AgConnections – Skilled Agricultural Work Liaison pilot program

Feedback for applicants

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) has provided the following general feedback for applicants of the AgConnections – Skilled Agricultural Work Liaison pilot program 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

AgConnections - a skilled agricultural work liaison program (the program), is an initiative under the Foundations for the Agricultural Workforce Package announced as part of the 2024–25 Budget of the Australian Government on 14 May 2024. The program contributes to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's Outcome 1: More sustainable, productive, internationally competitive and profitable Australian agricultural, food and fibre industries through policies and initiatives that promote better resource management practices, innovation, self-reliance and improved access to international markets.

The purpose of the program is to increase the number of skilled students from a broad range of disciplines entering the agriculture sector. The program will help overcome pre-held conceptions of working in the agriculture industry and encourage students from a broad range of areas to consider agriculture as a viable career opportunity

The program will be established through a grant opportunity offered to urban and regional Australian Universities, to develop and deliver a pilot over 2 calendar years (2025 and 2026). The pilot will be designed to target university students from a broad range of disciplines entering the agriculture sector (such as innovation and technology) as well as participation by priority cohorts, including, First Nations People and women, to increase diversity and participation in the agricultural industry.

Successful applicants will develop and implement an agriculture sector-specific liaison program collaborating with the agricultural industry and agribusinesses/farm businesses to facilitate internship and work-based learning opportunities for students with the aim of increasing the number of skilled students entering the sector.

The application submission period opened on 17 September 2024 and closed on 15 October 2024.

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. All applications were found to be eligible.

A departmental Selection Committee comprising 3 officials, conducted a preliminary evaluation of the applications against the selection criteria in line with the guidelines.

A Selection Advisory Panel (Panel) was established by the department, comprising senior officials and probity advisor. The Panel reviewed all applications and the findings of the Selection Committee and considered their comparative strength against the selection criteria along with other objectives such as achieving a geographical and urban/regional spread, to provide recommendations on funding to the Financial Delegate.

Selection Results

There was a strong interest in the grant opportunity and applications were of a high standard. The recommended applicants had strong responses on all criteria.

This feedback is provided to assist grant applicants to understand the key attributes of a strong application.

Criterion 1: Describe the activity proposed, how it will be delivered, and how it will meet the objectives of the program.

When addressing the criterion, strong applicants will:

- explain how the project will build on existing services and resources within university communities and the agricultural sector
- explain how the program outcomes will be achieved and continue beyond the life of the grant.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated:
    - strong alignment with the program objectives
    - the ability to pilot activities that build on existing services and resources within the university communities and agricultural sector and
    - the ability to continue to deliver value for partners beyond the pilot program.

Criterion 2: Demonstrate your organisation's ability to successfully manage, deliver and monitor the grant activity.

When addressing the criterion, strong applicants will:

- outline their governance oversight approach for the program, including arrangements you will have in place to manage stakeholders, resources, finances, risk and so on
- explain how they will ensure the program is culturally sensitive and inclusive of priority cohorts
- describe how they will engage, consult, and leverage new and existing stakeholders
- describe their approach to monitoring program outcomes.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated:
    - strong governance arrangements with a track record in delivering grants
    - a sound approach and commitment to ensure the project is culturally sensitive and inclusive of priority cohorts
    - the ability to collaborate with diverse partners to achieve impactful outcomes
    - a clear structure and understanding of how all levels of risks will be managed and
    - a robust monitoring and evaluation approach.

Criterion 3: Demonstrate experience and professionalism in building and maintaining student-agricultural industry connection.

When addressing the criterion, strong applicants will:

- outline the experience of key personnel to be involved in the design, development and management of the program
- demonstrate delivery of similar liaison programs, which may include evidence of the university's approach to industry connection, any current or past successful student-industry connection projects and how they intend to engage agribusiness/farm businesses and students in the program.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated:
    - strong organisational experience with which to deliver and manage the proposed project
    - excellent evidence of track record and ability to successfully deliver similar programs that connect with the agricultural industry and
    - a depth of experience in engaging successfully with a broad range of agricultural stakeholders.

Criterion 4: Describe your organisation's ability to collaborate and share valuable information on key learnings from the pilot program.

When addressing the criterion, strong applicants will:

- demonstrate how they intend to achieve this during and following the pilot
- describe how collaboration and shared learnings will benefit continuous improvement of the program.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated:
    - an excellent ability to collaborate with a range of stakeholders in delivering the activity and
    - a sound approach to facilitate collaboration and share key learnings from the pilot to achieve continuous improvement of the program.

Criterion 5: Demonstrated understanding of the agricultural sector and its workforce challenges

When addressing the criterion, strong applicants will:

- describe the agricultural sector's current and emerging workforce, including its challenges, needs and how establishing careers in the sector can help overcome these
- outline the broad range of skilled career opportunities the program will foster outside traditional on-farm roles.

Strong applications:

- Demonstrated:
    - an excellent understanding of the agricultural sector and its workforce challenges and needs and
    - how establishing careers in this sector can help overcome these issues

- Provided strong evidence on how the proposed activities will:

  − support skilled career opportunities

  − foster awareness of opportunities outside of traditional on-farm roles

  − address the workforce supply gap and

  − attract and retain students in the industry.

Individual feedback

Individual feedback will not be provided for this grant opportunity.

To make a complaint about this grant process, please follow the instructions as set out in the guidelines section 13.1.