



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

FOI 23-145

On 15 April 2020, the former government announced a package of short-term measures to support Australian media businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included the \$50 million Public Interest News Gathering (PING) Program.

The objective of the PING was to support regional broadcasters and publishers to maintain or increase their production and distribution of public interest journalism in regional Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic phase. The PING provided direct support for the continued provision of local and regional journalism which was vital during a time when communities across Australia needed access to trusted sources of news and information.

Applications were considered through a demand-driven grant process whereby organisations that satisfied the criteria were eligible to receive a share of the funding. Funding amounts were determined using a formula that was outlined in the PING program guidelines ([Demand-driven grants guidelines PING \(OGC Comments 30042020\).docx \(smartygrants.com.au\)](#)).

Grantees were able to expend funding on a number of eligible activities which supported the production and distribution of public interest news journalism during the grant period. These activities were provided for under the guidelines:

- Purchase of lease of assets and equipment
- Acquisition of relevant content, intellectual property or other rights
- The costs of acquiring technology to assist with the production and distribution of content
- Salaries for employees that are directly connected to the production of public interest journalism or to the generation of revenue to fund the production of public interest journalism
- Costs to assist journalists with content production and distribution
- Costs of staff training
- Office and travel costs related to public interest journalism
- Other costs that directly support the production and distribution of public interest journalism



Australian Government

**Department of Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts**

It should be noted that the below expenditure reflects that a number of applicants had grant amounts reduced. The funding agreements contained conditions that had to be met to support the PING objectives. Grantees were required, at a minimum to maintain their level of journalistic staff, and mastheads or news bulletins during the grant period. Where it was determined that a grantee was unable to meet these requirements, action was taken to reduce funding. Most of these reductions took place prior to the execution of grant agreements where grantees indicated that they would be unable to meet these conditions.

The below table outlines expenditure by the pool of applicants against each expenditure category:

Eligible Expenditure Category	Expenditure
Purchase of lease of assets and equipment	1,850,025.32
Acquisition of relevant content, intellectual property or other rights	950,514.96
The costs of acquiring technology to assist with production or distribution of content	1,298,973.97
Employee salaries directly connected to production of public interest journalism or generation of revenue to fund production of public interest journalism	42,516,617.74
Costs to assist journalists with content production and distribution	322,990.93
Costs of staff training	70,773.96
Office and travel costs related to public interest journalism	15,442.00
Other costs that directly support the production and distribution of public interest journalism	1,310,252.11
Total	48,335,590.99

A formal evaluation of the PING was conducted by the department and is available, along with the government response to the evaluation, on the department's website at [Response to ACIL Allen report | Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts](#).