



# DESIGN OF ALTERNATIVE VOICE SERVICE TRIALS

## Request for comment & expressions of interest

Australian Private Networks Pty Ltd (APN) trading as Activ8me appreciates the opportunity to provide a response in relation to the Design of Alternative Voice Service Trials – Request for comments and expression of interest paper.

APN is an Internet Service and Infrastructure Provider servicing Regional, Remote and Rural Australia declare we express our interest as a stakeholder to participate in the trials. APN are pleased to submit a response to the questions outlined in the discussion paper and understand our response will be treated as non-confidential and information will be made publicly available.

# Response to Questions

---

## Question 1

Should the department be seeking to achieve other objectives through the trials? If so, how would this affect the design?

APN suggest no changes to the objectives as set out in the Design for Alternative Voice Service Trial – request for comments and expression of interest paper are broad in nature, they articulate the clearly outline what the Department is trying to achieve.

## Question 2

In terms of the deliverables for customers, do you have any concerns about the proposed design of the trials or suggestions to improve it, for example, locations for the trials, how best to recruit consumers to take part, requirements on CSPs, and service requirements?

The design of the trial for all intended purposes sets the deliverables that a CSP must deliver to and the parameters they must work within. There are elements of the design that need deeper discovery/understanding to be provided to the CSP's so they are clear before commencement. For instance, this information may be forthcoming in the release of the request for funding guidelines and/or requirements, APN would like this considered if not already.

- Are the CSP's entering in to a 3-way agreement with the Department, Customer and CSP? If so the guidelines for such will need to be defined.
- Will a set of requirements be issued to CSP's for consideration as part of their solutions? This would enable a CSP to choose a category they wish to provide a solution for and enable the Department to measure CSP's on the same parameters.
- Survey detail and the measurements within the survey, these need to be clear and provided to the CSP's as part of the request for submission. CSP's needs to understand how they are being assessed and ensure the services can be measured in this manner.
- What is the education/training considerations required for the customers as part of the Trial, as this may be new technology for the customer?
- In order for the CSP's to continue compliance with the relevant statutory requirements, what is the expectation on CSP in supply of these Trial services?
- During the Trial what information will be shared between CSP's or will a CSP only be provided information on the performance of their services?
- Should a customer trial more than one service during the Trial period? This would give a view of how multiple services perform from a single customer.
- Consideration for support processes and how Trial customers need to interact with CSP and/or the Department. Assume it will be the CSP's responsibility, but needs to be clear.

There are two types of customers that could be considered for the Trial, being customers:

1. With existing Broadband Internet Service.
2. Without a Broadband Internet Service.

This needs to be taken in to consideration when selecting customers and locations, in cases the solution/service will require a Broadband Internet Service to operate.

### Question 3

In terms of the needs of CSPs, do you have any concerns about the proposed design of the trials or suggestions to improve it, for example, information required, capping of customer numbers, timeframes, level of funding available, and the approach to payment?

APN understands the intent of the funding model as explained in the Design for Alternative Voice Service Trial- request for comment and expression of interest paper. APN assume the model will be a 3-way agreement and the payment model will be the responsibility of the Department and not the customer.

The Department in finalising the Funding Model, should consider:

- Define what can be included in the 'Upfront Cost'. Will a CSP be able to include infrastructure costs as part of 'Upfront Cost'?
- Will the Department fund the Broadband Internet Service for customers with existing Broadband Internet Service? If so, is there a period of time during the Trial the Department will fund only?
- Will the Department fund the Broadband Internet Service for customers requiring connection to be part of the Trial? If so, is there a period of time during the Trial the Department will fund the Broadband Internet Service?
- Will the Department fund hardware for customers which may be required to operate the service at their premise?

### Question 4

Do you have suggestions on what should happen at the end of the trials, noting that Government funding will cease?

At the end of the Trial there are three alternatives that could be considered. This decision needs to be finalised 4 weeks prior to the conclusion of the Trial, as it will require all parties to plan and communicate appropriate path.

1. Transition Trial customers by converting the Trial service to production and cancel HCRC services
2. Stop the Trial and continue with HCRC service, why the strategic outcome is being decided.
3. Extend the Trial and funding, as further analysis is required.

### Question 5

Do you have any comments on the stakeholder reference group? What stakeholders should be represented on the groups? Would you like to nominate anyone as a possible member?

APN acknowledges the stakeholder reference group will play a critical role in the Trial process.

It is our belief this stakeholder reference group needs members from the Department (or advisors to the department), customer representatives (should be members of the Trial but could be customer representative groups/bodies) and CSP's in order to provide a fair and reasonable balance. Further, this would provide a forum to enhance the services during the trial. The underlining principle of the group is to ensure at the end of the Trial there is clear direction on a voice alternative to HCRC, with no bias. There will be a need to have defined criteria to manage outcomes consistently.

APN would like to nominate a representative as a member for the stakeholder reference group. Already having a great understanding of Remote, Rural and Regional Australia APN see this as a great opportunity to leverage this knowledge and provide trusted advice whilst getting a deeper understanding of the challenges and provide insights to the industry.

### Question 6

Do you have any comments regarding the criteria for assessing proposals and contracting CSPs?

APN recommends the Department consider including within the criteria the following requirements for assessing suitability of a CSP to be included in the Trial:

- A CSP must be a registered Telecommunications provider with a carrier number in Australia.
- Adheres to the Australian Government Procurement Policies
- Can delivery on the objectives as stated in the Design for Alternative Voice Service Trials – request for comments and expressions of Interest in conjunction with or replaced by future documents to be released by the Department as part of the invitation.
- Can provide a full end to end service from delivery, support to project management, thus can support the Trial in the manner it requires.
- Provides both Telephony service and Broadband Internet service. This enables end to end ownership of service and can distinguish between both when fault arises. Provides the Department and Trial customer one organisation to deal with.
- Support operations are based in Australian, inclusive but not limited to Customer Call Centre and National Operational Centres.
- Demonstrate ability to provide ongoing support for services after the Trial is completed, including the growth as customers move from HCRC to new service.

### Question 7

Do you think regular surveys of trial customers would be useful? Do you consider there are any particular matters that should be monitored and evaluated during the trials in addition to those identified (e.g. service outages, quality issues and customer turnover)?

APN strongly recommends regular reviews of the services through surveys to customers and reporting from CSP's on performance of the services. Our experience with trials demonstrates that regular reviews not only captures the customer experience immediately (whilst it is fresh in mind), but will enable the CSP's to improve the services through a Continuous Improvement Program (CIP).

In relation to what should be included for monitoring and evaluation, what you have already identified is reasonable, however APN recommends the below be considered for inclusion:

- Service outages needs to be broken in to categories and causes. As an example, a VOIP service is reliant on Broadband Internet Service and if there is an outage on the Broadband Internet Service needs to be recorded as such.
- Quality issues will need some parameters/guidelines. While this may be subject to opinion-based feedback, if there are set parameters/guidelines for customers to follow and then provide feedback would be more beneficial.
- There are many aspects that can impact a service and this will need to be identified at time of getting responses, such as weather, latency and location.
- Service incidents reported
- Usage statistics – Volumes of calls, duration of call, etc
- Customer profiles that the assessment can be measured against
- Consideration for support processes, including escalations and how Trial customers need to interact with CSP and/or the Department.

### Question 8

How would the trials be best promoted to rural and remote customers by both the department and CSPs? How would the results of the trials be best communicated once they are complete?

The Department and the selected CSP's must be consistent with their communications and it must be about the service, the objectives and value proposition. Criteria will need to be set on what is allowed in terms of marketing during the Trial, for example limiting or not allowing a CSP to cross sell other services as this is not part of the objective. Whilst a CSP may want to increase their market share in other areas, CSP's have to act in a manner that totally supports the Trial objectives.

In terms of the mediums/methods for communicating to best promote, APN suggest using these:

- Communicate with senior local representatives such as Mayor, to ensure they buy in and support the Trial.
- Community/Town meetings – Ensure we get sponsorship/support from senior local representatives, such as Mayor.
- Social Media such as Facebook for blogs and interest articles
- Telephone calls
- Utilise existing groups/forums such as BIRRR, Isolated Parents Association, Farmers Federations, etc. Promote on their website and social media platforms
- Direct Mail to potential customers
- Email to potential customers if email address is known

## Expression of Interest

APN expresses interest to be part of the Trial as a CSP. We welcome the opportunity to be invited and submit a response detailing our services, for consideration when the formal requests are issued.

As per our profile below, we have a long history of providing telecommunication services to Remote, Rural and Regional Australia, which includes a significant number of telephony services. We provide a variety of telephone services today from basic VOIP to our bespoke developed Business Office Solution (BOS), being a business grade hosted telephone service. APN is not your standard Retail Service Provider (RSP) in this case CSP, as we are a solutions organisation that develops telecommunication solutions for Rural, Remote and Regional Australia. Given the opportunity to respond we are confident we can demonstrate:

- We can offer and provide appropriate alternative services.
- Our consultative approach and methods to undertaking trials.
- Our ability to support the Trial and Post-Trial pending outcomes.
- The development capability through our Research and Development team should the need arise.

## Profile

Since 2003 Australian Private Networks PTY LTD (APN) trading as Activ8me has been providing internet services to customers across Australia. It has grown to become the pre-eminent internet service provider (ISP) in rural, regional and remote Australia, including certified in nbn Sky Muster™ satellite services, Fixed Wireless and Fibre.

Holding carrier licence 167, APN has a proven track record of providing commercially viable solutions to Government agencies, Remote Communities, Not-For-Profit Organisations and commercial entities. Our solutions include:

- Telephony services
- Satellite services
- Point to Point and Mesh network services
- Public WiFi services
- Fixed Wireless services
- Fibre services
- IoT services

APN is 100% Australian owned and has 100% of its workforce located in Australia, the head office is located in Preston, Victoria. APN is an end to end service provider and is therefore structured to provide sales, in-house customer care department for the management of support and faults and acts as a conduit to the nbn so our customers receive seamless experience. APN develops its own software and hardware in Australia and where possible, when not produced in-house, it uses Australian hardware in its solutions.

APN has provided satellite internet services to a total of over 50,000 customers across Australia under the Australian Broadband Guarantee Scheme and similar Federal Government schemes. Under this program APN undertook all aspects of the delivery including detail planning, full stock and logistics/freight management, installation resources, field support and activation of services. In the process APN has become the largest single

supplier for such services and are experts in the installation, support and maintenance of satellite services in rural and remote Australia. APN has made major investments and innovation in management systems and processes that have added significant value to the services provided. The result is a fully integrated service that combines order management, hardware procurement, warehousing and logistics and service delivery into a seamless package that ensures customers are connected as soon as possible and keeps them informed during the process.

Having exceptional working relationships with remote and Indigenous communities, federal and state government departments/agencies, local councils and remote businesses such as farmers. Proud partners with the Royal Flying Doctors Service and NSW Farmers Federation and are continually forming new alliances with other entities looking to innovate solutions in rural, regional and remote Australia.



APN is obliged to comply with many governing authorities and or policies such as but not limited to ACCC, TCP Code, ACMA, PCI Compliance, Privacy, Meta Data and has a fully certified management system which conforms to the Australian and international standards and is re-certified by external independent organisation to the latest standards regularly.