

APPLICATION HANDBOOK

RECONNECT PROGRAM (2021)



RECONNECT GRANT APPLICATION

The Department of Education and Training (DET) invites eligible organisations to apply to deliver the **Reconnect Program (2021)**. Please read the 'Reconnect Program (2021) Guidelines' document carefully, then read this document. Note that there have been many changes to the previous program delivery design, applicant eligibility, program delivery and submission requirements.

BACKGROUND

- The Reconnect program was initially established in response to a decline in the number of young, early school leavers enrolling in VET, as part of the **Back to Work scheme**, announced in October 2015.
- In 2017, under the **Skills First** reforms Reconnect expanded the age criteria for participants to include adults aged 64 years and under. However, under the **Skills First Reconnect**, the minimum age of students increased to 17 years old.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

- **Reconnect** is a place-based response that focuses on increasing access and equity for disadvantaged Victorians to participate in education and training, or to gain employment.
- The program supports participants to access tailored wraparound services to address non-vocational barriers and to increase participants' capacity to successfully achieve their vocational aspirations. Participants develop employability skills and capabilities to participate and succeed in their chosen education and training pathway.
- It provides Learn Local Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), TAFEs and Community Service Organisations (CSOs) with a Learn Local RTO or TAFE partner with grant funding to build or develop community stakeholder relationships that assist in identifying and engaging participants, and harness a community effort to improve education and training outcomes.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- In 2020, DET completed a comprehensive review of the **Reconnect** program. The main objectives of the review were to devise strategies that would improve the program's responsiveness and enhance participant outcomes. The redesigned program intends to increase support for Victorian adults and communities that are experiencing circumstantial disadvantage. The **Reconnect** program supports 17 – 64 year old Victorians experiencing disadvantage to access Vocational Education and Training (VET) and employment.

APPLICATION PROCESS

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to apply as a Lead Organisation for the Reconnect Program (2021), the Applicant must be registered for Goods and Services Tax (GST) with an active Australian Business Number and MUST be one of the following:

- a) A Learn Local organisation (registered with the Adult, Community and Further Education Board) that is also a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with a current *Skills First* VET Funding Contract with the Department of Education and Training, Victoria; or
- b) A TAFE institute based in Victoria; or
- c) A Community Service Organisation (CSO) with a Learn Local RTO or TAFE partner that has a current *Skills First* VET Funding Contract with the Department of Education and Training, Victoria.

EVIDENCE

CSO applicants must provide sound evidence of a genuine, robust and effective partnership arrangement with a TAFE or Learn Local RTO. This could include official letters, or a MOU. All applicants are welcome to upload documentation that supports their application.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managed organisations (that meet the above criteria) are strongly encouraged to apply.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

PARTICULARS	DATE
Release of Application	Tuesday, 15 September 2020
Online Information Session	11.30am, Friday, 18 September 2020
Closing Date & Time of Application	Midnight, Sunday, 4 October 2020
Announcement of Successful Organisations	By Friday, 30 November 2020
Funding Agreement in Place	By Friday, 30 November 2020

SUBMISSION

The application form is an online form and will require that each applicant create a profile within the system.

For further information regarding eligibility and program delivery please carefully review the 'Reconnect Program Guidelines (2021)' document available at: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/reconnect-program.aspx>.

APPLY HERE: Link to the Online Application Form (will be available after the Online Forum is held on 18 September 2020).

GRANT AGREEMENT DURATION

Program funding includes a grant agreement for a term of 2 years plus 1, plus 1 (2 years with the right of renewal of 2 additional 12-month periods). The Department will decide based on priorities and performance whether to exercise the right of renewals.

PARTNERSHIPS: AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT

Partnerships and connections to local community continue to play an integral role in the delivery of successful programs. Existing partnerships that are proven to be robust and effective will be highly valued. Each of the four program elements (engagement; learner wraparound supports; education, training and employment; and pathways) require strong connections to local services and partners with proven capability to deliver the program with impactful outcomes. In addition, linkages to local businesses and industry are vital to ensuring participants have access to relevant pathways towards job experience and employment.

LOCATION OF DELIVERY

DET wants to ensure that the Reconnect Program will be delivered across Victoria, especially in the most disadvantaged Local Government Areas (LGAs).

To ensure appropriate allocation of the program delivery, organisations will be required to select up to a maximum of 5 LGAs in the order of preference (1 being the most important and 5 being the least important) that you would like to deliver the Reconnect Program in.

CASE LOAD

The case load for each applicant is the mechanism through which participant targets are determined and how the grant agreement value is calculated.

Case load (previously participant targets) is applied per calendar year of the contract and will be amended annually or as required based on local community needs, program delivery and Government priorities.

One unit of metropolitan or regional case load funding will include a set participant rate for a set number of participants, along with funding to support the salary of a full-time staff member and oncosts as follows:

One Unit of Metropolitan Case Load Funding	One Unit of Regional Case Load Funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metropolitan LGAs will receive a <i>participant rate of \$5,000 per participant against a caseload of 40 participants; and</i> \$80,000 to cover the equivalent of one full-time staff member salary and oncosts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional LGAs will receive a <i>participant rate of \$5,500 per participant against a caseload of 35 participants; and</i> \$80,000 to cover the equivalent of one full-time staff member salary and oncosts.

Applicant may select a minimum of a 0.5 case load and a maximum of 3 case loads per year. The case loads can be selected via possible combinations within this limitation. For example, 0.5 x Metro case load plus 1 x Regional case load will equate to 20 metro participants (\$100,000), 35 regional participants (\$192,500) and 1.5 staffing allocation (\$120,000). This will equate to \$412,500 in total funding.

Please note, the location of delivery and case load is only relevant to the first calendar year of the contract and will be amended annually or as required based on local community needs, program delivery and Government priorities.

APPLICATION DETAILS

KEY SELECTION CRITERIA

SELECTION CRITERIA	WEIGHTING
<p>1. Proposed Program Methodology</p> <p>Explain the proposed program methodology in detail in term of how the Applicant (Lead Organisation or Consortium) will successfully develop and deliver the program in accordance with the Reconnect Program (2021) Guidelines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate how the program will be developed, coordinated, managed and delivered in the selected location(s). (Maximum 300 words) Demonstrate how the program will be integrated with locally existing programs and services. (Maximum 300 words) Demonstrate a comprehensive program methodology to the specified service elements, including reporting and outcome requirements. (Maximum 500 words and an additional optional one-page visual description can be provided as an attachment to describe the program methodology if required) Demonstrate a commitment to high standards of quality, timeliness and efficiency. (Maximum 200 words) 	30%

<p>2. Robust Partnership Model & Stakeholder Engagement</p> <p>Explain how the Applicant (Lead Organisation or Consortium) will successfully delivery the program through a genuine, robust and effective partnership arrangement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate evidence of preparation made to date and the capacity to work collaboratively with existing, Community Service Organisations (CSOs), employers and industry, TAFEs, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), Learn Local organisations, Government departments and agencies that have appropriate service delivery experience and expertise to compliment the delivery of the program in the selected location(s) of delivery. (Maximum 500 words) ▪ Provide examples of flexible service provision, successful collaboration and linkages with other organisations to support the proposed program delivery model and how it will benefit the target group and emerging needs of the local community. (Max 500 words) ▪ Demonstrate community connections and localised knowledge and understanding of community needs in selected delivery location(s). (Maximum 500 words) ▪ Evidence of partnership arrangements, including Letters of Support, Memorandum of Understanding etc. can be attached. 	40%
<p>3. Capability, Knowledge & Experience</p> <p>Detail the Applicant's (Lead Organisation's or Consortium's) capability, knowledge and experience in working with and supporting disadvantaged people facing significant barriers in our society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate successful project management experience in managing a multi-sector, cross-departmental, community-based project where successful project outcomes have been met. (Maximum 500 words) ▪ Demonstrate expertise and experience in successfully delivering vocational education and training programs to people experiencing disadvantaged, including achieving successful training outcomes and pathways to further education and/or employment. (Maximum 500 words) ▪ Demonstrate expertise and experience in the provision of case management, brokerage of services for people experiencing disadvantage, specifically vocational barriers. (Maximum 500 words) 	20%
<p>4. Financial Planning</p> <p>Provide a detailed and carefully thought through financial planning and budget allocation for the development and delivery of the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a detailed and carefully thought through financial plan and budget allocation for the development and delivery of the program. (Maximum 500 words). ▪ Complete the program budget summary template. 	10%

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS

Applicant responses should demonstrate how the following Program Development and Delivery Requirements will be successfully provided at the selected delivery location (refer to **the Reconnect Model** and **Program Elements** in the *Reconnect Program Guidelines (2021)*):

1. **Leadership and Program Management:** Lead, coordinate and manage the overall location-based delivery. Establish and maintain Community of Practice (CoP) with other Reconnect Providers.
2. **Integration of Services:** Integrate the 'education response' and 'pathway planning' with other services to develop a comprehensive plan and response to participants vocational aspirations.
3. **Education Response:** Develop and deliver the education response encompassing both the educational and needs-based support services that are identified to be critical for peoples experiencing disadvantage to engage in sustainable education pathway.
4. **Pathway Planning:** Co-develop tailored pathways to employment and further education with and for participants.

FOUR PROGRAM ELEMENTS (SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES TO BE DELIVERED)

Applicant responses should include examples of innovative and effective modes of delivery that enhance vocational outcomes that align with the *four program elements*. The services and activities detailed under the below elements directly correspond to the **Reconnect Participant Journey** in the *Reconnect Program Guidelines (2021)*.

1. ENGAGEMENT

- Engage participants (including non-service-connected)
- Develop and maintain place-based partnerships with community services that facilitate referral pathways
- Assess suitability of the program for potential participants
- Engage with participants to identify their strengths and interests

2. PARTICIPANT WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

- Work with participants to identify support needs

- Refer participants to appropriate services that address support needs
- Develop and harness community connections to enable referrals and generate fruitful collaborations
- Identify opportunities for community participation

3. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

- Assess education and training support needs
 - Facilitate engagement in education and training via partnerships
 - Identify employment goals and facilitate opportunities through industry partners
 - Co-develop individual vocational plans with participants
- Participants may engage in non-accredited, pre-accredited, and/or accredited education and training programs, or employment

4. PARTICIPANT PATHWAYS

- Regularly check-in with vocational plan and adjust to respond to participants needs and aspirations
- Support participants towards effective transition out of the program
- Participants may pathway into further education, training or employment. Some participants may need to pathway into another service for additional support.

CONTACT DETAILS

Please contact DET's Reconnect Program team via Reconnect.Program@education.vic.gov.au or speak to Stefanie Wale, Senior Project Officer, Program Management Unit on 03 7022 0606.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. Funding Criteria

Only the organisations that were selectively provided with the Expression of Interest formally by the Department of Education and Training are eligible to make a submission. Providers not currently funded by the department must provide proof of their legal status. The applicant must have an Australian Business Number (ABN) or provide written advice from the Australian Tax Office that withholding tax is not required from the grant payment.

2. Consortia, Coalitions and Subcontracting

There are three legal and management options available to consortia in making a submission. Each of these types of arrangements is acceptable to the department:

- a) incorporate as a single body
- b) each member signs as part of a non-incorporated consortium, or
- c) subcontracting by the lead agency to other members of the consortium.

The Department encourages partnerships with the objective of promoting integration to better meet the needs of the community. Where the provider is a consortium, the submission must indicate which parts of the project each entity comprising the consortium is proposing to provide. Where subcontracting is proposed, the submission must detail how the lead organisation and the subcontractor(s) would relate to each other to ensure full provision of the required services.

3. Evaluation of Submissions

Eligibility and evaluation criteria will be used to evaluate all submissions and determine the successful service provider(s). Submissions need to address all the elements within the criteria.

4. Additional Information

Should information additional to that contained in a submission be required while submissions are being considered by the Department, written information and/or interviews may be requested at no cost to the Department. The name and telephone number of an officer or employee of the provider capable of clarifying technical and commercial aspects of the submission must be provided.

5. Negotiation

The department may elect to negotiate with short-listed providers after the nominated closing date for submissions.

6. Part Offers

The department may accept submissions in relation to part of the scope of activity described in this brief, or appoint one, more than one or no provider on the basis of the submissions received.

7. Lobbying

Applicants are reminded that they should not attempt to exert influence on the outcome of the assessment process by lobbying, directly or indirectly, the departmental staff or members of parliament.

8. Unauthorised Communication and Improper Assistance

Invitees are required to direct all communications through the Contact Person, unless advised otherwise by the Contact Person or the Department. Unauthorised communication and/or seeking to obtain assistance of employees, agents or contractors of the Department in preparation of their proposal may, in the absolute discretion of the Department, lead to disqualification of an Expression of Interest submission.

9. Conflicts of Interest

Providers must declare to department any matter or issue that is, or may be perceived to be, or may lead to, a conflict of interest regarding their submission or participation in providing the services described. Where applicable, providers must also describe a strategy designed to avoid any conflict of interest.

10. Insurance

In accordance with the standard Common Funding Agreement terms and conditions, all providers are required to indemnify the Department against a claim by any person for loss of or damage to property, death or personal injury or other financial loss caused by the negligence of or breach of statutory duty by the successful applicants.

11. Funding Conditions

- The successful applicants must enter into a Common Funding Agreement with the Department of Education and Training that includes conditions and reporting requirements.
- Funds must be spent on the project as described in the approved business case.
- Any variation to the approved project must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for approval prior to implementation.
- Police Checks and Working with Children Checks are conducted on staff and people aged 18 and over who come into regular, direct and unsupervised contact with young people participating in the program.
- The successful applicants must have at least \$10 million Public Liability Coverage to cover all aspects of operations of the project delivery. Successful applicants will be required to produce a certificate of currency to verify their insurance.

12. Accuracy of Expression of Interest

The Department does not warrant the accuracy of the content of the Expression of Interest. The Department will not be liable for any omission from the Expression of Interest.

13. Confidentiality

It must be noted that this Expression of Interest is conducted in a selective manner and is only provided to selected organisations. The Department may require persons and organisations provided with this Expression of Interest (or information relevant to this Expression of Interest) to execute a deed of confidentiality in a form required by, or satisfactory to, the Department before or after access is granted. Whether or not execution of a deed of confidentiality is required by the Department, all persons obtaining or receiving this Expression of Interest and any other information in connection with the Expression of Interest must keep the contents of the Expression of Interest and such other information confidential and not disclose or use that information except as required for the purpose of developing a response to this Expression of Interest.

14. Quotation Documents

All responses to the Expression of Interest and any accompanying documents will, upon submission, become the property of the Department. The Department will not return any of these documents. By submitting a response to this Expression of Interest, an Invitee licenses the Department to reproduce the whole or any portion of the documents which it has submitted for the purposes of, or in connection with, its evaluation, notwithstanding any copyright or other intellectual property rights that may subsist in those documents.

15. Late Expression of Interests

If an Expression of Interest is lodged after the Closing Time, it may be disqualified from the Expression of Interest process and may be ineligible for consideration unless:

- The invitee can clearly document to the satisfaction of the Department that an event of exceptional circumstances caused the Expression of Interest to be lodged after the Closing Time; and

- The Department is satisfied that accepting a late submission would not compromise the integrity of the market approach.

The determination of the Department as to the actual time that the Invitee's response is lodged is final. All Expression of Interests lodged after the Closing Time will be recorded by the Department. The Department will inform an invitee whose Quotation was lodged after the Closing Time of their ineligibility for consideration.

16. Incomplete Expression of Interests

If an Expression of Interest does not include all the information in the format required by the Expression of Interest or is incomplete in any way as determined by the Department in its sole discretion, it may be rejected.

17. Validity of Expression of Interest

An Expression of Interest will be valid for acceptance by the Department for a period of 90 Business Days from the Closing Time. This period may be extended by mutual agreement between the parties.

18. Reservation

The Department reserves the right to, in its absolute discretion, refuse to consider or accept any Expression of Interest. The Department will not necessarily accept the lowest priced Expression of Interest nor any other Expression of Interest. The Department further reserves the right to:

- a) reject all Expression of Interest without giving reason for the rejection;
- b) accept a portion or the whole of any Expression of Interest at the price or prices quoted unless the Expression of Interest states specifically to the contrary; and
- c) negotiate with one or more Invitee's and allow any Invitee to vary its Expression of Interest.

19. Preferred Supplier

Selection as a preferred supplier does not give rise to a contract (express or implied) between the preferred supplier and the Department for the supply of Goods and/or Services. No legal relationship will exist between the Department and the preferred supplier until such time as a binding contract is executed by both parties.

20. Performance Monitoring and Liaison

Performance monitoring will be managed through the appropriate departmental division (depending on the location of the program) and be undertaken through liaison with the successful applicants.

21. Statement of Departures

Applicant must state in their submissions that they have not proposed any changes or departures from this document. By making a submission in response to this document, providers are deemed to have accepted these conditions.

22. Presumption to Full Disclosure

The Victorian Government has a strong presumption in favour of disclosing agreements and, in determining whether any clauses should be confidential, specific freedom of information (FOI) principles (including a public interest test) will apply. The government cannot pre-empt the workings of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 or constrain the Auditor-General's powers to secure and publish documents as appropriate.

23. Disclosure of Submission and Agreement Details

Subject to this clause and the Conditions of Agreement, all documents provided by the provider will be held in confidence so far as the law permits. Notwithstanding any copyright or other intellectual property right that may subsist in any documents, by making a submission the provider licenses the department to reproduce the whole or any portion of the submission documents for the purposes of evaluation. In making its submission, the provider accepts

the department may publish (on the internet or otherwise) the name of the successful or recommended provider(s) and the value of the successful agreement(s), together with the provisions of the agreement generally.

24. Non-Disclosure of Agreement Provisions

Non-disclosure of agreement provisions must be justified under the principles for exemption within section 34(1) of the Freedom of Information Act, providing that information acquired by an agency or a government minister from a business, commercial or financial undertaking is exempt under the Act if the information relates to trade secrets or other matters of a business, commercial or financial nature and the disclosure would be likely to expose the undertaking unreasonably to disadvantage. The department will consider these arguments in the evaluation and negotiations with providers.