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Support and connection for parents and carers of young children with disability or developmental concerns

Feedback for applicants

The Department of Social Services (DSS) has provided the following general feedback for applicants of the “Support and connection for parents and carers of children with disability or developmental concerns” grant opportunity to assist grant applicants to understand what generally comprised a strong application and what constituted quality responses to the assessment criteria for this grant opportunity.

Overview

The “Support and connection for parents and carers of young children with disability or developmental concerns” is one of a number of activities under the National Early Childhood Program for Children with Disability or Developmental Concerns (the NECP), and contributes to the broader NECP outcomes. This grant opportunity is to provide facilitated group information sessions, workshops or interactive sessions in all states and territories for parents and carers of young children aged zero to 8 years with a newly identified disability or who have concerns regarding their child’s development.

These information or interactive sessions should provide opportunities for families early in their journey to learn from, and connect with, evidence-based information, family-focused strategies and peers with similar experiences. Suggested topics may include:

- how to navigate the service and support landscape
- key milestones in child development and what to look out for when a concern is raised
- the parent or carer’s role in supporting their child’s learning and future development.

This grant opportunity will aim to develop the skills, confidence and capability of parents and carers to support their child’s learning and development and connect with services and supports.

The grant opportunity must provide:

- 50 per cent of all sessions tailored to address autism, or autism-like characteristics
 - at least 30 per cent of all sessions in regional or remote areas
 - services to a minimum of 6 per cent of parents and carers who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
 - services to at least 15 per cent of parents and carers come from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds
 - activities that complement and enhance existing services and supports in the early childhood service system, and do not duplicate those already under way.
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The grant opportunity application period opened on 1 August 2022 and closed on 26 August 2022.

There was a strong interest in the grant opportunity. DSS received 45 applications, which were assessed according to the selection process outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines (the Guidelines) and below.

Selection Process

The applications were screened for eligibility and compliance against the requirements outlined in the Guidelines for this grant opportunity. If DSS determined your application did not meet the eligibility and/or compliance criteria, you were notified of the outcome and your application did not progress to assessment.

DSS, through their Selection Advisory Panel (the Panel), then considered all eligible and compliant applications through an open competitive grant process.

Applications were assessed on merit, based on:

- how well it met the assessment criteria
- how it compared to other applications
- whether it provided value with relevant money, as described in section 6 of the Guidelines.

When assessing the extent to which the application represented value with relevant money, the Panel gave regard to:

- the overall objective/s to be achieved in providing the grant
- the relative value of the grant sought
- the score achieved in the assessment process
- extent to which the geographic location of the application matches identified priorities
- the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrated that it will contribute to meeting the outcomes/objectives
- how the grant activities would target groups or individuals
- how it compared to other applications
- the risks, financial and other, that the applicant or project poses for the department.

Each applicant was required to address the below selection criteria.

Criterion 1 – Supports (30% weighting)

Describe how you will deliver your activity across states and territories for parents and carers of young children aged 0-8 years, who have a disability or developmental concerns, and the type of supports and activities you will provide.

When addressing the criterion strong applicants will:

- describe how they will ensure their activities are delivered across all states and territories, including face-to-face delivery in all states and territories and the anticipated frequency of delivery, or where national face-to-face reach is not possible, detail the areas where they will deliver supports

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- detail the types of services and activities they will deliver, and the types of professionals that are anticipated to deliver them
 - address when they will be able to commence service delivery, including when they will be able to reach full face-to-face service delivery in all states and territories, if applicable
 - describe how they will obtain the appropriate digital capability to deliver this activity virtually when required (such as during COVID-19 lockdowns or for scheduled online sessions), and to maintain an active web presence of upcoming activities
 - demonstrate knowledge and experience in the area of child disability and child development, or describe how they will obtain the expertise if they do not have the relevant expertise, including through the use of sub-contractors and/or consortium members
 - if a consortia is used, demonstrate how the consortia will function or be managed, such as allocated responsibilities or delivery areas and governance structures.

Criterion 2 – Targeting key groups (30% weighting)

Describe how you will target priority cohorts, including, but not limited to those listed in section 2 of the Guidelines, and for specific disability types.

When addressing the criterion strong applicants will:

- explain how they will create a safe and inclusive environment to support meaningful participation of potentially vulnerable cohorts, including but not limited to those listed in section 2 of the Guidelines
- detail how they will promote and attract participants from potentially vulnerable cohorts and priority cohorts such as those listed in section 2 of the Guidelines
- explain how they will address the information and support needs of specific disability cohorts that may require different approaches, such autism, or autism-like characteristics prior to diagnosis
- detail how they are going to address the information and service needs of parents and carers living in regional and remote areas of Australia.

Criterion 3 – Promotion and connection with other early childhood services and local community (20% weighting)

Describe how you will promote your activity, establish connections with early childhood services and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Early Childhood (EC) Partners to target those early in their disability journey and gain referrals into your activity and how you will utilise local knowledge and networks to facilitate connections.

When addressing the criterion strong applicants will:

- explain how they are going to promote the activity to parents and carers
 - detail how they will ensure they are using local knowledge and networks to support connections for parents and carers
 - explain how they will target those who are yet to engage with disability services and supports or who may be at the early stages of their journey
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- detail how they will liaise with early childhood services to ensure appropriate referral into your activity, reduce duplication of services and educate participants on appropriate supports and avenues available to them.

Criterion 4 – Measuring success and outcomes (20% Weighting)

Describe how you will obtain information for measuring outcomes and success of the information and supports that are delivered, and how you will modify your supports according to these measures and results throughout the life of the grant, noting this information will reported to the department within your reporting requirements, further specified at section 12.2 of the Guidelines.

When addressing the criterion strong applicants will:

- describe the specific information and indicators you will aim to obtain from participants to measure the objectives and outcomes of the grant activity
- explain how they will use the information and data they have gathered to assess whether their activities or delivery need to be adjusted.

Selection Results

Applications ranked highly provided strong responses to the selection criteria outlined above.

Following the Decision Maker's decision, one (1) application was selected to deliver the "Support and connection for parents and carers of young children with disability or developmental concerns" grant for funding to a value of \$6,899,356 (GST exclusive). The selected organisation provided the strongest responses to the selection criteria in comparison to other applications, and clearly demonstrated their ability to meet the eligibility requirements as outlined in the Guidelines.

A number of applications focussed on providing state, regional or place based activities. These were considered by the Panel and while some rated highly, as outlined in the Guidelines, providers who could demonstrate reach by delivering face-to-face sessions across all states and territories, including in regional and remote areas according to service need were preferred.

General comments

The general strengths of the applications were noted by the Panel, with the following themes highlighted for general feedback:

- Stronger applications had a strong face to face delivery model complemented by online services to ensure coverage nationally rather than a heavy focus on online supports.
- Stronger applications demonstrated how activities link up with existing disability and mainstream services. Highly regarded applications provided detail of their capacity to connect families with other support systems.

- Applications that were considered to be aligned to the Social Model of Disability¹, the needs of the children and their families, and their circumstances were well regarded as opposed to applications that were focused on diagnosis and therapy.
- Applications with short lead in timeframes for full service delivery were well regarded. This reduced the risk of service gaps for parents and carers early in their journey.
- Stronger applications had activities focused on building the capability of families and that represented value for relevant money.
- Some applications potentially duplicated existing services. Strong applications demonstrated how the activity would complement and enhance existing services and supports in the early childhood service system.
- Applications that were broad in focus on all aspects of the grant opportunity were regarded well over applications that heavily focused on a singular aspect of the grant opportunity.

Further detail about what constituted a strong response to each criterion is provided below.

| Criterion | Examples of strong responses to criterion |
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| <p>Criterion 1 – Supports</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in depth details of delivery locations, including reach across all states and territories, or how they would determine delivery locations based on need – for example using disability service maps or Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistics of children, disability and other priority populations • how the activity would meet grant objectives and outcomes, specified in the Guidelines, in a logical manner • strong relevant evidence (anecdotal, research or evaluation) as to how the activity is beneficial and will deliver outcomes for parents and carers, and their children • the usage of an established delivery model, evidenced model or previously co-designed activity, that decreased long lead times that might otherwise have been required before for service delivery could be in place • strong face to face delivery model, including for locations in regional and remote locations • the organisation or consortia/sub-contractor experience in delivering related activities, and provided evidence (testimonials, research or |

¹ ¹ Definition of the Social Model of Disability, taken from [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031](#). The Social Model of Disability recognises attitudes, practices and structures can be disabling and act as barriers preventing people from fulfilling their potential and exercising their rights as equal members of the community.



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| | <p>evaluation) on the successes of the delivery; or the expertise of the organisation or its partners to be able to effectively deliver the program, evidenced by qualifications and justified by connectedness to the activity; and reporting and governance arrangements.</p> |
| Criterion 2 – Targeting key groups | <p>Strong responses demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• methods they would use to identify and promote participants from priority cohorts (for example connecting with child health nurses and other mainstream services to recruit and using Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) and ABS data sources to target specific locations)• experience engaging with the services that are often connected with these priority cohorts• knowledge of practices that can create safe and supportive environments for First Nations or CALD families, and explained how these would be implemented into their activity (for example co-designing activities, delivering sessions tailored to the cohort and led by a member of the cohort etc)• in depth information about how the program would be tailored to support First Nations people and communities• knowledge of specific disabilities, including autism and physical disabilities that may require specific information or different approaches (for example dedicated activities for families of children with specific disabilities) and discussed how these approaches would be implemented within the activity• capability to deliver nationally, including in regional and remote areas. |
| Criterion 3 – Promotion and connection with other early childhood services and local community | <p>Strong responses clearly demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• experience and pre-existing connections with relevant local organisations, or national based groups, and their ability to leverage these connections to promote and create referral pathways to the activity• ability to have staff in local communities, gathering information and building connections within common community areas such as libraries and child health hubs• awareness when parents and carers are likely to experience the first stages of their journey, and a plan for how to tap into mainstream services they may be engaging with, such as maternal health |



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| | <p>nurses, connecting with early childhood education and the health system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• knowledge of the early childhood service sector nationally, locally and regionally, including common touch points and referral pathways and were able to explain how they would leverage knowledge and systems in each delivery location to create new connections and referrals between mainstream systems and the activity• how the activity complements, enhances and does not duplicate existing supports in the early childhood service system, such as detailing the activities' unique features and identifying gaps the activity will fill in the early childhood service system. |
| Criterion 4 – Measuring success and outcomes | <p>Strong responses described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• their evaluation plan, including how this would be conducted (for example through a partner or within the organisation) and timeframes for methods of collection and synthesis• survey and feedback mechanisms to track progression of participants outcomes, and specific metrics with quality control (for example specific Likert scales to measure change)• regular review points of feedback and survey data to ensure participants are satisfied, review points of disability service/ABS data to ensure delivery needs are met, ensure KPIs and objectives are met and attendance numbers are appropriate – and where these were not met, described changing mode of services, location, target strategies and activity delivery. |