



Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Program 2026–27

Feedback for applicants

Thank you for your interest in the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Program 2026–27 grant opportunity. We appreciate the time and effort you put into your application.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) is providing the following general feedback for grant applicants to support future grant applications.

Summary of the Grant Opportunity

Application period: opened 11 March 2026 and closed 15 April 2026.

Summary of the round: The BEST Program forms part of the Australian Government's commitment to supporting the role of ex-service organisation (ESO) compensation and wellbeing advocates, who provide advice and assistance to the veteran and defence communities. It also links closely to the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP), which provides the essential skills for claims, advocacy and wellbeing work.

Formerly an annual program, this is the first time the BEST Program is being offered as a 3-year program, in response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (Recommendation 99).

The Australian Government is providing total grant funding of up to \$50.7 million (GST exclusive) over 3 years from 2026–27 to 2028–29 for this BEST Program grant opportunity. The BEST Program does not fully fund an ESO, but is intended as a contribution to an organisation's delivery of free advocacy services.

The objectives of the BEST Program are to assist ESOs to:

- provide free advocacy services to veterans and families of veterans
- improve the quality of claims received by DVA at the primary determining level
- promote the provision of wellbeing services to the veteran and defence communities.

The intended outcomes of the BEST Program are to ensure:

- the veteran and defence communities have access to free compensation and wellbeing advocacy services
- the veteran and defence communities benefit from ESO advocates who can lodge claims with DVA that are of a high standard and contain all required information to enable timely and quality decisions at no cost to the veteran
- ESO advocates can assist in improving claims assessment efficiency.

Conflict of Interest Management for Assessment Staff

All Community Grants Hub and DVA staff were required to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest before participating in the assessment process.

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 DVA's Grant Opportunity Delegate, who made the final decision on whether each identified grant application met those requirements.

Following completion of these checks, DVA undertook the preliminary assessment of all eligible and compliant applications through an Eligibility Based/ Demand Driven grant process. This involved assessing applications against the published eligibility criteria and any additional requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. Applicants (either in their 'own right' or sponsored by another ESO) needed to meet the eligibility requirements. This also included being an ESO and an eligible entity type, as well as additional eligibility requirements such as committing to meet service standards, before they could be considered for a grant. ESOs also need to have at least one ATDP-qualified compensation advocate working for them.

Eligibility compliance was confirmed by the Community Grants Hub and senior DVA grants officials.

Selection Results

While all eligible applicants received a grant offer in accordance with the updated funding model, some tips for future applicants are provided below.

DVA appreciates the ongoing commitment to supporting veterans and their families demonstrated by the applicants. The outcomes of this redesigned program provide:

- Increased funding investment in fee-free advocacy services.
- Greater certainty through a through a 3-year funding agreement.
- Improved ability to undertake future planning and workforce development.

The redesign of the BEST Program provides greater flexibility, certainty and sustainability with the focus remaining on supporting fee-free advocacy services and responding to Recommendation 99.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Read the supporting information before applying:

The application form required completing all fields as well as providing 2 mandatory attachments (workforce, naming staff at the time of the application, and a budget outlining how much funding was being sought).

Some applicants neglected to include the mandatory attachments, or did not complete them correctly. In accordance with probity rules, DVA followed up with these applicants until all attachments were received.

Workforce attachment

Applicants were required to name their advocates, and these were compared with the ATDP Register. A very large number of the advocate names did not match on an initial search. This was due to incorrect spellings, and/or different use of names including nicknames and abbreviations. These were amended manually by DVA.

DVA undertook a validation process to identify any duplicate records and to review the aggregate hours attributed to those advocates across all applications. Where the combined hours exceeded a reasonable full-time equivalent workload, in accordance with probity rules, DVA sought clarification from the relevant organisations and

corrections were made where required. This quality assurance process helped to ensure the integrity of the information used to inform funding allocations.

Where advocates are associated with two or more ESOs, organisations are responsible for accurately reporting the hours worked at their ESO. DVA expects BEST applicants to consult directly with their advocates to ensure the information provided is complete and accurate.

Some individuals were recorded at the incorrect ATDP qualification level or were not ATDP-qualified at all. An individual undergoing a pathway of recognition of prior learning they should only be listed at the attained qualification level (if any).

Legal practitioners and individuals who are not ATDP-qualified should not be listed as ATDP-qualified on the workforce attachment.

Trainees must be listed on the ATDP trainee register and be enrolled in an eligible ATDP course.

Individuals must be qualified and employed at a point in time (the closure of the grant round) to be considered for funding under the attribution model. DVA cannot accept placeholders for staff on the workforce template that are yet to be employed as they are unable to be verified as eligible.

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 and relevant attachments.

Next Steps

- Individual feedback will not be provided for this grant opportunity.
- 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>