



Australian Government

Community  
Grants Hub

Improving your grant experience



# National Child and Family Investment Strategy – Innovation Fund

## Feedback for applicants

The Department of Social Services (the department) has provided the following general feedback for applicants of the National Child and Family Investment Strategy: Innovation Fund grant opportunity.

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

## Overview

The application submission period opened on 8 January 2025 and closed on 12 February 2025.

As part of the development of the National Child and Family Investment Strategy (Action 2A of the Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026), the Australian Government committed \$8.573 million over 3 years (2024–25 to 2026–27) to test the principles of the Investment Strategy.

The Innovation Fund grant aims to contribute towards two overarching goals:

1. Shifting investment towards Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) for the delivery of child and family services.
2. Driving investment toward early and tailored support services delivered to First Nations children and families.

The Innovation Fund is a flexible grant that supports organisations to achieve these goals through capacity building, transition support, relationship building, and testing the Investment Strategy Principles.

## Selection Process

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

The department assessed and considered all applications through a Targeted competitive grant process.

The selection advisory panel (panel) established by the department, comprised of subject matter experts who assessed applications and provided advice to inform the funding recommendations to the Financial Delegate.

The panel's consideration of assessed applications was, based on:

- the overall objective/s to be achieved in providing the grant
- the relative value of the grant sought
- extent to which the geographic location of the application matches identified priorities
- the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates that it will contribute to meeting the outcomes/objectives
- how the grant activities will target groups or individuals
- how it compares to other applications
- meeting the compliance and eligibility requirements outlined in the guidelines
- the provision and quality of the information in the attachments, including project transparency and appropriateness of deliverables
- the volume of applications received for each region and the extent to which applications compared against other applications for the same region
- the equitable division of funding across targeted priority locations in Australia
- how well responses identified risks and the proposed mitigation strategies for the department and the Commonwealth.

## 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 guidelines based on the strength of their responses to the assessment criteria.

The department notified applicants of the outcome in writing, where their applications did not meet the requirements outlined in the guidelines.

This feedback is provided to assist grant applicants to understand what comprised a strong application and what was quality responses to the assessment criteria.

## Criterion 1

Describe how your project will facilitate the phased transfer of program funding from non-Indigenous NGO(s) to ACCO(s). This should include how project success is defined and evaluated.

- Demonstrated a deep understanding of the service needs and requirements for First Nations children, young people, and families in their community that their project would address.
- Clearly delineated how organisational capacity building activities would address specific service delivery outcomes and outline how this would be achieved, monitored and evaluated.
- Provided a detailed project plan and timeline that clearly charted a suitable phased transition approach, with the inclusion of broader considerations such as risk mitigation, clear party responsibilities and community feedback mechanisms.
- Demonstrated how their proposed transition plan is supported by the local community, other community organisations, and how they have engaged the community to align their plan with local priorities.
- Described their intended impact, scale and proposed geographical locations for the project and how the project would be best suited for the proposed location.

**Strong applications:**

- Demonstrated a clear transition process including strong modelling that was scalable, appropriately resourced and adequately considered the impact of other stakeholders on transition. Strong projects were also clear about what services were being transitioned and who would be responsible for leading this process.
- Demonstrated innovation in their approach to transition and were less likely to be limited to expanding an existing project. Transition pathways identified by these applications were closely tailored to local community needs.
- Included quality project planning that demonstrated longer-term impacts projects would have on targeted communities and community need. Project planning timeframes were accurate and adequate to the scale and goals of the project.
- Included projects which were appropriate for the context and community-driven. Factors such as remoteness and local community needs were thoroughly reflected in project planning.
- Completed the mandatory templates in a transparent and clear way for the panel to assess. Project budgets reflected eligible expenditure and were consistent with project plans. Costing and project resourcing were also equitably attributed to support the project's success. Budget items and resourcing also represented good value for money.
- Had well defined measures of success that aligned to the overarching goals of the project. Risks were appropriately identified and risk mitigation measures laid out clearly.

**Criterion 2**

**Describe how your project will shift child and family service provision towards early and tailored culturally safe supports. This should include how project success is defined and evaluated**

- Gave examples of their previous experience delivering early and tailored supports as well as how they have improved outcomes for children at risk of entry into the child protection system, including how principles and lessons learned would inform their project.
- Described how they proposed early and tailored supports meets the National Definition included in Section 2 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.
- Defined what early and tailored safe supports are needed for their communities as supported by quality community consultation, including other community organisations - and how their project would address service delivery gaps and opportunities.
- Outlined the path that will be taken to direct/redirect service delivery to meet community needs and aspirations and identify clear and measurable outcomes-focused goals that can be monitored and evaluated.

**Strong applications:**

- Defined what 'early and tailored supports' meant for their communities and practically demonstrated this throughout the applications. Supports offered by projects were appropriate to local community needs and assessed as more likely to achieve intended project outcomes.
- Referred to and built upon existing work to support their approach to transitioning or strengthening early years support in their applications. Strong applications were also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led.

- Were assessed by the panel as higher priority to fund due to having greater impact on the local community, especially where elevated community need was identified and targeted by the project.
- Included case studies and demonstrated integration into a broader service-delivery network for the local community. This was often evidenced by letters of support from the community for the project, highlighting the applicant's ability to deliver services.

### Criterion 3

## Describe how your project will be informed by and test the 7 national principles of the National Child and Family Investment Strategy.

- Cultural Identity and connection to culture - Children and young people grow up safe, connected and supported in their family, community, and culture.
- Self-determination - Self-determination is the collective right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine and control their own destiny.
- Shared decision-making - Shared decision-making and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families, organisations and practitioners are genuine and recognise the need for dedicated resources, place-based approaches and commitment to ensure equity in participation between parties.
- Sustainability - A commitment to the long-term and sustainable efforts required to achieve improved outcomes.
- Culturally responsive integrated services and systems - Services and systems adopt a holistic, wrap around approach to supporting children and families, recognising that the social wellbeing, safety, health and economic needs of families and children are interrelated.
- Evidence-informed investment and innovation - Investment planning and innovation is driven by evidence-informed practice and outcomes-focused approaches, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led design to ensure funding and investment is community driven and approaches are tailored to cultural contexts at the local level and contribute to building the evidence base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services.
- Rights-based - Investment in child and family services ensures that children receive and access services and responses that reflect and uphold the full range of children's rights as set out by international human rights frameworks.

### Strong applications:

- Linked goals and deliverables of their project to the Investment Strategy's principles.
- Demonstrated how one or more of the Investment Strategy principles are integral to their organisation's core function.
- Outlined how the proposed activities of the project would be guided by one or more of the 7 principles.
- Demonstrated what the Investment Strategy principles look like for the local community and unique context.

## Criterion 4

### Describe your organisation's governance.

- Described how their organisation(s) would contribute to improving collaborative service delivery to provide early and tailored culturally safe supports to help families keep children safe.
- If applicable, included information about the way the legally binding partnership agreement would work, for example terms of a deed, service agreements, governance structure, financial agreements, meetings, any memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and shared activities. Detailed how these agreements would embed self-determination and genuine shared decision-making models.
- Described how project success and community feedback will be measured, evaluated, and continue to inform ongoing service delivery.

### Strong applications:

- Clearly demonstrated internal organisation governance, project governance, and broader co-design with community. This included adequate support and contribution from parties relevant to supporting transition.
- Demonstrated a commitment to transition to ACCO-led service delivery beyond partnership between organisations. Governance structures for stronger applications supported ACCOs leading transition and demonstrated self-determination.
- Were transparent about who was leading and making decisions for which elements of the project. Strong applications also selected and justified appropriate governance structures that would increase the likelihood of their project successfully meeting its intended outcomes.
- Built upon other community initiatives and utilised existing opportunities to leverage capacity building or put into practice new initiatives that their communities were calling for.

## Individual feedback

Individual feedback will not be provided for this grant opportunity.