Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program (VWG) 2023–24

Feedback for applicants

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (the department) has provided the following general feedback for applicants of the Veteran Wellbeing Grants (VWG) program 2023–24 grant opportunity.

Assessment of applications was in accordance with the procedure detailed in the grant opportunity guidelines and outlined in the selection process below.

Overview

The application submission period opened on 28 November 2023 and closed on 23 January 2024.

The aim of the VWG program is to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of the Australian veteran community and forms parts of the department's commitment to fund projects and activities which sustain or enhance health and social wellbeing, build community capacity, potentially expand on existing services, and raise awareness of important issues faced by the veteran community.

The intended outcomes of the VWG program are to deliver projects that:

- fund organisations which can sustainably deliver services to the veteran community now and into the future

- increase opportunities for members of the veteran community to engage in social and community activities and/or improved health behaviours and supported healthy places

- support the development of well-researched and tailored services for veterans, with a particular focus on services supporting those at risk of experiencing poor mental health

- increase collaboration amongst organisations to expand services and harness existing expertise for the benefit of the veteran community

- increase awareness of veterans' issues and/or services within the veteran community.

The VWG program is a targeted competitive program which accepts applications annually. The VWG program offers 2 streams of grants:

1. Under Stream A, grants up to $50,000 per grant are available for small-scale, local, and community-based practical projects and activities that support safe, accessible environments for veterans and their families to enable social connection and positive engagement to improve wellbeing.

2. Under Stream B, grants from $50,001 up to $150,000 are available for large projects that deliver practical wellbeing support services and activities of broad-scale benefit to veterans and families in the community.

Selection Process

The Community Grants Hub undertook the initial screening for organisation eligibility and compliance against the requirements outlined in the grant opportunity guidelines. This information was provided to the department's grant opportunity delegate for the final decision on whether an application met the eligibility and compliance criteria.

The department assessed and considered all eligible and compliant applications through a targeted competitive grant process. The selection advisory panel (panel) established by the department was comprised of subject matter experts who assessed applications and provided advice to inform the funding recommendations to the Financial Delegate.

When assessing applications, the panel took into consideration several factors including alignment with the identified requirements outlined in the grant opportunity guidelines, the available funding envelope, the volume of applications received, and consideration of late applications submitted outside the closing date for the round.

Applications were initially assessed by the department based on:

- how well the application met the assessment criteria
- how the application compared to other applications and
- whether the application offered value for money.

Value for money was a judgement, based on the grant proposal and whether it represented an efficient, effective, economical, and ethical use of public resources. This was determined via a variety of considerations.

Financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each grant proposal were considered including:

- the quality of the project grant proposal and activities
- the grant proposal's fitness for purpose in contributing to government objectives
- the potential grantee's relevant experience and performance history
- whether the absence of the grant would likely prevent the grantee and the government's outcomes from being achieved.

The panel's consideration of applications was based on:

- the overall objectives to be achieved in providing the grant
- whether the grant proposal demonstrated relative value
- the extent to which the evidence in the grant application demonstrated how it would contribute to meeting the grant program outcomes and objectives
- compliance with the grant opportunity guidelines
- how the application compared to other applications
- identified risks and the proposed mitigation strategies for the department and the government.

Selection Results

There was a strong interest in the grant opportunity and applications were of a high standard. The preferred applicants demonstrated their ability to meet the grant requirements outlined in the grant opportunity guidelines based on the strength of their responses against the assessment criteria.

The Community Grants Hub notified applicants in writing where their applications did not meet the eligibility or compliance requirements outlined in the grant opportunity guidelines. The department notified all other applicants of the outcome of their grant application in writing.

Criterion 1: Project need and suitability

Describe the project and why it is needed.

Strong responses:

- provided a description of the activity that would be undertaken and the number of people in the veteran community who are expected to participate. Where a grant applicant included other community groups such as First Responders or other non-veteran cohorts, they identified the percentage of veterans expected to be involved, compared to other cohorts

- identified why the grant activity was needed by the veteran community, who the activity would support, and how the applicant determined the activity would be beneficial. **Note** target veteran cohorts could have included all veterans, at-risk veterans, transitioning veterans, younger veterans, older veterans and/ or veterans' families

- provided supporting information to demonstrate how they would address:

    - an identified need, gap, risk, or issue for the veteran community, or

    - for renovation work, how the renovations would increase or enhance the use of the facility to deliver activities to veterans.

- identified geographic location(s) where the activity would be undertaken and how the location was identified as having a strong veteran need.

Strong applications:

- outlined in detail the activities that would be undertaken and the number of veterans and/or other members of the veteran community who would participate

- outlined the needs of the target population (e.g. older veterans, young veterans, veterans' families), the activity to address the need and why the target population and location were chosen this included explaining the consultation with the local veteran community, or how they obtained data from local ex-service organisations or market research.

Criterion 2: Achieving outcomes

Describe how the target group(s) will benefit and how you will achieve program outcomes.

Strong responses:

- described the outcomes that would be achieved from delivering the activity

- outlined how the applicant would determine whether the activity had been successful and how it would be evaluated and reported

- described how the activity related to the VWG program outcomes, including *a* minimum of 2 outcomes for Stream A applications or three outcomes for Stream B applications. The VWG program outcomes were to deliver projects and activities that:

    - organisations could sustainably deliver to the veteran community currently and into the future (including co-funding and/or in-kind contributions where available)

    - increased opportunities for members of the veteran community to engage in social and community activities, improve health behaviours, and/or support healthy places and safe environments

    - supported the development of well-researched and tailored activities and projects for veterans, with a particular focus on activities and projects that supported those at risk of experiencing poor mental health

    - increased collaboration amongst organisations, expanded on existing activities and projects, and harnessed existing expertise for the benefit of the veteran community

    - increased awareness of veterans' issues and/or activities and projects within the veteran community.

For small value equipment funding requests of $5,000 or less only, applicants addressed at least one of the above outcomes and provided evidence that the equipment would enable achievement of the outcome.

Strong applications:

- demonstrated careful planning of tailored activities

- demonstrated the project's sustainability and outlined the details of confirmed financial and in-kind co-contributions and how these supported the project budget and future sustainability

- outlined how the organisation would meet the project delivery timelines and milestones, and successfully deliver the project

- identified how outcomes would be measured (e.g. through participation rates, survey results from participants and/or feedback from other sources such as local ex-service organisations)

- aligned their activity with at least 2 VWG program outcomes for Stream A, or three VWG program outcomes for Stream B

- highlighted the importance of the purchase of equipment and how it aligned with (at least) one VWG program outcome for Stream A (small value).

Criterion 3: Ability of the organisation to deliver the project

Describe your organisation's experience delivering projects that benefit the target group(s).

Strong responses:

- outlined the applicant's history of past performance or experience in delivering similar projects, including the outcomes they achieved

- demonstrated the applicant's community knowledge, links, networks, and partnerships

- described how the grant applicant would leverage the networks to successfully deliver the project

- described how the grant applicant was planning for success including:

  - how the activity would be delivered within the 12-month activity period

  - identified project risks and how these would be managed. (**Note** risk was not required to be addressed for the purchase of low value equipment/assets and funding requests of $5,000 or less).

Strong applications:

- outlined how the organisation had successfully delivered a similar project/s and how they met their project milestones to achieve the project outcomes

- demonstrated strong connections to the veteran community including local networks or partnerships with local ex-service organisations

- outlined how they leveraged relationships to successfully deliver the project and how their established links/ partnerships improved the organisation's delivery of the project (such as through shared resources or delivery of activities)

- outlined the risks associated with the activity and how these would be mitigated (such as mitigating the risk of reduced attendance rates by contacting participants prior to their attendance, or a wet weather plan for outdoor activities)

- for Stream A highlighted how they had leveraged established relationships to successfully deliver a similar project within a 12-month period

- for Stream A included quotes or detailed costing evidence in the application to support the request for funding

- for Stream B reflected sufficient planning and preparation to ensure successful project delivery within the 12-month period. The grant applicant provided a detailed scope of work to be undertaken, detailed quote/s, floor plans, council approvals, and asset or landowner's permission to conduct the project, where applicable.

Criterion 4: Performance measures and monitoring – ability to measure, report and meet targets (for funding of $100,000 or more ONLY)

Grant applicants were required to complete an additional template when responding to this criterion.

For grant funding requests of $100,000 or more, the applicant described how they would meet the measurable targets and measure the achievement of deliverables for the veteran community. The grant applicant provided specific details on each measurement and how they would manage and report on the activity.

Mandatory targets included requirements for:

- more than 75% of participants to complete the whole activity
- feedback to be received from more than 50% of participants, with 95% positive feedback attained
- more than 50% of participants to demonstrate improvements against the appropriate program objectives, including collection of a benchmark measurement at the start of the activity
- less than 10% variance against forecast costs.

Strong applications included up to three additional targets and goals, specific to their activity type. For example, if a grant applicant was training veterans in a new skill, they would have set a target for more than 80% of participants to demonstrate competency in the new skill, once the training was delivered.

Strong applications:

- clearly demonstrated the project's goals and the monitoring and evaluation framework to be used
- clearly outlined the performance targets, how they would be measured, the performance targets expected for each milestone, the goals to be achieved, and the number of program participants
- included three additional target and goals, outlined additional course offerings specific to the project and the goals to be achieved
- detailed connections with veteran participants post program and how feedback would be collected
- outlined how the activity would support a target demographic that was known to be vulnerable.

General feedback

Grant applicants are encouraged to read all grant opportunity documentation, especially the grant opportunity guidelines and follow instructions in the grant application form. The grant application form included helpful information relating to eligibility, and mandatory information required by the Community Grants Hub and the department for the selection process.

The grant opportunity documentation is specific to each round and contains important information about the purpose of the program, eligibility and compliance requirements, eligible items, timeframes and how to apply.

Individual feedback

The department provided grant applicants with written individual feedback when notifying them of the outcome of their application.