



Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence

Frequently asked questions

This document is intended to provide high level clarification and guidance to the public and stakeholders about the Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence grant, its objectives, eligibility criteria, and details of the grant application process.

Please note this document has been produced for information only and summarises certain information about the program application process from the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, which are expected to be published on [GrantConnect](#) in early December 2025.

In the event of any inconsistency between this document and the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, the Grant Opportunity Guidelines take precedence.

For more information on the Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence please contact the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) at FirstNationsPartnership@dewr.gov.au.

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What is the Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence (ICOVE) grant?

The Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence (ICOVE) grant opportunity supports the selection and establishment of the ICOVE Host and its operations through a restricted competitive grant process. The ICOVE Host will be an Aboriginal Community Controlled (ACC), or First Nations Led/Owned (FNO) Registered Training Organisation (RTO). The Host will build the capacity and capability of the ICOVE and will represent the First Nations RTO sector at the national level.

The grant contributes to the implementation of the Commonwealth's Closing the Gap deliverables under the [NSA \(Clause A99\)¹](#), including to enable a First Nations Vocational, Education and Training (VET) organisation(s) to represent communities and organisations on national VET matters. The ICOVE will operate as the National First Nations VET hub – it will lead research, projects, pilots and initiatives on national First Nations VET matters and will partner with the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments on the formation of the VET Policy Partnership. The ICOVE will advance First Nations skills outcomes around 4 key pillars: innovation; capacity building; policy and advocacy; and research and data.

What are the objectives of ICOVE grant?

- To develop a First Nations-led VET model that supports better skills, employment and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as committed to under the National Skills Agreement and National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- To embed the 4 Closing the Gap Priority Reforms and work towards improved Closing the Gap outcomes against Targets 6, 7, and 8.
- To provide a national focal point for First Nations VET policy, practice, and advocacy
- To align First Nations VET reforms with workforce needs across sectors
- To build partnerships with industry and other policy areas (for example housing, justice, mental health) to support culturally responsive skills training with strong employment pathways
- To embed Closing the Gap Priority Reforms into the broader VET system.

How will the ICOVE grant achieve these objectives?

- To operate as the National First Nations VET Hub and as a First Nations Skills Peak alternative, representing the First Nations VET Registered Training Organisation (RTO) sector. This grant opportunity will run over financial years from 2025–26 to 2028–29.
- As a commitment under the National Skills Agreement (Clause A99) to:
- To establish and manage a nationally networked VET Policy Partnership, starting with the Interim Partnership Committee (IPC)
- To enable a First Nations VET peak organisation(s) to represent communities and organisations on national VET matters
- To support First Nations peak organisations and affiliates to lead research, projects, pilots and initiatives on national VET matters.

¹ <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2023-10/National-Skills-Agreement.pdf>

Refer to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap ²for more information on these targets and priority reforms.

What are the intended outcomes of the ICOVE grant?

- To improved training outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all delivery environments
- To strengthened ACC and FNO RTO sectors.
- To transformation to government approaches to First Nations VET training and education
- To establishment of First Nations VET peak alternative to represent the First Nations VET sector
- To create shared decision-making and partnership governance through the nationally networked VET Policy Partnership
- To create strong employment pathways for First Nations VET learners

How will these outcomes be measured?

The effectiveness of the ICOVE will be assessed through the broader program evaluation process. Grantees are required to:

- Participate in program evaluation activities, including responding to evaluation requests and completing the program evaluation as required.
- Engage with ad hoc evaluation requests to provide information on progress and outcomes.
- Provide data and insights that may include a detailed assessment of program success and achievement of outcomes.
- Note that eligible expenditure (see Appendix A) includes costs incurred in conducting the evaluation of your program.
- These evaluations ensure accountability and help measure the impact of ICOVE initiatives within the broader program objectives.
- For more information on the evaluation process, refer to Section 12.7 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

² <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/priority-reforms>

How will the ICOVE grant be delivered?

This grant opportunity and process will be administered by the Community Grants Hub on behalf of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024](#)³ (CGRPs).

What is the duration of the ICOVE grant?

The ICOVE grant will run over 4 financial years from 2025–26 to 2028–29.

What is the maximum project period?

The maximum project period is 33 months.

When will the grant need to be completed by?

You must complete the grant by 31 December 2028.

What are the eligible locations?

Activities must be based in Australia but can be at different locations within Australia.

Where can we read more about the ICOVE grant?

Visit the [DEWR website](#) for more information.

How do I apply for the grant?

For detailed information please refer to the Grant Opportunity Guidelines when it is published on [GrantConnect](#). Please ensure you read and understand the guidelines thoroughly, including all eligibility and assessment criteria. You are responsible for ensuring your application is complete and accurate.

When will the ICOVE grant be open?

The ICOVE Grant Opportunity is expected to open on 3 December 2025 and close on 15 January 2026.

How much funding will be awarded for this grant?

Please refer to the Grant Opportunity Guidelines once published on [GrantConnect](#).

Who do I contact if I have a question about submitting my application?

If you have any questions during the application period, contact Community Grants Hub at support@communitygrants.gov.au or 1800 020 283.

Can the department clarify the meaning of the words '...have adverse findings and/or rulings from the Fair Work Commission and/or the Fair Work Ombudsman' from section 4.5 (Who is not eligible to apply for a grant?) of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines?

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations expects that an organisation (whether applying or partnering) will not have findings/rulings of the Fair Work Commission and/or the Fair Work Ombudsman against it that remain unsatisfied at the time of submitting the application.

³ [Changes to the Commonwealth Grants Framework 2024](#) | Department of Finance

DEWR does not intend to exclude organisations (whether applying or partnering) that have satisfied any such findings/rulings against them at the time of submitting the application.

When are grant applications assessed?

How long does the assessment process take?

The assessment and approval process is expected to take 8-12 weeks after the application submissions closing date.

What happens if my grant application is successful?

If successful, you must enter into a legally binding grant agreement with the Commonwealth.

Each grant agreement has general terms and conditions that cannot be changed.

The grant agreement will be managed through the Community Grants Hub, including issuing and executing the grant agreement. Execute means both you and the Commonwealth have accepted the agreement.

You must not start any ICOVE grant activities until a grant agreement is executed.

DSS or DEWR are not responsible for any expenditure you incur and cannot make any payments until a grant agreement is executed. The Commonwealth will not be liable, and should not be held out as being liable, for any activities undertaken before the grant agreement is executed.

The approval of your grant may have specific conditions determined by the assessment process or other considerations. We will identify these in the offer of grant funding.

Will the grant be publicly announced?

If successful, your grant will be publicly listed on [GrantConnect](#) 21 calendar days after the date of execution.

How are grants awarded, and payments made?

How many grants will be available?

There will be one grant awarded. The decision maker will decide the number of grants to approve taking into account the application assessment, the recommendations and advice of the selection assessment panel.

Is the entirety of the grant funding available anticipated to be allocated this round (or will some be held back for future rounds within the grant timeframe?)

There is only one round and the entirety of the grant funding is available.

How many years will the grant funding be provided to successful applicants?

The ICOVE grant will run over 4 financial years from 2025–26 to 2028–29.

How long must grants run for?

The maximum project period is 33 months. You must complete the grant activities by 31 December 2028.

What will happen to any unallocated program funds?

Decisions about the future use of any unallocated program funds will be decided by DEWR.

When would successful projects be expected to commence?

If you are successful, you are expected to commence the grant in April 2026.

The maximum grant period is 33 months. You must complete your project by 31 December 2028.

When can project expenses be incurred?

Refer to Appendix A Eligible Expenditure of the Guidelines which states, *'You must incur the grant expenditure between the activity start date and completion date specified in your grant agreement for it to be eligible unless stated otherwise. We are not responsible for any expenditure you incur until a grant agreement is executed.'*

The Commonwealth will not be liable, and should not be held out as being liable, for any activities undertaken before the grant agreement is executed.'

Ongoing expenses after the project completion date will be ineligible expenditure, even if these result from purchases that were eligible expenditure.

How will grant money payments be made?

Please refer to the full Grant Opportunity Guidelines once published on [GrantConnect](#).

The Community Grants Hub is overseeing the grant execution and will make an initial payment on execution of the grant agreement. Subsequent payments will be made as milestones are achieved, in arrears, based on actual eligible expenditure.

The first milestone payment for all projects will occur on the provision of a project management plan and communication plan for your project (templates to be provided) and acceptance of these documents as satisfactory by DEWR.

Payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the grant.

What can grant money be spent on?

You can find a detailed list of eligible and ineligible project expenditure in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

You must also incur project expenditure between the project start date and completion date specified in your grant agreement for it to be eligible, unless stated otherwise.

Does travel expenditure include accommodation expenses?

Refer to Section A.5 of Appendix A. Eligible Expenditure of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, which states, *'Eligible travel expenditure may include domestic travel only limited to the reasonable cost of accommodation and transportation required to conduct agreed project and collaboration activities in Australia.'*

Are equipment or assets able to be purchased as part of this program?

Grantees cannot use the grant money for any activity or purpose not related to their agreed project activity or which is otherwise ineligible expenditure.

The Grant Opportunity Guidelines set out the specific requirements for what grant funding may be used for, including in Section 5 and the lists of eligible and ineligible expenditure categories at Appendix A and Appendix B. While applicants should check the eligibility of any proposed expenditure

against these specific requirements, some examples of equipment or assets applicants **cannot** use grant money for are:

- to purchase land
- major construction
- capital works or capital expenditure (including infrastructure, assets, capital equipment) and depreciation funding existing debt or loan requirements and any costs incurred before the grant agreement is executed
- activities, equipment or supplies that are already being funded through other sources
- buying, leasing or maintaining a vehicle

If successful in being awarded a grant, DEWR will review all expenditure included in the application and negotiate as required before both parties enter into a grant agreement, noting that the decision maker / Program Delegate makes the final decision on what is eligible/ineligible expenditure and may give additional guidance if required.

In forming a consortia, do all members need to be Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACCRTTO) or First Nations Registered Training Organisations (FNL RTO)?

Not all members of a consortia are required to be Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The ICOVE Grant Opportunity Guidelines state that the lead organisation must be an eligible Aboriginal Community Controlled or First Nations-led/owned RTO. Other members of the consortia can include First Nations organisations that are not RTOs, provided they contribute meaningfully to the objectives of the ICOVE initiative.

Consortia partners should demonstrate a clear role in supporting the delivery of culturally responsive vocational education and training and strengthening pathways to employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Partnerships should align with ICOVE's four key pillars:

- Innovation
- Capacity Building
- Policy and Advocacy
- Research and Data

The arrangement should clearly outline how each member will contribute to achieving these outcomes.

Will you accept a grant proposal from a consortia of Indigenous Registered Training Organisations (RTO)?

Consortia applications are acceptable under the ICOVE grant opportunity if:

- The ICOVE is led by an Aboriginal Community Controlled (ACC) or First Nations Organisation (FNO) Registered Training Organisation (RTO).
- There is a lead applicant who is solely accountable to the Commonwealth and is an eligible entity.
- Eligible organisations may partner with ineligible organisations as outlined in Section 7.2 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Consortia applications must include:

- A Governance Plan detailing governance structure, decision-making, and accountability.

- A Letter of Support using the mandatory template.

Applications without these attachments or templates will be non-compliant.

Whether it is envisaged that the ICOVE host will have a role in formally engaging with ASQA about how the regulator can better support prospective First Nations-led organisations seeking to become RTOs (not only existing RTOs)

Yes. One of the core objectives of the Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence (ICOVE) is to act as a national focal point for First Nations VET policy, practice, and advocacy. Under the ICOVE's Policy and Advocacy pillar, the Host organisation is expected to engage in national VET policy processes, including building relationships across the VET ecosystem and advocating for systemic reforms that improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners.

This includes working with governments, regulators, and other stakeholders to identify and address barriers to participation in the VET sector. While the guidelines do not prescribe specific engagement mechanisms with ASQA, they make clear that the ICOVE Host will represent the First Nations RTO sector at the national level and lead initiatives that strengthen the capability of Aboriginal Community Controlled and First Nations-led RTOs. This advocacy role extends to influencing regulatory settings and supporting culturally safe approaches that enable new First Nations-led organisations to become RTOs, not just supporting existing ones.

The ICOVE Host will also co-chair the VET Policy Partnership alongside the Commonwealth, providing a platform to raise issues such as regulatory support for prospective First Nations RTOs. Through this governance role and its broader advocacy mandate, the ICOVE is well positioned to work collaboratively with ASQA and other regulators to ensure the VET system is responsive to the needs of First Nations organisations and communities.

Reference:

See *Section 2.1 – About the ICOVE* and *Assessment Criterion 2 – Strategic Alignment and Contribution to Program Objectives* in the ICOVE Grant Opportunity Guidelines, which outline the Host's responsibilities for policy advocacy, engagement in national VET policy processes, and strategies for collaboration with governments and stakeholders

Whether the capacity-building and advocacy functions of ICOVE are intended to extend to organisations that are not yet RTOs but are working towards registration.

Yes. The ICOVE's mandate explicitly includes capacity building and policy advocacy to strengthen the Aboriginal Community Controlled (ACC) and First Nations-led Registered Training Organisation (RTO) sector. This is not limited to existing RTOs. The guidelines state that the ICOVE Host will lead initiatives to grow and strengthen the ACC and First Nations-led RTO sector, and build cultural capability across the broader VET system. These functions are designed to remove barriers and enable new First Nations organisations to enter the VET sector, which includes supporting organisations that are working towards becoming RTOs.

Under Pillar 2 – Capacity Building, the Host is expected to “sustainably grow and strengthen the ACC RTO sector and First Nations-led RTOs” and under Pillar 3 – Policy and Advocacy, to “engage in state and national policy processes and facilitate nationally networked partnerships” to influence systemic reforms. These responsibilities cover organisations that aspire to become RTOs, as part of building a strong and culturally safe First Nations VET ecosystem.

Reference:

See *Section 2.1 – About the ICOVE* and *Assessment Criterion 2 – Strategic Alignment and Contribution*

to *Program Objectives* in the ICOVE Grant Opportunity Guidelines, which outline the Host's role in capacity building and advocacy across the sector, including strategies to strengthen ACC and First Nations-led RTOs and improve outcomes for First Nations learners.

Can I claim extra costs over the maximum grant agreement amount?

Your grant agreement will state the maximum grant amount which you may receive from the Commonwealth. DSS will not exceed the maximum grant amount under any circumstances.

If you incur extra costs, you must meet them yourself.

Will indexation be included in the ICOVE grant funding?

Yes. As referred to in Section 3.1 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, indexation has been included in the funding for this program and will be passed on to grantees.

- The grant agreement will outline how and when indexation will be paid.
- We will formally advise you in writing of any changes to the grant agreement, for example through a notice of change, including the amount to be paid.

This ensures transparency and clarity on indexation arrangements for all grantees.

Will ICOVE grant participants have opportunities to collaborate with other participants?

A fundamental element of the ICOVE grant is the sharing of knowledge (such as lessons learned, successes and opportunities), experiences and the ability to foster partnerships across the VET sector, including collaboration with public, private, and community-based training providers, Jobs and Skills Councils and Industry (outlined in Section 6 The assessment criteria, of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines).

Yes. As outlined in Section 6 – The Assessment Criteria of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, collaboration is a key component of the ICOVE grant opportunity. Under Pillar 3 - Policy and Advocacy, applicants are expected to:

- Outline strategies for engaging in state and national policy forums, including committees and policy submissions, and building relationships across the national VET ecosystem, inclusive of Jobs and Skills Councils.
- Facilitate nationally networked partnerships and collaboration across the First Nations VET network, including private, public, and community-based providers, governments, and industry groups.
- Provide an outline of proposed strategies for collaboration with governments, the Coalition of Peaks, and other stakeholders to co-design the ICOVE structure and governance.

These requirements ensure that ICOVE participants will have opportunities to collaborate broadly, strengthening connections and advocacy across the VET sector.