
New submission from 2020 Shared Value Awards application - Shared Value Project of the Year

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Where did you hear about the Shared Value Awards?

SVP Email

About your organisation

Organisation name

Optus

Organisation type

Corporate

Website<https://www.optus.com.au/about/sustainability/community/future-makers>**Overview**

Optus Future Makers is a capacity building and accelerator program that empowers social start-ups who leverage technology to address social challenges for disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Shortlisted applicants take part in a six-month program to help them grow and scale their business. Participants are coached by Optus top talent, subject matter experts and business leaders and have the opportunity to network with each other and connect with other social innovation leaders. The program is inclusive and open to start-ups, social entrepreneurs and not-for-profit organisations who are leveraging technology to provide innovative solutions addressing social needs and challenges across our three focus areas: health, education and employability. Through Future Makers, we've chosen to focus on these three social areas, as part of Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4 and 8 as we believe they are increasingly important in our society today.

What is your shared value project or initiative?

Name of project or initiative

Optus Future Makers

What makes your project or initiative a leading example of shared value in action?

What economic opportunity does your shared value project/initiative deliver?

The Optus Future Makers program is committed to harnessing the power of technology and leveraging our business to accelerate the pace of social innovation to solve challenging or complex social issues. Optus purpose is to power

optimism with options, and the program provides us with the opportunity to strengthen the creation of share value opportunities with innovative social start-ups.

By strategically selecting Future Makers with initiatives that support Optus business strategies and our customer needs, we have a unique opportunity to either enhance existing products or develop new solutions for our customers. The program also enables us to further build trust in our regional communities as this is a critical element required for us to increase market share in these areas and creates differentiation for our brand.

The program also enables us to strengthen ties across the Singtel Group of companies in Asia as we hold a Future Makers regional program every year. This provides us with the opportunity to partner with other telcos in our network and develop unique cross-country solutions for our customers in different markets which differentiates the group.

Another key element of shared value the program offers is the opportunity to collaborate with strategic clients on shared social issues. For example, our work with Commsync Foundation (2018 Future Maker) has led to successful commercial deals with Brisbane City Council and has provided opportunities for Optus to work more closely with Scentre Group, one of our key customer clients.

What social issue(s) does your shared value project/initiative address?

At Optus we believe that social innovation and technology can help solve the most challenging and systemic societal challenges of our time. Social innovation coupled with new technologies help us unearth and increase the pace of developing new solutions that address complex social issues, both locally and globally. Through Future Makers, we've chosen to focus on 3 social areas, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that we believe are increasingly important in our society today. These issues are important to us as they impact our key stakeholders – our customers and our people.

SDG 3 Good health and well-being - Chronic diseases and conditions are on the rise worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation, chronic disease prevalence is expected to rise by 57% by the year 2020. We're also seeing a large increase in mental health disorders, across Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Health Survey: First Results, 2017–18, one in five Australians have a mental or behavioural condition. Covid-19 has seen the rise of the use of telehealth services reinforcing the critical need of technology in delivering vital health services, which is amplified where geography, travel and financial constraints exist for individuals.

SDG 4 Quality education - Optus believes that every young person should have access to quality education. Educational disadvantage and the digital divide that exists for families and young people who have limited or no resources is a huge problem in Australia. Results from PISA 2015 show that Australia has the largest gap in the shortage of teachers between disadvantaged and advantaged schools among all OECD countries. We're passionate about improving education outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable people. For example, we want to see solutions that increase the uptake of STEM subjects in schools and provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children greater access to quality education and support in remote areas.

SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth - Finding suitable employment for disadvantaged and vulnerable Australians can be major challenge. As a technology company we believe we have a role to play in implementing innovative solutions that remove barriers that prevent disadvantaged people from accessing available tools, training or employment opportunities.

Shared value solution description

Optus Future Makers is a capacity building and accelerator program that empowers social start-ups who leverage technology to address social challenges for disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

Future Makers take part in a six-month program that includes eight days of in-person workshops, however in 2020 due to COVID-19 the program moved to an online model. A key element of the program is the coaching participants receive from Optus top talent, SMEs and business leaders. Participants also have the opportunity to network with each other and connect with other social innovation leaders. All finalists have been matched with two dedicated coaches for the duration of the program and also have access to a pool of support coaches who provide ad hoc specialised coaching. Coaches and speakers provide support on topics such as product development, technology innovations, digital marketing, social impact measurement, securing corporate support, impact investing and pitch training. The program will culminate in a pitch event where our Future Makers will have the opportunity to pitch for funding (provided by Optus) to a wide audience.

The program is inclusive and open to start-ups, social entrepreneurs and not-for-profit organisations who have a solution that meets the criteria below.

Solutions needs to demonstrate the following criteria:

1. A technology-based solution that improves outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable people
2. How it embraces diversity and addresses inequality for minority groups
3. You must have a current minimum viable product of your solution
4. Addresses one of our focus areas: education, employability and health
5. The potential to grow and scale locally, across Australia or overseas

We're looking for solutions that are already underway. Applicants must have a minimum viable product, completed basic user acceptance testing aimed at beneficiaries and have refined tangible milestones. If applicants have a scalable plan or have launched their product to market – even better.

In 2019 we introduced a shared value stream to the program which aims to match Future Maker solutions with Optus business needs. We held our first shared value workshop in April 2019 with stakeholders representing Consumer, Corporate and Optus Business Divisions.

Outcomes included:

- What's Right Thrive (2018 alumni) connected with our Product Innovation team, opportunities to support Paralympics Australia sponsorship and athletes through their coaching App
- Commsync (2018 alumni) developed a pilot program with Brisbane City Council (strategic Optus client) and Optus to broaden their scope to support children exposed to domestic violence by providing 25 wearable devices to at risk children over a 12-month pilot to address local needs
- Equal Reality (2018 alumni) explored options to pilot program with D&I team to harness VR in unconscious bias training for staff.
- Virtual Psychologist (2017 alumni) established partnerships with Optus Regional team to support our Optus customers in remote and regional communities with free text rates to its counselling services.

In 2020 we embedded shared value into the key accelerator program from the start by selecting finalists who aligned with Optus' strategy and purpose. We will be running shared value workshops with key business units and our current cohort at the end of the program and have already commenced work with our product team.

Market segment and potential for scaling the solution

Benefit: Key benefactors of the Future Makers program are social entrepreneurs, start-ups and innovators who are using technology to address either health, education or employability issues faced by those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. We reach them through an open application process which is advertised through our public social media channels, targeted digital marketing towards start-ups through mediums such as Social Change Central and through our business networks and existing relationships. This includes speaking at events at the Sydney Start-up Hub, university accelerator programs and external media announcements. Other benefactors are the beneficiaries of the Future Maker's services like families in remote and regional areas who cannot easily access mental health services or Indigenous students receiving access to tutors.

Scale: Within Australia, Optus will often pilot a Future Maker solution with the aim of further scaling as it provides us and the start up to learn from the customer segment adoption and where the experience of the solution needs to be improved. The potential for increasing our reach even further is significant as we run an annual Singtel Group Future Makers program which includes the Singtel Group of companies in Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia. The Singtel Group Future Makers program enables two local Optus Future Makers to pitch and scale their solution within these countries as they align with the company's customer segment and marketing needs. They are supported through coaching and funding provided by the Singtel Group. An example of this is our Optus 2017 Future Maker Virtual Psychologist who is now successfully running a pilot with Globe Telecom in the Philippines as a result of participating in the 2019 program in Singapore.

We are also exploring opportunities to collaborate with other Shared Value Project corporate members which will see wider awareness and potentially adoption of the Future Maker solutions to help add value to their customer products and services.

Key activities and resources including a basic development plan

Future Makers launched in 2016 and we have run accelerator programs in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020. ~~In 2019 Optus made the decision to run a local Future Makers program every second year. This enables us to focus our efforts on shared value integration within the business and their solutions and helping Future Makers scale in Asia through the regional program.~~ Optus has given away close to \$1 million in grant funding to support these Future Makers and provided over 200 hours in skilled volunteering and coaching from our people.

In our current program, we have made shared value a key element of the program content from the beginning, bringing in senior Optus leaders and decision makers to be part of the evaluation process to ensure that solutions have the potential to support Optus' purpose and strategy. We have taken the time to match all of the Future Makers to coaches within Optus who have the capacity to make decisions or influence how future collaborations could work. For example, 2020 finalist Maslow has been matched with our Head of Customer Experience. His team is working with Maslow to better understand how we can improve all Optus customer touchpoints for people with a disability. The Maslow team have people with lived experience who can help advise Optus teams on what improvements can be made to channels like our mobile app or website. In turn, our Customer Experience team is also helping Maslow with the user experience functionality of their apps.

Additionally, we have worked closely with both our tech and product teams to gain their feedback on the solutions. All our Future Makers have had the opportunity to pitch to our tech and product teams to gain feedback on their solutions and to give our teams a better understanding of how we could potentially work together.

Towards the end of the accelerator program component, all Future Makers will have the opportunity to pitch twice – once for funding from a pool of \$200,000 and the other to work with Optus on a customer solution. The second year of the program then explores how the collaboration will work as we pilot and test initiatives.

Measurability

We have conducted a thorough program impact evaluation with leading sustainability firm, Think Impact. Reported

impact to date can be broken down into three key areas:

More skilled social innovators (Future Makers)

- Increases in communication skills, confidence and skills to pitch their business model
- Enhanced feeling of being valued as a social entrepreneur
- Increased business planning and strategy skills and awareness of revenue opportunities

More sustainable Social innovation businesses:

- Enhanced reach and reputation were the greatest reported outcome for businesses.
- Improved financial position through increased awareness of revenue opportunities and
- leveraging association with Optus to attract capital and grants
- Increased ability to develop, pilot and implement technical solutions

Enhanced brand, staff engagement and business opportunities for Optus:

- Employees involved in the program experienced an increased sense of pride in the workplace and greater awareness of Optus social impact commitments
- The creation of shared value opportunities between the application of Optus technology and business products and Future Maker businesses

For Optus' partnership with Virtual Psychologist we also measure engagement in the community as the Regional team has a critical task of building trust within the community and trust cannot be bought as we do with awareness; trust has to be earned. Our roadshows and the zero-rating of the texts have been about helping the community through the challenging times like droughts, fires and more recently COVID19. Direct results from this campaign include:

- 10.25% of all users that engaged in VP services during the period of the campaign did so as a direct result of Optus marketing campaign
- 17.65% of users reported that they found out about VP's service via an Optus campaign.
- 77.78% of users reported that they would not have engaged in psychological support if Text counselling had not been made free by Optus. (This is the highest result VP has ever)
- Optus also had strong engagement on our social media channels based on our CTR and engagement levels - Reach (unique users): 356,928, Impressions: 1,668,994, Clicks: 8,289, Average CTR: 0.5% (benchmark 0.1-0.15%), Engagements: 90,639.
- External media – publication in local and national news, special feature in Vogue Australia September 2020 demonstrating great brand profiling for Optus

Tangible results to date

- Close to A\$1m has been awarded in grant funding for the initiatives
- 30 Future Makers have participated in the program
- Positive media profile each year the program has run with 100% positive sentiment
- Run successful shared value workshops with key business units which has resulted in two commercial deals with Commsync and Virtual Psychologist (outlined further below)
- Skilled volunteering opportunities for Optus staff with over 200 hours contributed
- Singtel Group Future Makers
- Tangible skills development for Future Makers and Optus staff – skill building webinar and workshop series and one on one mentoring
- Two Singtel Group Future Makers programs supporting 4 finalists to expand in the Asia region, with Virtual Psychologist now working with Globe Telecom in the Philippines.
- Partnership with Optus Regional team to support customers in remote and regional communities. This included a two-week roadshow in Central NSW touring bushfire and drought affected communities which gave Optus the chance to build trust in new and existing communities. Optus is also supporting post-paid and prepaid customers with free text rates to all of Virtual Psychologist's numbers to ensure they have the resources in place to access support. These initiatives help Optus build trust in regional communities which is a critical element of doing business in these regions.
- Commercial deals with strategic client, Brisbane City Council as a result of our work with Commsync supporting domestic violence victims in QLD. It has also opened doors for us to collaborate with another strategic client Scentre Group in local Westfield shopping centres in QLD targeting communities which have a high prevalence of domestic violence in their suburbs
- Future Makers have also gone on to receive substantial grant funding as a direct result of participating in the program. Virtual Psychologist has received over \$1m in federal government funding and Commsync has also received local government funding. Xceptional won the Google Impact Challenge grant immediately after participating in Future Makers – the program is all about improving their skills and building their case as an important social start-up.

Please provide relevant documentation to support claims made in this application.

Upload any supporting documentation

- [Shared-Value-Awards-Optus-Future-Makers.zip](#)

Official endorsement

Endorsement

- I am authorised to submit this application on behalf of my organisation and confirm that all required approvals have been sought and received.

27/09/2020

I acknowledge that in order to finalise this application I will pay the relevant administration fee.

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