

Final Evaluation Report: Holiday Break Program

The Office of Regional Youth,
Department of Regional NSW

28 April 2023



Nous Group acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging, who maintain their culture, country and spiritual connection to the land, sea and community.

This artwork was developed by Marcus Lee Design to reflect Nous Group's Reconciliation Action Plan and our aspirations for respectful and productive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

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Glossary

Acronym / terminology	Definition
Applicant	Refers to Regional NSW councils and not-for-profit organisations that are invited to apply for funding to provide social and recreational activities for young people.
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
Delivery providers	Refer to Partners and Applicants collectively
the Department	Department of Regional NSW
the HB Program/the HBP	The Holiday Break Program
KLEs	Key lines of enquiry
LGA	Local Government Area
MOUs	Memorandums of Understanding
NFPs	Not-for-profit organisations
NGOs	Non-government organisations
OOHC	Out of home care
ORY	Office of Regional Youth, within the Department of Regional NSW
Participant	Young person who participated in a Holiday Break Program activity
Partner	<p>As a collective, 'Partners' refers to all Holiday Break Partners who receive annual funding. Partners are divided into three sub-categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Locally based Partners' refer to those who have a more permanent presence in regional communities (<i>PCYC, STARTTS, and The Museum of Contemporary Art</i>) • 'External Partners' refers to Partners which are based outside of the regional communities where they deliver activities (the <i>KYUP! Project, The Museum of Contemporary Art, NSW Rugby, Create NSW</i>) • 'Sub-Partners' refers to the organisations that <i>Create NSW</i> has subcontracted to deliver on its behalf.
Priority cohorts	Refers to the seven cohorts of young people which Partners and Applicants are required to target their activities to: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people; young people that are carers; Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people; young people from a refugee background; LGBTIQ+ young people; young people living with disability; young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
SES	Socio-economic status

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HOLIDAY BREAK PROGRAM EVALUATION: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Holiday Break Program (the HB Program) supports equity of access to recreational activities to a wide range of young people living across regional NSW while supporting local communities.

HB Program activities are valued by youth for the new social and creative experiences they provide

Delivery providers build new relationships with each other, and with young people

ADMINISTRATION

The Office of Regional Youth funds diverse organisations (delivery providers) to run activities


207
APPLICANTS


7
PARTNERS

HB Program cost
\$5.69 million
and created
546 jobs

EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT

Five types of activities are offered to regional youth (12-24 years old)

More than **46,000** young people went to an activity






96%
'really liked' or
'liked' the activity



55%
said that the best
part was the 'fun activity'



ACTIVITY TYPES

 **43%** Art
 **41%** Sport and Fitness
 **7%** Music
 **4%** Technology
 **4%** Life Skills

DELIVERY PROVIDERS

Long-term partners and one-off grant applicants deliver holiday activities across regional NSW


233
activities from
APPLICANTS
(57%)


246
activities from
PARTNERS
(43%)

568 activities

Activities ran in
92 regional LGAs



PRIORITY COHORTS



Priority cohort representation among survey respondents

25%**
Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait
Islander

13%
Culturally and
Linguistically
Diverse

7%
Living with
disability

LGBTQIA+

Experiencing
socio-economic
disadvantage

3%
Refugee
background

3%
Carers

YOUNG PEOPLE, DELIVERY PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TOLD US THAT THE HB PROGRAM HAD DIFFERENT IMPACTS IN DIFFERENT REGIONAL NSW COMMUNITIES

Bourke

The HB Program brings innovative new activities to young people, and build community connections

Muswellbrook

The HB Program provides activities in remote areas, and supports the Arts sector

Coffs Harbour

The HB Program activities fill gaps in what is available particularly for 'priority cohorts'

Lismore

The HB Program helps local youth to recover from adversity

Albury

The HB Program builds on existing initiatives to deliver activities to diverse groups of young people

THE HB PROGRAM IS DELIVERING ON ITS INTENDED SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES



STRONG EVIDENCE

Increased engagement between young people and local organisations

Improved access to recreational, physical and creative activities

Reduced barriers to activity participation for young people

MODERATE EVIDENCE

Social relationships between regional youth participants

Strengthened local capacity for councils to host activities

Increased contract opportunities for local organisations

EMERGING EVIDENCE (based on self-reporting from regional youth)

Strengthened creativity, physical, cognitive and emotional skills

THERE ARE FOUR KEY WAYS THE HB PROGRAM CAN BE MADE EVEN BETTER IN THE FUTURE

- 1 Set the HB Program's strategic objectives to best support priority cohorts and better guide funding decisions about delivery
- 2 Set longer term funding cycles and facilitate relationships between holiday periods to better sustain the benefits
- 3 Streamline processes to better support Applicants (particularly smaller NFPs) to apply for and deliver the HB Program
- 4 Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework, including a minimum dataset, to support implementation outcomes

1 Executive Summary

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This evaluation found that the Holiday Break Program (HB Program) is broadly operating well, with a strong footprint across regional NSW and activities that are enjoyed by a large number of young people. For young people in regional NSW, the evaluation found that the HB Program provides access to social and recreational activities not consistently available outside metropolitan regions due to remoteness and social isolation, fewer market driven solutions, decreased access to services and a higher likelihood of developmental and social vulnerabilities.

Now in its third year, the HB Program has demonstrated a strong proof-of-concept by meeting, or being on track to meet its intended short-term outcomes to strengthen social relationships between participants, increasing engagement between young people and local organisations, providing increased access to new recreational and creative activities, while generally supporting delivery providers to host and deliver recreational and social activities and creating opportunities for new contracting arrangements between local organisations and not-for-profit organisations.

As it transitions out of this establishment phase, the evaluation found opportunities to better define the outcomes the HB Program seeks to achieve for regional youth and communities. This can guide more strategic decision-making about which activities and organisations to fund and support, and how. A more strategic approach can also address some delivery challenges around better targeting priority cohorts and managing the Office of Regional Youth's (ORY) time intensive HB Program administration processes.

Background

The Holiday Break Program (HB Program) is coordinated by ORY within the Department of Regional NSW (the Department). The HB Program is part of the NSW Government's \$200 million Regional Recovery Package which is supporting regional communities to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters. The HB Program provides regional youth between the ages of 12 and 24 years old with opportunities to connect, socialise and have fun during the school holidays by delivering a range of free activities across regional NSW. The objectives of the HB Program are summarised in Figure 1 below.

Regional NSW councils, not-for-profit organisations and other eligible organisations are invited to apply for funding to provide social and recreational activities for young people (referred to as Applicants in this report). NSW Government agencies and non-government organisations (referred to as Partners in this report) are also engaged to deliver activities over multiple holiday periods and multiple locations.

Figure 1 | Objectives of the HB Program



Purpose of the evaluation

In May 2022, ORY engaged Nous Group (Nous) to undertake an evaluation of the HB Program across the holiday periods of Autumn, Winter and Spring 2022, and Summer 2022-23. The purpose of the evaluation was to evaluate the short-term outcomes of the HB Program including: program administration; program reach across regional NSW and priority cohorts; impact on young people; and the experiences of delivery providers (Partners and Applicants).¹ This evaluation was guided by six key lines of enquiry (KLEs):

1. What is the operating context and need the HB Program seeks to address?²
2. How effective and efficient is program administration?
3. What is the reach of programs across regional NSW and priority cohorts?
4. What was the impact on young people who have participated in the HB Program and how can the HB Program be improved?
5. What was the experience of delivery providers (Partners and Applicants)?
6. What was the impact of the HB Program in specific places?³

This report provides evaluation findings to KLEs 2-6, structured around three 'focus areas' (see Table 1 below). Findings relating to KLE 1 are at Appendix B.

Table 1 | Three focus areas

Focus area	KLEs
1 Reach, enjoyment, and impact (Section 44)	KLEs 3, 4 and 5
2 Impact on local capacity, regional communities, and the Arts sector (Section 50)	KLEs 4, 5 and 6
3 Program administration (Section 66)	KLE 2

Summary of HB Program outcomes

The HB Program was designed to achieve a range of short-term outcomes.⁴ The nature of the HB Program, and the activities it delivered, meant it was more closely aligned with some of these outcomes than others. This was consistent with the evidence gathered through this project; stronger evidence was received to support those short-term outcomes the HB Program was more closely aligned to, as shown in Figure 2 overleaf. It is to be emphasised that this evaluation did not receive any evidence suggesting the HB Program, through its current design, could have done more to support delivery of the short-term outcomes beyond a more intentional approach to funding local organisations.

In particular, there is strong evidence to suggest that the following short-term outcomes were achieved:

- Increased community engagement between young people and local organisations.
- Increased opportunity to access recreational activities.
- Expanded range of innovative creative and recreational activities.
- Barriers to participation by regional youth in recreation and social activities are reduced.
- Increased physical activity.

¹ Short-term outcomes included: improved social relationships between participants, increased engagement between young people and local organisations, increased opportunity to access recreational activities (including innovative and creative activities), increased physical activity, strengthened creativity, imagination, self-confidence and self-efficacy, strengthened physical social, cognitive and emotional skills, localised contracting opportunities for local organisations and NFP organisations and strengthened capacity for local councils to host recreational and social activities.

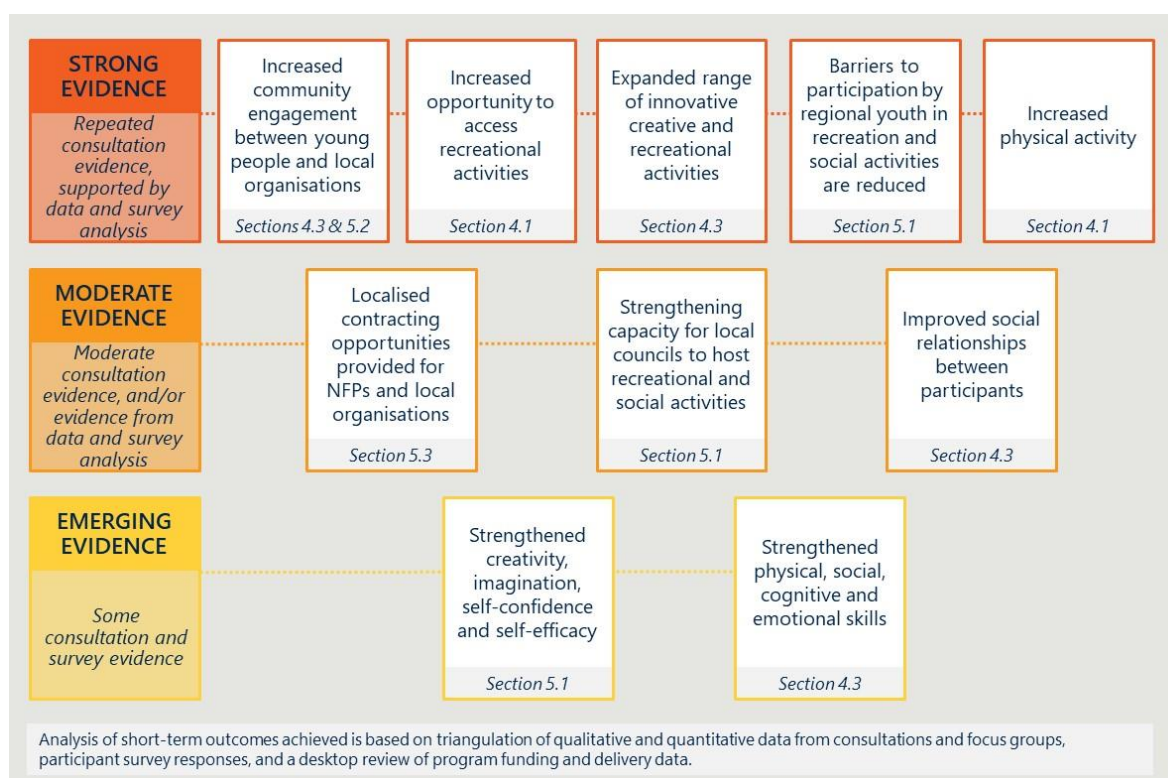
² KLE 1 is addressed in Sections 2 and 3, and Appendix B - Literature review.

³ KLE 6 is also addressed in Appendix A - Five place-based case studies.

⁴ HB Program's Short, Medium and Long Term outcomes are outlined in its Program Logic.

There was moderate evidence to suggest that the HB Program is contributing to capacity building of local not-for-profit organisations (NFPs), local organisations and councils with examples of new partnerships and relationships created as a result of the HB Program. There were some emerging evidence provided by youth participants about building new skills and confidence as a result of activities, although it was not possible to develop conclusive findings about long-term skill building. It is likely that some medium and longer-term outcomes are also on-track (e.g. established relationships between service providers and young people). However, given the HB Program is in its first few years of delivery, this evaluation report does not present findings related to these outcomes.

Figure 2 | Evidence of short-term HB Program outcomes being achieved



Summary of evaluation findings by focus areas and case study locations

Table 2 below outlines evaluation findings based on focus area. This is followed by Table 3 on page 6, which provides more detail on the impact of the HB Program in five specific communities (agreed in advance with ORY to reflect a broad range of communities).

Table 2 | Key evaluation findings by focus area

<p>The need the HB Program seeks to address</p>	<p>Young people in regional NSW are a diverse population, with different strengths, challenges and needs compared to their peers in metropolitan areas.</p> <p>Regional youth have unique strengths but face increased risk of social isolation, have fewer opportunities for social activities and decreased access to services.</p> <p>Social and recreational activities are a possible means of supporting young people to overcome regional challenges and reach their full potential.</p> <p>The most effective social and recreational activities for youth leverage the local understanding of community organisations.</p> <p>Inclusion must be at the forefront of community-led and government-supported programs.</p> <p>See Appendix B for mor information on these findings.</p>
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Reach, enjoyment, and impact of the HB Program

Holiday Break activities were well-attended with a strong footprint across regional NSW. Attracting priority cohorts and transport are key challenges.

HB Program activities were well-attended with more than 46,000 (13% of all regional youth) attending between Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022-23. While survey numbers suggested high attendance by priority cohorts, consultations indicated challenges in targeting some cohorts (people with disability, low SES and LGBTQIA+). All delivery providers with high attendance of priority cohorts agreed that intentionally targeting priority cohorts through a considered choice of activity and outreach efforts were the most effective strategy to engaging them.

Most HB Program activities were delivered by NFPs, although council-run activities attracted more attendees. The HB Program delivered activities across nearly all regional local government areas (LGAs), include remote areas, with similar numbers of young people attending activities across most LGAs (an average of 143 young people attended each activity). Of the 570 activities delivered, Sports and Arts activities accounted for most activity types and highest attendance. Transport to and from activities is the primary barrier to regional youth attendance at HB Program activities, especially amongst priority cohorts.

Nearly all regional youth found the HB Program activities enjoyable. There was strong interest in more arts and music activities.

Nearly all (96%) young people enjoyed HB Program activities. Young people were particularly keen to access more arts and music activities.

HB Program created opportunities for regional youth to have fun, socialise and gain new experiences.

Most young people reported 'fun' as the main benefit of the HB Program. Several stakeholders emphasised the HB Program provided access to new creative and social experiences which are otherwise unavailable in regional NSW. HB Program was also identified as strengthening social cohesion and giving young people opportunities to socialise and make friends.

Impact on local capacity, regional communities, and the Arts sector

HB Program supported providers to address service gaps and build and strengthen relationships between providers.

HB Program supported providers to deliver free, high-quality activities that meet community needs and address gaps. HB Program strengthened existing networks between providers and supports the creation of new connections in regional communities.

The HB Program is well served by a mix of Partners and Applicants however funding allocations between Partners and Applicants could be more intentional to align to community needs.

Locally based Partners and Applicants strengthened local capacity, communities and the Arts-sector while external providers addressed market gaps. Applicants were more effective at targeting priority cohorts while Partners required different methods, often through local partnerships. Supporting longer-term relationships are critical to sustaining benefits.

The HB Program is strengthening the Arts sector and created some job opportunities for local artists.

The HB Program provided some employment opportunities in the Arts sector. Activities delivered in partnership helped to build Arts sector capacity and equip local artists and art-based organisations to deliver their own programs.

Program administration

While the flexible program administration was generally seen as appropriate, there was scope to strengthen forward planning and support for smaller NFPs.

Partners and Applicants were supported to deliver recreational activities through flexible administration of the HB Program. Areas to strengthen administration included forward planning and support for small, resource constrained NFPs and some regions.

There are opportunities for ORY to streamline some resource-intensive processes and focus on more strategic planning.

HB Program funding of \$5.6million supported 317 organisations to deliver activities.⁵

Most funds were invested in the Spring break, while Winter had the lowest delivery cost for activities. While a significant majority of funding supported sport/fitness and arts activities, Life Skills were the most expensive to deliver. By region, the North Coast received the most funding while Illawarra Shoalhaven was the most expensive by attendee.

⁵ Note: The budget for the HB Program over Autumn 2022 – Summer 2023 was \$5.3m. Funding distributed was higher through internal reallocation of funds by ORY.

Table 3 | Summary of the impact of HB Program in place-based case study locations⁶

<p>In Albury and surrounding areas, \$52,760 was invested in 7 activities</p>	<p>The HB Program built upon existing initiatives in Albury to support community organisations to deliver to a broader cross section of young people.</p> <p>The HB Program supported local organisations to make existing activities more accessible for young people and priority cohorts and built on the existing capacity of local Albury organisations by supporting them to try new things and form new partnerships. The HB Program created difficulties for some Albury organisations with its reporting requirements, and distribution of funding. The HB Program funding was particularly valued in Albury and surrounding regions as a way to improve social relationships between participants following lengthy COVID-19 lockdowns, and as a way to build new relationships between participants and local organisations.</p>
<p>In Bourke and surrounding areas, \$123,995 was invested in 13 activities</p>	<p>The HB Program supported Bourke organisations to deliver new activities and build partnerships. Regular activity delivery is key to realising the greatest outcomes in Bourke and surrounding areas.</p> <p>Sport is an important part of Bourke’s culture that is well catered for in comparison to creative arts activities; HB Program funding was particularly valued to strengthen increased access to physical activities and to fill a gap in access to creative activities The HB Program provided an opportunity for local organisations in Bourke to collaborate with established not-for-profits across NSW. In dispersed remote areas, consistent and regular provision of activities during each holiday period enables forward planning and strengthens access.</p>
<p>In Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and surrounding areas, \$96,726 was invested in 12 activities</p>	<p>Successful engagement with young people in Coffs Harbour and its surrounding areas requires purposeful and targeted social and recreational activities, with strong local partnerships.</p> <p>Coffs Harbour and the surrounding area’s large migrant and refugee population are a key group to consider when delivering activities in these locations. This cohort particularly valued the chance for new social relationships between participants and the opportunities to access recreational activities. The HB Program supported organisations in the Coffs Harbour area to deliver new activities and build sustainable relationships. Applying for and delivering the HB Program was a challenge for some small local organisations who struggle to source workers and volunteers.</p>
<p>In Lismore and surrounding areas, \$17,540 was invested in 2 activities</p>	<p>HB Program activities provided Lismore young people with an effective way of addressing and overcoming adversity, including the impact of recent flooding events.</p> <p>Arts activities supported Lismore young people to reconnect with their peers and community and build resilience following the recent floods. While Lismore’s young people have need for HB Program activities, few local organisations had capacity to deliver social and recreational activities. The HB Program could greatly support the Lismore recovery effort and re-engagement of young people with longer-term funding and support.</p>
<p>In Muswellbrook and surrounding areas, \$98,278 was invested in 16 activities</p>	<p>The HB Program filled a gap in Muswellbrook by providing new experiences for young people based outside of the city centre and provided a way to engage local artists after COVID-19.</p> <p>The HB Program supported young people in Muswellbrook and surrounding areas to engage with a variety of new activities, especially arts activities. The HB Program supported community organisations to strengthen the local arts sector and re-engage young people after COVID-19 lockdowns. Limited resources were a key barrier to applying for HB Program funding, due to a high reliance on volunteers.</p>

⁶ Funding and activity deliver data is based on Applicant delivery and funding data for the period Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23. More detail about each of these case studies is at Appendix A.

Summary of recommendations

Building on the evaluation findings, Nous identified four key recommendations. They are intended to continue to strengthen the HB Program and ensure strategic investment of grant funding, as it transitions from a proof-of-concept establishment phase to an ongoing initiative in ORY's suite of programs for regional youth. Table 4 below outlines these recommendations.

Table 4 | Recommendations to improve the HB Program

Opportunity	Timeframe
<p>1 Set the HB Program's strategic objectives to best support priority cohorts and better guide funding decisions about delivery providers.</p> <p>ORY could define the HB Program's strategic objectives more clearly, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> defining the outcomes the HB Program seeks to achieve for each priority cohort defining the outcomes it seeks to achieve in communities and what factors should guide decision-making about appropriate delivery providers. <p>This can then inform decisions about the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> balance of funding to Partner versus Applicant organisations, based on community needs types of activities and Applicants the HB Program seeks to fund. 	0 – 6 months
<p>2 Set longer term funding cycles and facilitate relationships between holiday periods to better sustain the benefits.</p> <p>ORY could explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options for longer term (i.e. annual) funding cycles that enable Applicants to commit to delivery activities further ahead, and support Partners to return to communities. The use of virtual sessions to build information sharing and co-delivery relationships between Partners and Applicants beyond holiday periods. Opportunities to support Partners and Applicants to develop longer-term connections with regional youth beyond holiday periods, for example, via an active social media page or an online portal. 	6 – 12 months
<p>3 Streamline processes to better support Applicants (particularly smaller or resourced constrained NFPs) to apply for and deliver the HB Program.</p> <p>ORY could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline the HB Program administration for Applicants by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> simplifying application and acquittal processes (e.g. not requiring submission of minor receipts) outlining example expenses that Holiday Break funding can support. Explore the use of ORY's regional coordinators to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> local councils and NFPs to learn about the HB Program and their eligibility to apply applicants to apply for, report on, and deliver the HB Program, including through clear guidance on what success looks like. 	0 – 12 months
<p>4 Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework, including a minimum dataset, to support ongoing improvement in program delivery and better outcomes for regional youth.</p> <p>ORY could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement consistent data collection practices to build a minimum dataset across Partners and Applicants to ensure similar data is collected across Partners and Applicants. Consider the establishment of an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework, supported by a data strategy that identifies data points that support ORY to understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementation success (e.g. number of attendees, type of activity) performance against the HB Program Outcomes. 	6 – 12 months

2 Background and purpose of the evaluation

This section provides the background and context for the evaluation.

2.1 Background and context

As agents of social change, economic development and progress, young people are an essential part of vibrant regional communities. There is substantial evidence demonstrating that young people thrive and develop best when able to regularly participate in recreational and social activities. However, young people in regional NSW often face geographical, financial and accessibility barriers that impact their ability to enjoy recreational and social activities within their local communities.

Part of the Department of Regional NSW's vision for regional NSW focuses on supporting vibrant and inclusive communities. This involves ensuring that rural residents have access to experiences in places with quality services and infrastructure, as well as a focus on inclusivity and community support.⁷ More specifically, the NSW Government's vision for regional young people discusses the need to build communities which feel vibrant and inclusive.⁸ The Holiday Break Program seeks to address these goals by providing support and enrichment activities so that young people have the best chance to thrive in regional NSW.

The Department of Regional NSW (the Department), through the Office of Regional Youth (ORY), commissioned Nous Group (Nous) to undertake an evaluation of ORY's HB Program across the holiday periods of Autumn, Winter and Spring 2022, and Summer 2022-23. This is the first evaluation of the HB Program.

2.2 Overview of the HB Program

The HB Program is coordinated by ORY and is part of the NSW Government's \$200 million Regional Recovery Package which is supporting regional communities to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters. The HB Program provides regional youth between the ages of 12 and 24 years old with opportunities to connect, socialise and have fun during the school holidays by delivering a range of free and subsidised activities across regional NSW.

The activities provided through the HB Program provide what may otherwise be unavailable in many regional communities: opportunities for children and young people to connect, socialise, and have fun. ORY manages the HB Program, with a range of delivery Partners (including *Create NSW*, *NSW Rugby*, the *KYUP! Project*, *The Museum of Contemporary Art*,⁹ *The Office of Sport*, *PCYC*, and *STARTTS*) and Applicants (grant recipients) delivering activities across rural and regional NSW.

⁷ NSW Gov (2022) – Our Vision for Regional Communities

⁸ NSW Gov (2022) – Regional NSW Youth Framework

⁹ *The Museum of Contemporary Art* is no longer a Partner, with their final holiday break as a Partner being Summer 2022-23. Given this evaluation was undertaken while *The Museum of Contemporary Art* was a Partner, they are treated as such for the purpose of this report.

The HB Program's objectives are to:

- address geographical, financial and accessibility barriers that impact the ability of young people in regional NSW to enjoy recreational and social activities within their local communities;
- provide funding for local councils and regional NFPs to host fully subsidised recreational and social activities;
- deliver a program of engaging, high-quality events during the NSW school holidays;
- increase access to free, local recreational and social activities that are responsive to the needs and interests of children and young people, and;
- assist the Arts sector to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 through creation of employment opportunities targeting Arts sector employees.

A program logic to describe the HB Program, adapted from a program logic provided by ORY, is provided in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 | HB Program Logic, adapted from content provided by ORY



A key feature of the HB Program approach is the funding of holiday activities (sports and fitness, art, music, technology, life skills and other) across two funding streams:

- Regional NSW councils and regional, NFPs and other eligible organisations are invited to apply for funding prior to each holiday period to provide social and recreational activities for young people (referred to as Applicants in this report). Applicants are eligible for funding up to \$15,000 (dependent on the holiday period).
- NSW Government agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) are also engaged through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) to deliver a wide range of additional activities (referred to as Partners in this report).¹⁰

The HB Program recognises that some young people have specific service and accessibility needs when accessing recreational and social activities within their local communities. To meet the needs of these young people, Applicants and Partners are required to provide activities which target one or more of the following seven 'priority cohorts'¹¹:

1. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people
2. Young people that are carers
3. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people
4. Young people from a refugee background
5. LGBTIQ+ young people
6. Young people living with disability
7. Young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

¹⁰ As a collective, 'Partners' refers to all Holiday Break Partners who receive annual funding. Partners are divided into three sub-categories: locally based Partners, external Partners, and Sub-Partners. 'Locally based Partners' refers to those who have a more permanent presence in regional communities (*PCYC, STARTTS and The Office of Sport*). 'External Partners' refers to Partners which are based outside of the regional communities where they deliver activities (the *KYUP! Project, The Museum of Contemporary Art, NSW Rugby, Create NSW*). 'Sub-Partners' refers to the organisations that *Create NSW* has subcontracted to deliver activities on its behalf. Sub-Partners largely operate like external partners, but in some cases have stronger connections with regional communities compared to external Partners.

¹¹ NSW Department of Regional NSW, 2022 Holiday Break Program; Grant Guidelines, 25 February 2022.

3 Evaluation methodology

This section outlines the methodology undertaken to deliver the evaluation.

3.1 Purpose of the evaluation

In May 2022, ORY engaged Nous to undertake an evaluation of the Holiday Break Program. The purpose of this evaluation was to evaluate the short-term outcomes of the HB Program as well as:

- the effectiveness and efficiency of program administration;
- the current reach of programs across regional NSW and priority cohorts;
- the current impact on young people who have participated in the HB Program and feedback on current and future activities, and;
- the experiences of delivery providers (partners and Applicants).

The evaluation was conducted between June 2022 and April 2023. This report outlines the evaluation findings.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report is structured in sections as follows:

- **Section 1** provides an executive summary of the evaluation.
- **Section 2** outlines the background and purpose of the evaluation.
- **Section 3** outlines the methodology undertaken to deliver the evaluation.
- **Section 4** outlines the reach, enjoyment, and impact of the HB Program.
- **Section 5** outlines the HB Program's impact on local capacity.
- **Section 6** outlines Nous' findings regarding program administration.
- **Section 7** presents recommendations and future considerations to improve the HB Program.
- **Appendix A** - Five place-based case studies.
- **Appendix B** - Literature review.
- **Appendix C** – Survey results and consultations.
- **Appendix D** – Partner delivery data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).
- **Appendix E** – Partner funding arrangements (Autumn 2022 to Summer 2022-23).
- **Appendix F** – Applicant delivery data and funding (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).

3.2 Key lines of enquiry

The evaluation was guided by six key lines of enquiry (KLEs). In Table 5 below, these KLEs are mapped to the sections of this report where relevant findings are discussed.








Table 5 | Evaluation key lines of enquiry mapped to report sections

Key line of enquiry	Section of this report
1. What is the operating context and need the HB Program seeks to address?	2 Background and purpose of the evaluation Appendix B Literature review
2. How effective and efficient is program administration?	6 Evaluation findings – Program administration
3. What is the reach of programs across regional NSW and priority cohorts?	4 Evaluation findings – Reach, enjoyment, and impact
4. What was the impact on young people who have participated in the HB Program and how can the program be improved?	4 Evaluation findings – Reach, enjoyment, and impact 6 Evaluation findings – Program administration
5. What was the experience of delivery providers (Partners and Applicants)?	5 Error! Not a valid result for table.
6. What was the impact of the HB Program in specific places?	4 Evaluation findings – Reach, enjoyment, and impact 5 Error! Not a valid result for table. Appendix A Five place-based case studies

3.3 Evaluation methodology

A mixed methods approach was used to collect and analyse a diverse range of insights from stakeholders, including young people, delivery partners, community members (in case study locations) and ORY. The evaluation was staged over June 2022 to March 2023, with key activities outlined in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 | Overview of HB Program evaluation¹²

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE	TIMING
 Desktop Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of HB Program documents and data. Desktop review of best practice literature. 	June – July 2022
 Participant Survey	A voluntary participant survey was distributed to Winter 2022 – Summer 2022-23 Holiday Break activity youth participants.	Winter (Partner activities only), Spring and Summer breaks
 Partner Stakeholder Consultations	Consultations with Partners were undertaken to assess what is working well and what could be improved in the HB Program.	June – July 2022
 Interim Report	Interim insights were delivered to ORY, based on insights / analysis to date.	November 2022
 Place-based Consultations [Albury/ Bourke/Cobar; Coffs Harbour; Lismore, and; Muswellbrook]	Focus group consultations were undertaken across five case study locations. Stakeholder groups were: (i) Program Partners and Applicants; (ii) Local Councils (Applicant councils); (iii) Local education and sports & recreation organisations; (iv) Local not-for-profits and Non-government organisations, and (v) Regional youth who had participated in a HB activity	November 2022 – January 2023
 Data Analysis	Analysis of HB Program delivery data, cost data and survey results.	January – March 2023
 Evaluation Report		April 2023

¹² Ethics approval was not required for the stakeholder engagement undertaken in this evaluation. In line with the National Statement on Ethical Research, parent/guardian consent was obtained for young people 14 years and younger who responded to the participant survey and/or participated in consultations. Young people aged 15 years and older provided their own informed consent to participate in this evaluation.

Data sources used to inform this evaluation

Evaluation findings in this report are based on a triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data sources described below.

Qualitative data sources:

- Desktop review of program documentation provided by ORY and published literature about the social and recreational needs of regional youth.
- 1,760 survey responses were received across all three holiday periods.
- Seven Partner organisations were consulted in semi-structured interviews.
- One consultation with ORY in a semi-structured interview.
- Five place-based case studies through semi-structured consultations with:
 - nine Applicants operating in case study locations (three NFPs and six local councils);
 - seven Partners (including three Sub-Partners) operating in case study locations (*STARTTS*,¹³ the *KYUP! Project*, *PCYC*,¹⁴ *NSW Rugby* and *Create NSW Sub-Partners*¹⁵);
 - seven young people who had participated in HB Program activities in case study locations, and;
 - six other local organisations (local educational and sporting institutions and local NFPs /NGOs).

Quantitative data sources:

- Partner delivery data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).¹⁶
- Partner funding arrangements (Autumn 2022 to Summer 2022-23).¹⁷
- Applicant delivery and funding data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).¹⁸

Data limitations and implications for interpreting evaluation findings

This evaluation provides evidence based on ORY program data, Partner and Applicant data provided by ORY, participant surveys and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. There are some limitations to the information sources that informed this evaluation. These are detailed in Table 6 overleaf.

¹³ Representatives from *STARTTS* were consulted with as part of the Albury and Coffs Harbour semi-structured interviews.

¹⁴ Representatives from *PCYC* were consulted with as part of the Albury, Bourke, and Muswellbrook semi-structured interviews.

¹⁵ Representatives from *Create NSW Sub-Partners* were consulted with as part of the Lismore semi-structured interview.

¹⁶ The data provided to Nous varies for Autumn 2022 – Summer 2022-2023 Partners. As described in Appendix E - Partner delivery data, Partner data for activities outlines: Partner and Sub-Partner organisation name, activity descriptions, start and end date, and locations and LGA.

¹⁷ These include Office of Sport MoU, MCA MoU, *PCYC* Holiday Break Proposal, *Create NSW* Holiday Break Proposal, Letter from ORY to *NSW Rugby* (dated 4 August 2022), *KYUP! Project* Revised Budget and Payment Schedule, and *STARTTS* Budget and schedule of activities and payment.

¹⁸ The data provided to Nous varies for Autumn 2022 – Summer 2022-2023 Partners and Applicants. Applicant data for activities outlines: organisation name, organisation type (council/NFPs), activity category, funding allocated, LGA, electorate, attendees, jobs created.

Table 6 | Data limitations and implications for interpreting findings

Data Type	Data limitations
Participant Survey Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses were received from 1,760 young people, out of a total 46,108 participants (3.8% response rate). • While all young people were invited to complete surveys by Applicants and Partners, surveys were optional for young people to complete, and all questions within the survey were optional; therefore, not all young people participated and that some surveys were returned without all questions responded to. • Survey participation from young people may be subject to self-selection bias. i.e. those who felt strongly about their experience (positively or negatively) may have been more inclined to respond to the survey. Priority cohorts may be over-represented in the data due to stronger encouragement to complete surveys by some delivery partners working exclusively with priority cohorts. • Survey responses from the Winter break included only responses from young people who had participated in Partner activities. Spring and Summer activities included survey responses from Partners and Applicants. Survey responses from Spring 2022 and Summer 2022-23 included responses from young people who participated in Partner and Applicant activities.
Partner funding arrangements (Autumn 2022 to Summer 2022-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all Partners delivered activities across all HB Program periods (e.g. <i>NSW Rugby</i>). • Funding agreements varied as to how they described apportionment of funding (e.g. <i>Create NSW</i> budget details costs on an annual basis, not per period).¹⁹ • Partner funding agreements varied in the form in which they were provided, and the information they contained (e.g. <i>Office of Sport</i> was received as an MOU, while <i>NSW Rugby</i> was provided as a letter with camp and funding schedules).
Partner delivery data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on Partner activities included the name/description of activities that took place, the date of delivery, the age group (for Winter and Spring), the sub-partner that delivered the activity (if applicable), and the LGAs in which activities took place. Unlike Applicant data, it did not consistently contain information related to attendees, activity cost or activity type. • Partner data did not contain specific cost distributions.
Applicant delivery and funding data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorisation of activity data was inconsistent. For example, some art related activities, like watching a movie, were miscategorised under sport and fitness.²⁰ • Applicant data contained a mix of complete and incomplete acquittals. Cost and attendee findings are based on a combination of actual costs and attendees (as reported in Applicant acquittals), and estimates made in application forms (as acquittals were not completed by all Applicants in all breaks).
Place-based consultations / case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five case study locations were selected based on: distribution across regional NSW; a variety of HB Program activities being provided, and diverse community experiences (e.g. recent flooding events). • Participation in consultations were potentially subject to self-selection bias and may not be representative of all experiences. Participation was optional for stakeholders (Partners and Applicants; local councils; local education and sporting institutions; local NFPs and NGOs, and; young people).²¹ • Though local councils who were not HB Program Applicants were invited to participate in place-based consultations, none participated.²² • Insights from young people who participated in place-based consultations may be impacted by a selection bias. i.e. those who had a positive experience may have been more inclined to participate.²³

¹⁹ To account for this, *Create NSW* funding was equally apportioned across four Holiday Breaks when undertaking cost analysis.

²⁰ Note: Applicant activities can only be categorised against one category for each holiday period. In some cases, multi-event activities may have been captured inconsistently (e.g. where sport/fitness activities and arts activities were delivered jointly by an Applicant).

²¹ However, Nous did invite all Partners and Applicants delivering activities in each of the case study locations and invited a wide range of other local institutions and organisations to participate in consultations.

²² Local councils which were Applicants did participate in place-based consultations (Bellingen Shire Council, Snowy Valley Council, Albury City Council, Upper Hunter Shire Council, Singleton Shire Council, Muswellbrook Shire Council)

²³ A total of thirteen young people participated in place-based focus groups.

4 Evaluation findings – Reach, enjoyment, and impact

This section presents evaluation findings regarding the Holiday Break Program’s reach, program enjoyment and impact on regional youth.

KEY FINDINGS

The Holiday Break Program activities were well-attended with a strong footprint across regional NSW. Attracting priority cohorts and transport were key challenges.

HB Program activities were well-attended with more than 46,000 (13% of total regional youth in NSW) attending between Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022-23. While survey numbers suggested high attendance by priority cohorts, consultations indicated challenges in targeting some cohorts. Most HB Program activities were delivered by NFPs, although council-run activities attracted more attendees. The HB Program delivered activities across nearly all regional LGAs, with similar numbers of young people attending activities across most LGAs. Of the 570 activities delivered, Sports and Arts activities accounted for most activity types and highest attendance. Transport to and from activities is the primary barrier to regional youth attendance at HB Program activities, especially among priority cohorts.

Nearly all regional youth found HB Program activities enjoyable. There was strong interest in more arts and music activities.

Nearly all (96%) young people enjoyed all types of HB Program activities. Young people were particularly keen to access more arts and music activities.

The HB Program created opportunities for regional youth to have fun, socialise and gain new experiences.

Most young people reported ‘fun’ as the main benefit of the HB Program. Several stakeholders emphasised the HB Program provided new experiences (e.g. creative activities) which are otherwise unavailable in regional NSW. The HB Program was also identified as strengthening social cohesion and giving young people opportunities to socialise and make friends.

In **Albury and surrounding areas**, the HB Program supported local organisations to make existing activities more accessible for young people and priority cohorts, and built social cohesion.

In **Bourke and surrounding areas**, sport is an important part of the local culture, and is well catered for in comparison to creative arts activities; the HB Program is working to meet this need.

In **Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and surrounding areas**, the large migrant and refugee population are a key group to consider when delivering activities; social relationships and access to activities were identified as key benefits of the HB Program by these priority cohorts.

In **Lismore and surrounding areas**, arts activities supported Lismore young people to reconnect with their peers and community and build resilience following the recent floods.

In **Muswellbrook and surrounding areas**, the HB Program supported young people in Muswellbrook and surrounding areas to engage with a variety of new activities; arts activities were especially valued.²⁴

²⁴ See Appendix A for more detail.

4.1 HB Program activities were well-attended with a strong footprint across regional NSW. Attracting priority cohorts and transport were key challenges.

This section discusses evaluation findings regarding the reach of HB Program activities to regional youth and across regional NSW.

4.1.1 HB Program activities were well-attended with more than 46,000 attending between Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022-23.

HB Program activities were well-attended by regional youth. According to Applicant data, 46,108 young people attended HB Program activities between Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022-23 (of a total of around 364,000 regional youth in NSW, or 13%)²⁵. There was no data available on the number of young people who attended Partner activities. Attendance was highest during Spring 2022, and lowest during Winter 2022:

- Spring 2022 (Including Youth Week) – 13,444 attendees
- Autumn 2022 – 12,251 attendees
- Summer 2022-23 – 11,966 attendees
- Winter 2022 – 8,447 attendees.

4.1.2 While survey numbers suggested high attendance by priority cohorts, consultations indicated challenges in targeting some cohorts.

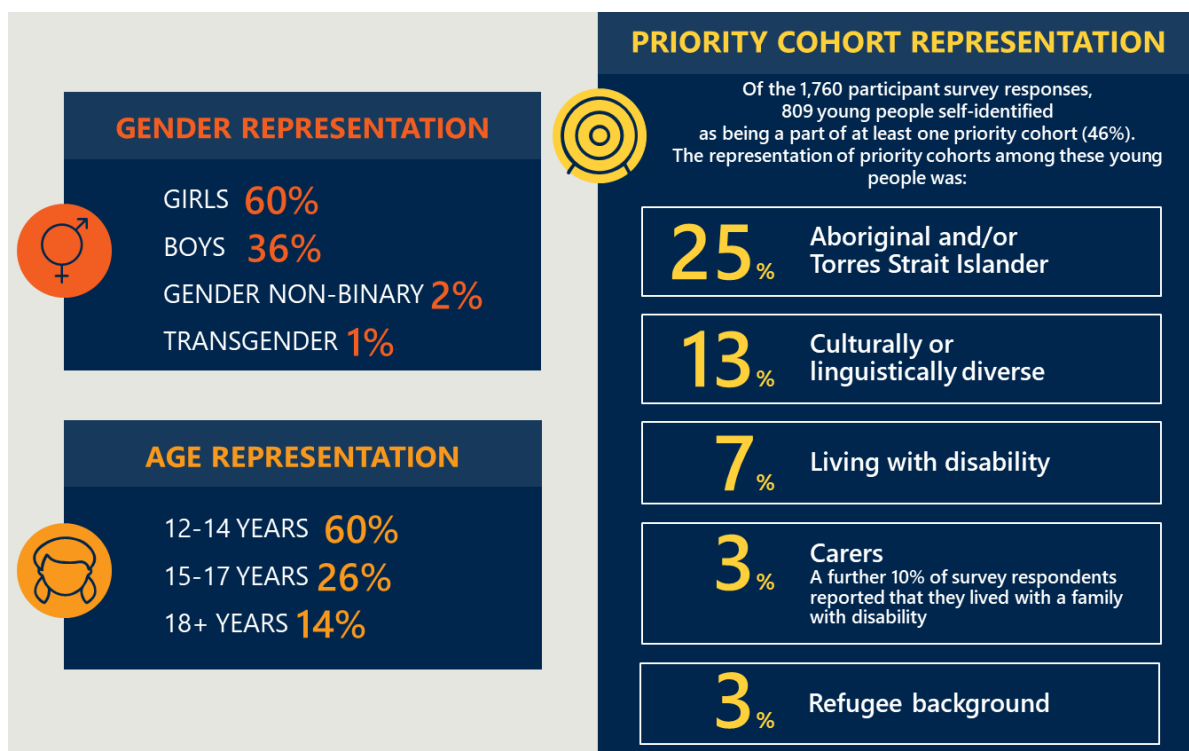
Based on survey data, 46 per cent of regional youth survey respondents self-reported that they belong to at least one priority cohort. This indicates a strong priority cohort representation at activities where young people chose to complete surveys.²⁶ However, this may be a result of self-selection bias in survey responses as many delivery providers reported challenges in targeting priority cohorts (see below).

Figure 5 overleaf provides an overview of survey respondents' self-reported demographic data, which is discussed in more detail overleaf.

²⁵ Department of Regional NSW 2022, Regional NSW Youth Framework: Empowering youth in regional NSW. [\[Link\]](#).

²⁶ Surveys were provided to all Partners and Applicants to distribute in the Spring 2022 and Summer 2022-23 breaks (and to Partners in the Winter 2022 break). However, surveys were optional for young people to complete, and responses were not received from young people at all activities.

Figure 5 | Demographic snapshot of regional youth participants²⁷



Strong representation was seen in the following cohorts:

- **Girls:** A total of 1,021 survey respondents (representing 60% of all responses) self-identified as girls. This may reflect more willingness among girls to fill in the optional survey or may reflect activities being more appealing to - or targeted directly at - girls. For example, all eighteen activities delivered by the *KYUP! Project* were solely offered to girls.
- **12-14 year olds:** Survey respondents indicated most (60 per cent) regional youth participants were between 12 and 14 years old, with proportion of attendance decreasing as age increases. Some stakeholders reported interest by children aged under 12, driven by family needs to find holiday activities for siblings.
- **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people:** One quarter of all survey respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared to 3.4 per cent of the total NSW population.
- **CALD cohorts:** 13 per cent of all survey respondents identified as CALD (compared to a state average of nearly 18 per cent of people in NSW born in a country where English is not the primary spoken language).

Some priority cohorts were underrepresented among survey respondents:

- **Regional youth with disability²⁸** (7% of survey respondents) and **regional youth who are carers²⁹** (3% of survey respondents). This could reflect challenges regarding appropriate targeting of activities, inclusive access and appropriateness of activities and supports for these groups.

²⁷ All demographic data displayed is based on self-reported demographic data from young people who chose to fill in the participant survey. With a total of 1,760 surveys completed among a total of 46,108 youth participants, it is likely that actual demographics of youth participants differs from this snapshot. In the Winter 2022 youth participant survey, young people were asked if they identified as LGBTQIA+ (3% of respondents did so). This question was subsequently removed from the Spring 2022 and Summer 2022-23 survey, due to concerns over the sensitive nature of this question for young people. LGBTQIA+ status has been excluded from Figure 5. Socio-economic status was also not included in the survey, and also excluded from Figure 5.

²⁸ 18.34% of all people in NSW in 2015 had a disability - Judicial Commission of New South Wales (2018), Equality before the Law Bench Book.

²⁹ 5.12% of all people in NSW in 2018 were carers - South Western Sydney Local Health District (2018), NSW Carers Facts

- **LGBTQIA+ regional youth** (3% self-identified as LGBTQIA+, data collected in the Winter 2022 participant survey only).³⁰ While this is lower than the estimated proportion of LGBTQIA+ people in the general population, Partners suggest that this may be an underestimate due to the fact that some young people may feel uncomfortable self-identifying their gender and/or sexuality, or they may not yet be aware of their LGBTQIA+ identity at a young age.
- Attendance by **regional youth from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds** was unclear, with some Partners (*The Office of Sport* and the *KYUP! Project*) reporting mixed attendance from both lower and higher SES backgrounds.³¹

However, delivery providers reported uncertainty about how to best target and meet the needs of priority cohorts. While the survey data indicated high attendance by priority cohorts, this is possibly due to self-selection bias and particular efforts by some delivery partners to promote completion of the survey. In consultations, many partners and most applicants reported uncertainty in:

- Which priority cohorts to target.
- How to promote activities to young people from priority cohort backgrounds.
- What activities to offer to young people from priority cohort backgrounds (including whether to target activities exclusively to priority cohorts).
- How best to cater to the needs of young people from priority cohort backgrounds.

There were mixed views about when to include people from diverse backgrounds and when to keep activities exclusive to particular cohorts to enable meaningful participation and enjoyment. There was strong consensus that there were benefits to mixing some cohorts, including higher and lower SES and those in out of home care (OOHC) and those not in OOHC.

Delivery providers that indicated high attendance by priority cohorts reported that supporting priority cohorts worked best with:

- tailored outreach, for example through a new or existing relationship with a priority cohort community (e.g. *STARTTS* with the CALD/refugee community)
- tailored and accessible activities related to the unique interests and skills of young people from a specific priority cohort
- transport to the activity (see Section 4.1.64.1.6).

For example, one Partner highlighted the importance of involving senior members of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community in promoting and delivering activities. Doing so greatly improved awareness among priority cohorts of upcoming activities and helped to increase attendance of priority cohorts at activities.

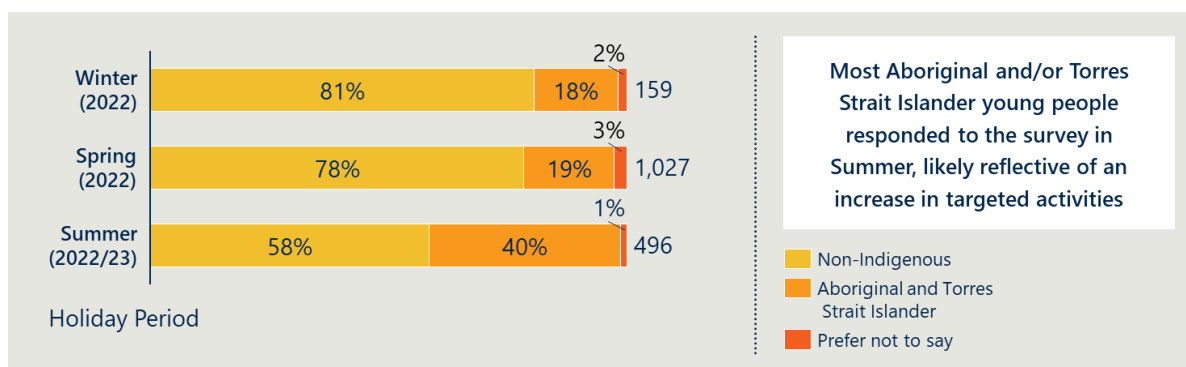
Between Spring and Summer, there was a 40 per cent increase in survey respondents who self-identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This was likely driven by a small number of activities that actively targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, for example Indigenous mask painting and Coolamon (bowl) making (see Figure 6 overleaf).

“It’s important to teach our kids with who they are comfortable with; you [can sometimes] need to bring in the indigenous elders [to make an impact]. They have crazy amounts of knowledge, and watching kids engage with them is really amazing.”
 – Partner

³⁰ See Footnote 2725.

³¹ Ibid.

Figure 6 | Proportion of survey respondents who self-identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander from Winter 2022 – Summer 2022-23



There were mixed views regarding age; some emphasised that accommodating a broad range of ages made access easier while other preferred age specific activities. The stakeholders that valued a flexible approach to ages said:

- Turning away young people on account of their age would take away their ability to build trust and relationships with local young people, and limit access to activities. Some survey respondents and delivery providers particularly reflected on a high level of interest from children under the age of 12; they reported that they traditionally held relationships with children of all ages and turning away children based on age could be detrimental to those relationships.
- Older attendees (aged 16 and over) often had caring responsibilities for younger siblings during holiday periods. This was particularly relevant for regional youth from refugee backgrounds, who, according to Partners, tended to have larger families who relied on older siblings to care for younger siblings. Providing space where carers could enjoy activities would help target this under resourced vulnerable group.
- Older regional youth would often attend activities initially targeted towards younger children, or conversely, brought younger siblings to activities targeted toward their older age group.
- Some Partners sought to engage different age ranges by developing activities that accommodated caring responsibilities. For example, one Partner moved away from delivering multi-day camps and focused on delivering single day activities, which allowed older attendees to participate and also fulfill their caring responsibilities.

“The age inclusiveness was great [...] this was the first time I had seen something age inclusive.”

– Youth participant

“I get a high volume of younger girls wanting to be involved. I’ve had kids as young as eight. As long as they can pay attention and not be disruptive, I don’t usually turn the younger girls away.”

– Partner

“You will struggle to have anyone older than 16 attend an activity if you don’t make it targeted to appeal to them.”

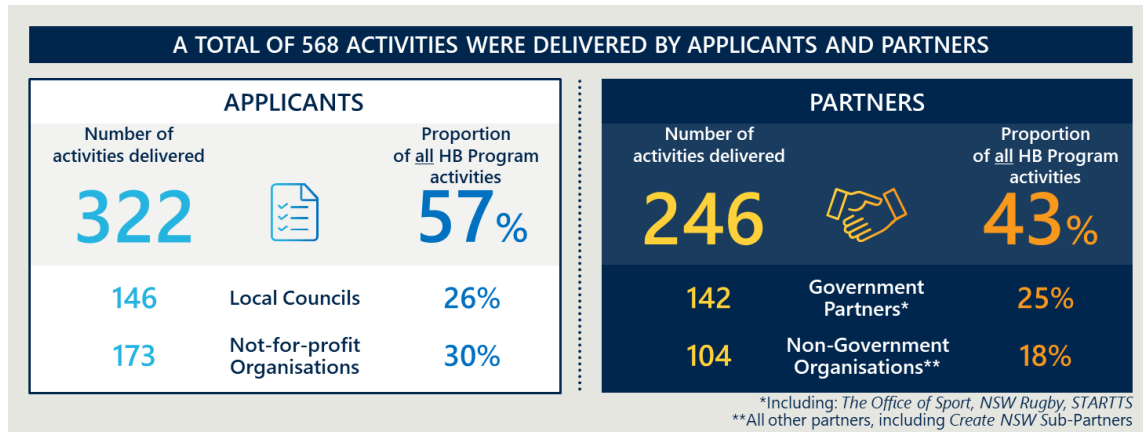
– Applicant

Some activities, such as large sporting festivals, were reported by stakeholders as easily tailored for all ages. However, in survey responses and in some consultations, young people reported that age targeted activities tend to be more enjoyable to attendees, with some commenting that too many different age groups among participants risked older participants feeling as though the activity was ‘like day-care’. The goal of Holiday Break activities is to appeal to the 12-24 aged cohort- however there may be some value in accommodating younger participants to allow young people with carer responsibilities to take part, enjoy some recreation whilst facilitating these responsibilities.

4.1.3 Most HB Program activities were delivered by NFPs, although council-run activities attracted more attendees.

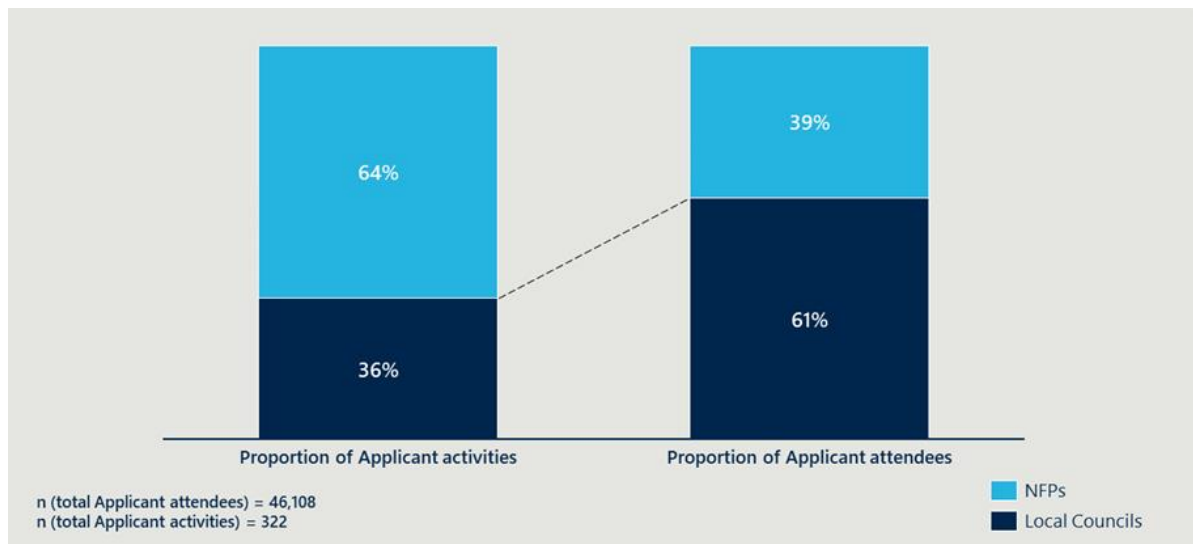
Applicants (207) delivered more activities than Partners (7³²), although Partners delivered more than one activity across the period. Between Autumn 2022 and Summer 2022-23, a total of 568 HB Program activities were delivered across regional NSW.³³ Figure 7 below provides a breakdown of the activities delivered by Partners and Applicants.

Figure 7 | HB Program activities provided by Partners and Applicants



Among Applicants, NFPs delivered more activities compared to local councils, but council activities attracted the most attendees. Figure 8 below provides an overview of the proportion of attendees at NFP and council activities, compared to the number of activities provided by these organisation types.

Figure 8 | Proportion of activity attendees and number of activities provided by NFPs and local councils



³² Does not include Create NSW Sub-Partners.

³³ Based on Partner and Applicant delivery data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).

4.1.4 The HB Program delivered activities across nearly all regional LGAs, with similar numbers of young people attending activities across most LGAs.

The HB Program appeared to have broad reach across nearly all of regional NSW. At least one HB Program activity was delivered in 92 of the 93 LGAs across regional NSW:³⁴

- On average, six activities were delivered in each LGA.
- In one third of regional LGAs (30) more than six activities were delivered.
- In thirteen LGAs only one activity was delivered.

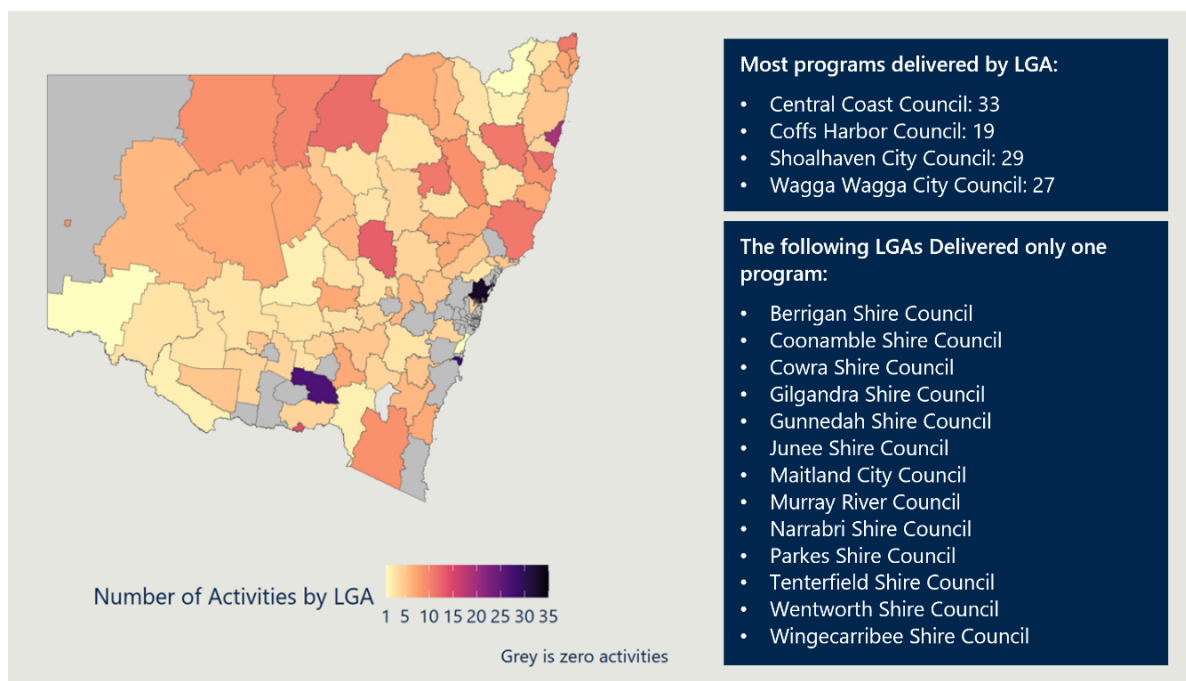
Figure 9 below provides an overview of the number of activities delivered in each regional NSW LGA.

In general, coastal LGAs, including the Central Coast Council, Shoalhaven City Council and Coffs Harbor Council hosted the most Partner and Applicant activities (33, 29 and 19 respectively). A high number of activities (27) were also delivered in the Wagga Wagga City Council LGA. This may reflect the high population density of the LGA, as well as more local capacity to deliver activities.

More remote LGAs, including the Wentworth Shire Council and Murray River Council had the lowest number of activities delivered (one). This may reflect lower demand due to lower population density; lower local capacity to deliver; and/or challenges associated with travelling to and delivering activities in remote communities.

A total of six HB Program activities were delivered in areas outside of regional NSW. Five HB Program activities were hosted in metropolitan LGAs, including four activities delivered in the Hornsby Shire Council and one delivered in the Wollongong City Council. One *STARTTS* activity, which targeted at young people with refugee backgrounds in Albury, took place in nearby Wodonga (Victoria).^{35 36}

Figure 9 | Heatmap of HB Program activities by LGA (Autumn 2022 - Summer 2022-23)



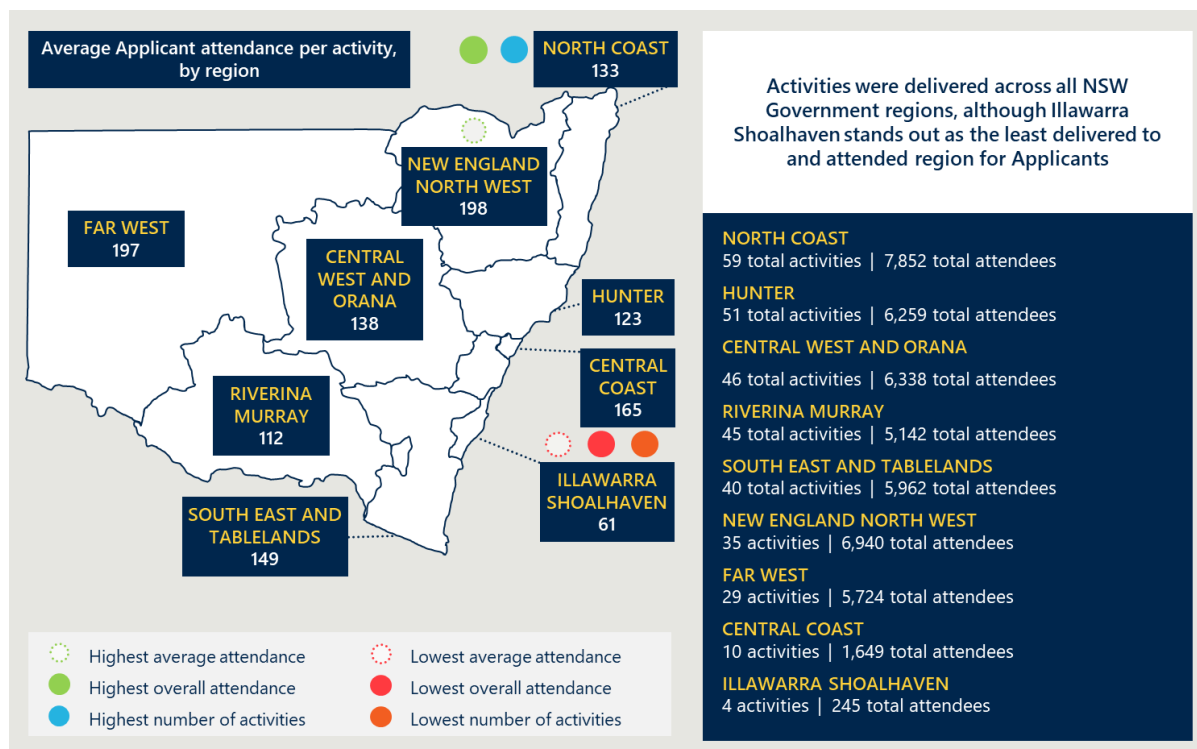
³⁴ Based on Partner and Applicant delivery data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).

³⁵ Information on why activities were delivered in these locations was not available.

³⁶ *STARTTS* facilitates activities in specific recreational venues, like bowling alleys and aquatic centres. This activity may have been delivered in Wodonga because a specific venue, necessary for the activity being delivered, was located in Wodonga council.

HB Program attendance varied across regions, with an average attendance of 143 young people participating in each activity. The Illawarra Shoalhaven region was an outlier, with lower average attendance of 61 young people per activity. Figure 10 below provides an overview of the number of activities delivered in each region of NSW.³⁷

Figure 10 | HB Program activities: attendance and number, by region³⁸



4.1.5 Of the 570 activities delivered, Sports and Arts accounted for most activity types and highest attendance.

Sports and Arts activities accounted for 85 per cent of HB Program Applicant activities and were the most attended activities overall.³⁹ While both sports and fitness activities and art activities attracted many attendees (20,000 and 18,000 attendees respectively), sport activities had the highest average attendance per activity⁴⁰. Overall, more remote LGAs had a higher number of sport activities delivered,⁴¹ while coastal LGAs had a higher number of arts activities.⁴² This aligned to what was heard in some place-based consultations, for example stakeholders in Bourke reported that sport was particularly popular. However, there was no evidence to indicate less interest in other activities in more remote LGAs.

Sports and fitness activities were the most attended activity type for both males and females. Sporting activities accounted for 51 per cent of total male attendance and 36 per cent of total female attendance. This may reflect that the majority of all HB Program activities were classified as sports and fitness.

³⁷ Attendee and activity data was analysed by region and not LGA. This allowed the evaluation to understand trends in Holiday Break activity delivery across different geographic areas of NSW.

³⁸ Based on Applicant delivery data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23). LGAs were mapped to the NSW Government's regional boundaries.

³⁹ Based on Applicant delivery data for (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).

⁴⁰ Sport activities had an average 157 attendees per activity, compared to Holiday Break's average of 143 attendees

⁴¹ Such as Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council (five sports activities) and Tamworth Regional Council (five sports activities).

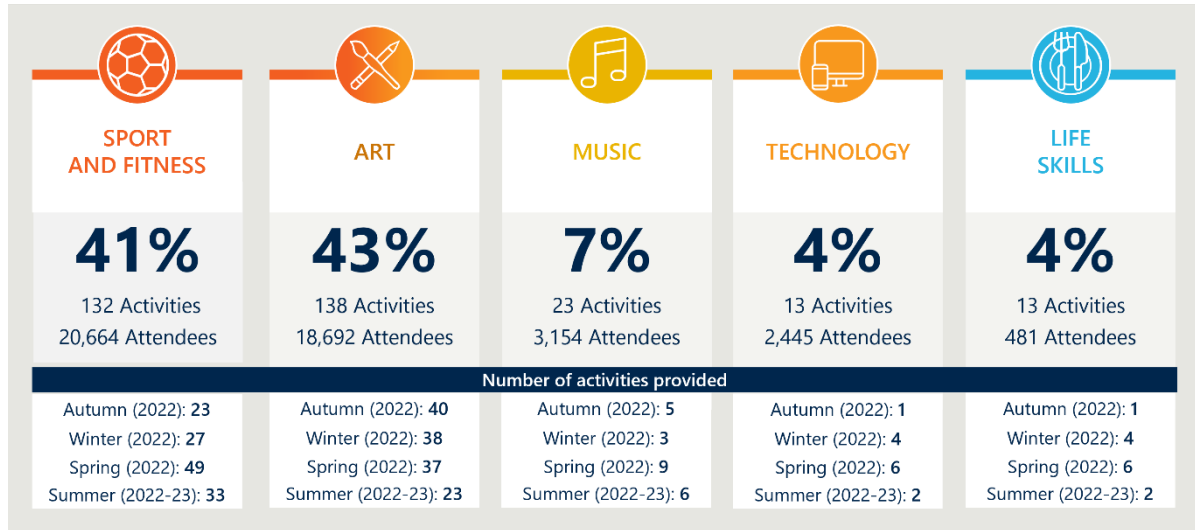
⁴² Such as Coffs Harbour City Council (seven arts activities) and Central Coast Council (five arts activities).

Of the other activity types:

- technology activities accounted for four per cent of all activities provided;
- music activities accounted for seven per cent, and;
- life skills activities accounted for four per cent.

An overview of HB Program activities delivered by category can be found in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11 | HB Program activities delivered by Applicants

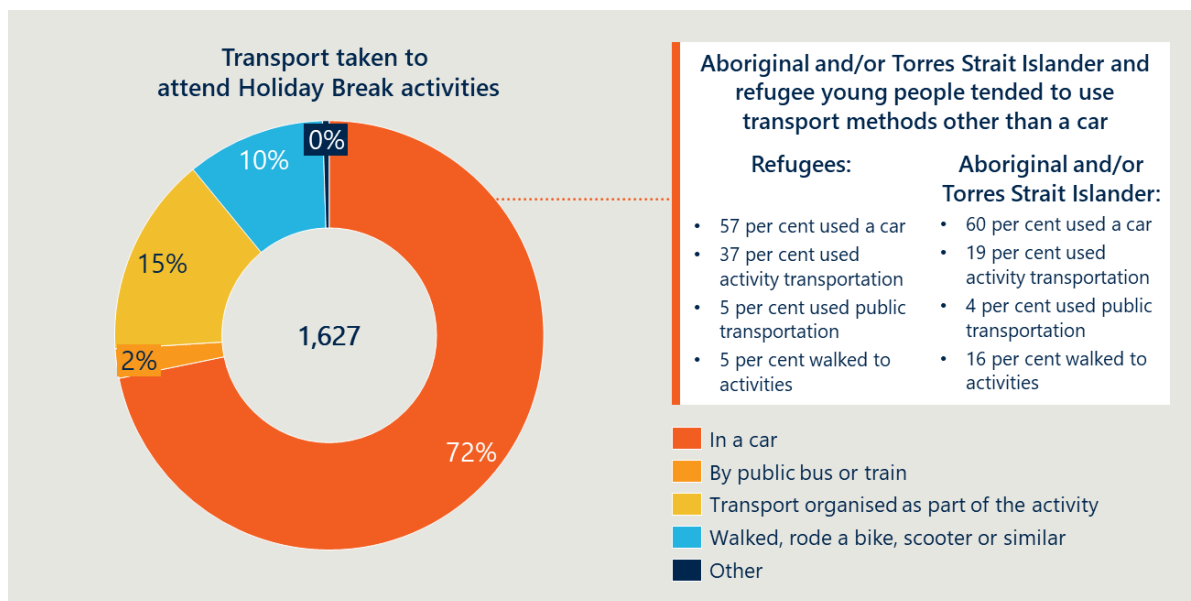


4.1.6 Transport to and from activities is the primary barrier to regional youth attendance at activities, especially among priority cohorts.

While most regional youth travelled to activities in a private car, young people from priority cohorts tended to travel further and utilise a wider variety of transportation modes to attend activities.

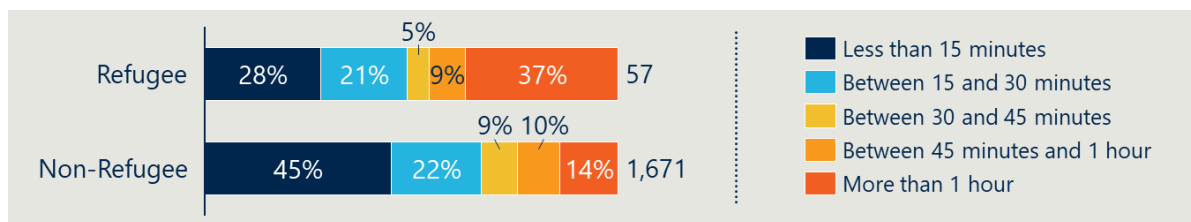
Figure 12 overleaf provides an overview of how young people travelled to HB Program activities. Survey data showed that young people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or young people from a refugee background (considered CALD regional youth) were less likely to use private transport (cars) to attend activities compared to their peers.

Figure 12 | Modes of transport used by survey respondents to attend HB Program activities



Similarly, while survey data showed that only 14 per cent of all survey participants travelled over one hour to attend activities, this increased to 37 per cent for young people who self-identified as refugees. See Figure 13 below for more information.

Figure 13 | Travel times to HB Program activities by refugee background



Partners, Applicants, and young people identified transport as the primary barrier to activity attendance. Key themes that emerged across survey responses and stakeholder consultations were:

- Partners reported that providing transport as part of their activity helped to increase reach and improve accessibility. Applicants reported that they wanted greater clarity over whether they could utilise HB Program funding to provide transport for young people to their activity.
- There was a high reliance on private transport to attend activities.⁴³ Young people wanting to attend HB Program activities often required an available car, as well as a parent or guardian who was willing and able parent, guardian or friend to drive them to the activity.
- Young people were concerned about the cost of fuel for their parents or guardians when taking private transport, especially when travelling over large distances. *The Office of Sport* suggested that this could contribute to young people opting out of activities, particularly young people from low SES backgrounds.

“Transport logistically is a big problem - many families don't have access to cars.”
 – Applicant

⁴³ According to applicant data, 72 per cent (1168) of Holiday Break attendees travelled to activities using a car.

- There were limited public transport alternatives in regional areas, although some exceptions were identified. For example, Muswellbrook and Albury were reported to have some public transport available (albeit not for young people living some distance away from town centres), while more remote areas like Bourke and Cobar reportedly did not have public transport.

“There are buses, but you will generally have to walk a lot.”

– Youth Participant

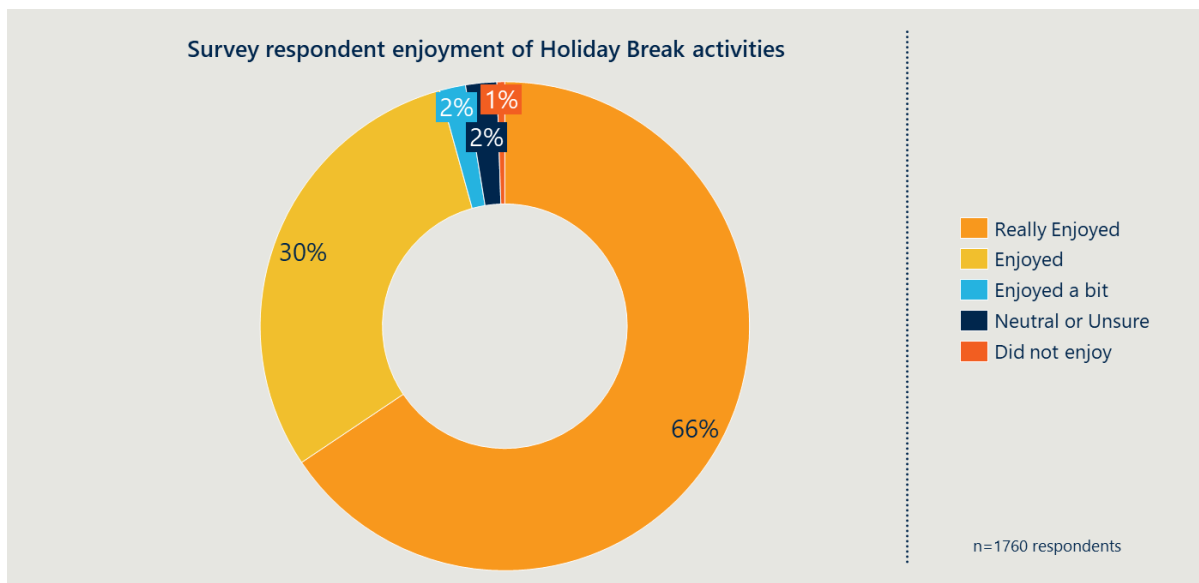
4.2 Nearly all regional youth found HB Program activities enjoyable. There was strong interest in more arts and music activities.

This section discusses evaluation findings regarding enjoyment of HB Program activities by regional youth.

4.2.1 Nearly all (96 per cent) young people enjoyed all types of HB Program activities.

Across all age groups and most priority cohorts, HB Program activities were ‘really enjoyed’ or ‘enjoyed’ by regional youth (96% of all survey respondents). Slightly over two per cent of survey respondents reported that they either ‘Enjoyed a bit’ or were ‘Neutral or unsure’ about whether they enjoyed the activity they attended, and slightly less than one per cent of survey respondents reported that they ‘Did not enjoy’ the activity. See Figure 14 below for a summary of activity enjoyment.

Figure 14 | Enjoyment of HB Program activities



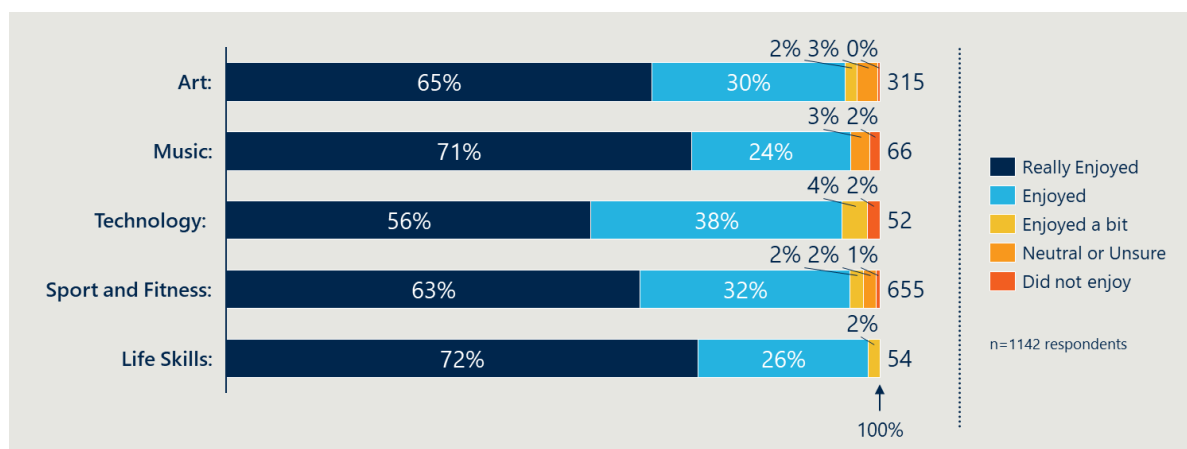
Despite low attendance by regional youth living with disability (see Section 4.1.24.1.1) this cohort particularly enjoyed activities. Young people from this priority cohort were eight per cent more likely to report they ‘Really Enjoyed’ the activity they attended than other young people who responded to the survey, potentially indicating very strong benefits of further targeting this cohort.

“The amazing people who help run these activities are always so welcoming and friendly, making the time really enjoyable.”

– Youth Participant

While all HB Program activities were enjoyed by attendees, the highest enjoyment ratings were for life skills activities, followed by music and art. Figure 15 below provides an overview of how different activity types were enjoyed by survey respondents.

Figure 15 | HB Program activity enjoyment by activity type



HB Program activities were broadly enjoyed, except for some activity specific concerns. Of the two per cent of young people who reported that they 'Did not Enjoy' HB Program activities, most qualitative complaints provided by survey respondents were related to specific aspects of an activity, including duration, comfort, and safety. Some examples of the kinds of complaints offered were:

- 'The day was a bit too long and the activities were stretched out longer than needed.'
- 'The seat was not comfy.'
- 'Soccer - boys were too rough.'

4.2.2 Young people were particularly keen to access more arts and music activities.

While sports and fitness activities made up the majority of HB Program activities offered, there was strong interest in art and music activities. Survey respondents indicated that regional youth were interested in a wide variety of activities.⁴⁴ Notably, only 28 per cent of survey respondents expressed an interest in future sports and fitness activities, even though 57 per cent of survey respondents reported that the HB Program activity they participated in was sports and fitness related.⁴⁵ While young people continued to have an interest in sports and fitness activities, there was a strong interest in more art and music activities in particular as these activity types were seen to be less accessible to young people in regional areas.

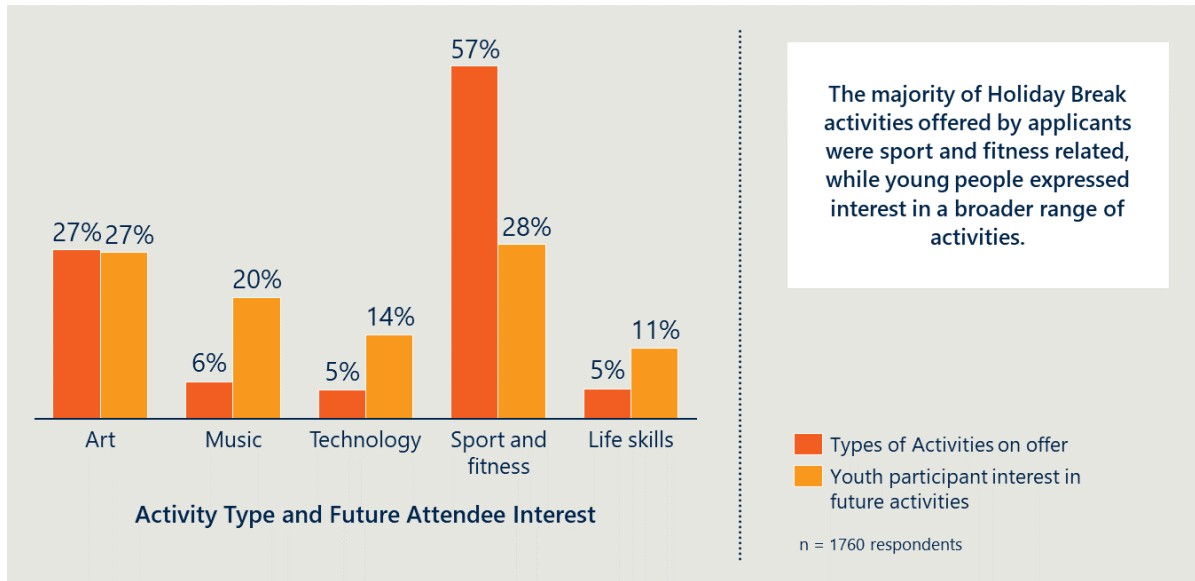
"Even if you're not interested in sport, you'll still find yourself getting involved just for something to do."
 – Youth Participant

Figure 16 overleaf provides an overview of the kinds of activities survey respondents expressed interest in, compared to the 2022 offering.

⁴⁴ Given that surveys were carried out immediately following activities, it is possible that respondents were inclined to report interest in activity types which were different from what they participated in. Respondents were able to select more than one activity type that they were interested in seeing offered in the future, which may have contributed to an even distribution of respondent interests.

⁴⁵ Based on survey data. Respondents were asked to identify which activity type their HB Program activity belonged to and were allowed to select more than one category when responding. Proportion of activity types identified by survey respondents differed from ORY activity data, summarised in Figure 11.

Figure 16 | Comparison of activities offered versus interest in future activities⁴⁶

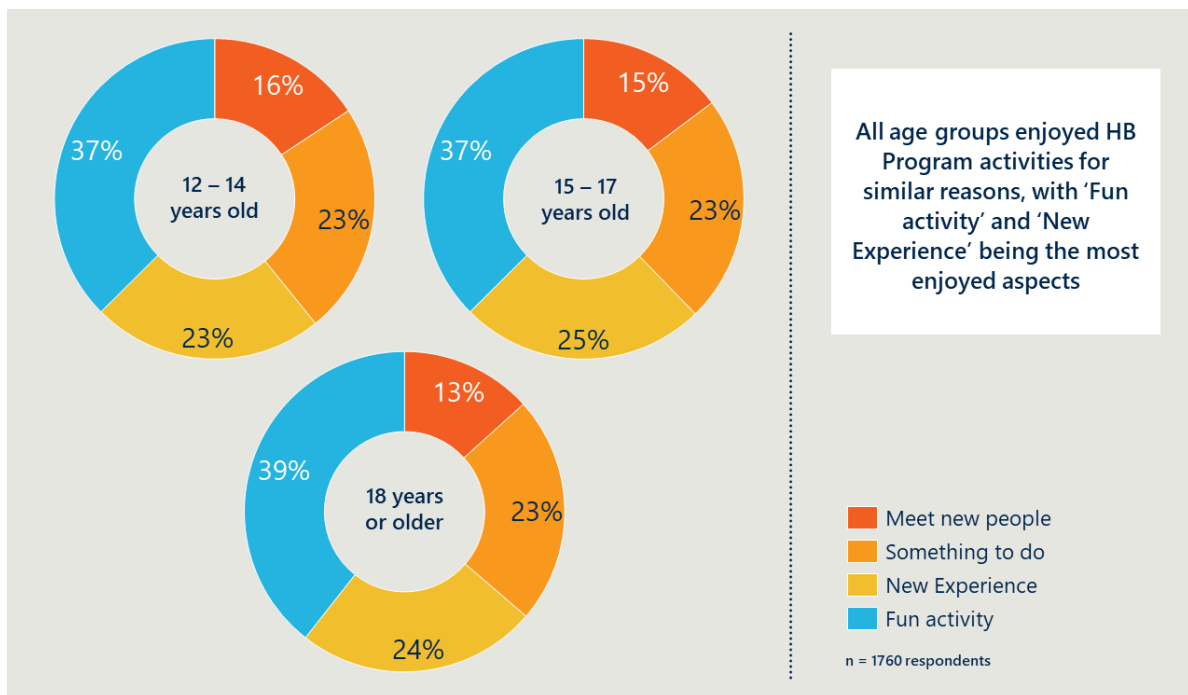


4.3 The HB Program created opportunities for regional youth to have fun, socialise and gain new experiences.

This section discusses evaluation findings regarding outcomes and impact of activities on regional youth.

Most young people reported 'fun' as the main benefit of the HB Program. Most survey respondents reported that they enjoyed the HB Program activity they attended because they were: a 'fun activity' (55 per cent) and/or 'something to do' (34 per cent). The type of benefit did not vary significantly by age. Figure 17 below provides an overview of what survey respondents gained from attending HB Program activities, by age.

Figure 17 | Reasons for liking HB Program activities were consistent across all ages of young people



⁴⁶ Based on Applicant delivery data (Winter 2022 to Summer 2022-23).

In consultations, a regional youth participant reported that it was 'great to have something close to attend with mates, while another said that they would not have 'done much [in the holiday period] without this activity'.

Similar reflections were provided by Partners and Applicants. For example, in consultations multiple Partners and Applicants reported that HB Program activities successfully engaged with regional youth who ordinarily have few activities to occupy them. Regional youth identified HB Program activities as most enjoyable when there are not many other opportunities to have fun in the holiday period. Young people over the age of 18 particularly emphasised 'fun activity', as they appreciated engaging in tailored activities for their cohort, which are not often provided in regional areas.

'Something to do' was reported in stakeholder consultations as being particularly important in communities which have faced recent adversity, such as Albury, Lismore, and Bourke (see Appendix A). Section 5.1 discusses the impact that filling gaps in opportunities has on local capacity, regional communities, and the Arts sector.

Several stakeholders emphasised the HB Program provided new experiences which are otherwise unavailable in regional NSW. Around 35 per cent of survey participants reported that the HB Program activity they attended was a 'new experience'.

Partners and Applicants reported the longer-term benefits that offering new experiences could provide young people. Some examples of these benefits are listed in Table 7 overleaf. Partners and Applicants emphasised the value of art focused activities for young people. Art activities require little prior experience or physical fitness and enabled young people to try something they had not been exposed to previously. A few stakeholders also reported that most art activities provided in regional areas were expensive to participate in, while many sporting activities already available in communities have no cost associated. The HB Program supported the provision of non-sporting skills which otherwise would be inaccessible to some participants.

HB Program was also identified as strengthening social cohesion and giving young people opportunities to socialise and make friends. Partners reported that making friends is a highly valued outcome of activities for young people. Survey respondents who 'really enjoyed' or 'enjoyed' the activity they attended reported that they did so because it gave them the opportunity to 'hang with school friends I might not have seen otherwise [during the holiday period]' and make new friends.

"They come to do art, but we're a lot more than art. They learn about diversity (e.g. disability). We've been that soft point of entry to other skills."

– Partner

Partners, Applicants, and young people emphasised HB Program activities as being particularly important in communities which have faced recent adversity (e.g. floods in Lismore and Bourke, COVID-19 lockdowns and separation in Albury-Wodonga). These communities reportedly had very few locally led opportunities available for young people. This was most tangible in Lismore and Bourke, as these communities are still recovering from the impact of severe flooding events in 2022. In these communities, the HB Program helped to fill a gap in what is available, and provided young people with the opportunity for new friendships which otherwise may not have taken place during periods of community recovery. Partners reported that in these contexts HB Program activities helped young people build resilience to traumatic events and aided in re-integrating them into the community. This is described in more detail in the Albury, Lismore, and Bourke case studies in Appendix A. It is also possible that making friends at HB Program activities helps young people to improve their social-emotional wellbeing following adverse events (see Appendix B of the literature review for further information).

"I hope these activities continue to run in our community. Usually, we have to travel over 50 kilometres to experience events like these. Makes me proud of my town."

– Youth Participant

"It was a great event! I learnt heaps about myself and my abilities."

– Youth Participant

The opportunity to make friends was also reported as being especially beneficial in communities with high cultural diversity, where young people from different backgrounds may not ordinarily have many opportunities to interact with one another (e.g. Coffs harbour). However, Partners reported there were limited avenues for young people to sustain their new connections and friendships, and that there were opportunities for ORY to better support young people to do so (see Section 5.1.1).

Table 7 | Selection of benefits enjoyed by young people when a HB Program activity was a ‘new experience’

HB Program activities reportedly supported regional youth to:	Potential longer-term benefits of new experiences provided through the HB Program
Develop a new interest or skill, or pursue an existing interest/skill	For example, Partners and Applicant reported that HB Program activities introduced young people to skills they continue to be passionate about and actively continue to pursue development of.
Connect young people with positive role models	The HB Program may facilitate a more positive trajectory for developing young people. Partners, Applicants, and young people reported strong facilitator and participant relationships established through HB Program. All stakeholders felt there were opportunities to continue to connect with the young people after an activity, and that HB Program could more closely support this.
Learn about and experience potential future career options	For example, one young person reported that they saw the activity as an opportunity to explore professional dancing as a future career path.
Improve their fitness and learn about healthy living	Potential for young people to build healthy habits early in life and improve longer-term health outcomes.

5 Evaluation findings – Impact on local capacity, regional communities, and the Arts sector

This section presents evaluation findings regarding the Holiday Break Program’s impact on local capacity to deliver activities to young people, local communities, and the Arts sector.

KEY FINDINGS

The Holiday Break Program supported providers to address service gaps and build and strengthen relationships between providers.

The HB Program supported providers to deliver free, high-quality activities that meet community needs and address gaps. The HB Program strengthened existing networks between providers and supports the creation of new connections in regional communities.

The HB Program is well served by a mix of Partners and Applicants; however, funding allocations could be more intentional to align to community needs.

Locally based Partners and Applicants strengthened local capacity, communities, and the Arts-sector, while external providers addressed market gaps. Applicants were more effective at targeting priority cohorts while Partners required different methods, often through local partnerships. Longer-term relationships are critical to sustaining benefits.

The HB Program is strengthening the Arts sector and creating some job opportunities for local artists.

The HB Program provided 545 jobs in the Arts sector and contributed to ongoing upskilling opportunities. Activities delivered in partnership helped to build Arts sector capacity and equipped local artists and art-based organisations to deliver their own programs.

In Albury and surrounding areas, the HB Program built on the existing capacity of local Albury organisations by supporting them to try new things, and form new partnerships, especially between council and local organisations.

In Bourke and surrounding areas, the HB Program provided an opportunity for local organisations to collaborate with established providers around NSW.

In Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and surrounding areas, the HB Program supported organisations to deliver new activities, build sustainable relationships beyond the holiday activity and hire local artists.

In Lismore and surrounding areas, young people have need for Holiday Break activities. Few local organisations had capacity to deliver social and recreational activities due to the impact of recent flooding.

In Muswellbrook and surrounding areas, the HB Program supported community organisations to strengthen the local arts sector and re-engage young people after COVID-19 lockdowns.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See Appendix A for more detail.

5.1 The HB Program supported providers to address service gaps and build and strengthen relationships between providers.

This section discusses evaluation findings relating to key benefits on local capacity.

5.1.1 The HB Program supported providers to deliver free, high-quality activities that meet community needs and address gaps.

Offering free activities makes a difference for providers and young people.

Locally based Partners reported that offering free activities supported them to build awareness among community members of their organisations' presence, purpose and routine offering in the community. This helped establish a broader client base for future activities that these organisations were planning outside of the HB Program.

Applicants reported that offering free activities improved their ability to provide quality services to their local community. The HB Program also encouraged Applicants to develop new offerings to reach different groups of young people and address different needs in their community. For example, a Coffs Harbour Applicant reported that the success of HB Program activities encouraged them to start a new initiative which focuses on building resilience among 8–14-year-old girls.

In addition, both Partners and Applicants said that offering free activities broke down barriers of accessibility for young people who may not have had the opportunity to attend fee-based activities, including those from lower SES backgrounds and other priority cohorts. This helped bring a more diverse range of participants to their activities than might have been possible if activities had a cost. The provision of free activities was seen as valuable opportunity to build trust with local young people, which stakeholders repeatedly emphasised was important for their success as providers (see Section 5.2.35.2.3 for more detail).

Most Partners and Applicants acknowledged the potential to build on the positive experiences of young people and create opportunities for longer-term engagement. A proposed solution was the creation of an online hub where regional youth participants can reconnect with their peers and delivery providers, learn about upcoming activities in their community, and extend their learnings over a longer period.

HB Program funding enables providers to focus on quality delivery and fill gaps in what is available in regional communities. HB Program funding provides valuable support to Partners and Applicants by enabling them to invest in delivering high-quality, in-demand activities and expanding their outreach to a larger number of young people. In consultations, both Partners and Applicants reported that HB Program funding allows them to achieve much more than they could without the HB Program's support.

Partners reported that funding was sufficient, allowing them to provide new and innovative activities that were not already available in regional communities. This is particularly the case in regions where there were fewer opportunities through the private market and/or fewer Applicants delivering activities. In these regions, the impact of Partners was comparatively greater, as they were able to fill gaps in what was usually available.

For example, in the Winter 2022 HB Program, Partner *Create NSW* subcontracted Sub-Partners *Westwords* and *Songmakers* to deliver creative writing and music workshops in Orange (Central West and Orana region) and Nowra (Illawarra and Shoalhaven region). In these locations, local sport and recreation opportunities were reported to be readily available for children and young people, but creative writing and music activities were less common. While *Westwords* and *Songmakers* had delivered activities in these communities before, HB Program funding supplemented their usual operating budgets and allowed them

"If it weren't for ORY, we would still deliver our activities, but for a fee. Only those who can afford it would come. [When this happens] the public suffers."

– Partner

to enhance their offering. This included bringing in special guest speakers, facilitators and instructors from the local communities.

Even though Applicants received less funding compared to Partners (see Section 6.3), Applicants reported that HB Program funding was sufficient to achieve their objectives. Funding reportedly supported Applicants to augment their usual offerings or offer new activities to fill gaps in what was already available in their local community. Offering high-quality activities can help to raise interest among young people and boost participation in activities, including among young people who may be vulnerable and/or disengaged from community events and activities due to various factors such as financial constraints, travel barriers, and lack of interest in traditional activities offered through schools. By increasing engagement, Applicants build their capacity to deliver activities to young people who they may not have been able to reach before. See Appendix A for examples of how the HB Program enhanced Applicant offerings in case study locations.

5.1.2 The HB Program strengthened existing networks between providers and the creation of new connections in regional communities.

Where they have existing connections, Partners work with local organisations to enhance activities. HB Program encourages external Partners to work with local organisations to bring unique activity offerings to regional youth. External Partners and local organisations leverage their comparative strengths to enhance Partner offerings. As a result, external Partners expand their reach and new activities can be delivered where they had not been delivered before, filling gaps in the diversity of social and recreational activities available to young people in regional NSW.

For example, *The Museum of Contemporary Art* leveraged its pre-existing relationship with the *Orange Regional Art Gallery* to deliver an artistic program to regional youth in Orange. In consultations, representatives from *The Museum of Contemporary Art* and the *Orange Regional Art Gallery* agreed that this arrangement offered a lot of value: they were able to work in “true partnership with shared aims” and learn from each other about delivering youth-focused activities. See Appendix A for more examples of how Partners leveraged existing connections to deliver activities in case study locations.

Partners also make new local connections, leverage local knowledge and resources, and improve accessibility of activities. HB Program encourages external Partners to make new connections within and across communities. This helps to ensure that local knowledge informs activity design and local facilities are used to benefit regional youth. Partners also reported that activities delivered in partnership with local organisations help young people to build their awareness of the support services that are available in their community (See Case Study 1 overleaf).

“The only way these programs work well is with a strong partnership with an organisation on the ground in the location we are targeting. We bring our strengths to match their strengths, and [help address] their needs.”

– Partner

CASE STUDY 1: KYUP! PROJECT AND PCYC PARTNERING TO INCREASE REACH AND DELIVER ACTIVITIES

The KYUP! Project delivered personal safety and self-defence workshops to girls and young women at PCYC facilities in a number of regional communities.

The partnership between the KYUP! Project and PCYC was established as a result of the HB Program. Outcomes of this new partnership were:

- KYUP! Project was able to expand its workshop offering into communities where they couldn't otherwise deliver activities (i.e. locations where KYUP! Project had no pre-existing access to suitable facilities).

CASE STUDY 1: KYUP! PROJECT AND PCYC PARTNERING TO INCREASE REACH AND DELIVER ACTIVITIES

“ The fact that PCYC was another Partner allowed us to collaborate. That made a big difference to us because they know us, we both know how [the HB Program] works, and we can work together to reach areas. ”
- Partner

- The *KYUP! Project* facilitator was able to better understand the unique needs of young women in each community, drawing on the expertise of local PCYC staff.
- Co-location helped *KYUP! Project* to target young women who had an existing association with or knowledge of PCYC, including girls and young women from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and/or from lower SES backgrounds.
- Co-location also introduced new activities to PCYC sites, expanding PCYC's own offering to the community.

Applicants benefit from the opportunity to collaborate with other local organisations to deliver targeted activities in their community.

Applicant organisations tend to be embedded in their local communities and are more likely to understand the needs of the local community and be equipped to target activities according to needs and build lasting relationships with young people and others in their community.

Applicants reported collaborating with other local organisations, such as sporting and recreational organisations, community groups, and councils, to deliver activities. Working together towards a shared purpose enables Applicants to leverage broader knowledge about the needs and wants of regional youth and shape their activities accordingly. Additionally, other local organisations bring their unique expertise and deliver capacity, sometimes resulting in joint delivery of activities. This collaborative approach reportedly raises the profile of Applicants and other local organisations among local young people and community members, and can also create longer-lasting connections, building a foundation for future collaboration.

“It's really important for each community to decide what to offer - they know best.”

– Applicant

“Collaboration with local organisations was the key to connecting with young people on the ground [and] establishing a community around our activity.”

– Applicant

While partnerships with other local organisations can be beneficial, they may not always be feasible or practical for all Applicants. While Applicants identified benefits to delivering activities in partnership with other local organisations, not all Applicants choose to do so. Applicants reported that they appreciated the flexibility to choose how they delivered their activities. This allowed them to:

- make new connections - or strengthen existing connections - with local young people;
- cater to the unique needs of local young people without needing to rely on the expertise or resources of other local organisations, and;
- gain a better understanding of what works well in their local community.

For example, in Coffs Harbour, an Applicant reported that they have stepped back from working with others to deliver activities because they are 'not always directly connected with the community' and working in partnership can place additional strain on already limited resources, including a transient volunteer workforce. In a community close to Bourke, a council Applicant reported that they felt an obligation to run a large-scale community event, to ensure that benefits flowed to young people and to the broader community. Due to limited funding, they had decided to deliver activities independently.

5.2 The HB Program is well served by a mix of Partners and Applicants; however, funding allocations could be more aligned to community needs.

This section discusses evaluation findings around differences in impact and need by delivery provider.

5.2.1 Locally based Partners and Applicants strengthened local capacity, communities, and the Arts-sector, while external providers addressed market gaps.

In place-based consultations, Partners, Applicants, and other local stakeholders reported that the HB Program had positive impacts on community cohesion and well-being by:

- building community awareness of the diversity and needs of local young people;
- creating opportunities for young people from different backgrounds to interact and engage with one another, and their families (see Case study 2 below);
- contributing to an overall sense of connectedness by promoting re-integration of young people via inclusive activities, and;
- providing respite for parents and guardians, and an opportunity to send their child/young person to a free, safe, and enjoyable event, which is particularly valuable for vulnerable families and/or those recovering from adversity.

Appendix B provides further detail on the benefits of community-led activities.

CASE STUDY 2: THE INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILIES IN ACTIVITIES CREATES A LASTING IMPACT

Several Partners and Applicants incorporated a 'community connection' event at the conclusion of their activity.

“ We had parents, grandparents, and friends coming to the celebration event at the end of the activity. Their banners were displayed outside the Gallery and inside the Learning Centre. It made a lasting impact. ”
- Partner

In numerous locations, young people were invited to showcase their artworks and newly gained skills to their families, carers, and friends in an inclusive setting at the conclusion of a HB Program activity.

Partners and Applicants reported that 'community connection' events instilled a sense of pride in participants and helped loved ones to see the value of the activities. For example:

- A Partner reported that these events helped to strengthen a sense of community and build enthusiasm for similar activities in the future.
- An Applicant reported that these events helped to strengthen family bonds and promote a sense of belonging within and between families.

By leveraging the strengths of both groups of delivery providers, the HB Program could strengthen its local impact.

Applicants and locally based Partners generally had a greater impact on local capacity, regional communities, and the Arts sector compared to external Partners. On the other hand, external Partners were particularly impactful in areas with limited private market opportunities where they could provide new experiences to regional youth. The benefits and drawbacks associated with Applicant and Partner delivery are summarised in Figure 18 overleaf.

Figure 18 | Benefits and drawbacks of Partner and Applicant delivery of HB Program activities

DELIVERY PROVIDER	APPLICANTS AND LOCALLY BASED PARTNERS			EXTERNAL PARTNERS (INC. SUB-PARTNERS)		
LOCAL CAPACITY 	BENEFITS OF DELIVERING VIA PROVIDER					
	Builds capacity to provide new or augmented activities which are community-driven and leverage organisations' local expertise	Supports collaboration between local organisations, leveraging existing networks	Builds a deeper understanding of the needs and wants of local youth, contributing to better targeted activities and services	Fills gaps in what is usually available in communities, contributing to a more vibrant community during holiday breaks	Collaboration with local organisations expands reach, leverages local knowledge, upskills local providers	Delivering activities at local facilities demonstrates that local organisations could provide similar activities themselves
	DRAWBACKS OF DELIVERING VIA PROVIDER					
	Limited existing resources and HBP funding may hinder opportunities for collaboration with other local organisations	Limited / no feedback limits opportunities to build expertise in delivering youth programs	Limited opportunities to scale activities and increase organisations' reach , due to limited resources / funding	Limited transfer of knowledge and skills , resulting in limited capacity building and longer-term impact	Foregone opportunity to leverage the unique knowledge, strengths and assets of local organisations	Trust and relationships can be fragile, easily undermined, and difficult to rebuild
DELIVERY PROVIDER	APPLICANTS AND LOCALLY BASED PARTNERS			EXTERNAL PARTNERS (INC. SUB-PARTNERS)		
REGIONAL COMMUNITIES 	BENEFITS OF DELIVERING VIA PROVIDER					
	Builds community awareness of services already available in the community, leveraging existing trust and relationships	Expands organisation/ council activity reach to diverse groups and priority cohorts, building trust among young people	Involving local volunteers in the delivery of activities provides opportunities for individuals to engage with local youth	Provides new and innovative activities in communities, including activities which local providers don't or can't provide	New networks are built within and between communities and organisations, improving targeting / lasting beyond HBP	Boosts local economies via spending on food, venues, lodgings etc; especially beneficial after adversity
	DRAWBACKS OF DELIVERING VIA PROVIDER					
	Limited existing resources to deliver activities, and smaller funding allocations may lead to lower quality activities	Localised experience / less exposure to delivery in other communities may restrict innovation and variety of activities	Limited HBP funding constrains ability to invest in breaking down barriers of participation (e.g providing transport)	Comparatively limited local knowledge makes it difficult to target priority cohorts	Competition with local organisations which are providing fee-based activities to local youth	Limited consultation time / resources hinders alignment of activities with needs/ wants
DELIVERY PROVIDER	APPLICANTS AND LOCALLY BASED PARTNERS			EXTERNAL PARTNERS (INC. SUB-PARTNERS)		
ARTS SECTOR 	BENEFITS OF DELIVERING VIA PROVIDER					
	Employment, training and mentoring opportunities for local artists and emerging artists	Supports recovery from COVID-19 related slowdowns in business	Co-delivery opportunities for art-based organisations	Enables artists to share skills and cultivate interest in artistic pursuits/ careers	Provides local art-based organisations with ' proof of concept ' and linkages to like-minded youth	Provides an impetus for art-based organisations to make connections / build networks
	<i>No drawbacks were reported</i>					

5.2.2 Applicants were more effective at targeting priority cohorts while Partners required different methods, often through local partnerships.

Applicants are typically well-positioned to target priority cohorts by leveraging local knowledge and networks. Applicants - some of whom are specialist organisations focused on young people or from priority cohort backgrounds - have a deep understanding of the demographics of young people in their local community. This allowed them to effectively target priority cohorts, as they may already have existing connections with young people through their usual service offerings. By leveraging their local knowledge and connections, Applicants can also ensure that their activities are community-driven and meet the specific needs and wants of young people.

For example, a local council reported working with a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and a homelessness support service to identify and promote their activity to young people who may benefit from the opportunity to participate in a free social and recreational event. This approach resulted in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people, and young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage attending the activity, which they reportedly enjoyed.

Other Applicants do not specifically target or advertise their activities to young people from priority cohorts and instead promote their activity to all local young people. This was particularly common among local council Applicants. While this approach does not necessarily break down barriers of accessibility for priority cohorts, it can play an important role in filling a gap in what is available in the local community. This is particularly important in communities where Partners have not delivered activities or have not returned to the community after delivering an activity in a previous holiday period.

External Partners tend to rely on local knowledge and organisations to reach priority cohorts.

Compared to Applicants and locally based Partners, external Partners reported that they sometimes had limited local knowledge, making it challenging for them to identify and target priority cohorts effectively. Additionally, external Partners reported that they have limited time and resources to undertake community consultation and engagement ahead of holiday breaks, often resulting in activities that are not specifically targeted at priority cohorts.

However, some external Partners reported that they had engaged with local organisations to identify potential participants, promote activities to their networks, and (in some cases) help deliver activities. Connections with community support services was reportedly effective in helping external Partners to target priority cohorts and expand their reach across diverse groups. For example, in Orange, *The Museum of Contemporary Art* and its subcontracted delivery Partner *The Orange Regional Art Gallery* encouraged attendance among LGBTQIA+ young people by partnering with the local Headspace organisation ('Kaleidoscope Group') to promote its art activities.

Locally based Partners were generally better equipped to target their activities to priority cohorts (compared to external Partners). These Partners tend to have a deeper understanding of the local community and are more connected to young people, allowing them to tailor their programs to meet the specific needs of priority cohorts (see Case study 3 below).

CASE STUDY 3: LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS CAN ENHANCE PRIORITY COHORT TARGETING

PCYC and STARTTS successfully partnered with local organisations to reach priority cohorts.

“Community groups working together can help bring kids in. It can [also] lead kids to use community services in the future.”

”
- Partner

In Wellington, PCYC worked with Barnardos and Mission Australia to target young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. Along with volunteers from other organisations, these organisations supported delivery (e.g. volunteers led sign-in processes, ran netball competitions, and delivered food). In Coffs Harbour, STARTTS promoted activities to young people from refugee backgrounds via the North Coast Settlement Service and Interrelate Family Relationship Centre. This helped STARTTS to achieve its broader objective of supporting people who had experienced trauma.

5.2.3 Supporting longer-term relationships are critical to sustaining benefits.

Community trust and relationships support activity delivery but take time and effort to build; it requires different approaches between external providers and local providers. Partners and Applicants reported that building and maintaining trust in local communities, as well as creating and sustaining local relationships, underpins the reach and success of the HB Program. These connections are important because they help to:

- encourage participation in activities from local young people
- establish a positive reputation for providers and the HB Program in the local community
- facilitate collaboration between providers and other local organisations
- support effective communication and engagement with the local community, which can help Partners and Applicants to deliver activities which respond to local needs.

External Partners reported that trust and relationships take time and can be established during early visits to a community while planning for HB Program activities. Once established, trust and local relationships allow Partners to leverage local networks, and can encourage young people participants to attend subsequent activities, if they are offered in the same community again in the future.

Applicants and locally based Partners reported that they typically have a degree of trust and existing relationships to leverage, given they are already active in their local communities. For Applicants, the HB Program did not necessarily support the establishment of new trust and relationships. Rather, the process of delivering activities supported Applicants to build on existing trust and relationships they enjoyed in their local community. For example, in Coffs Harbour and Bourke, delivering activities helped PCYC to build connections between local young people and police, resulting in an increased awareness among young people of the programs PCYC offers in their community, beyond HB Program activities. Reflecting on the vulnerabilities of some local young people and their families, Applicants in Coffs Harbour and Bourke reported that trust and relationships help to give parents assurance that young people are 'going somewhere safe' when they attend HB Program activities.

"Trust and credibility are key [but] we damage this relationship if we don't come back again. We need to put things in place to just have a deeper relationship beyond just the holidays."

– Partner

For external Partners, trust and relationships and can be undermined if they do not return to regional communities. Pre-activity visits to regional communities were not always possible for external Partners, due to logistical and/or resourcing constraints. While it is possible for Partners to deliver successful activities without pre-established trust and relationships, Partners reported their preference was to return to communities to deliver activities again in subsequent breaks. Partners reported that returning to the same community to deliver activities in subsequent HB Programs could have the following benefits:

- Allow trust and relationships with local young people to be fostered over the longer-term, which is particularly important when engaging with regional youth who are vulnerable, disengaged, and/or had a degree of distrust in institutions like schools and government agencies.
- Save Partner's time and resources, because new connections would not need to be built up in a new location each break. Partner's time and resources could then be re-allocated to professional development for staff, and to more consultation with young people about what they want to see offered in their community.
- Build local capacity by partnering with, and upskilling, local organisations to deliver similar activities in the future.
- Support more strategic and long-term planning around appropriate engagement in communities.

External Partners who were unable to return to communities reported that trust and relationships can be fragile, easily undermined, and difficult to rebuild if activities are only delivered in a community one time. Once-off delivery of activities can create a perception that external Partners are not genuinely committed to improving long-term outcomes for young people in regional communities.

External Partners identified three key opportunities for ORY to provide for more strategic support (see Figure 19 below). External Partners suggested that these interventions could help them to realise the potential benefits of returning to communities and mitigate the risks of undermining trust and relationships.

Figure 19 | External Partners suggested that ORY could provide them with more strategic support



"We have the data proves that [we] get maximum results with priority cohorts when [we] go back: that return visit is really important. People always want us to go back."

– Partner

Applicants could benefit from flexibility to deliver activities innovatively, and over multiple breaks.

Applicants said that HB Program funding could have benefited more young people over a longer period of time if they were approved for multiple funding rounds, and/or able to utilise funding over multiple HB Programs. While this would likely result in individual activities being scaled down (for example, specialist facilitators or equipment hired by Applicants might be removed from the offering), Applicants suggested that the benefits of offering recurring activities in each HB Program would outweigh the benefits of an expensive once-off activity.

For example, recurring activities would provide young people and their families with certainty over what they could do in future breaks and would benefit Applicants by giving them more opportunities to raise their local profile and develop their capacity to deliver high-quality activities without the need for external facilitators or equipment. This could help to strengthen Applicant's existing community trust and local relationships by building their image as trusted providers. This was particularly important to council Applicants, who were keen to demonstrate that they were delivering for their whole community.

In addition, council Applicants reported that there is potential for HB Program funding to be used innovatively to enhance existing community events. For example, a local council was interested in using the HB Program funding to top-up its budget allocation for its annual youth program. The council suggested that flexible use of funding could provide a cost-effective way to supplement its existing budget and deliver higher-quality community events. This could reportedly enhance the council's reputation as a provider of quality youth programs beyond HB Program activities.

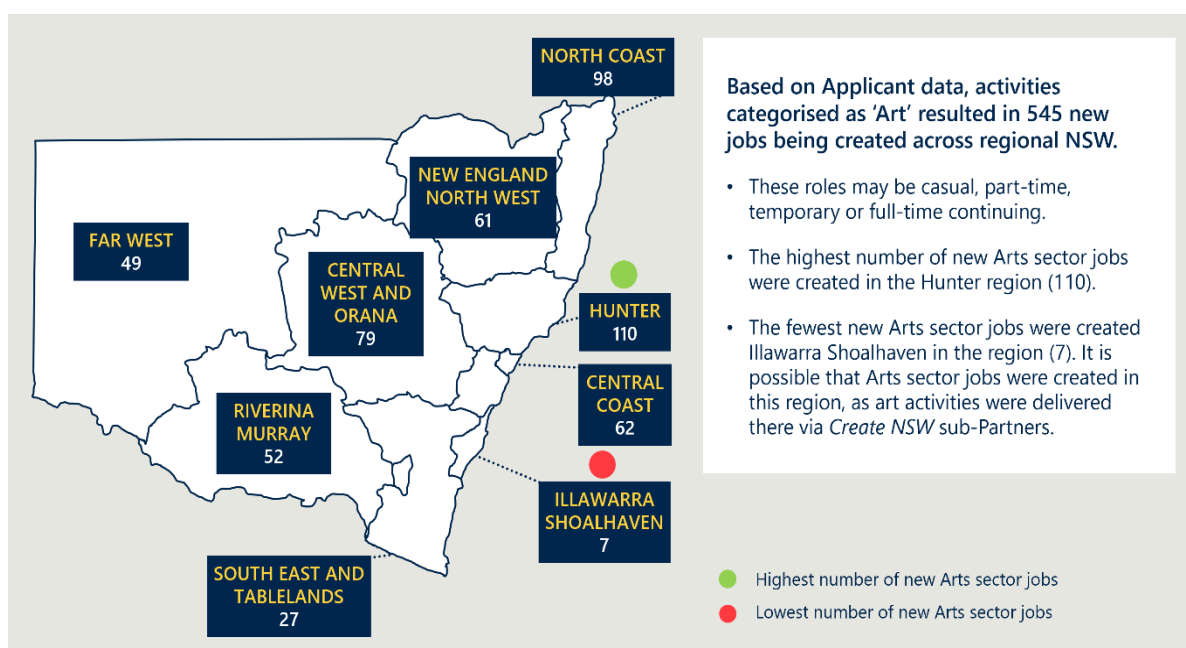
5.3 The HB Program is strengthening the Arts sector and creating some job opportunities for local artists.

This section discusses evaluation findings relating to strengthening the Arts sector.

5.3.1 The HB Program provided 545 jobs in the Arts sector, and contributed to ongoing upskilling opportunities

Partners and Applicants reported that the HB Program provided some employment opportunities for local artists and co-delivery opportunities for art-based organisations. Figure 20 below provides a summary of the 545 Arts sector jobs that were reportedly created across regional NSW as a result of Applicant activities.⁴⁸

Figure 20 | Applicant Arts sector jobs created, by region



"Whenever we go into regional communities, we try to find an aspiring artist who can gain skills in how to run the program themselves. [Our] long term vision is that our facilitators can leave behind a local person who can run that program locally."

– Sub-Partner

Applicants reported that the HB Program provided them with 'timely' support during their recovery COVID-19 lockdowns, which had significantly constrained their ability to deliver fee-based, in-person activities.

One Sub-Partner who delivered activities in Muswellbrook explained that the HB Program allowed them to 'give our artist facilitators more work, which they are desperate for' and 'bring in different artists [including a] filmmaker and lighting technician.' This Sub-Partner had also hired a local musician and paid a local emerging artist to help deliver their program in an internship capacity. They reported a 'good capacity building outcome' as the local musician would likely be engaged for their future projects in the area, and they planned to hire the intern on an ongoing basis and 'nurture her skills', with the hope that this person could run activities in the future. Similar opportunities for emerging artists reportedly did not exist in Muswellbrook or surrounding areas.

⁴⁸ There was no data available to Nous to determine how many Arts sector jobs may have been created as a result of Partner activities.

Similarly, external Partners pointed to some Arts sector job creation as a result of the HB Program (though there is no available data to support this). For example, *Create NSW* approached creative arts organisations that they had an existing relationship with and encouraged them to deliver activities. *Songmakers*, *Music in the Regions*, and *Westwords* subsequently provided creative arts and writing workshops for children and young people in numerous regional locations. Without HB Program funding, these workshops, and the jobs they supported, may not have occurred.

"[The HB Program is] strengthening the creative economy [in regional areas]. Only a small part of our program is Sydney-based providers going into the regions. Most of the time, our program is delivered by people from the local area or other regional areas."

– Partner

5.3.2 Activities delivered in partnership helped to build Arts sector capacity, and equipped local artists and art-based organisations to deliver their own programs.

Partners and Applicants reported partnering with local art-based organisations to deliver their activities. Applicants said that the HB Program had provided an impetus for art-based organisations to make connections with one another. Partnership approaches reportedly functioned as an encouraging 'proof of concept' for local organisations who were looking to engage like-minded young people in their community.

A *Museum of Contemporary Art* activity saw regional youth participants learn from practicing artists who were brought in to deliver courses over a three-day workshop. Representatives from *The Museum of Contemporary Art* reported that this helped to extend participants' creative thinking and build on their artistic skills and practices. In this case, local artists were given the opportunity to 'share their practice and methods of working and to take the young people through their artistic process'; an exchange which stakeholders felt was valued by regional youth participants and artists alike. This helped to build enthusiasm for artist pursuits and potential artistic career paths among young people.

In Broken Hill, *Westwords* worked closely with local providers to understand their capacity development needs, and to understand the needs and interests of local young people. *Westwords* shared its lessons learnt on organisational performance with local providers and established a mentoring program to 'model what is possible' for local providers.

"We partnered with [another Arts sector Applicant] and [a local council] Youth Venue to deliver our Art Week. Running the program at the Youth Venue built engagement with youth, and the council's confidence in offering programs.

[The council] was buoyed by the success of the week and are saying "let's keep it going and put more money into it!"

– [Arts sector] Applicant

"One thing the [young people] seem to really enjoy is working alongside artists.

The educators are practicing artists who introduce [young people] to new ways of making art, and new processes that they haven't had experience in before."

– [Arts sector] Partner

6 Evaluation findings – Program administration

This section presents evaluation findings regarding the Holiday Break Program's administration.

KEY FINDINGS

While Holiday Break Program administration was generally seen as appropriate, there is scope to strengthen forward planning and support for smaller NFPs.

Partners and Applicants are supported to deliver recreational activities through flexible administration of the HB Program. Areas to strengthen administration included in forward planning and support for small, resource constrained NFPs and some regions.

There are opportunities for ORY to streamline some resource-intensive processes and focus on more strategic planning.

HB Program funding of \$5.6m supported 317 organisations to deliver activities over Autumn 2022 – Summer 2022-23.

Most funds were invested in the Spring break, while Winter had the lowest delivery cost for activities. While a significant majority of funding supported sport/fitness and arts activities, Life Skills were the most expensive to deliver. By region, the North Coast received the most funding while Illawarra Shoalhaven was the most expensive by attendee.

In **Albury and surrounding areas**, the HB Program created difficulties for some Albury organisations with its reporting requirements, and distribution of funding.

In **Bourke and surrounding areas**, consistent and regular provision of activities during each holiday period enables forward planning and strengthens access in remote communities.

In **Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and surrounding areas**, applying for, and delivering the HB Program was a challenge for some small local organisations who struggle to source workers and volunteers.

In **Lismore and surrounding areas**, the HB Program could greatly support the Lismore recovery effort and re-engagement of young people with longer-term funding and support.

In **Muswellbrook and surrounding areas**, limited resources were a key barrier to applying for HB Program funding, due to a high reliance on volunteers.⁴⁹

6.1 While HB Program administration was generally seen as appropriate, there is scope to strengthen forward planning and support for smaller NFPs.

This section discusses aspects of the HB Program's administration that work well and not so well for Partners and Applicants.

⁴⁹ See Appendix A for more detail.

6.1.1 Partners and Applicants are supported to deliver recreational activities through flexible administration of the HB Program.

For Partners, administration was reported as flexible, efficient and effective to deliver social and recreational activities to regional communities. Both Partners and Applicants emphasised the importance of flexible grant program management to support delivery of social and recreational activities in regional areas. This ensures program activities are tailored to community needs,⁵⁰ cognisant of local context, and engaging for regional youth regardless of where they live in regional NSW.

Partners reported that the HB Program supported them to deliver effective activities through:

- proportionate administrative requirements to receive funding;
- fit for purpose administrative processes that support rather than hinder delivery of activities (for example, some Partners reported how HB Program's forward planning supported them to deliver well organised activities);
- flexible cooperative arrangements between Partners (for example, enabling the *KYUP! Project* and *PCYC* to work together to deliver activities), and;
- appropriate reporting timelines, which provide Partners adequate time to prepare acquittals following holiday breaks.

Providers delivering as a *Create NSW* Sub-Partners reported particularly positive experiences with the HB Program, although these organisations were recognised to deliver at an arm's length to the HB Program's administration.⁵¹

For Applicants, the flexibility and highly responsive communications and support from ORY was particularly valued.

Applicants described varied experiences with the HB Program, reflecting a mix of different organisation types and sizes. HB Program's administration was reported as generally flexible for Applicant organisations, as it supported them to:

- lead activity design and delivery (in line with community-led program best practice)⁵², and;
- deliver locally responsive activities (e.g. tailored for different NSW regional areas, and weather). This is achieved through iterative and highly responsive communication between Applicants and ORY.

The extent to which these supports are provided to Applicants, however, varies across organisation types and sizes (this is described in more detail in Section 6.1.2).

6.1.2 Areas to strengthen administration included in forward planning and support for small, resource constrained NFPs and some regions.

Partners and Applicants emphasised that limited opportunities to forward plan created challenges in consistency of service delivery. Both Partners and Applicants reported forward planning for HB Program

"You have to let us lead the Program, as we are the ones who can talk to the youth in the regional area, and know what capacity we have to deliver the activities."

– Partner

"Through our partnership with the community centre, we built their confidence to run more activities in the future! We have been set up for success, and are going to work together more closely in the future."

– Applicant

⁵⁰ For more information regarding the importance of community-led programs in regional areas, refer to the Literature Review in Appendix B.

⁵¹ Sub-Partners reported that *Create NSW* was effective at supporting delivery of the HB Program and felt they could provide few comments on their relationship with ORY.

⁵² See Appendix B.

activities as a challenge and problematic for quality service delivery and improved outcomes for regional communities. This challenge is driven by different causes for Partners and Applicants:

- For Partners, this challenge is driven by the annual-based model which means they cannot commit to revisit regions in future years, and they are encouraged to deliver in different regions across holiday periods. Planning to revisit a community creates opportunities to build deeper connections with young people and local delivery partners, and reinforces the benefits realised by program activities.
- For Applicants, the holiday period-based model presents a similar challenge as they cannot commit to deliver the activities again in the next period, as they must reapply for funding in advance of each holiday period.⁵³

“So much time could be saved for us if we could apply for funding over a 12-month period, instead of submitting an application four times a year.”

– Applicant

Table 8 below provides an overview of identified benefits and (to a lesser extent) challenges of a longer-term delivery model for HB Program funding.

Table 8 | Benefits and challenges of long-term delivery to a regional community

How long term delivery supports HB Program delivery providers	How long term delivery can be a challenge for HB Program delivery providers
<p>Partners and Applicants reported that longer-term delivery supports recipients to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase their capacity to develop and action long term plans (for more information, refer to the Literature Review in Appendix B). • Coordinate with other locally based organisations to deliver complementary activities (e.g. activity type, and timing). • Enable forward planning by regional youth to attend activities, rather than make alternative plans due to the assumption that activities won't be available (for more detail, see the Bourke Case Study in Appendix A). • Build trust with regional youth and community members, supporting engagement with young people and delivery of more tailored activities in the future. • Develop a deeper understanding of regional needs and available facilities. • Organise consistent volunteers and resources to deliver activities. 	<p>Partners and Applicants reported that longer-term delivery commits recipients to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver an activity before they can confirm they are prepared to deliver it. • Deliver an activity possibly not suited to a region's needs in the future.

“We have delivered activities for the past few holiday periods but were unsuccessful this Holiday Break round. The kids are really sad about it, as its one of the only things they look forward to in the holidays.

We'd like to refer them onto whoever received the funding, but we have no idea who that is or where to send them.”

– Applicant

⁵³ 66 per cent of Applicants delivered in just one holiday period, while four per cent of Applicants delivered in all periods (based on Applicant delivery and funding data).

“Every three months we spend a week's worth of time applying for and managing the grant, which is difficult to justify for the funding available.”

– Applicant

Some small NFP Applicants experienced particular challenges in applying, reporting, and delivering the HB Program due to resource constraints. Some smaller and more resource constrained Applicants reported that HB Program’s application and delivery processes can be time and resource intensive. Some smaller organisations reported they are heavily reliant on volunteers and can feel disincentivised from applying for the HB Program given the time required to develop an application and comply with reporting requirements. They reported the processes involved in applying for and administering a HB Program activity as disproportionate to the funding received, and perceived acquittal and documentation requirements as becoming more burdensome.

Applicants reported that these challenges could be overcome with longer funding periods (i.e. across multiple holiday periods).⁵⁴ Applicants also reported concerns with fund distribution, with many reporting that funds were not received until after funding acquittals were submitted, causing cashflow challenges for organisations with small operating budgets. Applicants reported that if funding was provided upon signing of the funding agreement, these challenges would be largely avoided. More information is provided in the Albury, Coffs Harbour and Muswellbrook case studies in Appendix A.

Some Applicants also reported concerns with sourcing sufficient volunteers and workers to deliver HB Program activities. When applying for activities, smaller Applicants are often uncertain of their capacity to deliver activities due to their reliance on volunteers. The buy-in and support of the local community for these organisations is key to deliver a HB Program activity. This was in-part caused by the uncertainty associated with funding for each holiday period. This was particularly emphasised in the Muswellbrook region (see Muswellbrook’s case study in Appendix A).

These concerns were less emphasised by larger and more established Applicants, such as councils.⁵⁵ Section 5.3 provides further detail on how these challenges could be overcome.

The time, effort and resourcing associated with the HB Program’s administration were identified as a barrier to applying and delivering activities in regional areas experiencing hardship. Stakeholders emphasised that local organisations in regions where communities are recovering from particular challenges, such as a natural disaster, were less likely to have capacity to apply for or deliver HB Program activities. Stakeholders emphasised, however, that HB Program provides greatest value for regional youth when it supports them to overcome recent challenges and re-engage with their community. When a regional town is in the process of recovery:

- Local organisations are less likely to have capacity to apply for HB Program funding due to a focus on delivering other critical services.
- The local region is unlikely to have facilities available to support delivery of HB Program activities.
- Young people are likely distributed across the regional area, often displaced from primary residences, and less able to travel to activity locations.

These challenges create issues for prospective Applicants and Partners as Applicants will struggle to source capacity to submit an application and deliver the HB Program, and Partners will struggle to engage

“The application and acquittal process is too long for a grant of \$5,000.

The acquittals are tedious, and we are currently struggling with a backlog of acquittals to complete.”

– Applicant

⁵⁴ While many Applicants reported that longer term funding would support them, there was no clear consensus as to what the ideal funding timeline would be for HB Program. See Section 6.1.2 for more detail regarding the benefits and challenges of long term funding.

⁵⁵ This finding is reflected in HB Program’s Logic, which assumes regional NFPs are small in scope and size, while local councils are assumed to have capacity to deliver high quality services and programs.

with regional youth, and organise appropriate facilities. This was raised as a key issue in Lismore after the 2022 floods and is described in more detail in Appendix A. In the absence of dedicated and targeted support, HB Program is unlikely to be engaged with or delivered effectively in these areas.

6.2 There are opportunities for ORY to streamline some processes and focus on more strategic planning.

Stakeholders reported the HB Program as successfully supporting the delivery of fun and enjoyable holiday activities for youth in regional areas. However, the emphasis on flexible and responsive grant administration, as valued by Partners and Applicants (see Section 6.1.1), has created capacity challenges for ORY staff due to:

- manual and time-intensive administration processes, including:⁵⁶
 - having to open, review and assess Applicant applications every holiday break;
 - supporting Partners and Applicants with program delivery, including changes to activities, and;
 - managing acquittals from Applicants each holiday period.
- a growing portfolio of grants to manage, with limited resources.⁵⁷

This focus on grant administration has created limited capacity for ORY staff to focus on strategic planning to continuously strengthen the HB Program. This includes a limited ability to consider:

- an overarching data strategy about what data to collect and monitor to inform continuous improvement and strategic decision-making (as evidenced by limited consistent data across Partners and Applicants to support this evaluation), and;
- a more strategic approach to determine which HB Program applications to fund (where eligibility criteria of the HB Program is satisfied), beyond being based on applications received.⁵⁸

“We [can’t] spend much time thinking about impact of the Program as we are so preoccupied with delivering the Program. I can see we are delivering valuable [activities], but I think we can now look to refine and refresh Holiday Break.”

– ORY

6.3 HB Program funding of \$5.6m supported 317 organisations to deliver activities over Autumn 2022 – Summer 2022-23.

Nous undertook a high-level cost analysis based on available Applicant and Partner data to develop cost insights for the HB Program over Autumn 2022 – Summer 2022-23. An overview of key cost insights is provided in Figure 21 overleaf. Detailed cost effectiveness analysis of the HB Program was not possible based on the data available, however, insights about delivery costs by holiday period, activity and location are provided overleaf.

The following trends were identified, and are discussed in more detail throughout this section:⁵⁹

- Most funds were invested in the Spring break. The Winter break was the most cost-efficient.

⁵⁶ Holiday Break’s use of SmartyGrants provides some support to streamline program administration.

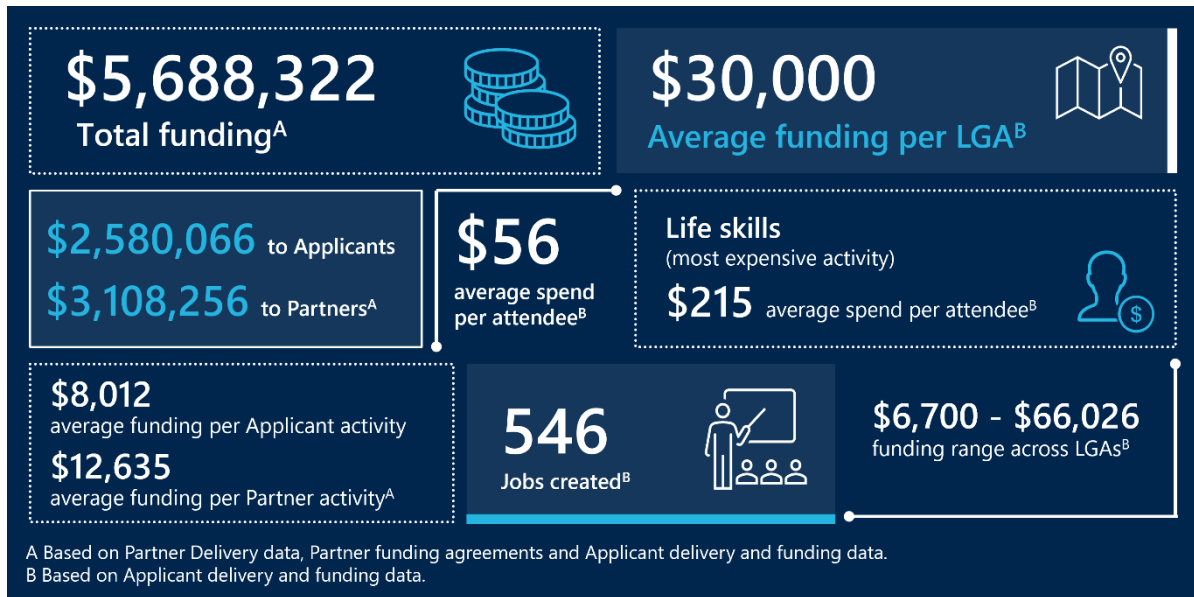
⁵⁷ Reported by ORY. Note: While Holiday Break’s Program Logic describes the HB Program’s staff load as 1.5 FTE, ORY has advised the HB Program’s current staff load is 2.3 FTE.

⁵⁸ ORY reported that where an application is from an eligible area, and providing an appropriate free activity, they will likely be approved. ORY reported that there were opportunities to closely consider the impact of potential applications.

⁵⁹ Note: These findings represent trends identified over the Autumn 2022 – Summer 2022-23 break only.

- The majority of funding supported sport/fitness and arts activities. Life skills were the most expensive.
- By region, the North Coast received the most funding. The Illawarra Shoalhaven was the most expensive per attendee.

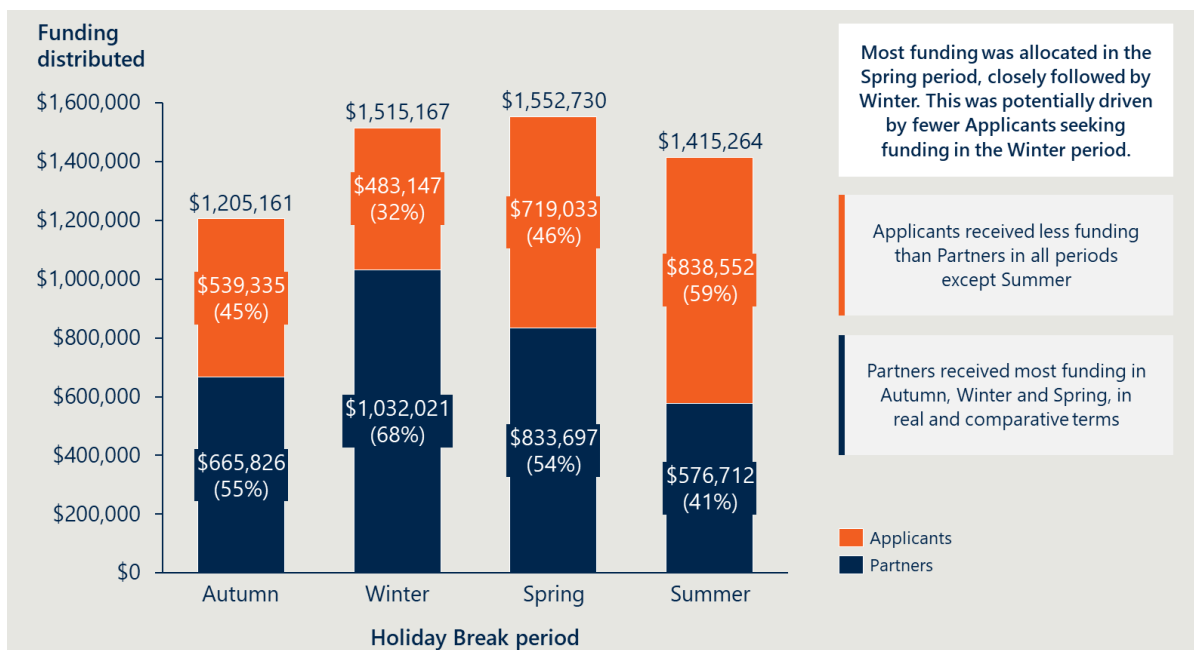
Figure 21 | HB Program cost insights



6.3.1 Most funds were invested in the Spring break, while Winter had the lowest delivery cost for activities.

The highest value of funding was invested in the Spring break period. Figure 22 below outlines the HB Program’s funding to Partners and Applicants over the four holiday periods.

Figure 22 | Grant funding distributed by holiday break period⁶⁰



⁶⁰ Based on Partner funding agreements and Applicant delivery and funding data. Note: *Create NSW* funding was recorded as a lump sum. This has been apportioned equally across the four holiday periods.

In all periods except Summer 2022-23, Partners received most of HB Program’s distributed funding. This is driven by an increase in average funding per Applicant activity in Summer (to \$12,705.33),⁶¹ and a decrease in Partner funding for that period. While Summer was the most funded Applicant period, it had the least number of Applicants activities delivered, as shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9 | Applicant attendees, activities, and average cost over holiday periods⁶²

	Autumn	Winter	Spring	Summer
Applicant attendees	12,251	8,447	13,444	11,966
Applicant activities	70	76	110	66
Average Applicant funding per activity	\$7,704.79	\$6,357.19	\$6,536.66	\$12,705.33

Based on Applicant data (as Partner data was not available), Winter was the most cost-efficient period in which to deliver activities, followed closely by Spring, despite more activities delivered and higher attendance in the Spring break.

6.3.2 While a significant majority of funding supported sport/fitness and arts activities, Life Skills were the most expensive to deliver.

Sports and fitness and arts activities represented 84 per cent of total HB Program Applicant funding across all periods.⁶³ All activity type cost around the same amount on a per attendee basis, except for Life Skills, which was four times more expensive. This analysis is limited because Applicant activities were categorised inconsistently.⁶⁴ Table 10 below considers Applicant attendees and funding across HB Program activities.

Table 10 | HB Program activities by funding and attendees for Applicants only⁶⁵

	Sport/fitness or physical activity	Art	Music	Life Skills	Technology	Other
Funding allocated	\$1,097,812.9	\$1,070,961.4	\$186,938.6	\$103,286.2	\$100,068.0	\$21,000.0
Attendees	20,664	18,692	3,154	481	2,445	672
Funding per attendee	\$53.13	\$57.30	\$59.27	\$214.73	\$40.93	\$31.25

6.3.3 By region, the North Coast received the most funding while Illawarra Shoalhaven was the most expensive by attendee.

Based on Applicant data only, the North Coast region received 19 per cent of all HB Program funding. Most other regions received similar amounts of funding, ranging from between \$290,000 to \$490,000, except for the Central Coast and Illawarra Shoalhaven which together received only 3.6 per cent of total

⁶¹ See Table 9. This is possibly explained by Summer having the highest amount available for Applicants per activity in comparison to other holiday periods.

⁶² Based on Applicant delivery and funding data.

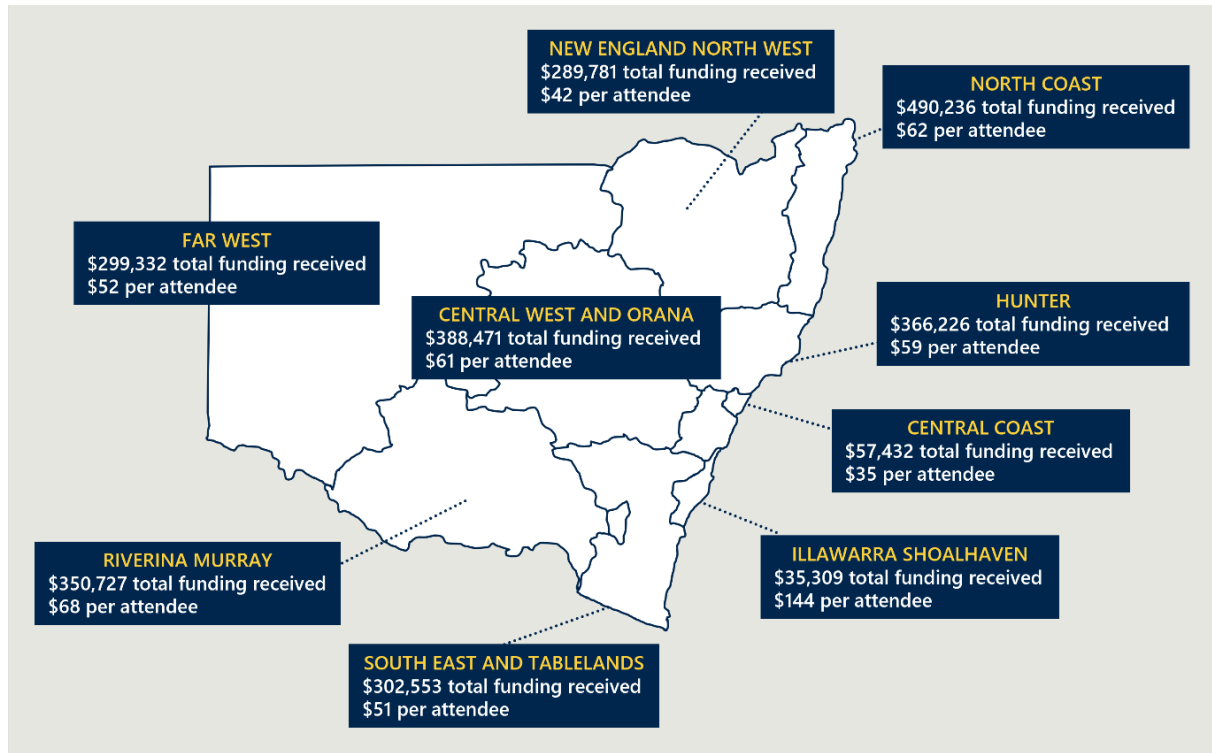
⁶³ Based on Applicant delivery and funding data.

⁶⁴ For example, many activities categorised as Life Skills activities were camps. Some Music and Arts activities also involved camps.

⁶⁵ Based on Applicant delivery and funding data.

funding.⁶⁶ There is no clear relationship between HB Program funding provided and attendees across NSW Government regions. This is likely reflective of the different regional youth populations in each NSW Government region. HB Program’s attendance and reach with regional youth is described in more detail in Section 4.1. By attendee, Illawarra Shoalhaven was the most expensive region in which to deliver HB Program activities at \$245 per attendee, while the Central Coast was the least expensive at \$35 per attendee. Most other regions were similar, ranging between \$42 to \$68 per attendee. Figure 23 below presents these findings across a map of NSW.

Figure 23 | Applicant funding and cost per attendee by NSW Government region⁶⁷



⁶⁶ Note: This is likely reflective of the Central Coast and Illawarra Shoalhaven covering ineligible HB Program LGA areas (Newcastle City Council and Wollongong City Council respectively). Both Central Coast and Illawarra Shoalhaven also had the least number of activities delivered (see Section 4.1.4 for more detail).

⁶⁷ Applicant delivery and funding data.

7 Recommendations

This section presents recommendations and future considerations to improve the Holiday Break Program.

7.1 There are four broad opportunities to further strengthen the HB Program as it shifts out of its establishment phase.

The Holiday Break Program is now in its third year of delivery.⁶⁸ The evaluation found that the HB Program appears to be operating well. Activities are delivered across all of regional NSW and are attended and enjoyed by a large number of regional youths, including priority cohorts. The HB Program also had positive impacts on the capacity of local organisations (including local councils) and the Arts sector to deliver activities and enhance their usual offerings in regional communities.

As the HB Program shifts out of an initial establishment phase, four opportunities emerged to strengthen the HB Program and ensure strategic government investment (see Table 11 below). These are explained in further detail below.

Table 11 | Opportunities to enhance the HB Program

Opportunity	Timeframe
<p>1 Set the HB Program’s strategic objectives to best support priority cohorts and better guide funding decisions about delivery providers.</p> <p>ORY could define the HB Program’s strategic objectives more clearly, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• defining the outcomes the HB Program seeks to achieve for each priority cohort• defining the outcomes it seeks to achieve in communities and what factors should guide decision-making about appropriate delivery providers. <p>This can then inform decisions about the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• balance of funding to Partner versus Applicant organisations, based on community needs• types of activities and Applicants the HB Program seeks to fund.	0 – 6 months
<p>2 Set longer term funding cycles and facilitate relationships between holiday periods to better sustain the benefits.</p> <p>ORY could explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Options for longer term funding cycles that enable Applicants to commit to delivery activities further ahead, and support Partners to return to communities.• The use of virtual sessions to build information sharing and co-delivery relationships between Partners and Applicants beyond holiday periods.• Opportunities to support Partners and Applicants to develop longer-term connections with regional youth beyond holiday periods, for example, via an active social media page or an online portal.	6 – 12 months

⁶⁸ Holiday Break is currently funded through the NSW Government’s 2020 Regional Recovery Package. The HB Program existed before this package as a rotating film festival (name unavailable).

Opportunity	Timeframe
<p>3 Streamline processes to better support Applicants (particularly smaller or resourced constrained NFPs) to apply for and deliver the HB Program.</p> <p>ORY could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline the HB Program administration for Applicants by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> simplifying application and acquittal processes (e.g. not requiring submission of minor receipts) outlining example expenses that Holiday Break funding can support. Explore the use of ORY’s regional coordinators to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> local councils and NFPs to learn about the HB Program and their eligibility to apply Applicants to apply for, report on, and deliver the HB Program, including through clear guidance on what success looks like. 	0 – 12 months
<p>4 Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework, including a minimum dataset, to support ongoing improvement in program delivery and better outcomes for regional youth.</p> <p>ORY could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement consistent data collection practices to build a minimum dataset across Partners and Applicants to ensure similar data is collected across Partners and Applicants. Consider the establishment of an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework, supported by a data strategy that identifies data points that support ORY to understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementation success (e.g. number of attendees, type of activity) performance against the HB Program Outcomes. 	6 – 12 months

Recommendation 1. Set the HB Program’s strategic objectives to best support priority cohorts and better guide funding decisions about delivery providers.

This evaluation found that the HB Program has a broad geographic footprint, provides a range of enjoyable activities to many regional youths, and delivers through diverse organisations. As the HB Program shifts out of its establishment phase, there is an opportunity for ORY to further refine the strategic outcomes the HB Program seeks to achieve, to guide more strategic decision-making about funding.

Key challenges to address include:

- Minimal Partner and Applicant guidance on targeting priority cohorts and age groups. There are opportunities to better support Partners and Applicants reach different priority cohorts and age groups (see Section 4.16.1.2).
- Differences in the types of benefits achieved by delivering through Partners and Applicants. There are opportunities for more intentional decision-making regarding delivery through Partners versus Applicants (and within Applicants, councils versus NFPs) (see Section 5.25.1).
- Differences in the types of needs and challenges experienced in different NSW regions. There are opportunities to provide more tailored support for delivery of the HB Program (see Section 6.16.1.2).
- Despite strong enjoyment across all activity types (see Section 4.24.2), funding decisions were largely driven by applications received (see Section 6.26.2). There are opportunities for more intentional decision-making regarding the type of activities to fund.

To address this, the HB Program could define its strategic priorities more clearly, including:

- **Define the outcomes the HB Program seeks to achieve for each priority cohort and age group.** Different priority cohorts and age groups have distinct needs for HB Program activities. The HB Program could more clearly articulate the outcomes it seeks to achieve for each cohort and age group, and use these to guide activity funding decisions, and provide clearer guidance to Partners and Applicants about desired outcomes for different groups. This could include specific guidelines for Partners and Applicants regarding HB Program intentions for different cohorts, or examples of desired activities for each cohort.

For example, the outcome for youth with disability could be to facilitate access to appropriate and enjoyable recreational activities (which may require ORY to specifically seek out a delivery provider experienced in delivering activities for youth with disability). Conversely, the outcome for LGBTQIA+ youth may be to ensure recreational activities are safe and inclusive for all youth. The outcomes should align to ORY's broader strategy for priority cohorts.

- **Define the outcomes Holiday Break seeks to achieve in communities and what factors should guide decision-making about appropriate delivery providers.** The HB Program is delivered jointly by Partners and Applicants, with Partners receiving more funding in total over Autumn 2022 – Summer 2022-23 than Applicants.⁶⁹ There is limited information in program documentation about what factors to consider when determining whether to deliver through Partners or Applicants, or why Partners represent 55 per cent of total funding. The HB Program could more clearly define what outcomes it seeks to achieve in communities and therefore what factors should guide decision making, with consideration to the different benefits provided to regional communities by Partners and Applicants.

This could include the development of assessment guidelines and grant program policies. These guidelines should provide guidance as to HB Program's intended funding distribution (e.g. when and where to fund Partners activities, when to require a Partner to partner with a local organisation and/or investigating the feasibility of providing councils block funding to support local NFPs to deliver the HB Program). In developing these guidelines and policies consideration should be given to the most appropriate partners to achieve program objectives (e.g. capacity building of local organisations versus providing new experiences, or a balance which could include a requirement for Partners to always deliver in partnership with local organisations).

This could better guide decisions about the:

- balance of funding provided to Partner versus Applicant organisations, including decision making about what type of activities to fund, and through what organisation type (i.e. Partners, NFPs, or councils)
- types of activities the HB Program seeks to fund.

ORY could then:

- refine the HB Program's eligibility criteria, and application and review process;
- align grant guidelines and promotional materials to those outcomes;
- develop advice to Partners and Applicants about the outcomes the HB Program seeks to achieve for priority cohorts and different age groups, and;
- streamline when and how ORY provides supports to Applicants in the application process (see Section 6.1.2).

⁶⁹ See Section 6.3 for more detail.

Recommendation 2. Set longer term funding cycles and facilitate relationships between holiday periods to better sustain the benefits.

Partners and Applicants reported that HB Program activities are enjoyed by young people but felt that more could be done to sustain the benefits of the HB Program beyond the one-off delivery of an activity (for more information, see Section 6.1.25.2.3). In particular, Partners and Applicants reported:

- there are challenges with HB Program forward planning, and opportunities to sustain relationships and other outcomes through longer-term funding cycles (see Section 6.1.26.1.2);
- more could be done to facilitate proactive engagement between HB Program funding recipients to maximise program benefits (see Section 5.1.25.2.3),⁷⁰ and;
- regional youth are eager to stay connected to activity facilitators (especially Partner facilitators), especially those relating to skill development (see Section 4.34.3).

To sustain connections between Partners and Applicants, local organisations, and young people, ORY could explore:

- **Options for longer term (e.g. annual) funding cycles that enable Applicants to commit to deliver activities further ahead, and support Partners to return to communities.** The HB Program could investigate options to fund Partners and Applicants for longer periods of time to realise benefits associated with long term delivery (see Section 6.1.26.1.2). This could include providing an option for Applicants to apply for one-off (as is currently available), annual or bi-annual funding, securing HB Program delivery in specified regional areas for a period of time and enabling more secure partnerships. HB Program's strategic priorities (see Recommendation 1) could support ORY to identify organisations that could be funded more long term.
- **The use of virtual sessions to build information sharing and co-delivery relationships between Partners and Applicants beyond holiday periods.** Organisations reported there would be strong value in meeting other providers operating within their local area to facilitate opportunities beyond holiday periods. This would support:
 - Partners and Applicants to share lessons learnt and regional connections, deliver jointly organised activities, and refer young people to other HB Program activities available in a region;
 - Partners to connect with locally based organisations, and;
 - Applicants to build their local capacity and improve their activities.Virtual sessions could also be an avenue of engaging new prospective Applicants in regional areas.
- **Opportunities to support Partners and Applicants to develop longer-term connections with regional youth beyond holiday periods, for example, via an active social media page or online portal.** This would allow Partners and Applicants to share activities they are delivering in the future, stay connected with young people eager to stay in touch, and promote the HB Program to new regional youth.

⁷⁰ The only existing initiative identified as facilitating engagement between Partners and Applicants is the Holiday Break website and interactive map.

This could support the HB Program to realise benefits of long-term delivery, including:⁷¹

- more effective forward planning by Applicants, including organising consistent volunteers and resources to deliver activities
- providing Partners and Applicants a deeper understanding of local regional needs and available activity facilities
- facilitating Partners and Applicants to develop sustained relationships and greater levels of trust with regional youth.

Recommendation 3. Streamline processes to better support smaller NFPs to apply for and deliver the HB Program.

Some Applicants experienced challenges with the complexity of HB Program's application, reporting, administrative and funding distribution processes (see Section 6.1.26.1.2). The ORY team currently operate a highly flexible and responsive - yet time and resource intensive - process to administer HB Program funding. While Partners and Applicants appreciated ORY's flexibility in administering the HB Program, there are opportunities to streamline application and reporting processes for some Applicants (particularly smaller and more resource constrained NFPs). This could also help to reduce the administrative burden on ORY.

To support smaller NFP organisations to deliver HB Program activities, and reduce ORY administrative workload, ORY could:

- **Streamline HB Program administration for Applicants. Changes the HB Program could consider include:**
 - Simplifying application and acquittal processes. Where possible, the HB Program should be administered and delivered proportional to each grant's value. For Applicants, the lower value associated with the HB Program should correspond with minimal reporting and documentation to support Applicant reporting and delivery with the HB Program (e.g. not requiring submission of minor receipts). ORY could consider removing Applicant reporting requirements beyond data collected through the standardised data collection tool (see Recommendation 4).
 - Outlining example expenses that the HB Program funding can support. This will provide certainty as to how HB Program funding can be spent, providing Applicants more confidence to deliver an activity before applying, and how HB Program funding will support them. Example expenses should be key items identified to support Applicant delivery of activities, such as transport and activity staff salaries.
- **Explore the use of ORY's regional coordinators to support Applicants to apply for, report on, and deliver HB Program.** ORY's regional coordinators are well placed to support Applicants with HB Program applications, planning and delivery to reduce pressure on the Holiday Break ORY team. These efforts could be targeted towards Applicants who:
 - Have potential to diversify activities available to young people in their local community (i.e. councils / NFPs who have unique capabilities, expertise, venues or other resources to provide new offerings which young people want).
 - Can best support young people from priority cohort backgrounds to hear about, access and benefit from HB Program activities (i.e. leveraging council/ local NFP's deep knowledge of the

⁷¹ For more detail, refer to Table 8 in section 6.1.2.

needs and wants of local youth, their existing connections with these young people, and/or their expertise in delivering services and programs to priority young people).

- Have existing connections with other local providers and community members (including young people), and/or existing connections with external providers who they can work with to enhance their offering.

Specifically, ORY could explore opportunities to leverage its regional coordinators to:

- Identify and support potential Applicants to learn about the HB Program and their eligibility to apply.
- Support new and returning Applicants to apply for funding, including by providing clear guidance on what may help to make an application successful.
- Provide learnings about what works best when delivering the HB Program to Applicants, to build their capacity and potential for successful delivery.

Recommendation 4. Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework, including a minimum dataset, to support ongoing improvement in program delivery and better outcomes for regional youth.

Data collected with the HB Program provides a view of what activities have been delivered across NSW (see Section 43.3). Data collected for Applicants appeared to be more complete than Partner data which allowed more insights to be drawn against Applicant activities. Across both Partner and Applicant activities, there is limited data collected to measure outcomes for regional youth and communities. As the HB Program becomes more established, there are opportunities to improve measurement of program outcomes and strategic priorities with more targeted data collection.

ORY could:

- **Implement consistent data collection practices to build a minimum dataset across Partners and Applicants to ensure similar data is collected across Partners and Applicants.** Collecting the same data across Partners and Applicants would enable ORY to more clearly understand outputs of the HB Program across both funding streams. ORY could support Partners and Applicants to collect consistent data through a standardised data collection tool. This tool would outline key data points to collect, and the approach to collect and report data (e.g. by providing definitions for each activity category). This would also reduce time spent by Partners, Applicants and ORY in managing data.
- **Consider the establishment of an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework supported by a data strategy.** HB Program could develop an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework, supported by a data strategy, that sets out key indicators to track. This could inform executive and operational decision-making and future monitoring and evaluation efforts. The data strategy should consider the different possible users (e.g. ORY Executive versus Delivery team) and uses (e.g. operational versus strategic decision making) for HB Program data, and identify data points that support ORY to understand:
 - **Implementation success.** This will include data points collected by Partners and Applicants, such as:
 - consistent activity categories (with clear guidance instructions to ensure activities are categorised consistently)

- number of actual attendees
- location delivered to (e.g. by LGA).
- **Performance against HB Program outcomes.** This will include data points and measures that match to the identified short, medium, and long term outcomes of the HB Program (see also Recommendation 1).

Table 12 below provides example data points against a collection of the HB Program’s Program Outcomes.

Table 12 | Program outcomes mapped to example data measures

Program outcome ⁷²	Example data point ⁷³
Short term outcome: Strengthening local council infrastructure and capacity for local councils to host recreational and social activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Councils and NFPs funded through the HB Program • Reports from Councils and NFPs regarding their experience with the HB Program
Medium term outcome: Established relationships between service providers (Councils and NFPs) and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Councils and NFPs repeatedly funded through the HB Program • Reports from Councils and NFPs regarding their experience with the HB Program
Long term outcome: Embedding the HB Program with the social fabric of regional communities	<p>Over 3-5 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of activities delivered in regional areas • Surveyed experiences of young people engaging in activities • Reports from Applicants regarding their experience with the HB Program.

⁷² Based on the ORY’s Program Logic for the Holiday Break Program.

⁷³ To capture this data, ORY should investigate the use of surveys to document Partner and Applicant Holiday Break experience, and spot surveys to document attendee experience. This would provide an understanding of experiences with Holiday Break, while minimising administrative burdens placed on Partners and Applicants.

Appendix A Five place-based case studies

Appendix B Literature review

Appendix C Survey results and Consultations

Appendix D Partner delivery data

Appendix E Partner funding arrangements

Appendix F Applicant delivery data and funding



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