**Digital Partnership Program Consultation Paper Responses Summary and Findings**

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## Executive summary

### Discussion Paper History

The NDIA has established the Digital Partnership Program (DPP) which is a program of digital initiatives designed to support participants to achieve their objectives, by making it easier for them to connect and interact with providers, and to manage their plans.

In December 2019, the NDIA released a preliminary discussion paper on the development of this program to support its approach, the then titled Digital Market Service (DMS). Feedback received from this paper was incorporated in the refinement of the NDIA Digital Partnership Program (DPP) Discussion Paper, which was released in February 2020.

This paper included updated details on the proposed DPP, the subscription process for accessing it, the terms and conditions to which subscribers to the Program will be asked to comply, and an overview of the proposed new NDIS Payments Platform.

### Responses

This DPP consultation response paper summarises the 31 responses to the final Digital Partnership Program (DPP) Discussion Paper, including NDIS participants, providers, community organisations, software developers and peak bodies. See Appendix A for a breakdown of respondents.

The responses received confirmed that the community supports the NDIAs approach to delivering the DPP, as well as understanding he value in balancing access to data and information against privacy controls.

The positive sentiment toward initial Application Programming Interface (API) requirements signals endorsement of the NDIAs approach thus far and indicates a readiness among the marketplace to engage with the DPP. These consultations have provided valuable context to both the concerns and the aspirations of stakeholders, which will help inform the focus of important next steps.

Key themes

* Support for the DPP approach and using APIs to deliver capability included:
  + Feedback endorsing the initial suite of APIs as fit for purpose
  + Endorsement for future APIs and DPP priorities
  + A strong appetite for data sharing opportunities, tempered by privacy concerns
  + A request for more detail on any potential future Payments Platform.
* A reinforced need to establish a Digital Partnership Office (DPO) responsible for robust ongoing management and delivery of APIs, including:
  + Strong and broad alignment with DPP Principles
  + Clear terms and processes to minimise risk to digital partners
  + Greater clarity on governance for Digital Partners
* Longer-term views on development and sustainability of the DPP, including:
  + Encouragement to pursue ongoing innovation, continuous improvement, agile delivery and new technologies.
  + Participant trust in NDIA apps compared to those of third parties
  + Proposal for a grants system to encourage and support development and investment by Digital Partners.

Learnings:

* **Focus on participant experience**. Encourage development of apps, tools and marketplaces that help participants connect and interact with relevant providers.
* **Enable third party innovation, and competitiveness**. Improve the efficiency of third party businesses delivering services to other providers and participants.
* **Communicate and collaborate with digital partners and participants.** Develop a culture that is open, innovative, engaged, and transparent with effective feedback mechanisms and communication vehicles in place.
* **Ensure terms protect digital partners.** Mitigate financial risk to businesses investing in the NDIA APIs through well-designed policies and processes.

### Next steps

To deliver on the goals of the DPP, and meet market demand, the NDIA will:

* **Establish a DPO.** Resourcing a DPO team for ongoing operations.
* **Refine and prioritise key deliverables.** Review the existing DPO roadmap based on these learnings and other projects to determine future development.
* **Define how we will collaborate.** Confirm the approach to forming a Digital Community of Interest (DCI) and consult regularly to determine approaches that will provide most value to the market and ultimately NDIS participants.
* **Build trust through continuous delivery.** Determine a regular development, testing and delivery rhythm and continuously iterate through prioritised work.

## Background

The Digital Market Service (DMS) Strategy developed in 2019 marks a significant shift from the 2015/16 proposal. The major difference being the departure from the NDIA developing its own solutions, instead enabling the market to do so. The Market Enablement Framework released in 2018 suggests this change, but does not provide detail on requirements.

The NDIAs Preliminary Discussion Paper of December 2019 requested feedback on the DMS. This was the NDIAs first formal release to provide detail on the new DMS Strategy, receiving 36 responses, which were used to publish a more nuanced Discussion Paper for a second round of consultation.

The DPP Discussion Paper was released in February 2020. This paper asked for more detailed feedback on:

* The DPP approach and plan for implementation
* What additional functionality and support the market would like
* First release APIs and what the market would like to see in future APIs
* The proposed subscription process, including terms and conditions
* Data which the market seeks to access and data the NDIA will seek from partners under the DPP and
* Any other ideas, feedback, or concerns relating to the DPP.

Covid-19 had a significant impact on the consultation and resulted in:

* Rescheduling the closing date from 22 March to the 14 April
* Limited media exposure (only Australian Financial Review and IT News publishing articles)
* Repositioning NDIAs social media focus limiting its reach to software developers and other audiences.

In total, the NDIA received 31 responses from a cross section of the parties, including:

* registered providers
* plan managers
* peak bodies
* community organisations
* software developers
* aggregators
* platform intermediaries

This paper also includes feedback from 22 NDIS participants whose feedback was collected through a separate consultation process.

## General support for the DPP and APIs

Summary

The positive market response to the DPP and availability of APIs gave particularly strong support and enthusiasm for third party capability to develop solutions using NDIA APIs.

Significantly, no responses opposed the DPP, the use of APIs or the approach the NDIA is taking to digital development. This indicates a market readiness to embrace the direction set out by the DMS, commit to the DPP and engage with APIs upon release.

Key themes

* The majority of respondents showed interest in the DPP and expressed intent to subscribe. Uptake is already underway with nine parties confirmed.
* There is broad acknowledgement that the DPP:
* simplifies interactions between providers, participants and the NDIA
* demonstrates a commitment to promoting and managing the growth of digital markets;
* gives participants direct access to information.

*“Information-sharing aspects of the DPP can lead to a better understanding of individual needs and improve participant outcomes, whilst improving the experience for participants and providers” -* **Specialist Disability Accommodation Provider**

* Participant representatives and carers generally support the DPP, but raised concerns on matters of potential exploitation and barriers to digital inclusion related to disability. The NDIA acknowledges the importance of establishing appropriate controls to ensure participants and providers have confidence in the delivery of secure platforms that are also accessible.

*“We feel that it is important to highlight that people with disability and their carers may face increased barriers to digital inclusion…”* **– Transition Provider**

Learnings

* The marketplace expects the NDIA to grow its digital capability through the DPP, develop tools and build a knowledge base for developers. Sustained industry engagement is seen as integral to building a digital culture that will support future roadmaps and growth in digital partnerships.

### Initial suite of APIs is on the right track

Summary

Provider response to the initial suite of APIs was considerably positive, acknowledging the first iteration should focus on delivering key functions that providers rely on to conduct business. Replicating provider portal functions like creating service bookings and lodging payment requests is considered an appropriate first offering, extending API access to registered providers first, before opening up access more broadly. Following this initial staged rollout there is strong consensus to make the initial APIs available to the broader community as soon as possible.

Key themes

* Support for the initial suite of APIs is strong, with a consensus to limit the initial access to registered providers.

*“The set of initial APIs is a great start …. The headline API roadmap priorities align to ours in general. The short and longer term API roadmap will be hugely valuable”* – **NDIS Provider.**

* It was noted that initial APIs appeared to prioritise providers over self-managed participants.

*“The NDIA should now prioritise APIs that allow online claiming for self-managed participants”* ***– NDIS Provider****.*

* Some expressed concern, cautioning the NDIA to ensure reliability and availability with regard to its API platform, to protect developers who invest in the design and construction of API solutions.

Learnings

* Current API specifications are an appropriate starting point as they will offer providers improved process efficiencies; directly benefit participants; and help end data inconsistencies between provider and NDIA information systems.
* The NDIA, through the DPO, is expected to establish Service Level Agreements (SLA) to establish accountabilities; provide ongoing support and documentation for developer access to NDIA APIs; and continue evolving API offerings.

### Significant interest in future APIs and DPP priorities

Summary

The NDIAs approach to market engagement, API prioritisation and development has received intense interest. This is not without scrutiny, demonstrated by the volume of recommendations regarding which elements of API rollout the NDIA should prioritise.

Common suggestions centre on access to participant plan data, allowing participants using digital marketplaces greater visibility and improved management tools for plan implementation. This brings attention to issues of data privacy and security where data is made available to, or even via, third parties and platforms.

Decisions on data use and sharing policy countered by NDIAs risk appetite loom as large competing factors needing further exploration. Privacy and security are important pre-requisites to developing and releasing APIs of this nature to the market, but there is no question demand for access under appropriate controls, is high.

Key themes

APIs recommended include:

* APIs that help Participants implement their plan and use their funding. This could include real-time budget tracking, planning and management views and budget forecasting.

*“Build and support functionality for the development of systems and services which support participants in understanding what they can do with their plan, and help them to find and engage well-matched services and providers.”* **– Support Coordinator**

* Alerts and notifications for participants and providers. This could include plan renewals, plan funding, appointments and plan sharing consent.
* Service finder by occupancy and geography, capacities, and price guide.

*“Providing participants with guided processes for evaluating, quoting and purchasing Assistive Technology”* **– Provider**

* Price Guide. This could foster a competitive market and help the NDIA test pricing in different markets.

*“…Service Provider partners have access to real time updates on the NDIS price guide so they can manage payments and create services.”* **– Support Coordinator**

* APIs to collect and share data between the NDIA, digital partners and participants.

Learnings

* The NDIA needs adequate processes in place to support the future roadmap of APIs.
* Strong desire for collaboration opportunities, which open channels for feedback to support seamless integrations with Digital Partners.

### Significant interest in data collection & sharing

Summary

Provider responses demonstrated a strong desire for access to NDIA data generally.

Responses from participants on data sharing are more varied, some raising concerns on how data is shared and stored.

Key themes

* All stakeholders agreed that ownership and control of participant data must remain witheach participant.

*“Concerned about privacy and people accessing information, not everyone treats information as confidentially as they should.”* **– Plan Managed Participant**

* Marketplaces sharing data with the NDIA is generally supported, but the details need to be worked through

*“…the ability to access on-demand data through the NDIA will allow us to provide … leading-edge tools and insights, develop a suite of value-add services and measure the outcomes of the services we provide our NDIS customers.”* **– Provider**

* The NDIA should share anonymised and aggregated data on a regular basis, even if individual participant and provider data cannot be.

*“Harness data from digital partners to access, analyse and determine common supply and demand issues, including thin markets (especially in regional areas), slow market adoption, and market failure.”* **– Plan Management Provider**

Learnings

* Recommended that the NDIA is transparent in how they collect and use the data by:
  + Extending the NDIA Privacy Policy to include new behaviours and usage patterns introduced by the NDIA APIs access and use of data.
  + Extending the NDIA Data Use Policy and Data Usage documents to ensure appropriate measures are implemented to minimise the risk and exposure to the NDIA, Digital Partners, providers and participants.
* Data collected would support the delivery Scheme goals by:
  + Increased focus on participant and provider experiences
  + Greater data driven insights to build capability and fill market gaps
  + Identify where alternative supports are leading to better outcomes
  + Integrate with future digital solutions and government platforms.

### Appetite for a streamlined payments platform

Summary

The discussion paper referenced the new Payments Program given its direct relationship with the DPP APIs.

As agreed, separate industry and participant consultations have commenced. The NDIA published an Approach to Market for Real Time Claims on 8 May 2020. A summary of these consultations will be published separately.

Feedback received on existing NDIA digital functionality and payments processes indicated a need for streamlined administrative processes.

A peak body stated *“the ongoing burden of lengthy wait times for payment, due to portal ‘glitches’, scheduled maintenance, or difficulties in creating timely service bookings and payment requests has proven too much for some providers and they have chosen to de-register from the NDIS.”*

This sentiment highlights the need to ensure new digital solutions do not adversely affect participant and provider experience.

Key themes

* Payment APIs for real-time claims would provide clear efficiency for providers and the NDIA.

“*Real time claiming of payments: This would be a great improvement, based on the assumption that the status of the payment could be viewed at any time and more certainty of payment timelines could be given”* **– Payment platform**

* Sending invoices for self-managed participants directly to the NDIA avoids double handling and complexity for participants.
* Participants viewing their plan and current balance in real time via an App gives greater choice and control.

“*Good to know what money is left, on a day to day basis. Makes it easy to address any hiccups on the same day.”* ***–* Agency Managed Participant**

Learnings

* Considerable interest in understanding how APIs can be applied in the context of a future claims platform, encouraging the development of specific uses once the payment platform intentions are more fully formed.
* Vast support for real-time claims functionality and a NDIA participant mobile app. Participants, providers and software developers demonstrated their acknowledgement of the benefits these solutions offer.

## Clarity of Roles will be key

Summary

Responses focused on communication, engagement and support requirements the DPO should consider adopting to ensure operational confidence for Digital Partners. Recommendations include publishing key processes early on, which cover operational, technical and future API development, to ensure greater clarity and consistency in the market. In addition, material should not be onerous or create barriers for Digital Partners.

Responses also highlighted desires for both one-to-one relationships and a broader Digital Community of Interest, allowing consultation with Digital Partners on a variety of matters.

Key themes

* Communicate a clear understanding of digital partner requirements (technical, functional & administrative) in order to gain access to the APIs

“*DPP should establish “General Rules of Engagement” to include operational guidelines, and rules relating to behaviours, including any NDIA required contract terms between Participants and Providers, data ownership, accessibility and governance, audit, funds holding, and security to provide a nationally consistent digital trade environment.*” **– Software Developer**

* Thorough ongoing support and documentation for developers
* Promote the quality and safety of services provided to scheme participants
* Support and foster innovation including development for hard to reach participants
* While DPO should include maintain one-to-one relationships with Digital Partners, it should also establish a Digital Community of Interest for broader input.

*“given the DPO will assess, approve and prioritise the future development of APIs, consultation must be extended to include NDIS participants, their families and carers, as well as peaks and representatives as end users of the proposed digital products.”* **– Provider**

Learnings

How the DPO communicates and engages with Digital Partners will be critical. For the DPO to succeed, the NDIA needs to:

* Providing transparency of their Digital and API roadmap
* Publish key development tools and artefacts for Digital Partners
* Give early and clear information about changes that may affect Digital Partners.
* Consult and collaborate via the Digital Community of Interest.

### Support for the proposed DPP Principles

Summary

Digital Partnership Principles provide a basis for the Digital Partnership Program, how it affects participants, and how the NDIA acts as a market steward. The DPP Principles were broadly supported, especially with regard to promoting participant choice and control. Many submissions went further to suggest improvements or additions to current principles in an effort to ensure they are clear and targeted.

Key themes

* There was both strong endorsement of the principle“Wherever possible, participants are not to be charged service or transaction fees” and comments that consideration of how developers are able to monetise their offerings still requires further thought.

*“As a marketplace platform we find it challenging that you state we cannot charge transaction fees. Limited number of business models available that support modern digital marketplace businesses. Digital Monetisation models typically range from 1. Commission 2. Membership/subscription fee 3. Listing fee 4. Lead fee 5. Freemium 6. Featured listings and ads”* **– Plan Manager**

* The NDIA should support participants to access digital solutions and build their capacity to use them.

*“All participants and providers should have equal access to the full potential benefits of the DPP.”* **– Provider**

* Privacy and participant consent continues to be a key focus from respondents.

*''Participants’ personal information and privacy must be protected above all else' - We believe this principle is of the upmost importance”* **– Provider**

Learnings

* Recommendation to review and amend principles where required, to be clear and unambiguous.
* Ensure alignment between DPP and new NDIS Payments Platform principles.

### Terms and conditions need to support digital partners

Summary

Guidelines detailing the DPO subscription and on boarding process attracted particular attention, with strong feedback recommending the DPO publish a resource that sets minimum standards for all Digital Partners. This should outline expectations for their technical infrastructure, administration and internal processes.

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for both Digital Partners and the NDIA Digital Partnership Office formed a key theme among respondents. Comments from a provider stated that SLAs will *"...ensure that Digital Providers deliver appropriate digital solutions that meet the service availability, capacity and reliability expectations of their users".*

Terms and Conditions are largely supported, notwithstanding additional requests for further clarification in some areas. Further recommendations include publishing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to support Digital Partners.

One clause received more feedback than most: the NDIA being able to revoke access to the APIs at any time at its sole discretion.

Businesses and participants expressed concern regarding the potential for adverse impact where the NDIA revokes access to Digital Partners without warning. To mitigate unintended hardship and maintain support for this clause, the NDIA should consider creating a “notice and rectification process, as well as some form of dispute resolution process”.

Key themes

* Document, publish and maintain Service Level Agreements that support Digital Partners.
* FAQs section for the on boarding and Terms and Conditions to provide extra context to processes.
* Establish a framework, including notification and rectification processes that set out how and when the NDIA can withdraw access to the APIs.

*“As stated in the Discussion Paper, a formal subscription process should be implemented and enforced”* **– Provider**

Learnings

* Service level commitments to be maintained by NDIA ensuring Digital Providers deliver appropriate digital solutions that meet the service availability, capacity and reliability expectations of their users.
* Terms and Conditions require additional explanation and clarification to ensure that they do not stifle uptake or result in unintended negative impacts.

### Clarity of Governance for Digital Partners

Summary

Those familiar with the scheme raised questions about the role that quality and safeguards should play. How the NDIA monitors and governs digital marketplaces needs greater consideration. This is essential to ensuring the safety of participants and the quality of supports provided.

Key themes

* The DPP opens up a risk around ambiguity of governance and clarity of roles. The role of the NDIA needs to be clear but flexible.

*“Creation of flexible governance arrangements based on the application or business case put forward by the digital service provider or app developer when registering to be part of the DPP can also support market development and innovation. It is important to note that this does not mean that governance arrangements do not need to be documented, rather they can be designed in a way where there are firm governance elements (e.g. security and IAM) as well as flexible elements (e.g. process and user experience).”* **– Advisory Service**

* Responsibility for monitoring the quality and safeguarding of the DPP, APIs and Digital Partners not clear. The NDIA needs to provide oversight to digital partners and APIs.

*“It also includes careful stewardship of the emerging market- e.g. registering and accrediting market players, including ongoing regulation to ensure participants act in a manner consistent with defined standards and regulations.”****–* Provider**

Learnings

* There is a need for clearly defined governance roles and responsibilities for the NDIA working with Digital Partners
* Recommended introduction of a monitoring and oversight framework by the NDIA for digital partners

## Other Suggestions

### Support innovation and emerging technologies

Research and development on emerging technology and security operations will need to be a key focus of the Digital Partnership Program to realise a world for participants that delivers innovation safely. Two responses provide insight on this point; recommending the NDIA assess the use of e invoicing and Block Chain as an option to support claims and payments processing.

The Digital Partnership Office is also encouraged to adopt an agile collaboration approach, practicing continuous delivery in the effort to support innovation with Digital Partners. To truly transform the digital experience of participants and providers, the DPP must take measures which allow an organisation to innovate and improve services without undue restriction. Striking the balance to deliver an ecosystem where governance and market innovation work together is crucial to its success and ongoing consultation was seen as key to this aim.

### The NDIS mobile app will be a trusted platform

Part of the Payments Program development work sought to understand participant levels of trust when considering an NDIA app compared one developed by a third party. Most participants confirmed they would not only trust, but also prefer to use a mobile app developed by the NDIA. Comments included: “NDIS already has all the information”, “would trust NDIS app more than an unknown organisation” and “concerned at sharing information across to other organisations.”

It is notable that privacy concerns regarding third party software developers persist among participants. *“Organisations need to be accredited, with security and privacy protection and consent and ability to choose information which is shared with 3rd parties”*.

### Consider a digital grants program

The NDIA is offering the current suite of APIs without fees or charges. Some responses recommended the NDIA provision funding grants to support businesses developing applications on NDIA APIs.

*“There seems to be a prevailing view in public claiming that the whole financial burden should be borne by providers, not payers or consumers.” “…recommend that the NDIA consider a digital grants program. This could fund service providers with existing digital systems to update their systems to connect to the NDIA APIs.”*

## Next Steps

This paper summarises feedback received from participants, providers, community organisations, software developers and peak bodies in response to the DPP discussion paper. Key highlights provide context on the potential challenges and in some instances solutions, suggested by stakeholder perspectives. Taken together, the responses illustrate areas of opportunity where the NDIA can accelerate activity in digital channels through increased collaboration and innovation. The following next steps are planned by the NDIA to further develop the DPP based on these recommendations.

### Formalise a Digital Partnership Office

The formation of a Digital Partnership Office will be a key resource to bring the Digital Partnership Program to life – Working collectively and individually with Partners in the spirit of collaboration, Establishing and executing a roadmap of developments within a well communicated and documented governance framework. This group will be created as soon as possible to ensure the ongoing development of the DPP in consultation with the NDIA community, and the on boarding of as many Digital Partners as possible.

### Refine Digital Partnership Program key deliverables

The responses, as well as internal recommendations will be used to refine the DPP deliverables that span all of the major themes outlined in this paper.

These deliverables will then be prioritised and scheduled and used as the delivery pipeline for the Digital Partnership Office.

### Form a Digital Community of Interest

Forming a Digital Community of Interest will ensure the collaborative benefits realised through consultation to date, can continue. External stakeholder interest in the DPP is clear and a focus will be placed on maintaining these relationships to help form closer working ties with key stakeholders and organisations. Building trust and consensus will help align the range of needs across different groups and maximise the potential of the DPO

The scope and function of the Digital Community of Interest will be decided and an application process announced for ongoing consultation with the community.

The DPO will align with other internal Digital initiatives such as Real Time Claims, participant Mobile app and myplace provider- and participant- portal upgrades to ensure the NDIA is presenting and consulting on a holistic vision of digital innovation.

### Continue to deliver

Many of the comments targeted specific deliverables, or identified gaps in the APIs currently available. As soon as practical, the existing APIs will be released to the broader market, including unregistered providers and software developers. The API development options will also be constantly reviewed, and prioritised alongside other work to demonstrate a commitment from the NDIA to continually improve its digital services with a predictable, well communicated rhythm that supports a highly engaged and diverse range of digital partners.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the DPP with the oversight of the DPO supports the NDIS vision to deliver quality innovation to participants, through a more business ready and resource equipped digital marketplace. Consultation with key stakeholders highlights the importance of a staged and structured rollout that sets clear and transparent expectations to achieving successful, effective and sustained engagement. Feedback received to date reinforces the value in the approach taken by the NDIA thus far.

Beyond the specifics of the responses received, the DPP discussion paper notes wide interest, enthusiasm and support for the success of the DPP. The opportunity to improve the lives of participants through digital innovation is not only apparent; the COVID-19 Pandemic has recast the importance of essential digital projects in a future NDIS environment.

This paper acknowledges the voices calling for a focus on quality and safeguard controls. Not least, the emphasis on appropriate privacy and security measures to protect those most vulnerable from unintended exposure to risk. These concerns are welcomed and will inform the NDIAs approach to balancing access with security, while ensuring product delivery that adds broad value.

The NDIA will continue to collaborate openly while maintaining an awareness to embrace opportunity where broad consensus is achieved. Such an approach sets the necessary foundation for this program to reshape how the NDIA, participants, and providers work together and bring about positive change with efficiency. Continued effort in this manner provides real opportunity to ensure NDIS participants have the same opportunities as every Australian.

For more information on the Digital Partnership Program and the NDIA APIs, email Digital Partnership Office [DPO@ndis.gov.au](mailto:DPO@ndis.gov.au).

## Appendix A

Respondents Breakdown

| **Type** | **Total** |
| --- | --- |
| Registered Provider | 11 |
| Consultancy Firms | 3 |
| Alliances & Peak Bodies | 4 |
| Marketplaces | 3 |
| Software Developers | 10 |

This paper also includes feedback from 22 Participants whose feedback was gathered as part of a separate consultation process.