



**Community
Grants Hub**
Improving your grant experience



Disability Employment Centre of Excellence

Feedback for applicants

The Department of Social Services (the department) has provided the following general feedback for applicants of the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence (Centre of Excellence) 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 4 September 2024 and closed on 23 October 2024.

The department conducted an open grant round to find a provider or consortium of providers to establish the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.

The Centre of Excellence will be an evidence-informed, best-practice hub that will provide resources, tools and training to help providers deliver quality employment services and supports to both participants with disability and employers.

The Centre of Excellence will collect, translate and disseminate disability employment-related research and evidence of what works into best-practice resources. The Centre of Excellence will bring together and use existing resources available both nationally and internationally.

The Centre of Excellence is expected to commence in March 2025, to support the introduction of the new specialist disability employment program from 1 July 2025. A dedicated online hub will be available from September 2025.

A single grant to the proposed value of \$22,106 million GST exclusive is available for the grant activity, with funding over the 2024–25 to 2027–28 financial years.

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 all eligible and compliant applications through an Open Competitive grant process.

The selection advisory panel (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:

- whether the application provided value for money, including:
 - the overall objectives to be achieved in providing the grant
 - the extent to which the geographic location of the application matches identified priorities
 - the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates that it will contribute to meeting the outcomes/objectives
 - how the grant will target groups or individuals
 - how it compares to other applications.

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 Hub 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: Capacity and capability to establish and operate the Centre of Excellence

When addressing the criterion strong applicants:

- demonstrated their experience and capability to deliver the Centre of Excellence, including experience in delivering similar projects
- demonstrated their ability to identify relevant evidence and convert it into practice
- demonstrated their ability to effectively establish and operate the Centre of Excellence, including the ability to access resources and personnel with relevant expertise, skills and experience
- demonstrated their access or futures access to any infrastructure, equipment, technology and Intellectual Property to support the establishment and operation of the Centre of Excellence
- demonstrated how they would ensure the efficient and economical use of the grant funds in establishing and operating the Centre of Excellence, and how high-quality outcomes would be achieved in a cost-effective way
- outlined how an online Hub would be established and maintained, including, but not limited to resources, training materials, and information about the Centre for Excellence
- identified the risks and issues that may be encountered in establishing and operating the Centre of Excellence, including describing the strategies or measures to mitigate the impact of risks identified, and
- demonstrated how success would be measured.

Strong applications:

- demonstrated that they clearly understood the purpose, objectives and outcomes of the Centre of Excellence as outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, and provided responses that did not go beyond the scope of the purpose, objectives and outcomes

- reflected this understanding in a considered and detailed response that outlined how they would establish and operate the Centre of Excellence with particular attention to the elements of the selection criterion
- provided further detailed information in the Activity Work Plan to support the response to Criterion 1.

Criterion 2: Proposed model, governance and staffing structure of the Centre of Excellence.

When addressing the criterion strong applicants would identify the proposed operating model, governance and staffing structure for the Centre of Excellence. In responding to this criterion, they should have included:

- if applying as a consortium, the consortium arrangements for the Centre, why the consortium organisations were chosen and how consortium members would contribute to the Centres goals
- evidence that the organisation is demonstrating leadership through its own inclusive employment practices for the recruitment and retention of employees with disability
- how they would ensure the Centre of Excellence operates as a genuinely inclusive entity that has the needs of people with disability at its core
- the proposed approach to working with stakeholders and developing partnerships to deliver the Centre of Excellence
 - provided information on how they intend to meet the collaborative requirements of the grant opportunity
 - described their existing partnerships with key stakeholders and how these would be used to deliver the Centre
- Their proposed governance model for the Centre of Excellence
- Their proposed staffing structure for the Centre of Excellence, including information on the skills and experience staff would require to deliver the Centre of Excellence.

Strong applications:

- provided a considered response to all aspects of the selection criterion
- demonstrated how the Centre of Excellence would operate providing clear detail on the proposed model, leadership, governance and staffing structure, and how consortium members would work together within these structures
- were clear on how consortium members would contribute to the goals of the Centre of Excellence
- clearly described existing partnerships with key stakeholders and how they would be used to deliver the Centre of Excellence, including seeking confirmation of engagement prior to submitting the grant application, or sought out new stakeholder relationships and received confirmation of engagement prior to submitting the grant application
- clearly outlined the proposed staffing structure for the Centre of Excellence, including information on the skills and experience staff would require to deliver the Centre and who would lead the Centre.

Criterion 3: Delivery of core functions of the Centre of Excellence

Described how they would operate the Centre of Excellence to ensure core functions of the Centre of Excellence, as outlined in section 5.1 of the guidelines were delivered to a high standard.

Please note: Two deliverables would need to be met by specific deadlines. How they would meet these deliverables needed to be clearly stated in their response to Criterion 3. These were:

1. a suite of information and practice-based resources on the topics of disability awareness and employer engagement for use by employment service providers must be delivered progressively by 13 June 2025 to support the commencement of the new specialist disability employment program on 1 July 2025
2. a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence Online Hub (stand-alone website) capable of hosting information and practice-based resources and training in a range of formats by 1 September 2025. The online hub must be compliant with:
 - the Digital Transformation Agency's Service Standards
 - Australian Privacy Principles
 - Australian Government Style Manual
 - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 at a minimum AA standard and where possible a AAA standard
 - use of plain language principles with the user's needs at the forefront.
 - The website would need to be hosted on secure hosting services with >99.9% uptime
 - Use of a Web Application Firewall (WAF) or Content Delivery Network (CDN) is preferred
 - Regular backups must be captured and a full site recovery should be achievable in under 2 days
 - No public user accounts should be created on the site
 - The website should be built on the Drupal Content Management System (CMS). Where possible, the site should be based on the GovCMS distribution
 - While created and maintained by you, the domain name, website, all content, code, databases and related materials will be owned by DSS.

In addition to Criterion 3, they were required to complete a Draft Activity Work Plan including sections for a Budget Plan, stakeholder engagement and risk management for the 4 years of the grant period.

The template for these requirements were available on GrantConnect and did not count towards the character limit for this criterion.

The Draft Activity Work Plan must have detailed objectives, deliverables, timeframes and measures of success for all establishment and delivery of core functions outlined in Eligible Grant Activities (section 5.1), and in response to the Assessment Criteria outlined in this section. A detailed stakeholder engagement plan and engaging with stakeholders will be required to finalise the Activity Work Plan.

The Budget Plan should have been comprehensive and given a detailed breakdown of costs for establishment and operation of the Centre, including breakdowns of:

- establishment costs including assets, staff recruitment, IT systems

- establishment costs, legal and accounting costs; and any other establishment costs staffing numbers and remuneration costs, and other annual operating costs including consulting and contracting; maintenance (depreciation); occupancy; equipment and materials; marketing and media; travel; accommodation, catering, events and conferences; governance costs; and any other recurrent costs.

Strong applications:

- provided a considered response to all aspects of the selection criterion
- demonstrated the applicant's ability to deliver all the core functions of the Centre of Excellence
- demonstrated, as part of the draft Activity Work Plan, realistic timeframes, capacity to deliver the project, a very detailed plan for delivery and good risk identification and mitigation plans
- a strong consortium who could support immediate establishment of the Centre, especially the early milestones of the initial suite of resources by 13 June 2025 and establishing the online hub by 1 September 2025
- proposed comprehensive budgets with detailed breakdowns of costs
- contained stakeholder engagement plans which confirmed partners and the role they had agreed to play with the consortium.

Criterion 4: Demonstrate how engagement and collaboration will be used to establish the Centre

When addressing the criterion strong applicants:

- if applying as a consortium, outlined how the consortium of eligible organisations would enhance collaboration and achieve impact through the grant
- if applying as an eligible entity type as listed in section 4.1, outlined how the organisation would enhance collaboration and achieve impact through the grant
- outlined how they would establish the Centre as a collaborative institution
- outlined how collaboration and engagement would be used within the governance structure of the Centre and decision-making processes
- demonstrated their ability to collaborate and engage with relevant research institutions, service providers, peak bodies and employers to develop and deliver quality, practice-based resources, tools and training
- outlined how they would disseminate outputs of the Centre to the sector
- outlined their understanding of the current disability employment landscape, including employment options, challenges to the sector and the role of employment services providers.

Strong applications:

- provided a considered response to all aspects of the selection criterion
- demonstrated how collaboration and engagement would be used to achieve the objectives of the grant
- demonstrated the applicant's ability to collaborate and engage with required stakeholders
- provided a good level of detail on how outputs would be disseminated and used by service providers
- demonstrated an understanding of the objectives and intent of the grant, in particular that the purpose of the Centre of Excellence is to provide resources, tools and training to help

providers deliver quality employment services and supports to both participants with disability and employers

- demonstrated the applicant's understanding of the disability employment landscape.

Criterion 5: Deliver value for money for Government

When addressing the criterion, strong applicants:

- provided a project budget (template was available for use in the grant opportunity documents available on GrantConnect)
- outlined a proposed payment structure
- justified how the grant would deliver value for money for Government.

Successful applications should have additionally covered:

- how accessibility requirements would be met, and
- how the needs of diverse cohorts of people with high support needs would be met, including intersectional (culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTIQA+, young people and school leavers, and so on) groups.

Strong applications:

- provided a considered response to all aspects of the selection criterion
- demonstrated value for relevant money, including substantiating any claims made
- provided a well thought out, detailed and realistic budget
- demonstrated how in-kind support would contribute to the development of the Centre of Excellence
- demonstrated and substantiated with examples, how accessibility requirements would be met and how the needs of diverse cohorts with high support needs would be met.

Individual feedback

Although the guidelines stated individual feedback would not be provided for this grant opportunity (section 9.1 of the guidelines), the department has decided it will provide individual feedback on request. Should you wish to receive individual feedback, please contact COE@dss.gov.au.