Pathways in Place
Co-Creating Community Capabilities

The FlexFunding Framework: Getting Funders and Grantees on the Same Page About Flexibility

A practical tool to improve communication and expectation-setting in grant schemes

Governments often seek to achieve public health-related outcomes through grants that support other organisations to deliver public health initiatives[1,2]. Traditional grant-making approaches have a range of limitations, including rigidity and limited scope for adaptation, prompting calls for increased flexibility in government grants over the past few decades[3,4]. 'Flexible grant schemes' can be described as granting models designed to be adaptable to the needs of grantees by allowing them more flexibility in the use of funds, project timelines, or objectives.

Our systematic scoping review revealed a lack of clarity about what 'flexibility' means in flexible grant schemes. On some occasions, funders and grantees had differing interpretations, which can hinder the effective delivery of grant-related activities.

To address the lack of clarity around what 'flexibility' means in flexible grant schemes, we developed the FlexFunding Framework. The FlexFunding Framework is designed to help funders clearly communicate what 'flexibility' means to foster a shared language and understanding with grantees.

What is it?

The FlexFunding Framework (Table 1) identifies several aspects of flexibility that can be explored based on the classic 5W1H journalistic tool of who, what, when, where, why, how[5]. In each of these six aspects, several areas where the level of flexibility could differ can be identified. We have identified areas based on our review, but there might be others.

How can it be used?

We see two main ways that Funders could use the Framework:

1. To clarify and communicate the level of flexibility in Government flexible grant schemes. For instance, Government funders could use the Framework to identify the areas where the level of flexibility differs in their grant scheme by using the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the tool to identify these areas. Then, they can consider the level of flexibility for each area on a spectrum from limited to full flexibility. Funders can tailor configurations of flexibility to suit specific grant schemes and objectives.

2. To align interpretations and expectations about flexibility between Government funders and grantees so they are 'on the same page'. For instance, the Framework could guide discussions between Funders and grantees around levels of flexibility in the grant schemes.

How was it developed?

We conducted a systematic scoping review to explore academic and other types of literature about flexible grant schemes, following a widely used five-phase methodological framework for scoping reviews[6] and a checklist[7] to ensure our review was rigorous. The findings of the review informed the development of the FlexFunding Framework. We found 38 publications and identified a lack of clarity around what flexibility means both within and across grant schemes. We also identified some of the main areas where the level of flexibility could differ. More details about our review can be found in our peer-reviewed publication.

What's next?

The FlexFunding Framework is a new tool, and its application and usefulness are still to be tested with Government funders. We invite funders to integrate the Framework into their grant schemes and share their experiences. Feedback will help us refine and enhance the Framework.

Contact Us: We'd love to hear from you if you have used the FlexFunding Framework. Please email us at pathwaysinplace@vu.edu.au

Pathways in Place
Co-Creating Community Capabilities

Table 1: FlexFunding Framework

Aspects of flexibility	Examples of areas where level of flexibility could differ	Level of flexibility		
		Limited	Moderate	Full
Who	Choosing stakeholders for project design, delivery, or evaluation		●	
	Selecting the target population or grant beneficiaries		●	
What	Adapting grant activities to meet local needs		●	
	Shifting activities due to changing circumstances		●	
	Redefining project goals		●	
Where	Pooling funds from multiple sources		●	
	Adjusting geographical focus based on community needs		●	
When	Adjusting timelines and deadlines for project milestones		●	
	Adjusting the order in which activities are delivered to respond to evolving local needs		●	
Why	Identifying and targeting locally significant outcomes		●	
	Defining success metrics and evaluation criteria		●	
	Prioritising objectives based on emerging data and trends		●	
How	Selecting methods and approaches to be used in the design, delivery and evaluation of grant activities		●	
	Innovating and implementing new strategies		●	
	Modifying project plans based on real-time feedback and learning		●	

References

[1] Crowley R, Mathew S, Hilden D. *Modernizing the United States' public health infrastructure: A position paper From the American College of Physicians.* Ann Intern Med. 2023;176(8). Available from: https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M23-0670

[2] Shiell A, Garvey K, Kavanagh S, Loblay V, Hawe P. *How do we fund Public Health in Australia? How should we?* Aust N Z J Public Health. 2024;48(5):100187.

[3] DeSalvo KB, Wang C, Harris A, Auerbach J, Koo D, O'Carroll P. *Public Health 3.0: A call to action for Public Health to meet the challenges of the 21st century.* Prev Chronic Dis. 2017 [cited 2024 Feb 3];14(E78). Available from: https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2017/17_0017.htm

[4] Perrotte BM, Noorestani A. *Going beyond Public Health 3.0: How flexible funding streams can help to break down silos, change systems, and advance health equity in local communities.* Am J Public Health. 2021;111(S3):S189–92.

[5] Waisbord S. T*he 5Ws and 1H of digital journalism.* Digit Journal. 2019;7(3):351–8.

[6] Arksey H, O'Malley L. S*coping studies: towards a methodological framework.* Int J Soc Res Methodol. 2005 Feb;8(1):19–32.

[7] Tricco A, Lillie E, Zarin W, O'Brien KK, Colquhoun H, Levac D, et al. P*RISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and explanation.* Ann Intern Med. 2018;169(7):467–73.

About Pathways in Place

Pathways in Place: Co-Creating Community Capabilities is an innovative program of research and action that supports flourishing of children and young people. This Program is jointly delivered by Victoria University (Victoria, Australia) and Griffith University (Queensland, Australia) with funding generously provided by the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

The Program teams are each leading one of two complementary streams:

1. Early learning and development pathways (children and youth 0-15 y.o.), led by Griffith University in Logan (Queensland, Australia).

2. Pathways through education to employment (youth 15-24 y.o.), led by Victoria University in Brimbank (Victoria, Australia).

LOGAN, QLD

BRIMBANK, VIC

For more information contact the Pathways in Place team at:
✉ pathwaysinplace@vu.edu.au
✉ pathwaysinplace@griffith.edu.au
⊕ www.pathwaysinplace.com.au

Suggested citation

Craike, M., Mowle, A., Fitzpatrick, E., & Klepac, B. (2025) The FlexFunding Framework: Getting Funders and Grantees on the Same Page About Flexibility. Pathways in Place-Victoria University. Victoria University. doi: 10.26196/6m99-xh41

This snapshot is based on the following publication:
Klepac, B., Mowle, A., Fitzpatrick, E., & Craike, M. (2025) Flexible grant schemes: a systematic scoping review. BMC Public Health 25, 538. *The full publication is available here.*

![Paul Ramsay Foundation - Partnerships for Potential] ![Mitchell Institute] ![Victoria University Melbourne Australia] ![Griffith University Queensland, Australia]