



Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL) Program Phase 2

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations acknowledges the traditional custodians of all the lands on which we work. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We extend that respect to the First Nations people who have so generously shared their wisdom, time, knowledge, and lived experience with us in developing this program.

Feedback for applicants

Thank you for your interest in the Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL) Program Phase 2 grant opportunity. We appreciate the time and effort you put into your application.

The Department of Employment and 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 8 April 2026 and closed 4 May 2026.

Applications received: 54

Summary of the round: This grant opportunity aims to support people transitioning from incarceration into the community by facilitating access to health, housing, and other social services as well as building better connections to employment, education, and training opportunities. Connecting them to culture, Country, and language where appropriate, aligning with the strategic objectives outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Conflict of Interest Management for Community Grants Hub and Departmental 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 progressed through an Open Competitive grant process. This involved assessing all eligible and compliant applications against the published selection criteria and any additional requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Following the preliminary assessment, the department convened a Selection Advisory Panel to make final funding recommendations to the Financial Delegate. The Selection Advisory Panel was comprised of senior executive staff, 50% of whom were First Nations staff (ensuring strong First Nations representation in the decision-making process), who reviewed the assessment outcomes, considered value for money factors as outlined in the GOGs, and made recommendations to the Financial Delegate.

Before participating in the assessment process, all relevant staff, including Selection Advisory Panel members, were required to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest.

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

- the extent to which applications addressed the assessment criteria, including supporting evidence and attachments
- the overall objectives of the REAL Program
- the relative value for money of the grant funding sought
- the extent to which proposed activities would contribute to achieving the intended outcomes of the grant opportunity
- the extent to which services would effectively target and support the intended participant cohort
- any risks posed by the applicant or the proposed grant activities.

Selection Results

In making recommendations, the Selection Advisory Panel considered the comparative strengths of each application, value for money, any identified risks, alignment with the objectives of the grant opportunity, and the extent to which proposed activities were likely to achieve positive outcomes for participants.

Consistent with the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, the Selection Advisory Panel also had regard to the First Nations prioritisation policy, which supports increasing the proportion of services delivered by First Nations organisations where proposals were similarly ranked.

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 Grant Opportunity Guidelines through the quality of their responses to the published assessment criteria. Successful applicants also demonstrated strong organisational capability, established community connections and support, culturally safe and trauma-informed service delivery approaches, and a clear understanding of the needs of the target cohort and the local environment.

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:

Before preparing an application, organisations should have read the Grant Opportunity Guidelines in full, as they contain the eligibility requirements, assessment criteria, funding rules, mandatory attachments, and grant conditions. Applicants should have also regularly checked GrantConnect, which is the authoritative source of information for the grant opportunity, for any updates, addenda, FAQs and Questions and Answers documents published during the application period. Applicants were encouraged to use all available support channels, including Community Grants Hub guidance materials and published Q&As, to ensure they understand program requirements before lodging an application.

Strong applicants demonstrated a thorough understanding of the Program objectives, service model, participant cohort, and local delivery environment in their application.

Eligible entity types:

Eligible entity types included:

- Companies
- Cooperatives
- Corporate Commonwealth Entities
- Corporate State or Territory Entities
- Incorporated Associations
- Indigenous Corporations
- Local Governments
- Non-corporate Commonwealth Statutory Authorities
- Non-corporate State or Territory Entities
- Non-corporate State or Territory Statutory Authorities
- Partnerships
- Sole Traders
- Statutory Entities.

Trustees applying on behalf of a trust were able to apply where the trustee was an eligible entity type. Applicants were not eligible if they were individuals, unincorporated associations, overseas organisations, organisations listed on the Workplace Gender Equality Agency non-compliant list, or organisations listed on the National Redress Scheme register of institutions that had not joined or signified their intent to join the Scheme. Eligible organisations were also encouraged to partner with other eligible organisations through consortium arrangements.

Eligibility:

Strong applications demonstrated:

- strong links to First Nations communities, Elders, and cultural groups
- the capability to deliver culturally safe and trauma-informed services to First Nations people, supported by relevant experience, community connections, and local partnerships
- a current relationship with or the ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with correctional facilities and referral partners

- a clear understanding of local service systems and participant needs including pre-release, on-release, and post-release
- organisational capability, governance structures, qualified staff, and workforce strategies relevant to Program delivery
- the inclusion of case studies and examples within the selection criteria responses that demonstrated delivery of similar services.

Common gaps observed:

- limited detail regarding the capability to deliver proposed activities in practice, including participant recruitment, engagement, support, and retention throughout the program
- limited evidence demonstrating current or the ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with key stakeholders, First Nations communities, correctional facilities, and local service providers relevant to the proposed service area
- budgets and participant servicing profiles that were not clearly aligned, including applications that did not adequately demonstrate how the proposed cohort would be serviced within the funding profile outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, or provide a clear rationale where participant numbers were lower than expected
- limited evidence demonstrating organisational capability, governance arrangements, risk management processes, or the capability to deliver similar activities and achieve comparable participant outcomes.

Compliance:**Common compliance issues:**

- mandatory attachments were not provided
- eligibility or assessment criteria were not fully addressed, including not making full use of character count limits
- financial information was incomplete, outdated, or inconsistent with other information contained in the application.

How applicants avoided compliance issues:

- all mandatory attachments were submitted before the closing date
- all sections of the application form were completed, and all assessment criteria were addressed fully and made the best use of character count limits
- financial statements were current and aligned with organisational information provided elsewhere in the application.

Attachments and evidence:**Mandatory documentation included:**

- a formal letter of support from a member, organisation, or community group within the proposed service location
- financial statements for 2022–23, 2023–24 and 2024–25
- a 2025–26 year-to-date profit and loss statement, balance sheet, or other financial statement, where available
- trust documentation, where applicable.

Strong supporting evidence typically included:

- letters of support from the First Nations communities intended to be serviced, particularly from local organisations, community representatives, Elders, or cultural groups. Support originating from the relevant communities where the facility was located demonstrated stronger relevance than letters of support outside of that location or state
- letters of support from correctional facilities, evidence demonstrating efforts to obtain them, or information within the application demonstrating established relationships, engagement, or the capability to work effectively with the relevant correctional facility
- evidence of governance arrangements, staff capability, partnerships, and service delivery infrastructure.

Value for money and risk:

Strong applications demonstrated value for money by:

- clearly linking proposed activities to the Program objectives and participant outcomes
- presenting a realistic and proportionate funding proposal that aligned with the expected scale of service delivery, participant caseloads and program requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines
- demonstrating how funding would contribute to sustainable outcomes for participants, including reconnection with community, education, training, and employment pathways
- providing evidence of previous success delivering similar programs and achieving measurable outcomes
- demonstrating how proposed services would complement, rather than duplicate, existing supports.

Strong applications addressed risk by demonstrating:

- robust governance, reporting and program management systems, including financial viability and organisational sustainability
- appropriate risk management processes and oversight arrangements
- capacity to recruit, train and retain suitably qualified staff, including staff with community connections and cultural capability
- current relationships with, or the ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with correctional facilities, local service providers, and First Nations communities to support continuity of care and participant engagement
- evidence that key delivery risks had been identified and that mitigation strategies were in place to manage those risks.

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 tailored the Program to the relevant jurisdictions/facility(ies) to maximise its effectiveness, ensuring it complemented – rather than duplicated – existing support services
- their strategies for establishing connections to the communities that participants returned to
- how their organisation helped 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.

What strong applications did well:

- demonstrated current relationship with or the ability to establish, working relationships with correctional facilities and other local service providers, with clear referral pathways and coordination arrangements. This was evidenced by specific examples and relevant letters of support
- 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.

Common gaps observed:

- limited demonstrated correctional-sector experience, established custodial partnerships and existing referral pathways or limited detail on how those relationships would be established
- service delivery models described at a high level, with limited detail regarding implementation, participant engagement, service coordination, and operational processes
- limited tailoring of proposed services to specific correctional facilities, participant cohorts, and local community contexts
- limited evidence, case studies, or examples demonstrating how proposed approaches had achieved outcomes in comparable settings
- community and cultural reconnection activities identified as priorities, but not clearly explain how these activities would be implemented, monitored, and sustained to support participant outcomes and broader reintegration goals.

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 delivered quality, culturally competent services for participants tailored around their needs and promoted their agency in activity plans
- how their organisation embedded 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.

What strong applications did well:

- demonstrated robust engagement with First Nations communities, including meaningful consultation with Elders and First Nations groups. Provision of letters of support from local First Nations organisations and community leaders for the relevant 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.

Common gaps observed:

- sufficient evidence of community consultation, engagement with Elders and partnerships with First Nations organisations was not provided
- limited examples were provided demonstrating how community and participant feedback will inform program design or service delivery approaches
- cultural safety and culturally responsive practices were described conceptually but not clearly outlined how they would be implemented, monitored, and operationalised in practice
- cultural mentoring, reconnection, and support activities described without demonstrating how they would contribute to participant outcomes and broader reintegration goals.

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 was highly regarded
- their understanding of the local service environment (for example, pre-release vs post-release) and their capability to work effectively in a correctional setting, either directly or through a consortia arrangement with providers who had specialised expertise in complementary justice contexts
- how their organisation's infrastructure, information technology, and governance systems, including risk, reporting and program management, supported them to deliver safe and inclusive services for participants

- their organisation structure including staff training, qualifications, and lived experience, as well as their organisation's strategies for attracting and retaining staff with connections to community.

What strong applications did well:

- demonstrated experience delivering similar projects within a correctional setting or to post release clients, supported by case studies or 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 described how they would leverage 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. This included the provision of examples of existing systems and processes that have supported similar programs
- described their current organisational structure, including staff qualifications and training programs. This included outlining strategies for attracting and retaining First Nations staff with strong community connections and lived experience, supported by evidence of past success in workforce development.

Common gaps observed:

- organisational capability claims provided limited or no evidence of previous delivery success, participant outcomes, comparable program experience, case studies, or measurable outcomes
- workforce structures, qualifications, recruitment strategies, retention approaches, and workforce planning were insufficiently detailed
- governance arrangements, organisational systems, and risk management frameworks were described at a high level without sufficient detail
- limited evidence of organisational readiness to deliver services within correctional environments, including practical understanding of referral processes, facility operations, and custodial systems.

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 for money**.
- Identify risks and outline strategies for managing them.

Next Steps

- Individual feedback will be provided upon request. Applicants seeking individual feedback should submit requests to REALprogram@dewr.gov.au. Requests for individual feedback will only be accepted within 20 days of receipt of the outcome of

your application. Feedback will be provided in writing only within 30 days of receipt of the request.

- If you would like to know about upcoming grants opportunities for funding, you can [register](#)¹ to receive email alerts with [GrantConnect](#)² the Australian Government's grants information system.

¹ <https://www.grants.gov.au/RegisteredUser/Register>

² <https://www.grants.gov.au/RegisteredUser/Login>