

OFFICIAL

Visitor Servicing Fund Program Guidelines



May 2023

VISITOR SERVICING FUND

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1 Program Summary

1.1 Program context

1.1.1 Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan

The Victorian Government is helping to revitalise and grow Victorian tourism after the impacts of bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, with a roadmap outlined in the [Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan \(VERRP\)](#).

Informed by the findings of the [Regional Tourism Review](#), the VERRP will strengthen Victoria's nation leading tourism offering through the development of new experiences, products and infrastructure.

The VERRP, which is underpinned by an investment of \$633 million, outlines strategies to attract more international, interstate and intrastate visitors by making the most of marketing expenditure, transforming Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs) and ensuring state-wide collaboration.

1.1.2 Visitor Servicing Program

As part of the VERRP, the Victorian Government has committed funding of \$3 million to support partnerships with industry to implement improved approaches and technology to visitor servicing that meet contemporary visitor needs (**Program**).

1.1.3 Visitor Servicing Fund

Within the Program, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (**the Department**) has established a fund to support enhancements to visitor servicing (**Visitor Servicing Fund**). The Visitor Servicing Fund is to be administered via two funding streams:

- Stream A - Visitor servicing strategies
- Stream B - Major visitor servicing projects

See Sections 3 and 4 of these Program Guidelines for further detail on each of the funding streams.

1.1.4 What is visitor servicing and why is it important?

Visitor servicing refers to a broad range of tools that visitors use to facilitate and curate their time in a region. Visitor servicing can include online (e.g., booking and reservation websites, apps, social media, user reviews) and in-person (e.g. accredited visitor information centres, local ambassadors, business owners) sources of information and inspiration for visitors at different stages of their journey.

Through the provision of accurate, high quality and timely information, visitor servicing has the potential to play an influential role across the visitor journey and help visitors feel supported and safe during their visit. Exceptional visitor servicing can encourage visitors to form a genuine connection with a destination, enabling them to become strong advocates or ambassadors which in return can help build the reputation of a region and attract new visitors.

1.1.5 Victoria's Visitor Servicing Framework

Victoria's *Visitor Servicing Framework* has been developed to help government at all levels, businesses, the broader tourism industry and community work together to better plan and deliver visitor servicing for Victoria's cities, regions, and visitors.

The Visitor Servicing Framework principles are:

1. Visitor servicing is everyone's business
2. Curate in-person and online services that put customer needs first
3. Adopt an integrated stakeholder approach
4. Evolve and leverage the italicised *i* trademark (the iBrand)
5. Support modern visitor information centres

The *Visitor Servicing Framework* is the result of extensive state, national and international consultation and research to understand Victoria's greatest challenges and opportunities in visitor servicing. It sets strategic principles to guide better practices and ways of working in visitor servicing that can be applied and activated by all visitor servicing stakeholders. The *Visitor Servicing Framework* aims to set a benchmark for visitor servicing in Victoria and provides a useful guide for Visitor Servicing Fund applicants.

The *Visitor Servicing Framework* is included in these Program Guidelines at **Appendix 1**

1.1.6 Experience Victoria 2033

Experience Victoria 2033 is Victoria's 10-year strategic plan for a prosperous and resilient visitor economy. It describes how the tourism industry can work together to make Victoria a leader in the delivery of exceptional, diverse and connected experiences for visitors.

The strategy is a blueprint for industry, investors, governments and tourism partners to drive, enable and guide investment in high-quality products and experiences across five product priorities:

- First Peoples-led experiences
- wellness
- arts and culture
- food and drink
- nature

It also outlines nine key focus areas to enable the long-term growth and success of Victoria's visitor economy. These are:

- workforce
- drive demand
- aviation and transport
- investment facilitation
- industry excellence
- digital connectivity
- community engagement
- visitor servicing
- data and insights

The strategy outlines seven guiding principles to inform decision making so that, by 2033, Victoria's visitor economy is:

- Driving economic growth
- Innovative and outstanding
- Sustainable and regenerative
- Inclusive and welcoming
- First Peoples focused
- Valuable for our communities
- Unique to place

The strategy aims to deliver high quality, connected and personalised visitor servicing when and where visitors need it by:

- ensuring visitor servicing is customer centric, high quality, on brand and streamlined across in-person and online touchpoints
- collaborating on visitor servicing approaches and solutions to ensure current and future visitor needs are met and exceeded
- tailoring training and skills for the visitor economy workforce to ensure positive visitor experiences, reinforce demand and inspire return visits.

Experience Victoria 2033 was released in May 2023 and is available to download [here](#).

1.2 Fund objectives and outcomes

The objectives of the Visitor Servicing Fund are to:

- Support the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative visitor servicing models and processes
- Build the capability of visitor servicing stakeholders to provide better coordinated visitor servicing that responds to current and future visitor information needs.

The intended outcomes of the Visitor Servicing Fund are that visitor servicing stakeholders:

- Coordinate more effectively in their visitor servicing approaches
- Adopt more consumer-centric and region focused visitor servicing models
- Increase their capability to encourage visitors to extend their stay and spend.

2 Key dates

The following are the key dates for the Visitor Servicing Fund:

Step	Dates
Applications open	Monday 22 May 2023 10:00am
Stream A applications close	Monday 19 June 2023 4:00pm (late applications will not be accepted)
Stream B applications close	Monday 3 July 2023 4:00pm (late applications will not be accepted)
Assessment and approvals process	July 2023
Applicants notified of outcome	Mid-August 2023
Grant agreements finalised	Late August 2023
Project commencement	September 2023
Final project completion – Stream A	June 2024
Final project completion – Stream B	December 2024

3 Funding details

3.1 Available funding

Two streams of funding are available under the Visitor Servicing Fund.

Stream A is for the creation or updating of visitor servicing strategies. Stream B is for the delivery of major visitor servicing projects.

Subject to meeting the Fund eligibility criteria (see Section 4), applicants may apply for funding under the following streams:

Funding options	Available funding
Stream A – Visitor servicing strategies	Up to \$50,000 (exclusive of GST)
Stream B – Major visitor servicing projects	Between \$50,001 and \$625,000 (exclusive of GST)

- Eligible applicants can apply for both streams.
- Total project value can be greater than the grant amount requested.
- The Program doesn't require a co-contribution from applicants, however in order to better leverage government funding and provide value for money, projects with an applicant co-contribution will be highly regarded.
- This is a competitive grant process and as such not all eligible applicants will receive funding.

3.2 Activity costing treatment of GST

Applicants should note that all activity costs included in the application and activity documentation must be exclusive of GST.

4 Eligibility criteria

4.1 Applicant eligibility

4.1.1 Stream A specific eligibility requirements

Applicants must be one of the following entity types to apply under Stream A:

- Recognised Victorian [Regional Tourism Boards \(RTBs\)](#).
- Victorian Councils, where they are not currently aligned with an RTB.

4.1.2 Stream B specific eligibility requirements

Applicants must be one of the following entity types to apply under Stream B:

- Company incorporated in Australia
- Incorporated association
- Victorian Regional Tourism Boards
- Victorian Local and State Government entities, including:
 - Public Land Managers, Land Management Authorities and Committees of Management
 - Local Government Authorities
- Universities and educational institutions
- Not-for-profit organisations, including community groups that are an incorporated body, cooperative or association
- Traditional Owner Corporations, organisations and groups, and Aboriginal-owned businesses
- Other incorporated entity approved by the Department.

Where the Fair Jobs Code applies, Stream B funding applicants must satisfy additional requirements. See Section 8.6 for more information.

4.1.3 General applicant eligibility requirements (both Stream A and Stream B)

The following eligibility requirements apply to applicants of both Stream A and Stream B.

- Strategies or projects must encompass one or more tourism region. In areas not currently aligned with an RTB (including greater Melbourne), strategies or projects must encompass a minimum of three local government areas.
- In line with the Visitor Servicing Fund's objectives, eligible applicants must demonstrate that the strategy or project will be delivered in collaboration with multiple partner organisations.
- Partnerships between multiple RTBs, Councils and partner organisations (listed below) are permitted and encouraged.
- Partner organisations may include (but are not limited to):
 - Relevant State Government departments and agencies, such as Parks Victoria and the Department of Transport and Planning.
 - Melbourne Airport, Avalon Airport, other key regional airports, ferry operators etc.

- First Peoples' Traditional Owner Corporations, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, First Peoples' tourism operators.
- Tourism-related businesses, such as accommodation and hospitality providers, attractions and tour operators.
- Local/regional and sector tourism associations.
- Local/regional community organisations.
- Alpine Resort Management Boards.
- The following entities are ineligible partner organisations:
 - Visit Victoria
 - Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC)

Additional requirements – all applicants must:

- Have an operating business address in Victoria
- Demonstrate that the application project and activities proposed will be conducted in Victoria
- Hold an active Australian Business Number (ABN) registered in Victoria and have held that ABN on and from 1 July 2022¹
- Where required, be registered for Goods and Services Tax (GST) prior to application to the Program

4.1.4 Ineligible applicants

The following parties are ineligible to apply for funding under this Program:

- Visit Victoria
- Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC)
- Sole trader/individual
- Partnership
- Unincorporated association
- Commonwealth government agency or body.

4.2 Project eligibility

4.2.1 Stream A – Visitor servicing strategies

4.2.1.1 Eligible Projects

Stream A funding will support collaborative approaches (with RTBs or local councils as the lead applicant) to strategic planning and coordination of visitor servicing through:

- the creation of a visitor servicing strategy, or
- updating an existing visitor servicing strategy.

¹ Businesses that backdate their ABN registration or re-activate an ABN after 1 July 2022 will not be eligible.

Visitor servicing strategies should focus on the delivery of visitor information through a customer experience lens during the plan, book and experience stages of the visitor journey (Figure 1). This will ensure strategies remain regionally focused, customer-centric, on brand and identify visitor servicing stakeholder roles and responsibilities.

Figure 1 - Visitor journey stages:



Stream A project inclusions:

A. Regional overview

Including, but not limited to:

- o Current visitor servicing approaches
- o Current visitor servicing roles and stakeholders
- o Key visitor segments

B. SWOT analysis

Analysis of visitor servicing strengths, opportunities and threats in the region

C. Recommendations

Recommended actions to improve visitor servicing in the region with potential state-wide application

D. Implementation plan

A recommendation implementation plan including:

- o Timeframes
- o Roles and responsibilities
- o Measures of success

E. Alignment with the *Visitor Servicing Framework* principles (see Appendix 1)

F. Alignment with the guiding principles of *Experience Victoria 2033*

G. Five-year time period

The strategy development process should include:

- Collaboration with key industry stakeholders (e.g. Parks Victoria, major attractions, major accommodation providers etc.)
- Where relevant, consultation with tourism businesses and local communities to reinforce a collaborative approach.

4.2.1.2 Eligible expenses

Funding received under Stream A may be expended on the following project costs:

- External consultant fees (including stakeholder consultation costs)
- Short term staffing costs associated with developing/delivering the project
- Customised research (up to a maximum of 20% of the funding granted to a successful applicant)
 - o If visitor servicing research is included, it will need to be specific to the region/s and visitor segments.
 - o Existing visitor servicing research can be provided to applicants upon request.

4.2.1.3 Ineligible expenses

Funding received under Stream A must not be expended on the following:

- Requests for retrospective funding, where projects have been completed or have started prior to receiving funding approval
- Usual operational expenditure, communications, travel, entertainment, accommodation and office/back of house computing equipment
- Ongoing business-as-usual administrative or staffing costs
- Ongoing operating costs or salary subsidies
- Costs related to preparing the grant application, preparing any project reports and preparing any project variation requests
- Building tourism related websites, sales and promotional activities, marketing or communications campaigns
- Digital or printed marketing collateral
- Any costs relating to visitor information centres or the implementation of visitor servicing projects
- Any other expenditure as determined by the Department in its sole and absolute discretion

4.2.2 Stream B – Major visitor servicing projects

4.2.2.1 Eligible Projects

Funding Stream B is for the delivery of major projects that will drive innovation, transform visitor servicing in Victoria and generate long term and sustainable impacts.

Projects should focus on the delivery of visitor information servicing during the plan, book and experience stages of the visitor journey (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Visitor journey stages:



Stream B projects must:

- Support the delivery of one or more of the Visitor Servicing Framework principles
- Align with one or more of the guiding principles of *Experience Victoria 2033*
- Streamline the provision of visitor information across Victoria
- Focus on key target audiences from a State or regional perspective
- Where relevant, leverage state assets e.g. the italicised *i* trademark and the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW)
- Focus on the objectives of increasing stay, spend dispersal, referral and return visitation
- Address the ongoing sustainability of the project, beyond the funding period
- Have potential state-wide application.

Projects aligned with existing State, regional or local visitor servicing strategies, policies or Destination Management Plans (DMP) will be highly regarded.

Stream B projects might include (but are not limited to):

- Ambassador projects or programs (local communities, businesses)
- Building digital capabilities of visitor servicing staff and volunteers

- Mobile and other outreach services
- Trip/itinerary planning tools
- The extension or repeat of a previous project, provided the applicant demonstrates how added benefit will be provided for this project (subject to approval by the Department in its sole and absolute discretion).

4.2.2.2 Ineligible projects

Projects ineligible for Stream B funding include (but are not limited to):

- Development of new tourism-related websites
- Development of new marketing campaigns

4.2.2.3 Eligible expenses

Funding received under Stream B may be expended on the following project costs:

- Consultant fees
- Stakeholder consultation costs
- Short term staffing costs associated with developing/delivering the project
- Project implementation costs.

4.2.2.4 Ineligible expenses

Funding received under Stream B must not be expended on the following:

- Requests for retrospective funding, where projects have been completed or have started prior to receiving funding approval
- Usual operational expenditure, communications, travel, entertainment, accommodation and office/back of house computing equipment
- Ongoing business-as-usual administrative or staffing costs
- Ongoing operating costs or salary subsidies
- Costs related to preparing the grant application, preparing any project reports and preparing any project variation requests
- Building tourism related websites, sales and promotional activities, marketing or communications campaigns
- Digital or printed marketing collateral
- Any other expenditure as determined by the Department in its sole and absolute discretion.

5 Assessment process

This is a competitive grant process and as such not all eligible applicants will receive funding. Applications will be assessed using the following process:

1. Applications are received and assessed for applicant and project eligibility in accordance with the eligibility criteria at Section 4 by the Department.
2. Eligible applications will be competitively assessed against the Program assessment criteria (Section 5.1) by representatives from the Department.
3. Following assessment by the Department, Stream B applications will be additionally reviewed by an Oversight Committee, chaired by a representative from the Department's Tourism and Events group and including additional representatives from the Department, Visit Victoria and Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC). The Oversight Committee will provide advice to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events regarding recommended Stream B applications.
4. Funding recommendations for both Stream A and Stream B will be made to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for final decision.

5.1 Assessment criteria

Eligible applications will be assessed against the assessment criteria outlined below. All supplementary attachments and information provided as part of the application will be taken into consideration during the assessment process.

5.1.1 Stream A – Visitor servicing strategies

Assessment Criteria	Considerations
Criterion 1 – Visitor servicing objectives and project alignment (30%)	
<p>Assessed on how the strategy will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the objectives and outcomes of the Visitor Servicing Fund (see Section 1.2). • Align with the Visitor Servicing Framework • Align with Experience Victoria 2033 	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how and why a visitor servicing strategy could deliver on the following for a region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To develop collaborative and coordinated visitor servicing models and processes. ○ To build the capability of a region to provide a customer centric and better coordinated visitor experience, responding to current and future visitor information needs. • how well the application demonstrates the regional need to address visitor servicing (e.g. to increase visitor spend and length of stay, contemporary visitor needs not being met by the region/stakeholders etc.) • how the strategy will support the <i>Visitor Servicing Framework</i> • how the strategy will align with <i>Experience Victoria 2033</i>
Criterion 2 – Partnership commitment (30%)	
<p>Assessed on partnership eligibility and commitment</p>	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well the application demonstrates the current level of coordination and need between stakeholders to partner on a regional strategy or major visitor servicing project.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> governance structures or arrangements to ensure an effective partnership approach (e.g. partnership letter and commitment statement, as referenced in Section 6.3). evidence of financial and in-kind co-contribution from applicants or project partners (co-contribution not required but will be highly regarded).
Criterion 3 – Project readiness and delivery capacity and capability (30%)	
Assessed on capacity, implementation planning and project readiness	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strength of project planning, including scope, objectives, budget and timeframes provision of a detailed budget breakdown that includes income sources, co-contributions and expenditure demonstration of why this funding is needed now, including where relevant, whether the region/s has an existing or previous visitor servicing strategy capacity and expertise to lead and deliver the project, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> summary of how resources will support the delivery identification of contingencies in the case of any disruptions.
Criterion 4 – Need for funding and value for money (10%)	
Assessed on whether there is a strong argument for government support and whether the project represents value for money for the Victorian community	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated need for government assistance for the project to proceed the potential of the project to drive or enable economic impacts in the region and for the State via increased visitor spend and length of stay.

5.1.2 Stream B – Major visitor servicing projects

Assessment Criteria	Considerations
Criterion 1 – Project alignment and impact (30%)	
<p>Assessed on how well the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets the objectives and outcomes of the Visitor Servicing Fund (see Section 1.2). Aligns with the Visitor Servicing Framework Aligns with Experience Victoria 2033 Demonstrates state-wide applicability 	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how and why a visitor servicing project could deliver on the following for a region and/or Victoria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop collaborative and coordinated visitor servicing models and processes. To build the capability of a region and/or Victoria to provide a customer centric and better coordinated visitor experience, responding to current and future visitor information needs. how the project will drive innovation and transformation of visitor servicing in Victoria how the project will support one or more of the <i>Visitor Servicing Framework</i> principles how the project will align with <i>Experience Victoria 2033</i> the extent to which the project aligns with existing State, regional or local visitor servicing strategies, policies or Destination Management Plans (DMP)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how the project can be effectively applied across Victoria.
<p>Criterion 2 – Partnership commitment (30%)</p>	
<p>Assessed on partnership eligibility and commitment</p>	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well the application demonstrates that the project will be delivered in collaboration with multiple partner organisations and will encompass one or more tourism regions • governance structures or arrangements to ensure an effective partnership approach • signed commitment statement letters from partners (as required at Section 6.3) • evidence of financial and in-kind co-contribution from applicants or project partners (co-contribution not required but will be highly regarded).
<p>Criterion 3 – Project readiness and delivery capacity and capability (30%)</p>	
<p>Assessed on capacity, implementation planning and project readiness</p>	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application demonstrates the extent to which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ appropriate expertise and resources are identified to deliver the activity, (e.g. service providers to undertake the activity with appropriate skills) ○ a preliminary activity implementation plan has been provided that shows the outputs for the activity and demonstrates how the activity can be successfully delivered within anticipated timeframes ○ a detailed budget breakdown has been provided that includes income sources, co-contributions and expenditure ○ anticipated project timelines have been identified showing how the activity supports the proposed project to commence quickly after the completion of the planning and preparation activity ○ risks to the progression and development of the proposed project have been identified and strategies are in place to manage them ○ a monitoring and evaluation plan has been provided to measure progress to achieving objectives and outcomes ○ the ongoing sustainability of the project, beyond the funding period, is addressed ○ appropriate governance for the activity and proposed project has been developed where required.
<p>Criterion 4 – Need for funding and value for money (10%)</p>	
<p>Assessed on whether there is a strong argument for government support and whether the project represents value for money for the Victorian community</p>	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrated need for government assistance for the project to proceed • the potential of the project to drive or enable economic impacts in the region and for the State via increased visitor spend and length of stay.

5.2 Due diligence assessments

Applicants may be subject to due diligence assessments to enable the Department to assess financial and other non-financial risks associated with proposed projects. Outcomes from such assessments may be considered in any decision to recommend or award a grant and in contracting with successful applicants.

Such checks may include the delivery performance of other grants contracted with the Victorian Government and whether the applicant has failed to meet key contractual obligations for previous grant agreements with the State.

5.3 Discretion in awarding grant funding

Decisions on all matters pertaining to the recommendation or award of grant funding under this Program is at the Department's and the Minister's absolute discretion. This includes approving a lesser amount than that applied for, amending funding conditions or withdrawing the Visitor Servicing Fund without notice.

6 Application process

The person submitting the application must be authorised by the organisation to make the application.

6.1 Prepare an application

Applicants must undertake the following steps to apply:

- Carefully read Program Guidelines
- Compile all necessary supporting documents as detailed in the Program Guidelines
- Submit application online via the [Business Victoria website](#)
- Check spam/junk mail if confirmation email cannot be seen in your inbox

Only final applications that are lodged with the Department by the *Applications closing* date (Section 2) will be considered and assessed. Applications that are still 'in draft' and have not been submitted by the *Applications closing* date will not be assessed.

6.2 Application requirements

Applicants will be asked to include the following details in their application:

- Applicant details
- Responses to assessment criteria
- Project description
- Project budget
- Supporting documentation (see Section 6.3)

6.3 Supporting documentation

The following supporting documentation is **mandatory** to provide and will be requested as part of the application form:

<p>All funding applications:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A partnership letter which must agree to a nominated lead applicant and be signed by all identified partners outlining their commitment to the strategy or project, including their level of involvement, support and resources committed. • Project management plan (which must include scope of works, objectives, outcomes and deliverables and risk management plan) using the template provided on the Business Victoria website. • Detailed itemised project budget (which must include income sources, financial and in-kind co-contributions and expenditure) using the template provided on the Business Victoria website.
<p>Stream A funding applications only:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where relevant, most recent regional visitor servicing plan/s noting reasons they require updating (i.e. changes to regional visitor profile)

<p>Stream B funding applications only:</p>	<p>Stream B funding applicants must provide evidence of financial stability*, as a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audited Financial Reports for the last three financial years. This should be the 'final accounts' with Directors' Report and Declaration and should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Profit & Loss Statement ○ Balance Sheet ○ Cash Flows, and ○ notes to the accounts. If accounts are not audited, unaudited accounts from an Accountant will be accepted • If the latest financial report is more than six months old, up-to-date Management or Interim Accounts for the current year including Profit & Loss Statement and Balance Sheet, and, in the case of public listed corporations, a half yearly financial report • Current Business Plan, or project proposal • The company's financial projections for the next three financial years, including Profit & Loss and Cash Flow to be prepared or verified by an Accountant <p>Where the Fair Jobs Code applies, Stream B funding applicants must provide a copy of the applicant's Fair Jobs Code Pre-Assessment Certificate. See Section 8.6 for more information.</p>
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** Not required for Local Government Authorities, Alpine Resort Management Boards, State Government Departments and statutory agencies, and publicly funded universities and educational institutions.*

Other supporting documentation may be provided where relevant or appropriate and can include:

- Where relevant, the visitor servicing strategy, policy or Destination Management Plan (DMP) if one exists (for Stream B)
- Stakeholder governance structures in place to provide evidence on ways of working between partners (e.g. RTB board representation from councils)
- Where relevant to the application, provide any visitor servicing research noting any gaps that could be addressed via funding.
- Evidence of financial co-contribution from applicants or project partners (co-contribution not required but will be highly regarded).

6.4 Outcome notification

The final decision on application outcomes will be at the discretion of the Department. The Department has the discretion to make any number of grants available or withdraw funding under the Visitor Servicing Fund in part or in its entirety.

Applicants will be advised of the decision relating to their application in writing.

7 Conditions of funding

7.1 Acceptance of Letter of Offer

Successful applicants will be issued a letter of offer outlining an offer of funding (**Letter of Offer**). A recipient of a Letter of Offer will have 10 business days from the date of the Letter of Offer to accept the offer of funding by responding in writing in accordance with the instructions in the Letter of Offer.

An offer of funding is not binding on the Department unless and until both the Department and the applicant execute a grant agreement.

7.2 Grant Agreements

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a legally binding grant agreement with the Department on its standard terms and conditions (**Grant Agreement**). The Grant Agreement details all funding obligations and conditions.

The successful applicant will have 15 business days from the date of acceptance of the Letter of Offer to execute the Grant Agreement with the Department. The offer may be withdrawn if the Grant Agreement is not executed within the 15 business day timeframe.

Grant Agreements must be signed by individuals duly authorised to bind the applicant organisation and will:

- Describe the purpose for which the funding must be used;
- Set out any requirements or conditions that must be met prior to the payment of a grant instalment;
- Outline agreed milestones and project outcomes that must be achieved before payment of a grant instalment.

The project must not commence until a Grant Agreement has been duly executed by both the Department and the successful applicant.

Once a Grant Agreement has been executed, the successful applicant will be required to commence the project within the agreed timeframe recorded in the Grant Agreement and provide regular accurate progress reports to the Department. If a successful applicant does not commence the project by the commencement date, the Department has at its absolute discretion the option of terminating the Grant Agreement.

The documents provided as part of the application and as outlined in Section 6.3, will become annexures to the Grant Agreement and form part of the final executed Grant Agreement.

Where the Fair Jobs Code applies to a successful applicant, additional conditions will be included in the Grant Agreement to meet the requirements of the Fair Jobs Code (see Section 8.6).

7.3 Program evaluation reporting

Reporting is critical to the Department in understanding program impact, supporting continuous improvement in program design and delivery, and delivering more effective grant programs to the people of Victoria.

Successful applicants may be required to contribute information on project outcomes, including longer-term impacts beyond project completion, for use in program evaluation reviews and the Department marketing materials. Depending on the significance of the project, these evaluation

reports may be required for up to three years following completion of the funded project. Non-compliance could impact future applications to the Department's programs.

7.4 Sharing of project learnings

Strategies and learnings from funded projects must be shared with the Department. Strategies and project learnings may be used by the Department for such purposes as required (in the Department's sole discretion), including as examples of best practice to assist the industry in visitor servicing planning.

7.5 Audit

Grant recipients may be subject to audit by the Victorian Government or its representatives and may be required to produce evidence of how the grant funding was expended.

This request of the Victorian Government may be made for a period of two years after the grant has been acquitted.

7.6 Publicity/Acknowledgement

Successful applicants must agree to cooperate with the Department in the promotion of the program. This may include involvement in media releases, case studies or promotional events and activities.

Successful applicants must not make any public announcement or issue any press release regarding the receipt of a grant without prior written approval from the Department.

The Department may publicise the benefits accruing to the successful applicant and/or the State associated with the provision of the grant and the State's support for the Project.

The Department may include the name of the successful applicant and/or grant amount in any publicity material and in the Department's annual report.

The Department may request successful applicant fact checks any text and seek approval to use any owned imagery associated with the activity prior to the publication of any such promotional materials.

If requested by the Department, the successful applicant must ensure that the State's support for the grant is acknowledged on all promotional materials and appropriate signage consistent with the Guidelines for Victorian Government Advertising and Communications or as otherwise specified by the Department.

8 General terms of applying

8.1 Privacy and confidentiality

Information provided by an applicant for the purpose of applying to this Program will be used by the Department for the purposes of assessment of applications, program administration and program review. In making an application, the applicant consents to, and authorises the provision of their information to any local, State or Australian Government department or agency, for the purpose of assessing applications or conducting a review of the program or application process. If there is an intention to include personal information about third parties in the application, please ensure they are aware of and consent to the contents set out in this privacy statement.

Any personal information about an applicant or a third party will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and other applicable laws.

Enquiries about access to personal information, or for other concerns regarding the privacy of personal information, can be emailed to the Department's Privacy Unit by emailing privacy@ecodev.vic.gov.au. The Department's privacy policy is also available by emailing the Department's Privacy Unit.

8.2 Amendment of Guidelines

The Department reserves the right to amend these Program Guidelines and the application terms at any time as it deems appropriate without notice.

8.3 Absolute Discretion

The Department's decisions on all matters in recommending and awarding grant funding under this Program is at the Department's absolute discretion. This includes recommending for approval a lesser amount than that applied for.

The Department reserves the right to request the applicant provide further information should it be deemed necessary.

The Department makes no representation that a grant of funds will be made to any applicant and reserves the right to amend, suspend or withdraw funding under the Visitor Servicing Fund.

8.4 Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest is a situation in which someone in a position of trust or influence has competing professional or personal interests.

Applicants, and any project partners, must advise the Department of any real or perceived conflict of interest relating to a project for which it has applied for funding (or may otherwise benefit from).

Conflicts of interest for Victorian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Service Employees (Section 61) of the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

8.5 Tax advice

Tax implications for grant applicants may differ depending on individual circumstances. The Department recommends successful applicants seek independent tax advice, or alternatively liaise with the Australian Tax Office (ATO) for advice that are specific to their individual circumstances. The ATO website also provides guidance in relation to specific grants payments which may be used for tax determination purposes.

8.6 Fair Jobs Code

The Fair Jobs Code applies to grants valued at \$500,000 (exclusive of GST) or more under the Visitor Servicing Fund where a key milestone is to deliver new jobs in Victoria.

Where the Fair Jobs Code applies, applicants will need to:

- hold a Fair Jobs Code Pre-Assessment Certificate prior to an application being submitted to this Program; and
- prepare and submit a Fair Jobs Code Plan in accordance with the specific requirements of their grant agreement.

For more information and for full details of the requirements of the Fair Jobs Code, applicants should refer to the Fair Jobs Code and Fair Jobs Code Guidelines which can be found at:

<https://www.buyingfor.vic.gov.au/fair-jobs-code-suppliers-and-businesses>

To apply for a Fair Jobs Code Pre-Assessment Certificate, applicants should visit:

www.buyingfor.vic.gov.au/apply-fair-jobs-code-pre-assessment-certificate

9 Additional information and resources

9.1 Support for applications

To help applicants prepare their application, additional information and resources will be available on the Business Victoria website, including relevant application templates and frequently asked questions.

Please check with the Department representative prior to submitting if you are unclear about any part of the application.

To contact the Department regarding the Visitor Servicing Fund, please contact VSfund@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

9.2 Links to online resources

[Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan](#)

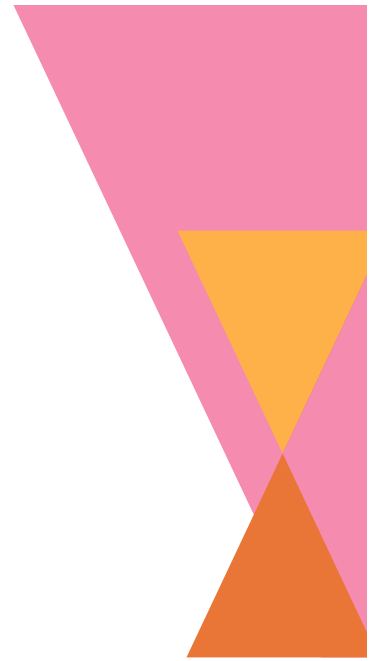
[Experience Victoria 2033](#)

[Regional Tourism Network organisations](#)

[Visit Victoria](#)

[Victoria Tourism Industry Council \(VTIC\)](#)

[Tourism industry research and data](#)



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This document is also available in an accessible format at business.vic.gov.au/visitor-servicing-fund

Appendix 1 - Victoria's Visitor Servicing Framework



May 2023

GROWING VICTORIAN TOURISM

Acknowledgement of Country

We proudly acknowledge the First Peoples of Victoria and their ongoing strength in practicing the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters throughout Victoria, and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

The diverse landscapes of Victoria have been the home of diverse First Peoples since time immemorial, where they have cared for and nurtured Country throughout this time. The lands and waters on which Victorians and visitors draw enjoyment and inspiration continue to be a living cultural landscape.

We recognise the rights and aspirations of Victorian First Peoples and acknowledge that First Peoples' Self Determination is a human right as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Building on this and guided by the 11 principles of First Peoples' Self Determination, we are committed to developing strong, respectful and enduring relationships and partnerships with First Peoples in the visitor economy, as decided for and by First Peoples.

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1 Introduction

The success of any tourism destination rests heavily on the quality of the visitor experience. Visitor information servicing plays a pivotal role in enhancing this experience, through the delivery of physical and digital content that provides visitors with information at critical stages in the visitor journey.

The rapid adoption of smart technology and changes in consumer behaviour have dramatically altered how people access this information, make travel decisions and purchase tourism products and experiences and this will continue to change at an even faster pace.

In particular, the widespread availability of digital information has raised expectations by visitors of personalised service, tailored to individual needs and via multiple information sources (both digital and in person) throughout their journey.

This expectation of a seamless omni-channel experience highlights the critical need for visitor servicing providers in Victoria to expand outside the traditional realm of information delivery by creating new and innovative approaches to ensure visitor services are available when, where and how visitors want them. *Victoria's Visitor Servicing Framework* aims to help government, the tourism industry and community work together to better plan and deliver visitor servicing for Victoria's cities, regions, and visitors.

The framework has been prepared by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions drawing upon national and international research and consultation with tourism industry stakeholders and will support the delivery of the Victorian Government's objectives for the visitor economy, as detailed in [Experience Victoria 2033](#).

The Victorian Government recognises the importance of visitor servicing and has committed funding of \$3 million to support partnerships with industry to implement improved approaches to visitor servicing that meet contemporary visitor needs.

1.1 Who is this framework for?

This framework aims to provide guidance to a range of industry stakeholders, including local councils, Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs), tourism businesses and local communities, on the development and delivery of contemporary visitor servicing models and processes.

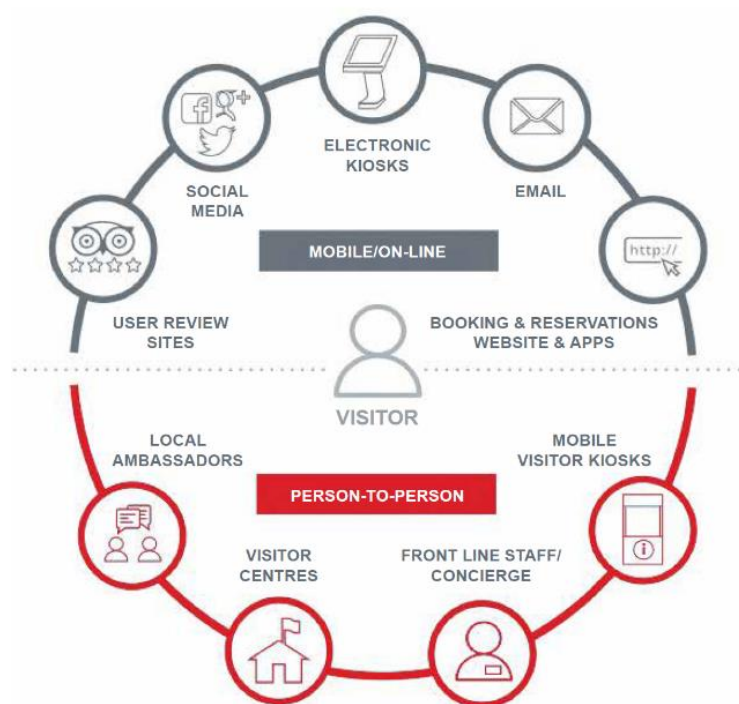
2 Setting the scene

2.1 What is visitor servicing and why is it important?

Visitor servicing is the delivery of timely, high quality and accurate information that has the potential to influence a person's travel and spending behaviour at any stage of the visitor journey and enhance the overall visitor experience - both outside and inside a destination. This potential is amplified when the information is delivered through a customer service lens.

Visitor servicing can include online and in-person sources of information and inspiration for visitors at various touchpoints in their journey, as demonstrated in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1.



Adapted from *A New Visitor Services Model for Alberta: Engaging Visitors in an Era of Technology*; Government of Alberta 2017.

Exceptional visitor servicing can encourage visitors to form a genuine connection with a destination, enabling them to become strong advocates or ambassadors which in return can help build the reputation of a destination and attract new visitors. **Figure 2** outlines four key visitor servicing benefits to consider across visitor servicing touchpoints.

Figure 2.

INSPIRING

Potential visitors learn about and are attracted to visit the destination.

CONVERTING

Potential visitors find it easy to source information and book travel, converting intention to action.

CREATING ADVOCATES

Visitors become destination advocates, wanting to repeat their visit and telling friends and family about their amazing experience, encouraging new visitors.

ADDING VALUE

Visitors receive information about things to see and do, inspiring them to engage in multiple experiences and extend their length of stay. Visitors receive exceptional service from arrival to departure.



Adapted from *Visitor Servicing Toolkit; Victoria Tourism Industry Council 2019, p.9*

Furthermore, through the information shared and the skilful advice provided in person and online, visitor servicing providers can unlock visitor spending, facilitating a flow on effect by increasing the number of activities that a visitor engages in, increasing dispersal across a region and by increasing the length of time that a visitor will stay at a destination. For instance, research has consistently found that visitors spend more time in a region as a result of visiting a visitor information centre.

3 Principles guiding the future of visitor servicing in Victoria

These five principles will assist the Victorian tourism industry to remain competitive nationally and globally, be a leader in customer centric visitor servicing and grow yield and length of stay.

The five principles are:



Visitor servicing is everyone's business



Evolve and strengthen the italicised *i* trademark



Curate in-person and online services that put customer needs first



Support modern visitor information centres



Adopt an integrated stakeholder approach

1. Visitor servicing is everyone’s business

We will recognise that visitor servicing is everyone’s business and exemplary visitor servicing is delivered at all touchpoints in the visitor journey.

Visitors are increasingly expecting to be able to access the information and support they need when and where they need it. This means that visitor servicing is everyone’s business as a range of tourism stakeholders interact with visitors at various points in the visitor journey.

An example of the visitor journey in **Figure 3** outlines the various stages to influence visitor decision-making.

Figure 3.



Adapted from: *A National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing; State Tourism Organisation Visitor Information Servicing working group 2019, p. 12*

Because of this, and despite the introduction of outreach programs in some regions, visitor servicing cannot solely be the responsibility of ‘bricks and mortar’ accredited visitor information centres. Tourism businesses and residents are also well positioned to provide invaluable and bespoke insights into a local area.

Leading tourism organisations around the world have recognised this important role and developed programs to support businesses and residents to engage with visitors and help them make informed choices to ensure they get the most from their visit.

iKnow Partner Programme – Visit Scotland

The iKnow Partner Programme was introduced in 2017 by Visit Scotland as part of the organisation’s focus on visitor servicing ‘to ensure that there is an information touchpoint in every corner of Scotland’.

The programme recognises and supports the efforts of businesses who provide good quality, accurate information to help visitors make informed choices and get the most from their visit. To become a certified iKnow Partner, business must demonstrate that they provide local information, in both printed and online formats or through knowledgeable staff.

Participating businesses received a window sticker, staff badges and a certificate to promote their commitment to providing local information.



‘Arnold Clark partner up with VisitScotland to welcome visitors.’ The Edinburgh Reporter. December 5, 2017.

2. Curate online and in-person services that put customer needs first

We will engage visitors via a blend of online and in-person channels, ensuring the provision of high-quality, on-brand, and streamlined visitor servicing across the whole visitor journey.

Digital technologies are continuously changing how people live, work and interact with each other. While COVID-19 has accelerated a focus on digital needs and requirements, it has also reminded society of our need to connect as humans. The combination and balance of in-person and digital visitor servicing creates opportunities to reach visitors throughout all stages of the visitor journey and influence them to increase how much they spend, where they go and how long they stay.

Importantly, fully embracing digital visitor servicing will require high-quality mobile and broadband coverage across Victoria with the capacity and resilience to meet demand during events, peak seasons and emergencies.

3. Adopt an integrated stakeholder approach

We will promote a partnership approach to visitor servicing to ensure stakeholders focus on greater collaboration, strategic planning, and brand alignment to deliver customer-centric visitor servicing solutions.

It is crucial to apply a broad region-based approach to the visitor’s decision-making matrix to appropriately address visitor servicing opportunities and challenges. Visitors don’t see geographical or

organisational boundaries and there is an opportunity for stakeholders to work together and ensure that the delivery of visitor servicing within a region is seamless and focused on the needs of the visitor.

Local councils play a key role in visitor servicing as both a significant investor in visitor services and conduit to strategic stakeholder partnerships. A whole of region approach should include multiple local councils and be driven by the relevant RTBs to strategically align planning and branding, delineate roles and responsibilities, share training programs, and involve industry and community.

There is not a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to visitor servicing stakeholder partnerships as it will depend on partnerships and relationships within a region, the tourism offering, its brand and the visitor profile.

4. Evolve and strengthen the italicised /trademark

We will continue to evolve and strengthen the italicised i trademark by ensuring the underpinning accreditation program aligns with changes to visitor servicing and reflects contemporary visitor expectations.

The Victoria Visitor Information Centre Accreditation Program was first initiated in 1997. Over subsequent years it has provided visitor information centres nationally with access to the trademarked yellow italicised 'i' with the blue background brand and signage, as well as other benefits. Accreditation has fostered high standards in visitor servicing by ensuring delivery of quality information and visitor facilities, and the professional development of staff and volunteers who are passionate about the brand. The brand offers peace of mind to visitors that they are receiving authoritative local information.

The benefits that visitor information centres and their stakeholders receive from accreditation and associated use of the brand determines the value of the program. To maintain value, the model must continue to evolve with changes in visitor servicing and visitor expectations.

The Victorian Visitor Information Centre accreditation guidelines have regularly been reviewed and updated over the past twenty years. The most recent update in 2018 paved the way for a more flexible approach to visitor servicing and enabled delivery of information to be tailored to suit the changing needs of the visitor. There are further opportunities to harness and strengthen the brand value of the distinctive yellow and blue italicised 'i' by applying the guidelines across a range of visitor servicing models, without compromising the integrity of the brand.

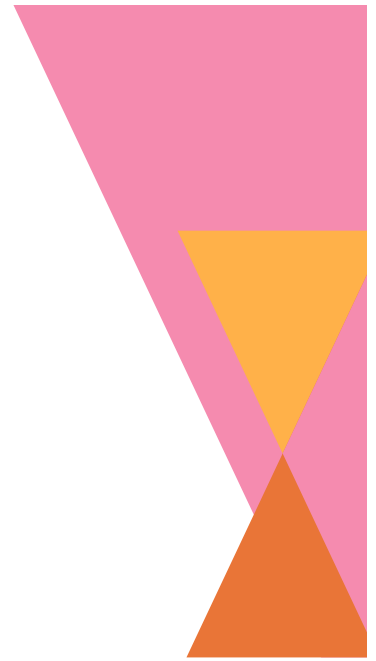
5. Support modern visitor information centres

We will embrace a contemporary approach to 'bricks and mortar' accredited visitor information centres, extending their reach and exploring best practice modelling and benchmarking.

'Bricks and mortar' accredited visitor information centres remain an integral part of Victoria's visitor servicing ecosystem, providing a positive impact on the overall visitor experience and unlocking visitor spending. They are also a source of pride for many communities, play a critical role during times of emergency and often service the broader community and local tourism businesses/associations.

However, changing visitor behaviour means that, unless a centre is located in prominent high traffic, central location, or become or be part of a 'must do' attraction in its own right, the number of visitors coming through the front door will continue to fall.

Best practice modelling and benchmarking can strengthen and evolve accredited visitor information centres, in line with current and future visitor expectations, by identifying opportunities for business improvements and operational efficiencies and guiding future investment in in-person and digital visitor servicing.



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