core opportunities to modernise grants management that will create a more efficient and effective process for administrators and recipients:

– Simplifying complex processes

– Standardising data and improving technology

– Reducing the cost to service grant programs.

# 02

# Simplifying complex processes

Reactive grant programs are designed quickly and need to be implemented faster due to the need for urgent support. In the speed to serve, administrators often invest in staff and external support to design, implement and manually assess eligibility. Some programs with manual processes may find higher than desired fraud levels because of the need to distribute funds swiftly. Programs with bespoke grant guidelines, reporting requirements and other elements may not have the same processes or datasets as other programs within the same department. This creates inconsistency within a portfolio which makes it difficult to obtain a holistic view across all grant programs. It also creates isolated data pools, meaning officials can't capture a single view of applicants, recipients or providers.

| Current grants management | Modern grants management |
| --- | --- |
| Bespoke processes | Repeatable processes |
| Short-term, tactical execution | Long-term, strategic planning |
| Manual review for eligibility | Automated eligibility reviews |
| Applies fraud indicators retrospectively | Automated fraud indicators applied at application |
| Reactive response to emergency grants | Proactive policies for anticipated threats |

If a grant program is executed poorly or if outcomes for intended recipients aren't achieved, government can be seen as being ineffective in how it spends significant amounts of tax dollars or in its interventions.

A fresh approach to grant management takes a broader perspective and applies a long-term view. It uses repeatable processes for the design, implementation, assessment and delivery of grants, as well as to detect fraud.

We expect post-pandemic government debt levels and the current economic conditions to put additional pressure on budgets, creating a stronger drive for governments to do more with less. The community expects public funds to be spent prudently and for grants to be designed and operated to reduce the risk of fraud.

## Speed vs diligence

Most grant management processes and platforms have been built with many layers of manual intervention, largely designed to provide checks and balances to overcome the risk of fraud.

### FRAUD IN GRANTS

In 2021, the NSW COVID-19 small business grants program was put on hold after more than **$20 million of payments**, or around **2.6% of all applications**, were suspected of being falsified.[5]

In Victoria and South Australia, up to **10% of emergency response grants** initially marked as eligible were later found to be either ineligible or fraudulent through an automated QA program.

NSW vowed to 'restore integrity to the State's **$4 billion grants system** with the introduction of a bill to make grants information openly available unless there is a sound public interest for not disclosing it. [6]

The Commonwealth Fraud Prevention Centre estimates as much as **$1 billion was lost to fraud in the 2021 financial year**.[7]

In early 2023, a citizen was sentenced to community work **for rorting a COVID-19 business grant program**. He created **28 fake businesses** in an **attempt to steal $180,000 in grants**.[8]

There's a perception that speed and diligence are mutually exclusive. That may be true under current ways of working, but a modern grants management approach enables speed and accuracy. A clear, repeatable grants process simplifies how officials can understand total administration costs, including fraud.

The cost of administering grants is typically around 3% to 10% of an overall program's budget. This overhead has an impact on overall productivity and capability.

### Aged processes and technology

We've observed a delta between the ambition of grant policies and the capability needed to deliver them. This is due, in part, to outdated processes and legacy technology which force staff to work on low-value, low-reward activities. Outdated technology is also expensive to maintain, which can contribute to the operational overheads of a grant program or a department.

Irrespective of the type of grant, administrators need to move at pace, work efficiently and minimise fraud. We've also observed a lack of consultation with the communities that grants are targeting, meaning the programs may have less impact.

5    Mondaq, 2021 Thousands of COVID Business Grants stopped as police look at fraud charges, (source)
6    ABC News, 2023, NSW Labor votes to legislate against pork-barrelling in allocation of grants, (source)
7    Commonwealth Fraud Prevention Centre, 2019, (source)
8    Aspiring Olympian created 18 fake businesses in COVID-19 grant rort, 18 January 2023, (Channel 9)

| IMPACT OF LEGACY PROCESSES AND TECHNOLOGY ON GRANTS MANAGEMENT |
| --- |
| Hinders the ability to work in new ways, such as repeatable processes, automation and digitisation |
| Creates multiple, isolated datasets about applicants and recipients |
| Limited visibility on how much is spent on a specific program, across a portfolio or in a specific electorate or location |
| Restricted ability to measure if a grant program achieves its intended goal |
| Difficult to view the grants experience from the perspective of applicants or recipients |
| People and businesses who need financial support may not receive it |
| Cumbersome processes create poor experiences for applicants, providers and recipients |

Administrators and ministers also need to understand the impact each grant program has for its recipients, which is difficult to achieve in many current instances.

A modern approach to data and technology enables administrators to extract information quickly and easily to create a real-time understanding of a program's progress and the progress of applications. It would also provide a complete picture of a business's or individual's grant interactions: their applications, assessment decisions and any flags for fraudulent activities.

Getting this right would minimise overheads, reduce fraud and increase the amount of funding available to eligible recipients.

### THE COST OF GRANT ADMINISTRATION

KPMG typically sees admin costs run at between **between 3% and 10%** of a program's budget

Targeted and effective changes to reduce the cost of administration can make a meaningful change to the outcomes of each grant program.

# Case study

Through the Commonwealth's audit process, a national agency didn't appropriately manage potential fraud in its billion-dollar grants program. The ANAO found the agency didn't consistently or sufficiently consider fraud prevention in its grant design or planning.

The agency distributed grants to more than 1,000 external providers between 2021 and 2022 and did not start any fraud investigations in the same period. Overall, the ANAO called the agency's prevention, detection and referral of potential provider fraud 'partly effective'.

# 03 Data standardisation and improving experience

KPMG believes best practice grants process should be applied from policy design to the evaluation of a program's impact. We've observed that grant applicants and recipients feel like more of a 'charity case' than genuine customers of the government. And with remarkable customer experiences available online, from banking to shopping, individuals and organisations reasonably have the same high expectations when interacting with the government. It should be easy to do business with government, but in many instances it's not.

> At times, grant application processes aren't suitable for their purpose. For example, bushfire survivors have been asked to submit proof of identity when applying for emergency grants, despite all their personal documents being burned or damaged beyond repair. This is frustrating for applicants who have already survived a deeply traumatic experience.

We've also observed application processes collect just enough information for officials to make decisions that may be adequate for a specific point in time limiting the amount of data collected. This results in less ability to cross-reference with other functions or departments to check for fraud or other spurious activities. Taking a strategic approach that has a set of consistent, standard core requirements would streamline the user experience and enable integrity in decision-making. It would also facilitate data connections between programs and departments.

These issues serve to erode confidence and faith in grants programs at a time when there's enormous pressure on administrators to prove trustworthiness.

Furthermore, there's a deepened expectation from citizens that governments demonstrate integrity in their decisions. There's a broad belief in the community that indicates this standard isn't being met and that at least some grants decisions are influenced by politicians to win votes.

One report found that of the 19,000 grants in 11 programs between 2017 and 2021, the former Coalition government allocated $1.9 billion in funding initiatives to government seats. Only $530 million was allocated to opposition seats during the same time.[9] The same report sampled programs in Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales and found government seats received more than $1 million in funding on average, compared to just over $300,000 for opposition seats.

9    The Grattan Institute, 2022, New politics: Preventing pork-barrelling, (source)

## The true cost of servicing grants programs

There's an expectation to see 'on the ground' results for every grant dollar spent. The reality is that overheads consume much of a grant program's budget, affecting how much funding makes it to recipients. Unfortunately, many grant administrators don't know the operating cost of their programs. KPMG has worked with many grant giving organisations that don't know the administration cost of each program they operate, which reveals a significant opportunity to improve.

We've observed that the cost of administration increases with the complexity of a grant management system and its supporting processes. Improving efficiencies by just 1% could result in an additional $810 million being available to eligible recipients.

### Grant program operating costs

Administration, including people, processes and technology

Fraudulent claims

Ineligible recipients

3-8%

10%

5%
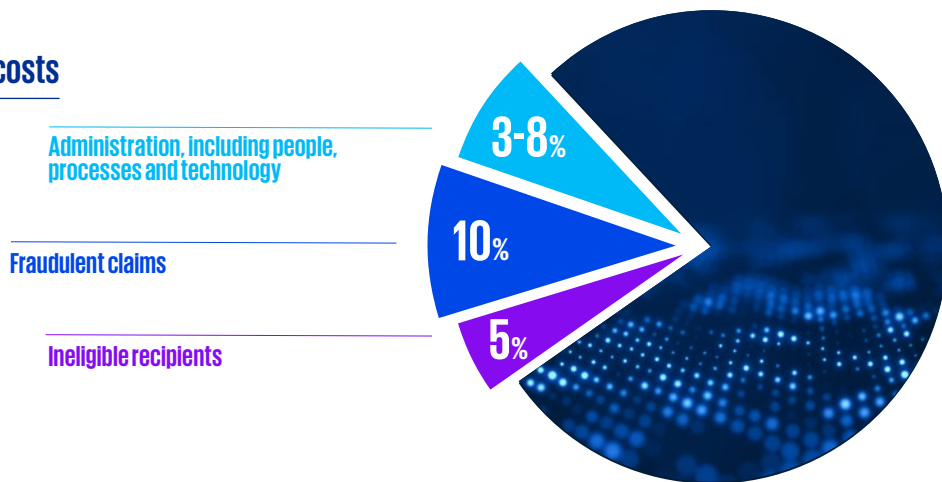
These figures don't account for the costs that grant recipients incur. The overheads generated from a poor grant management process is a significant burden and can notably slow down the distribution of grants or delivery of services through that grant to its end users. A poor experience and lack of customer centricity serves to deflect them from the added value they could be – and should be – providing to the communities they serve.

An Australian National Audit Office report[10] into the Australia Council Grant Program within the past five years found that one grant program spent 51 cents of every grant dollar on administration. A different program spent just 1 cent per dollar on admin. There can be many reasons for this disparity, including the number of applications and the overall grant fund available, however, administration efficiency should remain a top priority to deliver public value.

Governments should have a clear understanding of the true cost of operating grants programs so clear benchmarks can be determined. This could set expectations about what's acceptable so officials can manage performance against those standards.

### Are objectives being achieved?

Administrators also need to understand how recipients use funds. Officials need the confidence that grant programs are addressing the problems they were designed for. They also need to demonstrate the value delivered during any audit office reviews.

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**IMPACT OF DISCONNECTED SYSTEMS**

Recipients need to provide the same data to government repeatedly, **often having to prove eligibility in different ways**.

Decision-makers **struggle to obtain accurate data** on the **value and volume of grants** for specific regions.

Grant recipients **may not comply** with the needs of one agency, meaning **payments are withheld**. But a colleague agency may not have visibility on this non-compliance and continue to disburse funds to the same recipient.

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10   ANAO, 2017, Efficiency of the Australia Council's Administration of Grants, (source)

## Poor grantee experiences create high costs and frustration

### THE IMPACT OF POOR EXPERIENCES

An Ombudsman Report in Victoria into just one grant Fund **found over 500 formal complaints.**

Customers prefer **knowledge bases over all other self-service channels.** [11]

There's a distinct opportunity to both improve recipients' government grant experience and enhance standards of integrity for administrators.[12] Administrators rarely have a complete view of grant applications or recipients, which compromises the accuracy of outcomes and provides an incomplete understanding of flaws in existing processes.

Grant applicants have reported feeling frustrated and even defeated after experiencing poor systems, complex forms, rigid processes and feeling they're not making progress.[13]

Administrators need systems and experiences that are designed to accommodate those complex needs.

A connected effort across functions and departments to streamline and even standardise core needs and definitions for the grant application and management process could help improve the overall experience, lower costs and improve integrity.

Positive experiences with the grant application, decision-making and distribution processes will improve community trust in the government and the overall grants program.

[11]   Forrester (2018) Customer Service Trends (Source)
[12]   KPMG, 2022, Customer centricity can transform grant management, (source)
[13]   KPMG, 2021, Modernising Government: Global trends, (source)

# 04
# A new approach to grants management

A sustainable, long-term approach to the definition, application, assessment and distribution processes for grants will help to reduce fraud and increase community trust.

## The core elements of a successful grants function are:

designed citizen first

data driven

digitally delivered

Designing grant programs that align the operating model to a core set of standardised and repeatable practices is an effective way to deliver streamlined experiences.

KPMG and Forrester Consulting found that governments believe the customer experience they offer lags in comparison to the private sector. We also found that forward-looking governments put customer needs at the heart of future policy and ambitions,[14] which is the same approach that leading private organisations take to create outstanding experiences.

Grant management is often managed on inflexible, outdated legacy systems that have many opportunities for improvement. We must note that this is a global issue and not isolated to the Australian context. When examining the big picture for grant management, advances in efficiency that come from modernising the administration platform aren't limited to governments. Legacy platforms also create significant overheads for other organisations involved in the distribution of grants, especially providers.

### What does good look like?

We see the ideal future state for administrators as using case management, customer management, workflow, automation and analytics applications. The unintended differences in grant processes and requirements would be minimised, if not eliminated.

A customer-centric design approach to grants will create an efficient, effective and positive experience for recipients and administrators, giving them confidence when answering questions like:

– What level of confidence do you have that funding is going to the right recipients?

– Are your grant programs achieving the intended outcomes?

– For each million spent, how much of that makes it to the recipients?

– How much of each program is wasted or lost to fraud?

Transforming grant management creates better outcomes for everyone involved. This includes reducing administration costs, improving access to grants, helping recipients and increasing trust in grant programs.

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14   KPMG, 2021, Modernising Government: Global trends, (source)

Grounding these approaches in modern, agile, adaptable technology platforms can foster automation and agile decision-making, freeing up time for both the government and grant recipients. This can improve integrity and public trust by focusing on a customer-centric grant management process and help to ensure that a greater portion of government funding gets to the intended end users.

Implementing modern and adaptable platforms will enable automation and agile decisions. This creates efficiencies of cost for both administrators and recipients. As a result, more funding will be available for the intended recipients and public trust and the integrity of grants programs will be improved.

## Building digital capability

Current technology is essential to build digital capability for administrators, lowering costs, improving efficiency and providing a high return on investment.

### BENEFITS OF A SINGLE PORTFOLIO VIEW FOR PROVIDERS

- How much a recipient has received
- Automate reporting
- Centralise contacts
- Reduce administration overheads

### BENEFITS OF A SINGLE PORTFOLIO VIEW FOR GRANT MANAGERS

- Reduce time spent on low-value tasks
- Improve service provision
- Identify service misuse
- Launch new grant programs faster and with a deeper understanding of the provider network

### BENEFITS OF A SINGLE PORTFOLIO VIEW FOR POLICYMAKERS AND EXECUTIVES

- Detailed and accurate data that connects funding to outcomes
- Measure and understand the impact of grants
- An insights-led feedback loop that can directly input into public policy
- Answer the question: Did we make things better?

Technology has a key role to play in government and administrators' efforts to become modern, trusted and agile.[15] This approach also demands a different type of thinking to introduce and sustain.

## AUTOMATION

Significant benefits for high-volume grant programs

A rigorous, automated process could check an applicant's trading solvency, company registers, board memberships, conflicts of interest, etc.

Has the potential to significantly reduce fraud and expedite fund distribution[16]

## GRANT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Removes low-value tasks from officials and case workers

Data-led insights on where and how grants are spent

Efficiency gains lead to better recipient outcomes

Reduce administration overheads

## DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS

Measure process efficiency

Track the flow of funds

Identify how and where grants are helping

## STREAMLINED RISK MANAGEMENT

Intelligent automation can reduce fraud and errors

Improves the perception of fairness

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15 KPMG, 2021, Modernising Government: Global trends, (source)

16 KPMG, 2022, Customer centricity can transform grant management, (source)

# 05 How we can help

KPMG Powered Grants provides an end-to-end assessment and recommendation for how to design, establish, run, equip, close and monitor programs. It's a bespoke offering that combines our consulting experience with our technology and assurance practices.

KPMG Powered Grants enables governments to rapidly design and implement programs to get support to people and places when it's needed, without any trade-offs to the integrity of a program. It gets funding to the right people, in the right places and at the right time. And that helps administrators focus on the highest-value aspects of their role instead of doing repetitive manual tasks.

We can manage the whole grants journey with a full platform but can also provide individual modules, as we recognise some administrators may simply need advice. And because we understand the flow-on impact of information and processes, the outputs of individual modules of KPMG Powered Grants are optimised for the next step of the journey.

KPMG Powered Grants advises on the best course of action to take, manages the full process and can be tailored to meet the specific needs of a program. It enables officials to quickly take effective action, drive efficiency and ensure transparency. And it can deliver multiple grants to multiple cohorts of recipients.

It can give government leaders an accurate view of the cost to service a grants program, reduce admin costs and optimise the amount of funding that recipients receive. And it delivers grant funding quickly and accurately, ensuring that ministers and government are satisfied, along with the recipients themselves.

## Features of KPMG Powered Grants

- Accept, manage and process applications
- Administer grants
- Manage documents
- Track progress
- Send regular updates
- Make payments
- Risk and compliance analysis
- Generate real-time reports

# Supporting the end-to-end grant management process

## Advise

Our consultancy offers advice and support, including the design of grant frameworks and programs, reviews and market research. This helps officials to:

– manage risks

– ensure appropriate design

– embed continuous improvement

– capture meaningful insights and outcomes.

## Enable

We can deliver a technology solution on Microsoft or Salesforce platforms. The cloud-based application will collate and interrogate data to:

– realise efficiencies throughout the grant lifecycle

– provide real-time insights for simplified reporting

– capture clean and consistent data to drive decisions, compliance and assurance.

## Manage

Our grant management platform is an end-to-end managed service of best practice for people, process and technology. Comprised of modules that can be implemented individually or together, our solution provides:

– tailored options and pre-configured processes

– repeatable and customer-centric processes

– quality outcomes for applicants and recipients

– designed and administered grants programs

– surge support when it's needed.

## Assure

KPMG Powered Grants integrates strategic and operational quality assurance measures into the entire grant program lifecycle. Our approach incorporates dynamic risk assurance into every outcome. This gives officials confidence and assurance in the grants process, including:

– fraud detection and prevention

– data-based decision-making

– a transparent and trustworthy process

– confidence that grants provide the right people with the right funding at the right time.

# Case study

The KPMG Australia Data Risk team developed a quality assurance model for a state government department. This independently assessed every grant for eligibility, fraud and compliance before payment.

It replaced a heavily manual, sample-based approach and significantly accelerated application-to-payment timeframes. It lowered the error rate of grant payments and provided interactive reporting. This provided all stakeholders a sense of trust and confidence in these significant grant payments.

## Benefits

Officials can track applications at every stage of the progress, providing more accurate reporting to ministers and the public. And it helps administrators demonstrate clearly that money has been spent well and if the program objective has been achieved.

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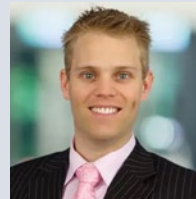**Partner, Consulting**
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Jennifer helps clients define their needs and connects them with KPMG's deep expertise to help solve problems or deliver outcomes. She has worked within government and consulting, giving her a unique perspective on how to work together for good.

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Mark understands the importance of balancing technology transformation with effective risk management. He has a keen interest in improving complex processes through automation and AI, while keeping human oversight in the loop and ensuring efficient risk and governance processes are embedded. Mark is a leader in the Powered Data and AI Practice and heads up the Powered Grants Assure pillar and has led the automation and assurance for some of Australia's largest grants programs.

Mark's work spans data platforms, migration, quality, governance, AI and more. He's also a key contributor to KPMG's Directors' Toolkit | Board Governance Guide – KPMG Australia.

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