



**Community
Grants Hub**
Improving your grant experience



Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL) Program Phase 1

Feedback for applicants

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the Department) has provided the following general feedback for applicants of the Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL) Program Phase 1 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 19 August 2025 and closed on 15 September 2025.

This grant opportunity reflects the Australian Government's commitment to provide funding for a new employment service supporting First Nations people's transition out of the justice system, named the REAL Program (the Program).

The Program builds on learnings from the Time to Work Employment Service and will aim to improve employment outcomes for First Nations people exiting the justice system by providing support to reestablish themselves in the community. The Program offers pre-release, and post-release supports to help people to reintegrate into their communities and engage with employment, education and training. The Program responds to extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, communities and evidence on how to improve support in the transition from the justice system to employment.

The Program is designed to be flexible, addressing the different service delivery models required for various cohorts, particularly adult and youth programs, as well as differences in custodial settings. This includes pre-release program structures, the utilisation of reintegration support, and the experience and skills needed by grantees. It is important that the grantee tailors supports and services to meet the needs of the individual, the cohort of prisoners in the facility and the relevant community.

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 eligible and compliant applications through an Open Competitive grant process.

The selection advisory panel (the 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:

- Meeting the compliance requirements outlined in the guidelines.
- Meeting the eligibility requirements outlined in the guidelines.
- How well the responses met the assessment criteria.
- The volume of applications received and the extent to which applications compared against other applications.
- The provision and appropriateness of the requested attachments.
- Whether the project demonstrated value with relevant money.
- The First Nations Prioritisation Policy outlined in the guidelines.
- 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 - Service Delivery

Describe how you plan to deliver the Program in alignment with its objectives and desired outcomes. Please use examples and/or case studies where relevant. When addressing the criterion, strong applicants described:

- Their organisation's experience in building relationships with correctional facilities and establishing referral pathways and connections with other service providers.
- How they will tailor the Program to the relevant jurisdictions/facility(ies) to maximise its effectiveness, ensuring it complements rather than duplicates existing support services.
- Their strategies for establishing connections to the communities that participants will return to.
- How their organisation will help participants identify personal goals, access local, state, and territory-funded supports, provide comprehensive assistance, build career readiness, connect with jobs or learning opportunities, and keep them engaged.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated established, working relationships with correctional facilities and other local service providers, with clear referral pathways and coordination arrangements. These relationships were evidenced by specific examples and multiple letters of support.

- Mapped existing services within each facility and tailored their service model to complement current supports. They explicitly described how their approach would fit alongside and add value to existing services.
- Set out practical strategies for outreach servicing, including detailed arrangements for engagement with participants, local organisations, Elders, and support networks.
- Outlined clear, end-to-end participant pathways, with structured phases for pre-release, on-release and post-release support.
- Provided specific examples and case studies that addressed both career readiness and wrap around supports.

Criterion 2 - Commitment to First Nations people and culture

Demonstrate your commitment and capability to work with First Nations people in a culturally safe way. Please use examples and/or case studies where relevant. When addressing the criterion, strong applicants demonstrated:

- How their organisation will deliver quality, culturally competent services for participants tailored around their needs and promote their agency in activity plans.
- How their organisation will embed cultural safety, diversity and trauma-informed service delivery for vulnerable participants in the Program.
- Their ability to conduct robust consultations with First Nations communities, including evidence of meaningful engagement, collaboration with Elders and cultural groups, and incorporation of feedback.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated robust engagement with First Nations communities, including meaningful consultation with Elders and First Nations groups. They provided letters of support from First Nations organisations and community leaders for each of the proposed delivery locations.
- Provided evidence of culturally competent practice, such as staff training programs, partnerships with cultural organisations, or use of interpreters and cultural advisors to ensure services are inclusive and respectful.
- Offered practical examples of how diversity and cultural safety would be woven into program design, mentoring, and activity planning for vulnerable participants.
- Clearly articulated how their service model is participant centred, with practical examples of tailoring supports to individual needs and promoting participant choice and agency in activity planning.
- Outlined specific mechanisms for continuous improvement in cultural safety, such as codesign processes and structured feedback loops with participants and community representatives.

Criterion 3 - Organisational Capability

Detail your organisation's capacity and capability to manage and deliver the Program. Please use examples and/or case studies where relevant. When addressing the criterion, strong applicants detailed:

- Their organisation's experience delivering projects of a similar size or scope. Experience working inside facilities and places of detention will be highly regarded.
- Their understanding of the local service environment (for example, pre-release vs post-release) and your capability to work effectively in a correctional setting, either directly or through a consortia arrangement with providers who have specialised expertise in complementary justice contexts.
- How their organisation's infrastructure, information technology and governance systems, including risk, reporting and program management, will support you to deliver safe and inclusive services for participants.
- Their current organisation structure including staff training, qualifications and lived experience, as well as your organisation's strategies for attracting and retaining staff with connections to community.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated experience delivering similar projects within a correctional setting or to post-release clients, supported by case studies and clear examples of outcomes achieved.
- Presented a thorough understanding of the local service environment and existing supports, demonstrating established relationships and referral pathways. Where relevant, they leveraged formal partnerships to bring in complementary expertise and strengthen capability.
- Detailed how organisational infrastructure, IT systems, and governance frameworks (including risk management, reporting, and program oversight) would ensure safe, inclusive, and compliant service delivery. They included examples of existing systems and processes that have supported similar programs.
- Described their current organisational structure, including staff qualifications and training programs. They outlined strategies for attracting and retaining First Nations staff with strong community connections and lived experience, supported by evidence of past success in workforce development.

Individual feedback

To request individual feedback please follow the instructions as set out in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines section 9.1.