

Aboriginal Business Growth Program

Guidelines

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of country throughout Victoria, their ongoing connection to this land and we pay our respects to their culture and their Elders past, present and future.

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1. Program Overview

1.1 About the Program

The *Victorian Aboriginal Business Growth Program* will provide grants to Aboriginal Victorian businesses and organisations to support investments that enable their growth and development.

The Program reflects the Aboriginal community focus on improving connections to community, Country and culture, and the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination, enabling business growth and economic inclusion.

Grant amounts of \$10,000 up to \$100,000 (excl. GST) are available to successful applicants.

1.2 Program Objectives

The objectives of this program are to:

- support Aboriginal businesses to access needed capital and expertise
- support business improvements that contribute to the overall sustainability and competitiveness of Aboriginal businesses
- resource Aboriginal enterprises to realise their economic development objectives
- support the ability of Aboriginal enterprises to build, retain and develop their workforce.

1.3 Program Outcomes

The intended outcomes of this program are:

- Aboriginal business owners have increased business capability
- Aboriginal businesses have more resources to support business growth
- more Aboriginal people are economically independent
- Aboriginal community enterprises have increased ability to attract more investment
- Aboriginal people have more opportunities to participate in economic activity.

2. Applicant Eligibility

3. Program Timeline

2.1 Eligible Applicants

Applicants applying to this program must meet all of the following criteria:

- a) be an Aboriginal owned and operated business¹
- b) be based in Victoria and have an economic connection to regional Victoria²
- c) hold a current Australian Business Number (ABN)
- d) be registered for GST
- e) be registered with the responsible federal or state regulator³.

2.2 Ineligible Applicants

The following are not eligible to apply:

- not-for-profit organisation, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Department prior to an application being made for support under this program
- a Commonwealth, state or local government agency or body
- a company not incorporated in Australia
- an unincorporated association.

Applications Open and Close dates	22 July to 6 September (5.00pm)
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Outcomes Announced	October 2024 onwards
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Grant Agreements Executed	October 2024 onwards
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Completion	All projects must be completed by 31 May 2025
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4. Available Funding

Grant amounts of \$10,000 to up to \$100,000 (ex GST) are available to eligible applicants.

Applicants may apply for one grant under this Program per ABN.

Applicants that have applied for funding from the Victorian Aboriginal Support Program may also apply to this Program.

1. An Aboriginal business is one where it is majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-owned and operated. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people must own and operate at least 51% of the business. Verification that the business is an Aboriginal business may be undertaken with Aboriginal organisations, such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Traditional Owner Groups and organisations such as the Kinaway Chamber of Commerce and Supply Nation.

2. The business must primarily operate in Victoria and either have an operating presence in regional Victoria or activity that services regional Victoria and/or engages with regional suppliers and supply chains.

3. Verification of business details provided may be undertaken with the Australian Business Register, Australian Securities and Investment Commission, Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, Consumer Affairs Victoria and/or other applicable regulators.

5. Project Eligibility – what will be funded

Applicants must propose a project that will support the business to improve and grow by funding operational and development initiatives.

Applicants must be able to explain how the proposed project will enable the organisation to improve and grow, for example, by:

- investing in new equipment and assets that enable increased business income generation
- increasing the efficiency of business processes and operational procedures e.g. new software and systems or strategic planning advice
- developing the businesses' products or enhancing the service offering
- enhancing the capability of business owners and their staff
- supporting market expansion (e.g. access new markets or to use new platforms to reach new customers).

Ideally the project should be supported by an implementation strategy that makes clear the way the investment will enable business growth and/or development, including relevant supporting evidence.

Projects that support future new employment opportunities for Aboriginal people are encouraged.

5.1 Eligible Activities & Expenses

Eligible activities and expenses may include:

- asset, equipment and machinery acquisition
- business case development and delivery
- feasibility studies
- site analysis
- minor building alterations and fit out costs
- labour and contractors related to projects
- business and process improvement activities
- technical and specialist training
- targeted professional development and mentoring.

The project may be made up of one or more activities and expenses.

The department reserves the right to determine eligible activities and expenditure in alignment with Program objectives and outcomes.

5.2 Ineligible Activities & Expenses

The grant amount may not be spent on ineligible activities and expenditure, including:

- activities that are already funded or partially funded by other government funding
- retrospective funding for activities that have already begun
- attending overseas events and/or travel expenses
- usual operational expenditure, including existing staff wages, communications, travel, entertainment, accommodation and vehicle hire
- routine replacement or minor upgrade of plant and equipment.

6. How to apply

Applications must be submitted no later than 5:00pm on 6 September 2024.

Please note that late applications will not be accepted. Applications that are still in 'draft' and have not been submitted by the closing date will not be assessed.

6.1 Preparing an application

- Carefully read these Program Guidelines (and 'Frequently Asked Questions' for the Aboriginal Business Growth Program).
- Compile necessary supporting documents to apply as detailed in the 'Documentation and Information Requirements' below.
- Submit an application online via the Victorian Aboriginal Business Investment Program webpage on the Business Victoria website.
- Confirm submission of the application by checking your nominated email address (or spam/junk mail).
- Applicants are encouraged to contact their relevant Aboriginal business support organisation or Aboriginal Economic Development in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, to discuss their project if needed.

6.2 Documentation and Information Requirements

The application form will ask you to provide information and enable you to add supporting documents and material:

- You can upload and submit up to 5 files and/or 5 URLs (external links).
- Attached files can be no more than 25MB in size each.
- You may need to combine documents as one file.

Specific information you may need to provide as part of your application is listed in the table below.

Note: information supplied should be appropriate to the size of the project e.g. larger projects would require more substantial supporting documentation.

If your application is for more than \$50,000, be prepared to provide the additional financial information that will be required. See below for details.

Document Type	Description	Requirement
Aboriginal-owned business	<p>Attest to being a member of Kinaway Chamber of Commerce or Supply Nation</p> <p>OR</p> <p>A letter of support from an Aboriginal-led organisation – confirming the applicant is a Victorian based Aboriginal business.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Assert to being an Aboriginal-led organisation.</p>	Mandatory
Co-contribution of funds evidence	<p>Where the applicant decides to include a co-contribution, details confirming co-contribution, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written confirmation from the applicant organisation’s board or authorised representative that the organisation can undertake the project and meet the required co-contribution amount and, • a bank statement showing sufficient cash in the organisation’s bank account to cover the co-contribution. 	Mandatory for projects with a financial co-contribution
Financial Information	<p>Applications over \$50,000 MUST provide the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants must provide evidence which demonstrates, to the satisfaction of the department, that the applicant is financially viable to deliver the project and its outcomes. This requires at a minimum, the provision of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audited financial reports for the 2022-23 financial year⁴. This should be the ‘final accounts’ with a directors’ report and declaration, and should include profit and loss statement, balance sheet, cash flows, and notes to the accounts. If accounts are not audited, unaudited financial reports, can only be accepted if they have been prepared by an accountant registered on the Tax Practitioner Board. - Interim (or management) accounts for the 2023-24 financial year including profit and loss statement and balance sheet, and, in the case of public listed corporations, a half yearly financial report. Parent Company Financial Statements (if applicable). 	Mandatory for grants over \$50,000

⁴ Annual financial reports should be inclusive of comparative data from the previous financial year.

Document Type	Description	Requirement
Approvals and permits	<p>For projects involving minor building works or upgrades the following MUST be provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of all relevant approvals and permits (e.g. local council planning or building approvals) related to the project • Evidence of land ownership/tenure or evidence of landowner consent if the applicant is not the owner of the land or building. 	Mandatory for projects involving building works
Other information	<p>Information related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the business' goals and growth plan • the project and its delivery. 	Optional

7. Assessment Process

The following assessment process will be followed:

1. All applications will be assessed for eligibility and may undergo due diligence checks, including a financial risk assessment, where required.
2. Applications will be reviewed and scored against the assessment criteria (at [section 7.1](#))
3. All supplementary attachments and information provided as part of the application will be taken into consideration during the assessment process.
4. Applications will be reviewed by a departmental panel.
5. Applications will be recommended by a departmental executive panel subject to available funding, for final approval by the Minister for Employment.

7.1 Assessment criteria

Eligible applications will be assessed on how well they meet the assessment criteria as outlined below.

Assessment Criteria	Considerations	Weighting
1. How well the proposed activities support the program objectives and outcomes	<p>These are the considerations used by the assessors in making an assessment.</p> <p>How well the application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has identified the business goal, e.g. market access, product development, more efficient processes or capability building • describes how the proposed activities will help achieve the identified business goal to improve the financial sustainability of the business • demonstrates a need for government funding by undertaking activities that would not otherwise be funded. <p>If this application proposes similar activities or to extend activities seeking funding under the <i>Aboriginal Business Support Program</i>, consideration will be given the new or additional benefits arising from this application – if the application for funding under the <i>Aboriginal Business Support Program</i> is successful.</p>	50%
2. Project planning, readiness and capability to deliver	<p>How well the application shows planning and capability to deliver, appropriate to the scale of the project, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • project and implementation planning, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - budget information including costs are based on verified estimates (e.g. quotes and proposals) where appropriate - timing and key dates for project delivery within the Program timeframes - identification of appropriate service delivery partners for the identified activities, where applicable - risk planning, if applicable • for minor building improvements and upgrades, required approvals have been obtained • information on co-contributions where relevant, including how these will support project planning, readiness and capability • the organisation has sufficient skills and capacity to deliver the project and has evidence supporting the co-contribution amount (where a co-contribution has been included). 	30%
3. Supporting regional Victorian Aboriginal Community, Culture and economic inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well the business creates benefits for or services regional Victoria either by having operations in regional Victoria or having goods and services sourced from or supplied to regional Aboriginal businesses and people • How the business and/or project supports increased economic connections among Aboriginal people and businesses and supports community, Country and culture. 	20%
		100%

7.2 Applicant checks

Applicants may be subject to due diligence assessments to enable the department to assess financial and other non-financial risks associated with the application. Outcomes from such assessments may be taken into account in any decision to recommend or award a grant and in contracting with successful applicants.

The department may, at any time, remove an applicant from the application and assessment process, if in the department's opinion, association with the applicant may bring the department, a minister or the State of Victoria into disrepute.

The department may undertake a directors check.

The department may request further information to confirm eligibility if required.

8. Notification of Outcomes

Applicants will be advised of the outcome of their grant application via email.

The department will attempt to notify applicants of the outcome of their application from October onwards.

9. Conditions of Funding

9.1 Funding Offer and Grant Agreements

Applicants will be advised in writing if they are successful and will be invited to enter into a legally binding grant agreement with the department within 14 days from the date of the offer.

An offer of funding is not binding on the department unless and until both the department and the applicant execute the grant agreement. Agreement execution means the grant agreement has been signed by both the department and the applicant.

The offer may be withdrawn if the grant agreement is not signed within the timeframe given.

The project, and any expenditure of funds associated with the project, must not commence until the grant agreement has been executed.

Once the agreement has been executed, the grant recipient (successful applicant) will be required to commence the project within the agreed timeframe. If a recipient does not commence the project by the commencement date, the department has at its absolute discretion the option of terminating the agreement.

The grant agreement details all funding obligations and conditions such as:

- payments
- funding use
- grant activity deliverables and due dates
- monitoring and milestones
- reporting and accounting
- audit
- publicity and acknowledgment.

9.2 Grant payment structure

Grant funds will be released under agreed milestone payments after the grant agreement has been executed by both parties, anticipated as follows:

- 70% upon grant agreement being executed and receipt of the project plan
- 20% upon receipt of the project status update report and evidence of financial commitments, contributions and progress with project delivery, to the satisfaction of the department
- 10% upon receipt of the final project report, to the satisfaction of the department.

9.3 Publicity/acknowledgement of support

The department requires grant recipients to acknowledge the Victorian Government's support on marketing and promotional materials, which must be approved in advance by the department. Acknowledgement of the Victorian Government's support in marketing and promotional material will depend on the grant given and should be specified in the grant agreement, e.g., required representation on channels or collateral such as websites, signage, advertisements, and brochures. The department will supply the grant recipient with a logo suite and associated brand guidelines, as well as a guide on how to acknowledge government support, for the purposes of acknowledgment.

Grant recipients must obtain written approval from the department before making public announcements about receiving the grant.

The department may publicise the benefits accruing to a grant recipient associated with the grant and the State's support for the project, and recipients must cooperate with the department in promoting the program. These requirements are currently outlined in the Grant Agreement. The department may include the name of the grant recipient and the amount of funding granted in any publicity material and in the department's annual report.

9.4 Program Evaluation

As a condition of funding, grant recipients will be required to participate in any program monitoring and evaluation activities initiated by the department. This may include completing surveys throughout the program and for a nominated period of time after program completion to measure progress to achieving outcomes. An interim evaluation will be conducted for this program.

Reporting is critical to the department in understanding program impact, supporting continuous improvement in program design and delivery, and delivering effective grant program outcomes for Victoria.

10. Applicant Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest arises where a person makes a decision or exercises a power in a way that may be, or may be perceived to be, influenced by either material personal interests (financial or non-financial) or material personal associations. A conflict of interest may arise where a grant applicant:

- has a professional, commercial, or personal relationship with a party who is able to, or may be perceived to, influence the application assessment process, such as a Victorian Government staff member, or
- has a relationship with, or interest in, an organisation which is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicant from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently.

Applicants must advise the department of any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest relating to a project for which it has applied for funding.

Victorian Government staff are required to act in accord with the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees (Section 61) issued under the *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic). This includes an obligation to avoid conflicts of interest wherever possible, and declare and manage any conflicts of interest that cannot be avoided.

10.1 Related Entities

A Grant Recipient cannot use grant funding available through this program to engage the services (including supplier or consultancy services) and/or purchase products from another entity that is wholly or partly owned or controlled by the applicant without the department's written consent. Applicants and service providers must be entirely separate entities. They may not be owned by the same parent company, share governance or have common directors.

11. Compliance and Audit

Grant recipients may be subject to audit by the Victorian Government or its representatives on the accuracy of their application, accounting records relating to the project, and use of government funds at the request of the Victorian Government, for a period of one year from conclusion of the project.

If any information in the application is found to be false or misleading (as determined by the Department in its discretion), or the grant payment is not applied in accordance with the terms of funding as set out in these guidelines, the application and the grant agreement, the grant payment will be repayable on demand.

If the grant recipient fails to complete the project, the Department may require the refund of the whole or part of the grant as it deems/determines appropriate, in its absolute discretion.

12. Privacy Statement

Any personal information provided for this program will be collected and used by the department for the purposes of assessing eligibility, program administration, program review and evaluation.

The department completes a range of eligibility assessments that may include data matching to clarify the accuracy and quality of information supplied. This is part of our auditing and monitoring processes and for confirming eligibility across this program.

In the assessment of an application for the program, it may be necessary to share personal information with State and Commonwealth Government departments and agencies, as well as other external experts. If personal information about a third party is included in the application, the applicant must ensure the third party is aware of and consents to the contents of this privacy statement.

The department collects demographic information for economic reporting purposes. No personal information is used in reporting; all reports are presented with aggregated data.

Any personal information about the 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 or correction to your personal information, can be emailed to AED@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

Other concerns regarding the privacy of personal information, can be emailed to the Department's Privacy Unit at privacy@ecodev.vic.gov.au. The Department's privacy policy is also available by emailing the Department's Privacy Unit.

13. Department Probity and Decision-making

The Victorian Government makes every effort to ensure the grant application and assessment process is fair and undertaken in line with the published program guidelines.

Decisions in recommending and awarding grant funding under this program are at the minister's and department's discretion. This includes not making any funding available or approving a lesser amount than that applied for.

These guidelines and application terms may be changed from time to time, as appropriate.

The department may request the applicant provide further information should it be necessary to assess an application to the Program's policy objectives.

Victorian Government staff are required to act in accord with the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees (Section 61) issued under the *Public Administration Act 2004 (Vic)*. This includes an obligation to avoid conflicts of interest wherever possible, and declare and manage any conflicts of interest that cannot be avoided.

13.1 Complaints and feedback

Any complaints or feedback you have about this grant opportunity may be made in relation to:

- The timeliness of the process
- Communication provided by the department
- Adherence to the published program guidelines.

The department aims to respond to all complaints within 28 days. Re-assessment of an application or overturning of a funding decision for a merit-based grant, will not be considered through the complaints process.

You can send your written feedback to AED@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

14. Other Information

Further information may be obtained at business.vic.gov.au or by contacting AED@ecodev.vic.gov.au or by phoning 13 22 15.

business.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-business-grants

