



OFFICIAL

Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence (ICoVE)

Feedback for Applicants

Thank you for your interest in the Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence (ICoVE) grant opportunity. We appreciate the time and effort you put into your application.

The Department of Workplace Relations (the Department) is providing the following general feedback for grant applicants to support future grant applications.

Summary of the Grant Opportunity

Application period: opened 3 December 2025 and closed 15 January 2026.

Applications received: 11

Summary of the round: The ICoVE is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government to develop a First Nations-led VET model that supports better skills, employment and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as committed to under the National Skills Agreement and National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Conflict of Interest Management for Assessment Staff

All Community Grants Hub and Departmental staff were required to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest before participating in the assessment process. Where a conflict was identified, appropriate steps were taken to manage it, which could include:

- Excluding the team member from undertaking assessment related to the affected application(s).
- Assigning the application(s) to an alternate assessor.
- Documenting the conflict and the management action in accordance with the Department's Conflict of Interest Policy.

Selection Process

The Community Grants Hub reviewed all applications to confirm they met the eligibility and compliance requirements for the grant opportunity. This information was provided to the Department's Grant Opportunity Delegate, who made the final decision on whether each identified grant application met those requirements. Grant Applicants whose applications were identified as ineligible or non-compliant were notified of the outcome in writing by the Community Grants Hub.

Following completion of these checks, the Department undertook the preliminary assessment of all eligible and compliant applications through a Restricted Competitive grant process. This involved assessing applications against the published selection criteria and any additional requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines (guidelines).

Following the preliminary assessment, the Department convened a Selection Advisory Panel to make final recommendations to the Financial Delegate. The Selection Advisory Panel was made up of subject matter experts whose role was to review the assessed applications, provide advice, and make recommendations to the Grant Opportunity Delegate.

Before participating in the assessment process, all Selection Advisory Panel members were required to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest. In cases where a conflict was identified, appropriate management strategies were applied to ensure the integrity of the process. These strategies included:

- Excluding the panel member from discussions or decisions related to the affected application(s).
- Reassigning the application(s) to an alternate assessor.
- Documenting the conflict and the management action in accordance with the Department's Conflict of Interest Policy.

In undertaking their role on the Selection Advisory Panel, panel members were required to consider:

- Whether applications met all eligibility and compliance requirements listed in the guidelines.
- How well responses addressed the published assessment criteria.
- The overall quality of applications compared to others received.
- The completeness and relevance of supporting attachments.
- Whether the proposed project demonstrated value for money.
- How the proposed activities aligned with the objectives of the grant opportunity.
- Any risks identified and the strategies proposed to manage those risks.

Selection Results

There was strong interest in this grant opportunity, and applications were of a high standard. The preferred applicant(s) demonstrated their ability to meet the requirements outlined in the guidelines based on the strength of their responses to the published assessment criteria. Applicants were notified of the outcome of their application in writing at the end of the selection period.

The following feedback is provided to assist grant applicants in understanding what comprised a strong application and what quality responses looked like against the requirements of the grant opportunity.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Read the supporting information before applying:

Applications that were scores strongly responded directly to the ICOVE guidelines. These guidelines set out:

- the purpose of the ICOVE grant program/grant opportunity
- applicant eligibility
- ICOVE weighted assessment criteria
- how grant applications are considered and selected
- how grantees are notified and receive grant payments
- how grantees will be monitored and evaluated
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the opportunity.

The guidelines also specify how to apply, including the documents to be submitted, timelines for submission and help information. This guidance was designed to support applicants to meet the criteria and should be read carefully.

Eligible entity types:

Applications were only considered for assessment when they demonstrated that they met the following entity types:

- Company
- Cooperative
- Incorporated Association
- Indigenous Corporation.

If an applicant was applying as a Trustee on behalf of a Trust, the Trustee must have also been one of the above listed entity types.

Applications from consortia were acceptable, as long as there is a lead applicant, solely responsible to the Commonwealth for the delivery of grant activities, and this lead applicant is an eligible entity type as per the list above.

To be eligible, applicants must also be one of the following entity types:

- an Aboriginal Community Controlled (ACC) Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
- First Nations Led/Owned RTO, with at least 51% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ownership and/or directorship and/or management.

Applicants were found ineligible where:

- Applicants did not meet the eligibility requirements as an eligible entity type, and either an ACC RTO, or a First Nations Led/Owned RTO, with at least 51% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ownership and/or directorship and/or management
- Applicants were an entity type other than those listed as eligible in the guidelines, including (but not limited to):
 - Commonwealth Government Bodies
 - A Commonwealth, State, Territory or local Government agency or body (including Government business enterprises)
 - An Individual
 - An Unincorporated Association
 - An Overseas Resident/Organisation.
- Applicants were an organisation, or any one of the applicants program partners was an organisation, that is included on the non-compliant list on the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) website
- Applicants were an organisation that has adverse findings and/or rulings from the Fair Work Commission and/or the Fair Work Ombudsman
- Applicants were an organisation, or any one of the applicants program partners was an organisation, included on the National Redress Scheme's website on the list of 'Institutions that have not joined or signified their intent to join the Scheme'.

Compliance:

Compliant responses were those that:

- completed the application form on GrantConnect
- provided all of the information required
- addressed all eligibility criteria and assessment criteria
- included all necessary attachments
- were submitted to the Community Grants Hub at or before the closing date and time.

The Community Grants Hub reviewed all applications for eligibility and compliance against the requirements of the application process. Applications were rated as eligible or ineligible, compliant or not compliant.

All eligible applications were considered compliant.

Attachments and evidence:

The guidelines set out the required attachments that Applicants needed to attach to their application. These included:

- a Governance plan, outlining the proposed governance structure for ICOVE, including stakeholder representation, consortia arrangements (if applicable), decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms
- implementation plan for the establishment phase and operational phase of the ICOVE, including detailing mechanisms for accountability to the department, the Coalition of Peaks, member organisations and First Nations communities
- an indicative budget aligned with the ICOVE implementation phases (establishment and operations) across financial years to 31 December 2028
- Board Profiles or Governance Capability Statement: evidence of board expertise across VET systems, cross-jurisdictional knowledge, and ability to apply a national lens
- a project management plan
- a risk management plan
- evidence of funding strategy, for example financial statements, loan agreements, cash flow documents
- evidence of support from your organisation's board, CEO or equivalent
- trust deed (if applicable)
- letter of support for consortia applications (if applicable) using the mandatory template.

Strong applications showed documentation that was accurately categorised, detailed and easy to locate within the submission.

A common failing of documentation related to letters of support for consortia or partner organisations that were unrelated to the ICOVE grant opportunity. Strong letters of support were tailored specifically to the ICOVE grant and set out specific activities, resourcing and other factors that the partner organisation would provide the applicant.

Value for money and risk:

When assessing the extent to which an application represents value with relevant money, the Department considered:

- the overall objective/s to be achieved in providing the grant
- the relative value of the grant sought
- how the grant activities will target groups or individuals
- the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates that it will contribute to meeting the outcomes/objectives of the ICOVE grant opportunity
- the extent to which the applicant demonstrates a commitment to the ICOVE
- the risks that the applicant or program poses for the Commonwealth.

Applicants were also asked to provide financial information in support of their application to ensure that they could:

- demonstrate capacity to deliver the grant activity and achieve value with relevant money

- allow payments to be made if the application is successful.

Financial statements provided were used to assess the applicant's financial risk, through a financial viability assessment. The financial viability assessment included:

- assessing the financial health of the applicant
- assessing any risks to the financial health of the applicant
- assessing the business continuity of the applicant
- establishing whether any relevant persons of the applicant (as applicable) have any adverse business history (for example, current or past bankruptcy).

The outcome of the financial viability assessment was considered when assessing and/or selecting applications.

Strong applications demonstrated:

- Minor overall financial risk, evidenced by comprehensive and complete financial statements.
- Strong governance and management processes and structures.
- Strong alignment with the purpose and outcomes of the grant.
- Innovative approaches for achieving national reach for the ICOVE.

Typical short falls included:

- High or Very High financial risk assessed, including with some unaudited or unavailable financial statements meaning some ratios were unable to be assessed.
- Applicants provided written risk assessments at a high-level only, and risks lacked mitigation strategies.
- Risk management systems within the organisations were not sufficiently demonstrated.
- The applicant did not demonstrate capacity to deliver a project of this magnitude.

Criterion 1: Demonstrated Organisational Capability and Cultural Governance (30%)

When addressing the criterion, applicants demonstrated their ability to meet this criterion through:

- evidence of being an ACC RTO or FNO RTO, including governance structures that reflect cultural authority and/or community control
- experience in delivering VET services to First Nations communities, including culturally responsive practices
- their strategy to increase resourcing to establish the ICOVE, including joint-secretariat resources to support the VET policy partnership
- their ability to foster partnerships across the VET sector, including collaboration with public, private, and community-based training providers, Jobs and Skills Councils and Industry
- a description of the governance model they propose for the ICOVE, including board expertise and stakeholder representation, with a focus on national reach and cross-sectoral engagement to act as a nationally networked representative for the First Nations VET sector
- a strategy for strengthening the capability of ACC RTO and First Nations Led/Owned RTOs to improve outcomes for First Nations learners (for example, a plan for building on the newly established Community of Practice)
- demonstrated their capacity to engage with and represent First Nations stakeholders, Including the Coalition of Peaks, in co-design processes.

What strong applications did well:

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated clear governance practice and structure with jurisdictional reach.
- Credible capability and capacity to deliver complex projects.
- Included governance structures with strong links to indigenous networks where cultural authority was spread across rural/remote regions.
- Provided strong, detailed letters of support from industry and regional partners.
- Demonstrated high-quality education and impacts on Closing the Gap.
- Described comprehensive implementation plans.

Common gaps observed:

Common gaps from applications include:

- A lack of capacity or thorough plan to scale operations to meet the demands of the ICOVE on a national scale.
- Less robust cultural governance frameworks, or community partnerships with organisations in regional/remote communities to deliver the ICOVE nationally.
- Lacked detail on plans to transitioning local or regional governance functions to a national scale.
- An absence of clear Indigenous leadership roles.

Criterion 2: Strategic Alignment and Contribution to Program Objectives (40%)

When addressing the criterion, applicants described how they would work towards the strategic objectives of the ICOVE through demonstrating:

- their ability to establish the ICOVE in alignment with the National Skills Agreement
- an outline of their strategic vision and approach to implement the ICOVE in line with their strategic objectives, and measures of success across each ICOVE pillar (providing examples of your previous relevant work and performance):
 - Pillar 1 – Innovation: outlined how they would support sector-led initiatives and enable access to future focussed training and employment opportunities
 - Pillar 2 – Capacity Building: outlined how they would sustainably grow and strengthen the ACC RTO sector, First Nations led RTOs and build the cultural capacity of public and private non-First Nations led RTOs to improve outcomes for First Nations VET learners accessing training through mainstream RTOs
 - Pillar 3 – Policy and Advocacy: outlined their strategy for engaging in state and national policy such as committees and policy submissions and build relationships across the national VET ecosystem inclusive of the Jobs and Skills Councils. Outlined how you would facilitate nationally networked partnerships and collaboration across the First Nations VET network, including private, public, and community-based providers, governments and industry groups
 - Pillar 4 – Research and data: outlined how the ICOVE will boost data and evaluation capability in the First Nations VET sector and implement culturally safe methods of capturing and sharing data in alignment with the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data¹⁸.
- their ability to operate alongside the department as co-chair and joint-secretariat of the VET Policy Partnership. Joint-secretariat functions include organising meetings, preparing g papers, supporting members, liaising with other policy-partnerships and facilitating sub-working groups
- outlined their proposed strategies for collaboration with governments, the Coalition of Peaks and other stakeholders to co-design the ICOVE structure and governance
- provided detail on how they will position the ICOVE to support Closing the Gap targets and priority reforms, particularly in national VET policy and delivery.

What strong applications did well:

Strong Applications:

- Demonstrated strong understanding and alignment with ICOVE objectives.
- Provided positive structures for codesign and communities of practice input.
- Comprehensively detailed requirements, with evidence of prior successful experience.
- Detailed plans to utilise expertise of regional partners to promote and implement ICOVE.
- Demonstrated experience to form communities of practice and effectively engage with indigenous groups and communities.

- Showed strong Indigenous-led approaches.

Common gaps observed:

Common gaps from applications include:

- Displayed lack of understanding the ICOVE grant purpose and goals and did not align with ICOVE objectives.
- Proposed plans, process and activities that did not align with ICOVE objectives or not clearly described.
- Unclear or less direct links between proposed activities and plans and programs intended outcomes.
- Plans that are based on boarder Australian community focus rather than specifically focusing on First Nations and expanding reach nationally.
- Outline and prove prior experience with similar engagements or activities.
- Did not show adequate innovation and excellence.

Criterion 3: Operational Readiness (30%)

When addressing the criterion, applicants demonstrated their operational readiness to establish and deliver the ICOVE, through a clear implementation plan and budget, strong cultural governance and robust mechanism for accountability through providing:

- an implementation plan (including Budget) for the establishment phase and operational phase of the ICOVE
- evidence of First Nations cultural governance, including how the applicant would uphold and embed principles of self-determination, and ensure representation from urban, regional and remote First Nations communities
- evidence of financial and organisational capacity/capability to manage their grant funds efficiently and ethically, including risk and performance management
- their proposed mechanisms for accountability to the department, the Coalition of Peaks, member organisations and First Nations communities.

What strong applications did well:

Strong Applications:

- Leveraged solid management systems and links to community partners to develop a strong operational base.
- Delivered detailed, clear and well written plans to deliver, manage and resource new responsibilities under ICOVE.
- Outlined budgets that were realistic and proportionally assigned to areas of spend in a mature and clear manner.

Common gaps observed:

Common gaps from applications include:

- Proposed timelines and implementation strategies that lacked sufficient depth or lacked specifics.

- Proposed unrealistic budgeting plans which inferred increased risk to the ICOVE and its delivery.
- Reliance on support from other organisations that was not substantiated.
- Did not clearly demonstrate that the applicant had the operational maturity to undertake and deliver the requirements of the ICOVE.
- Risk management discussions that were too high-level.
- In some instances, proposed activities or structures that did not align with the guidelines.

Tips for Future Applications

- Start early and read the **Grant Opportunity Guidelines** carefully.
- Check eligibility and gather required evidence before drafting your application.
- Provide complete, relevant attachments and references.
- Address each assessment criterion directly and clearly.
- Explain how your proposed activities deliver outcomes and demonstrate **value with relevant money**.
- Identify risks and outline strategies for managing them.

Next Steps

- Individual feedback will be provided upon request. To request individual feedback, follow the instructions in **section 9.1** of the guidelines.
- If you would like to know about upcoming grants opportunities for funding, you can [register](#) to receive email alerts with [GrantConnect](#) the Australian Government's grants information system.