

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

THE RECONNECT PROGRAM (2021 - 2024)



BACKGROUND

THE RECONNECT PROGRAM

The Reconnect program was initially established in 2016, under the *Back to Work* reforms, in response to a decline in the number of young, early school leavers enrolling in vocational education and training (VET) and becoming disengaged. The Reconnect program was designed to respond to the multiple barriers faced by vulnerable early school leavers who are at risk of remaining disengaged unless they can access targeted wraparound services that successfully support them back into education, training or employment. Reconnect continued in 2017 as *Skills First* Reconnect and was adjusted to provide supports for adults up to 64 years of age.

Currently, 34 TAFEs, Learn Local Registered Training Organisations, and Community Service Organisations are delivering the program across all 79 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria. Since 2016, Reconnect has supported 9,678 people access supports, services and education and training opportunities.

ALIGNMENT TO PRIORITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Education and Training's (the department) vision is to ensure all Victorians have equitable access to quality education and training. The department strives on building an education system that produces excellence, reduces the impact of disadvantage and improves outcomes for every child and young person in every community, regardless of background, circumstance or postcode.

Central to breaking the link between disadvantage and poor educational outcomes is ensuring that learners at risk of poor learning outcomes are supported to engage in education and reach their potential for improved life opportunities. The department's *Skills First* initiative tackles disadvantage by addressing the training, support, and other essential service needs of disadvantaged and high-needs learners who might otherwise slip through the cracks.

RECONNECT

STRIVING TO CREATE EQUITY FOR ALL VICTORIANS

The Reconnect program strives to support Victorians experiencing disadvantage. The program assists participants to overcome the barriers preventing them from engaging in education and training and provides support into further study or employment pathways.

The department has been working hard to improve partnerships and innovation across the VET sector in order to increase outcomes, especially for disadvantaged Victorians. Partnerships and innovation are key priorities in improving outcomes through Reconnect 2021-22 and include:

- Collaborating across other agencies, departments and levels of government to deliver evidence-based outcomes;
- Working with training providers, not-for-profits, families, and disadvantaged and disengaged Victorians to develop new approaches and share best practice;
- Strengthening learning, health and wellbeing through stronger place-based partnerships; and
- Strengthening career pathways for learners while meeting the needs of business and industry.

The Reconnect program delivers on the Government's commitment to understanding and addressing the needs of disengaged and disadvantaged learners with low levels of educational attainment. Reconnect is designed to support the significant number of Victorians experiencing multiple barriers to engaging in education and training by providing the supported pathways many learners need to succeed and break the cycle of disadvantage.

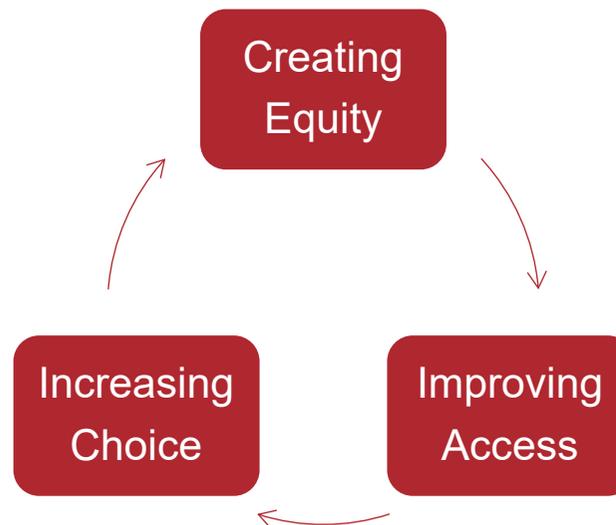
Reconnect also supports the integral role that TAFEs, Learn Locals and Skills and Jobs Centres have in the Victorian training system. Reconnect provides the opportunity for close partnerships between these organisations, ensuring that learners experiencing disadvantage are supported to engage meaningfully in education and training.

RECONNECT

INCREASING ACCESS, CHOICE AND CREATING EQUITY

The Reconnect program is intended to improve a person's chance of breaking the cycle of disadvantage by creating equity, improving access and increasing choice in pathways through education and employment.

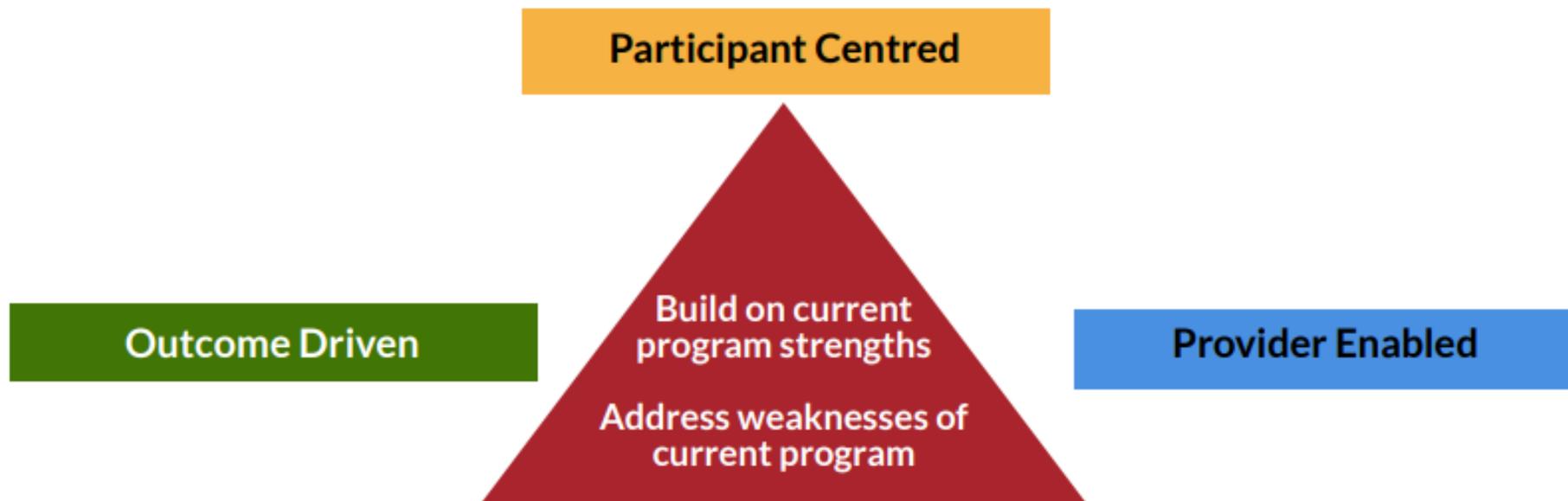
Reconnect has been developed based on the following three principles in order to support people experiencing disadvantage:



RECONNECT PROGRAM MODEL

The Reconnect program, commencing in 2021, has been adjusted from previous iterations in order to maintain the strengths and values of the program, whilst introducing elements that seek to enhance outcomes.

The adjusted Reconnect follows a model that puts the learner (participant) at the centre, enables providers to do what they do best, and is outcome driven.



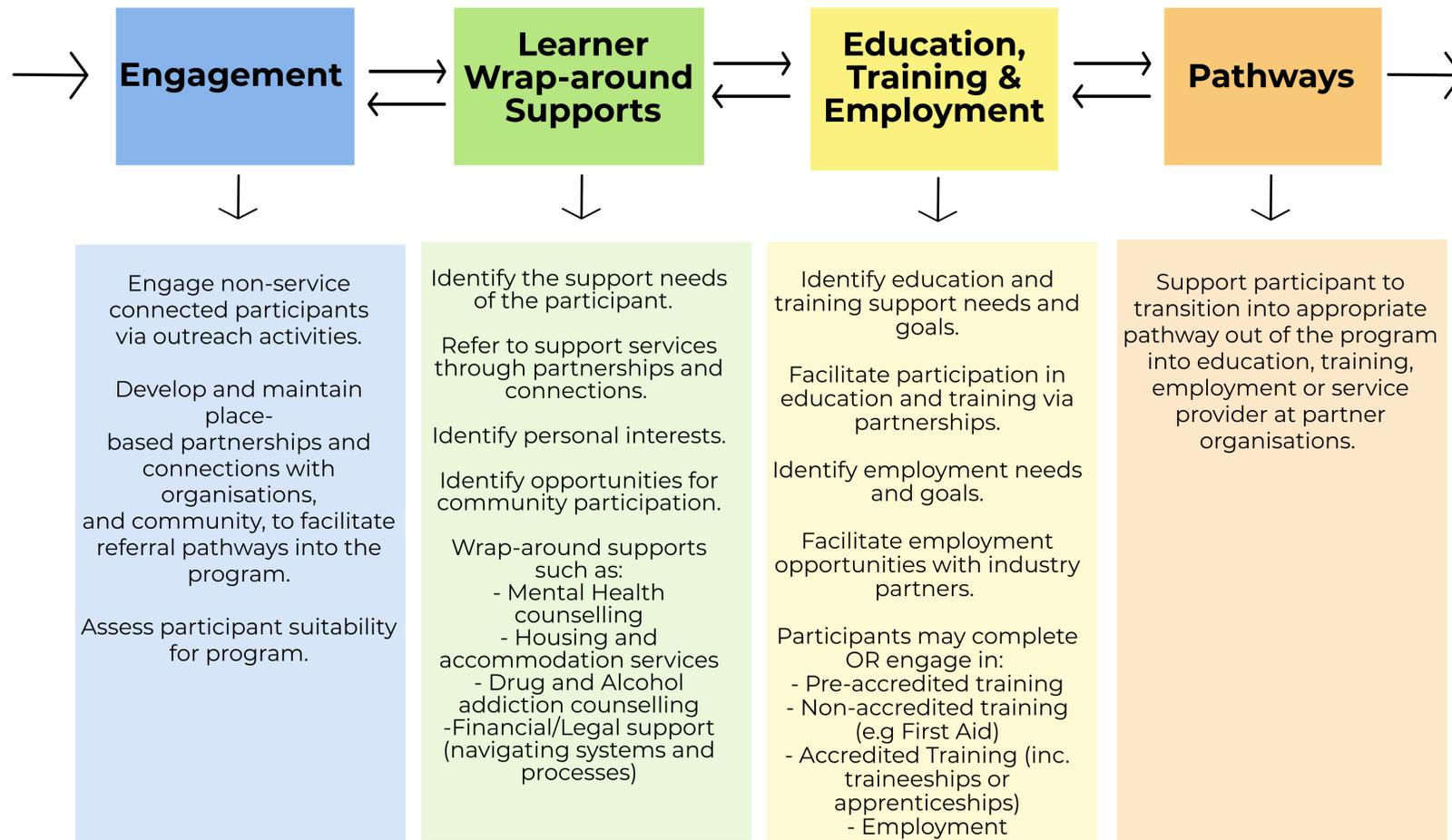
PROGRAM ELEMENTS

The program is made up of four key elements which will ensure participants receive the supports, guidance, and training required to successfully transition into further study or employment. The four elements of the program are as follows (refer to visual on the next page):

- **Engagement:** engage non-service-connected participants via outreach activities; develop and maintain place-based partnerships and connections with organisations and the community to facilitate referral pathways into the program. Assess participants' suitability for the program
- **Learner wrap-around supports** identify the support needs of participants; refer participants to support services through partnerships and connections; identify personal interests and identify opportunities for community participation.
- **Education, training and employment:** identify education and training needs and goals; facilitate participation in in pre-accredited Vocational Education and Training; facilitate participation in Accredited Vocational Education and Training; identify employment needs and goals and facilitate employment opportunities with industry partners.
- **Pathways:** support participants to transition into an appropriate pathway out of the program into education, training, employment or further service provision at a partner organisation.

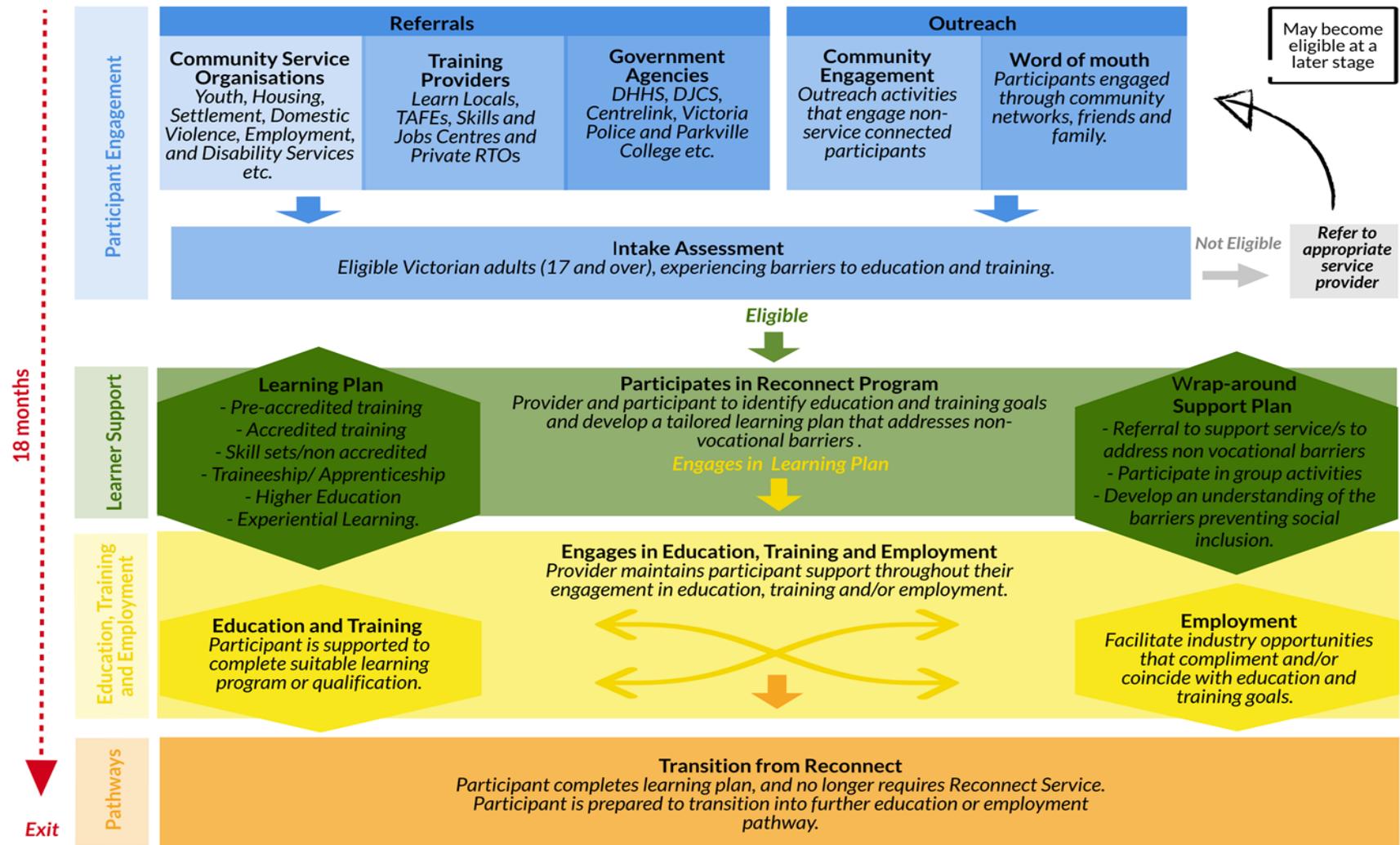
Organisations must demonstrate through ongoing reporting that each of the four elements are being delivered to each participant.

RECONNECT: PROGRAM ELEMENTS



PROGRAM DELIVERY LOGIC

The program delivery logic details how the key elements of the program connect to one another. This diagram will assist providers to structure their own program delivery proposal to include the key elements that the Department expects to see delivered in the program. Noting that these elements are not necessarily delivered in a linear order.

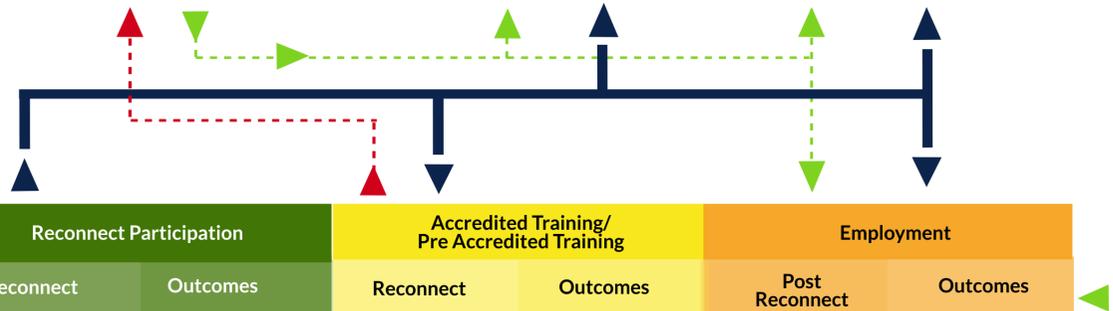
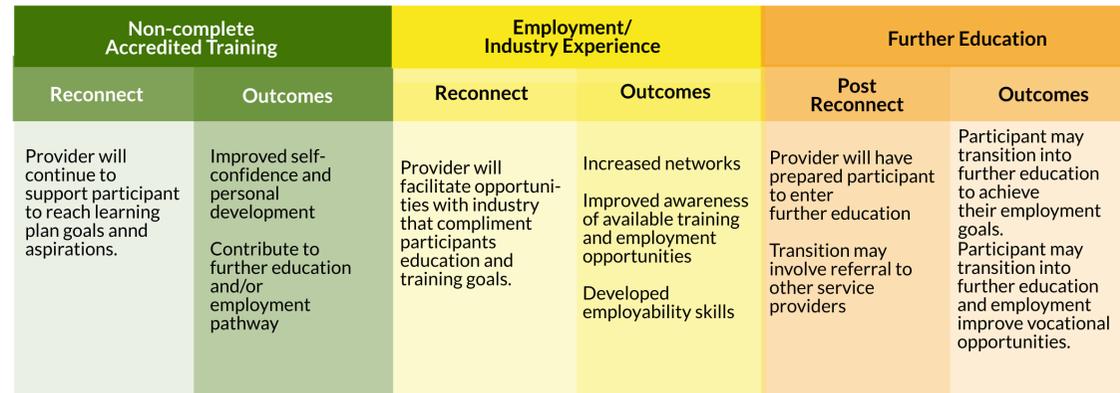
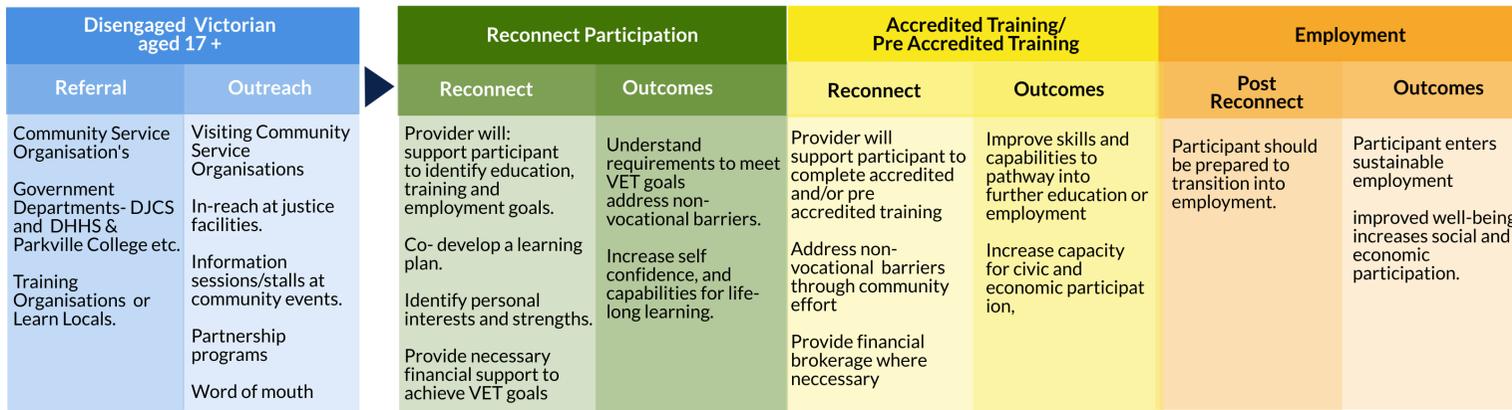


Effective education systems support communities by **fostering learning, encouraging personal and educational development, and building the skills and abilities for their current and future workforce's and social structures.** (Funding options for learner supports in vocational training, Deloitte Access Economics, 2014)

Reconnect Participant Journey

Legend

- = Key Reconnect transitions.
- = Alternative pathways that require support.



RECONNECT PROGRAM DELIVERY

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.

GOVERNANCE

A Community of Practice (CoP) will be established to maintain sharing and best practice across the program with each of the four regions (North West, North East, South West and South East) hosting quarterly regional CoP meetings to improve collaboration, problem solving and communications. A bi-annual state-wide Reconnect forum will be organised to improve connectivity and outcomes; organisations will have the opportunity to meet and share best-practice and be better supported by the Department through these forums. We will endeavour to host the forum face-to-face, however, COVID-19 restrictions may hinder the full capacity of the event. If this is the case the event will be conducted via Microsoft Teams with the central team advising all providers closer to the date.

The Provider Advisory Committee (PAC) will be chaired and run by Reconnect providers, with six representatives from TAFEs, Learn Locals, Community Service Organisations and one departmental representative. Members will be elected every 18 months. The PAC structure enables provider ownership, leadership and advocacy of the Reconnect program. The group will also provide feedback to the department ensuring there is a constant communication loop between on-the-ground delivery and program management.

REPORTING

Providers will be required to report to the department five times a year, in addition to participant journey reporting consisting of reporting each participant and their details into a department-mandated system (GEMS).

A project plan is required in February of each contracted year and must include details regarding how the program will be designed and delivered to meet the needs of participants whilst ensuring the four key elements of the programs are delivered. Work and Learning plans must be completed for a minimum of 80 per cent of all registered Reconnect participants and will be reported into a department-mandated system.

A financial report is due each June/July and requires that each provider report the percentage of budgetary spend against each of the four functions of the program: engagement; learner wrap-around supports; education, training and employment pathways.

PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY – WHO ARE THE LEARNERS?

The Reconnect program will continue to support people that are experiencing disadvantage with participant eligibility including the following four groups of people:

YOUNG PEOPLE	MATURE PARTICIPANTS	YOUNG PEOPLE IMPACTED BY JUSTICE SYSTEM	ASYLUM SEEKERS	OUT OF HOME CARE	OTHER
Aged between 17- 19 years: not engaged in education or training for six months or more (less than 8 hours per week).	Aged between 20-64 years: Unemployed for six months or more (less than 8 hours per week) and not engaged in education or training for six months or more (less than 8 hours per week).	Young people (17 to 24 years of age) who have been, or are currently on, Youth Justice Orders.	A person without citizenship but holds a valid: Bridging Visa Class E (BVE); Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV); or Temporary Protection Visa (TPV); or Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) (Subclass 449) Visa (449 visa)	Aged 17-64: A person that has a current or previous experience with Child Protection	From time to time, the Department may approve the accommodation of additional target groups during the term of the program (for example, this may include groups such as people impacted by bushfires, COVID-19 or retrenched workers etc.).

PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY – WHO ARE THE PROVIDERS?

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 (ABN) and MUST satisfy one of the following organisational eligibility criteria:

- 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
- A TAFE institute based in Victoria; or
- 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.

PROGRAM LEGAL & MANAGEMENT OPTIONS – WHAT ARE THE PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS?

The department encourages partnerships with the objective of promoting integration to better meet the needs of the community. Where there is a consortium comprising two or more organisations, the submission must indicate which parts of the project each organisation 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 the full provision of required services.

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

- a) incorporate as a single body (where the single body as the Lead Organisation will make the application)
- b) each member signs as part of a non-incorporated consortium (where the Lead Organisation will make the application on behalf of the consortium), or
- c) subcontracting by the Lead Organisation to other members of the consortium (where the Lead Organisation will make the application).

PROGRAM DELIVERABLES AND OUTCOMES

ELEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLE OUTCOMES
1. ENGAGEMENT	
<p>Funded providers will locate, engage and attract eligible individuals back into a learning environment using a variety of methods such as outreach, leveraging existing networks, and referral pathways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing participation of adults experiencing disadvantage and barriers to Vocational Education and Training. • Development of innovative strategies to engage and empower (build capability) hard to reach Victorians (outreach/in-reach and community engagement).
<p>Assess eligibility and suitability for the program using a robust and transparent assessment tool.</p>	
<p>Partnerships with organisations who have a current presence in local areas will be critical to the success of program delivery in these locations.</p>	
2. LEARNER WRAP- AROUND SUPPORTS	
<p>Identify the support needs of the participant and refer to support services through partnerships and connections. Identify opportunities for community participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of an integrated and place-based service model by building relationships with Community Service Organisations (CSOs), Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), industry and government agencies to harness local resources and increase equity and opportunity for program participants.
<p>The span of services and supports needed may include but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Counselling and mentoring support and coordination, supervision and monitoring of student services delivered by other specialist agencies; – Housing and accommodation services referral; – Drug and alcohol addiction counselling referral; – Delivery of capacity building, foundation skills and employability programs that focus on the participants' capacity to undertake further formal training and boost confidence, motivation and resilience; – Careers information, planning and advice. 	

3. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Identify education and training support needs and goals and facilitate participation in education and training and/or identify employment needs and goals. Facilitate employment opportunities with industry partners if required.

Organisations may support their participants with enrolment in pre-accredited programs to address basic language, literacy and employability skills needs.

Organisations may support participants to enrol in an accredited VET course. This may assist to address skills gaps, employment requirements, create connections to industry or career progression.

Services may be delivered through a combination of both the organisation's internal resources, and commissioned training, workplace learning and support services to be provided through agreements negotiated with third parties such as other training providers, Learn Local organisations, support agencies and health providers.

Note that funding for the delivery of accredited vocational training courses to participants will continue to be funded through Skills First VET Funding Contract. Reconnect Grant funds may be used to deliver or commission the delivery of non-accredited programs, workshops, focused programs or other supports needed by the students.

- Development of learner- centred service delivery models by building meaningful relationships with participants to effectively identify and co-design an **appropriate pathway to participation**.
- Delivery of an **agile service that is responsive** to the ever-evolving community and learner needs, and industry demands that may be impacted by the effects of climate change including droughts and bushfires, or a pandemic such as Covid-19.

4. PATHWAYS

Support participant to transition into appropriate pathway out of the program into education, training, employment or services at partner organisations.

Pathway planning must include a plan and will require advocacy and direct negotiation with other training organisations, employment agencies, youth services, employment programs and employers. Student progress must be tracked for at least six months following completion of program supports.

- Increased numbers of adult Victorians **succeeding in their chosen vocational pathways**.

Funded organisations will be required to provide regular reports on student progress throughout their period of engagement with services, along with ongoing monitoring and assessment of effective practices and approaches to inform future program delivery.	
5. WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY BUILDING	
Funded organisations are expected to coordinate, facilitate and participate in Communities of Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing improvements to professional practice
Reconnect workforce are expected to attend Professional Development opportunities	

PROGRAM FUNDING

GRANT AGREEMENT DURATION

The program funding includes a grant agreement of 2 years plus 1, plus 1 (2 years with an option of two 1-year extensions, 2021-2024). Should the organisation(s) delivering the program meet the outcomes and reporting requirements, the agreement will have a duration of 4 years, however, should outcomes not be met, the agreement may not be extended past the initial 2 years and may be terminated.

LOCATION OF DELIVERY

To ensure appropriate allocation of the program delivery, organisations are 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) where you wish to deliver Reconnect program.

CASELOAD

The caseload for each provider is the mechanism through which participant targets are determined and how the grant agreement value is calculated.

Caseload (previously participant target) 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 caseload 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 Caseload Funding	One Unit of Regional Caseload 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 caseloads per year. The caseloads 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 caseload 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.

MILESTONES

Milestone requirement	Due date	Payment	Costing
Signed contract (initial staffing contribution payment)	1 December 2021	Number of target participants divided by 40 metro or 35 regional = number of funded staff	\$80,000 per staff member (contribution)
Project Plan	1 February 2022 (yearly)	30% of total 12-month grant value	12-month grant value = \$5,000/\$5,500* X target number of participants for 12 month period
Work and Learning Plan report – Part I Payment requirement: 40% of registered participants completed a Work and Learning Plan	3 May 2022 (yearly)	20% of total 12-month grant value	12-month grant value = \$5,000/\$5,500* X target number of participants for 12 month period
Financial report Organisations will be required to report the percentage of spend against each of the four functions of the program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engagement learner wrap-around supports education, training and employment pathways 	1 July 2022	No payment	

Milestone requirement	Due date	Payment	Costing
Work and Learning Plan report – Part II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment requirement: 40% of registered participants completed a Work and Learning Plan 	3 August 2022 (yearly)	20% of total 12-month grant value	12-month grant value = \$5,000/\$5,500* X target number of participants for 12 month period
Training/Employment Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Payment requirement: 40% of registered participants engaged in pre-accredited training or Skills First-funded accredited training or employed for a minimum of 12 weeks (min. 20 hrs/wk.). Providers will be granted a 15% cap to receive outcomes for participants working less than 20 hrs/wk. 	1 November 2022 (yearly)	30% of total 12-month grant value	12-month grant value = \$5,000/\$5,500* X target number of participants for 12-month period
Participant journey Reporting participant information and demonstrating that each of the four functions of the program are being followed.	15 November 2022 (yearly)	No payment	
Ongoing staffing contribution payment	December (in contract years 2,3 and 4)	Number of target participants divided by 40 metro or 35 regional = number of funded staff	\$80,000 per staff member (contribution)

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

For further information please go to the Department of Education and Training *Skills First* Reconnect webpage at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/reconnect-program.aspx>

Or contact the Department's Reconnect Program team via Reconnect.Program@education.vic.gov.au