

# Community Legal Centres Queensland

## Reducing costs in community legal centres

### The project

The Queensland Government funded Community Legal Centres Queensland to produce a report on cost savings opportunities within the legal sector and with the broader community sector.

### Project Findings

Overall the project identified limited areas for costs savings for CLCs in their operating budgets due to the underinvestment in expenditure not specifically related to providing direct services. This underinvestment is consistent with benchmark research across the social and community sectors.

The project also found that the buying power of the Queensland CLC sector is an insufficient incentive to external retailers/service providers to reduce their prices. Savings for CLCs through group buying schemes are only possible if Queensland CLCs can join schemes that cover more than the Queensland CLC sector.

### Recommendation for Action

1. **Structured Volunteering:** Community Legal Centres Queensland scope the level of non-legal support by pro bono firms through a structured volunteering process.
2. **Capacity Building and Sector Sustainability:** Due to the underinvestment of CLCs in operational support there is an identified need for an ongoing sector sustainability strategy for Queensland CLCs to add value to existing CLC operating budgets. Some of the key areas for a sector sustainability strategy are: human resource management, evaluation and outcomes measurement, communications, alternative funding, training and development opportunities and internal policy and procedures.
3. **Professional Development and Training:** Community Legal Centres Queensland maintain a strategic focus on providing appropriate training and development activities for CLCs for free or at highly affordable costs.
4. **ICT:** Community Legal Centres should identify future opportunities to contribute to and leverage CLC specific ICT projects occurring in other jurisdictions.

### Cost Savings Resource

The project identified existing schemes that could assist CLC to either stretch their budgets further or supplement their existing resources. These included resources in the areas of:

- Staff and Volunteers
- Clients
- Overheads
- Fundraising

The resource can be found at <http://communitylegalqld.org.au/costsavings>.

## Areas of investigation

A number of operational areas were tested for cost savings.

### Human Resources

- Human Resource Management support was identified as a clear area for building future capacity in the sector. A structured volunteering program with non-legal support from law firms may provide some assistance, as well as CLCQ focussing on this as an area for its sector capacity building strategy.
- Staff training and development that is free or low cost and tailored to the work of CLCs was identified as an important way CLCQ supported CLCs to stretch their training budgets.
- A group buying scheme for outsourcing salary packaging functions of pay roll had a low level of interest.

### Service Delivery

- Currently Queensland CLCs pay the full cost of practising fees for employed solicitors. Other jurisdictions in Australia enjoy free or discounted practising certificates. While the Queensland Law Society provides free volunteer practising certificates, there may be scope in the future to negotiate discounted employed solicitor practising certificates.
- As part of this project CLCQ developed a resource in collaboration with Justice Connect Not for Profit Law on Partnership and Collaborative Relationships to assist with developing and maintaining relationships across the broader community sector.
- The CLCQ Self-Evaluation toolkit for CLC which is currently being trialled will support CLCs to better evaluate the outcomes of their services and demonstrate the value of investment in CLCs.

### Office Overheads

- The project identified that CLCs were eligible for the Queensland Government procurement scheme for office supplies and provided information to CLCs about the scheme.
- As a result of surveying CLCs it was determined that there was insufficient buying power as a group to drive down prices on telephone costs, electricity and document storage that involves only CLCQ members. However CLCQ will continue to monitor and promote broader group buying schemes where applicable.
- CLCQ should investigate future opportunities to contribute to and leverage off the ICT developments being undertaken in the NSW CLC sector in partnership with NACLC.

### Governance

- Mergers/Colocations were investigated for their possible cost savings. Forced mergers or colocations are problematic and costly. Should Queensland CLCs voluntarily pursue these options, there would be a role for CLCQ to facilitate and support such activities. Costs savings are only likely to manifest in the long term, with significant financial investment required to successfully undertake the merger/colocation process.

### Alternative Funding

- There was strong sector interest in building its capacity to garner non-government resources with development and fundraising work. This is an area where CLCQ can continue to provide training and support.