

Innovation Fund Application Information

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About the grant

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Background

The Closing the Gap (CTG) Innovation Fund is a grant program established under the National Skills Agreement (NSA) Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap, agreed between the Australian Government and NSW in November 2025.

The program is administered by the NSW Department of Education (the department) and supports place-based, innovative initiatives led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and First Nations Owned (FNO) organisations, or in partnership with them.

The Innovation Fund is designed to support the delivery of culturally responsive training environments for Aboriginal students and to improve their access to, participation in, and completion of skills development and training pathways.

The program also aims to strengthen the capacity, sustainability and growth of the ACCOs training sector by enabling innovative, community-led, culturally responsive approaches to skills development and employment pathways.

Funded projects are expected to trial new or expanded approaches that:

- improve Aboriginal students' access, engagement and participation in training
- strengthen culturally responsive and supportive training environments
- support pathways to employment and further skills development
- build the capability of ACCOs and FNO organisations to deliver training and student support services.

This grant program has funding available through to December 2028.

COMPETITIVE GRANT PROCESS

The Innovation Fund follows a transparent assessment process consisting of two stages.

This structure ensures that we identify concepts with the highest potential for impact before working collaboratively to refine them for delivery

Stage 1 - Application, initial proposal submitted and eligibility and capability check (open and competitive)

In the first stage, applications are reviewed by an independent assessment panel to ensure the proposal meets the foundational requirements of the fund.

- **Eligibility review:** All applications will first be assessed against the eligibility criteria, including applicant and project eligibility. Applications that meet eligibility requirements will then be assessed against the assessment criteria.
- **Assessment criteria evaluation:** The panel will evaluate eligible applications against the assessment criteria. Eligible applications will be assessed by an assessment panel, which will include representatives from NSW Government agencies. The panel may also seek input from subject matter experts, where required. The process will be supported by an independent probity advisor.
- **Outcome:** Recommended applicants will be invited to participate in the Stage 2 co-design phase

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Stage 2 - Co-design and final funding approvals (targeted and closed)

This is a collaborative co-design process focused on refining project and funding details and finalising funding deeds for successful proposals. Stage 2 is targeted and non-competitive and only applicants invited from Stage 1 will be able to participate in this Stage 2.

- **Joint development:** This stage ensures proposals are robust and clearly aligned with desired CTG outcomes and reporting requirements.
- **Refining details:** Both the department and your organisation will work to develop and refine the project scope, milestones, and reporting. This phase is used to determine the recommended amount of funding within the allocated budget.
- **Final execution:** Approval for the projects and funding will include the assessment panel and department executives. The successful completion of this phase results in the execution of a formal funding deed. Please note that projects that cannot meet the agreed expectations for deliverables may not proceed to a final deed.

Program purpose and objectives

The purpose of the Innovation Fund is to support delivery of the NSA CTG Implementation Plan by funding innovative, place-based initiatives that improve outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The Innovation Fund aligns with and supports the following NSW Government priorities:

- NSW Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, including:
 - Priority Reform 1: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making
 - Priority Reform 2: Strengthening the community-controlled sector
- NSW Closing the Gap targets relating to education, training and employment outcomes
- NSW Skills Plan 2024-28: Building Skills and Shaping success priorities.

The objectives of the program are to:

- improve access to culturally responsive skills development and training for Aboriginal students
- strengthen the capability, sustainability and growth of ACC and FNO organisations
- increase Aboriginal students' participation, retention and completion in training
- support clear and sustainable pathways from training into employment
- enable innovative, community-led, culturally responsive and place-based solutions.

Who can apply for the Grant?

To be eligible you must:

- be an Aboriginal Community Controlled or First Nations Owned organisation, including ACC or FNO Registered Training Organisations
- be an Australian legal entity with ABN/ACN
- be currently operating in NSW
- have the legal capacity to enter into a funding agreement with the NSW Government
- demonstrate the capacity and capability to deliver the proposed project
- deliver services supporting Aboriginal students.

For partnerships (where applications involve multiple organisations):

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- The lead applicant must be ACC or FNO organisation.
- The lead applicant will be responsible for entering into the funding agreement and meeting all reporting requirements.
- Partnerships must demonstrate clear roles.

Applicants must provide evidence of eligibility, which may include:

- incorporation and governance documents
- evidence of Aboriginal ownership or control
- letters of support from community or partners.

Eligible projects

To be eligible, projects must be delivered in NSW and to NSW students, and:

- align with the objectives of the Innovation Fund, CTG and NSA priorities for NSW
- improve access to, participation in or completion of training for Aboriginal students in the vocational education and training sector
- support the delivery of culturally responsive training environments for Aboriginal students
- demonstrate engagement with Aboriginal communities.

Examples of eligible projects include but are not limited to:

- culturally responsive mentoring and career advice
- accredited and non-accredited training or pathway, skills development (including foundation skills)
- employability skills development programs for Aboriginal people.

Ineligible projects

Projects will not be considered if they:

- are not led by an ACC or FNO organisation
- do not align with the objectives of the Innovation Fund
- duplicate existing NSW Government-funded programs (including Smart & Skilled and other CTG initiatives)
- request funding for business-as-usual activities
- include retrospective costs or activities already completed
- relate to major capital/infrastructure projects.

Evidence Requirements

Applicants must provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they meet the eligibility criteria. The minimum evidence requirements are outlined in the Innovation Fund CtG Guidelines. The department may ask for additional evidence at any time to support the application.

Disclaimer

The Applicant acknowledges and agrees that:

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- submission of this application does not guarantee funding will be granted for any project, and the Department expressly reserves its right to accept or reject this application at its discretion;
- it must bear the costs of preparing and submitting this application and the Department does not accept any liability for such costs, whether or not this application is ultimately accepted or rejected; and
- it has read the Funding Guidelines for the Program and has fully informed itself of the relevant program requirements.

Use of Information

By submitting this application form, the Applicant acknowledges and agrees that:

- if this project application is successful, the relevant details of the project will be made public, including details such as the names of the organisation (Applicant) and any partnering organisation (state government agency or non-government organisation), project title, project description, location, anticipated time for completion and amount awarded;
- the Department will use reasonable endeavours to ensure that any information received in or in respect of this application which is clearly marked 'Commercial-in-confidence' or 'Confidential' is treated as confidential, however, such documents will remain subject to the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW) (GIPA Act); and
- in some circumstances the Department may release information contained in this application form and other relevant information in relation to this application in response to a request lodged under the GIPA Act or otherwise as required or permitted by law.

Privacy Notice

By submitting this Application form, the Applicant acknowledges and agrees that:

- the Department is required to comply with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) (the Privacy Act) and that any personal information (as defined by the Privacy Act) collected by the Department in relation to the program will be handled in accordance with the Privacy Act and its privacy policy (available at: <https://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/privacy>);
- the information it provides to the Department in connection with this application will be collected and stored on a database and will only be used for the purposes for which it was collected (including, where necessary, being disclosed to other Government agencies in connection with the assessment of the merits of an application) or as otherwise permitted by the Privacy Act;
- it has taken steps to ensure that any person whose personal information (as defined by the Privacy Act) is included in this application has consented to the fact that the Department and other Government agencies may be supplied with that personal information, and has been made aware of the purposes for which it has been collected and may be used.

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Innovation Fund CtG Grant Guidelines

Eligibility Confirmation

I confirm that I have read and understood the CTG Innovation Fund Grant Guidelines and meet the Eligibility criteria set out in the Grant Guidelines *

Agreed

Applicants can only proceed if they select 'Agreed'

Applicant Details

* indicates a required field

Applicant Details

Applicant *

Individual Organisation

Organisation Name

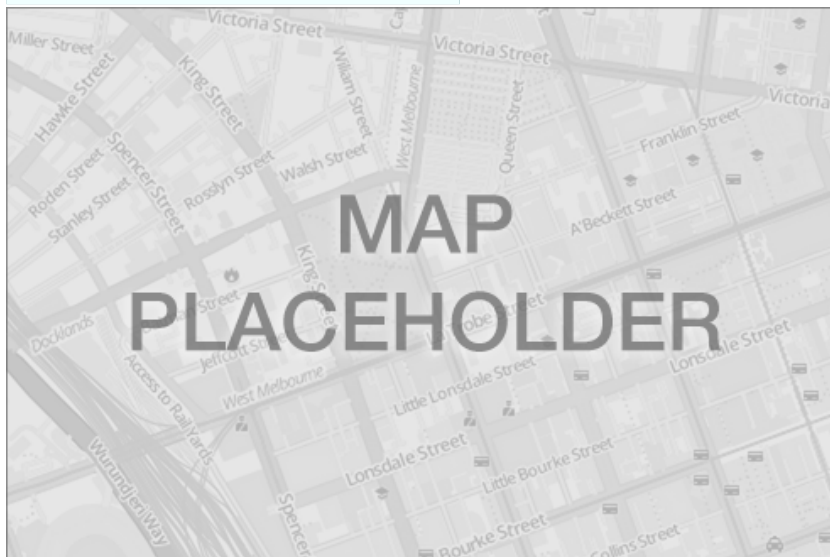
Title First Name Last Name

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Please use the organisation's full name. Make sure you provide the same name that is listed in official documentation such as that with the ABR, ACNC or ATO.

Primary Address

Address



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Postal Address

Address

Primary Phone Number *

Must be an Australian phone number.
Country code not required, area code for landlines is required.

Other Phone Number

Must be an Australian phone number.
Country code not required, area code for landlines is required.

Email Address *

Must be an email address.

Website

Must be a URL.

Primary Contact Details

Primary Contact *

Title First Name Last Name

This is the person we will correspond with about this grant.

Primary Contact Position *

e.g., Manager, Board Member or Fundraising Coordinator.

Primary Contact Phone Number *

Must be an Australian phone number.
Country code not required, area code for landlines is required.

Primary Contact Other Phone Number

Must be an Australian phone number.
Country code not required, area code for landlines is required.

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Primary Contact Email *

Must be an email address.

This is the address we will use to correspond with you about this grant.

Does the applicant have an Australian Business Number (ABN)? *

- Yes No

ABN *

The ABN provided will be used to look up the following information. Click Lookup above to check that you have entered the ABN correctly.

Information from the Australian Business Register	
ABN	
Entity name	
ABN status	
Entity type	
Goods & Services Tax (GST)	
DGR Endorsed	
ATO Charity Type	More information
ACNC Registration	
Tax Concessions	
Main business location	

Must be an ABN.

Application Organisation Details

Please indicate if you are a: *

- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO)
 First Nations Owned (FNO)
 Both ACC and FNO organisation
 Neither

Applicants must provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they meet the eligibility criteria. The minimum evidence requirements are outlined below

Eligibility requirement

Minimum evidence required

Notes

Legal entity status

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Valid ABN and/or ACN

Must be current and match the applying organisation

ACCO or FNO status

Evidence of Aboriginal ownership or control (e.g. constitution, governance documents, ORIC registration, statutory declaration)

The department may request additional information to verify status if required

Operating in NSW

Organisation address and/or evidence of service delivery in NSW

May include business registration, service locations or project delivery plan

Capacity to enter into a funding agreement

Confirmation within application form

Additional documentation may be requested if required

Capacity and capability to deliver the project

Description of organisational capability and/or relevant experience (or access to partnerships and expertise)

This may be further assessed under the assessment criteria. This could include of evidence of delivery of programs or projects, community referrals and/or organisational business capacity.

Deliver services supporting Aboriginal students

Description of current or proposed services supporting Aboriginal students

Does not require prior delivery if capability can be demonstrated

Partnerships (if applicable)

Letters of support and/or partnership agreements outlining roles and responsibilities

Must clearly identify lead applicant (ACCO or FNO)

Legal entity status *

Attach a file:

Valid ABN and/or ACN

ACCO or FNO *

Attach a file:

ICN no and Governance Framework document

Operating in NSW *

Attach a file:

May include business registration, service locations or project deliver plan

Capacity and capability to deliver the project *

Attach a file:

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Description of organisational capability and/or relevant experience

Deliver services supporting Aboriginal students *

Attach a file:

Description of current or proposed services supporting Aboriginal students

Partnerships (if applicable)

Attach a file:

Letters of support and/or partnership agreements outlining roles and responsibilities

Organisation Details

* indicates a required field

Applicant Organisation ACN or AIN *

Enter Organisation ACN (Australian Company Number) or AIN (Association Incorporation Number) if ABN not there.

Please detail the primary activities of the applicant organisation. *

Word count:

Must be no more than 200 words.

Please enter the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) code for the applicant organisation. *

Please upload a copy of your most recent Annual Report.

Attach a file:

If you do not have a copy of your most recent Annual Report, please provide recent Financial Statements.

Does the applicant organisation have at least \$20 million in public liability insurance, or is willing to obtain \$20 million in public liability insurance?

- Yes
 No, but willing to obtain

Applicants are required to hold at least \$20 million public liability insurance in order to enter into a funding deed with the NSW Government.

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Please provide evidence that the applicant organisation holds Public Liability Insurance.

Attach a file:

Applicants are required to hold at least \$20 million public liability insurance in order to enter into a funding deed with the NSW Government.

Merit Criteria

Criterion 1: Alignment with CtG priorities

The extent to which the proposed project aligns with the objectives of the Innovation Fund and broader CtG priorities.

You should demonstrate this by:

- Explaining how your project aligns with the objectives of the Innovation Fund
- Identifying which CTG priorities, reforms or targets your project contributes to
- Describing how your project will improve outcomes for Aboriginal students

Evidence may include:

- Project rationale linked to CTG priorities
- Description of target cohorts and expected outcomes

Criterion 2: Community engagement and partnership

The extent to which the project is informed by and connected to Aboriginal communities and supported by partnerships.

The expected benefits for Aboriginal learners and communities.

You should demonstrate this by:

- Describing how Aboriginal communities have been engaged in developing the project
- Outlining any partnerships and their role in delivery
- Explaining how Aboriginal leadership and community perspectives are reflected in the project

Evidence may include:

- Letters of support
- Description of consultation undertaken
- Partnership details or agreements

Criterion 3: Innovation and impact

The extent to which the project proposes a new, innovative or enhanced approach and delivers meaningful outcomes.

Avoidance of duplication with existing funding.

You should demonstrate this by:

- Clearly describing the problem or need your project is addressing
- Explaining what is innovative about your approach (new or adapted)
- Outlining the expected outcomes and impact for Aboriginal students and communities

Evidence may include:

- Description of current gaps or challenges
- Rationale for the proposed approach
- Defined outcomes or success measures

Criterion 4: Delivery capability

The extent to which the applicant has the capacity and capability to deliver the project.

You should demonstrate this by:

- Providing examples of relevant organisational experience
- Describing your approach to delivering the project
- Providing a high-level timeline and key milestones

Evidence may include:

- Examples of previous projects
- Organisational capability information
- Proposed delivery plan including timeline and key milestones

Criterion 5: Sustainable outcomes & value for money

The extent to which the project represents value for money and delivers sustainable outcomes.

You should demonstrate this by:

- Providing an indicative budget, including total funding amount requested and key cost categories
- Explaining how project activities will lead to the expected outcomes
- Describing how outcomes may be sustained beyond the funding period

Evidence may include:

- Indicative budget summary
- Explanation of cost drivers
- Sustainability approach

Application Process

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STAGE 1: Application, initial proposal submitted and eligibility and capability check

Upload a pitch presentation (max 5 minutes video or PowerPoint) addressing:

- Align with the objectives of the Innovation Fund, CtG and NSA priorities
- Improve access to, participation in or completion of training for Aboriginal students in the Vocational Education and Training sector
- Support the delivery of culturally safe training environments for Aboriginal students

Questions to consider:

- What are the key objectives and activities of your proposed project?
- How does the project respond to priority areas, regions, cohorts or sectors identified under the NSW Skills Plan?
- Budget and expected benefits - key project costs, expected outcomes from the project
- How the project contributes to strengthening the ACCO and FNO training sector

For further guidance please refer to the Innovation Fund CtG Grant Guidelines

Submitting application

- Applicants must complete the application in its entirety and must not amend any of the questions provided.
- Applications can be submitted either in written form or in video form
- Complete the application, including attaching all required supporting documentation
- You must respond to all mandatory questions in the application form. The word limit is specified under each of the questions and you will not be able to include content over the word limit
- For written submissions, responses must be in Microsoft Office compatible format (e.g. '.docx' and '.xlsx' formats) or PDF format
- Up to 5 files can be added as part of the tender response. If you have more than 5 files to lodge, you can either:
 - Manually combine or compress several files into 1 file.
 - Upload parts of your application in groups of 5 files.

Video submissions

- Video submissions may be submitted rather than a written submission
- **Upload videos via: <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB>** and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box
- A maximum of 1 video per question and video length is to be a maximum of 5 minutes long
- For video submissions, responses must be in the format (MP4, MOV, WMV, AVI, AVCHD, MKV, FLV, F4V, SWF, WEBM, HTML5, MPEG-2)
- Please name your video files in the following naming convention for ease of identifying the video: ORGANISATION NAME - QUESTION NUMBER. File names must not contain \ / : * ? < > | characters
- Please do not include promotional material, copyrighted material and links to file sharing services such as Dropbox or Google Drive in your video submission
- Ensure the video submission directly answers the questions in the application process

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- Please ensure the speaker is located in a well-lit area with minimal background noise and clear audio feed to the camera
- Please allocate enough time to test your submission and practice uploading your videos well in advance of the application closing date and time
- A successful upload will be confirmed with an onscreen receipt displaying details of what has been received (including file names, time and date received and receipt number). You may screen shot and retain the receipt information for your records
- If you have issues with upload times, you can speed this up by:
 - Submitting one video at a time.
 - After each video is successfully submitted and you have received a receipt number, you can click back on your internet browser to lodge your response again.

Budget notes:

Indicate whether the program is new, existing or existing and scaling up/expanding.

In-kind contributions and shared services can be included but must be clearly documented.

Funding excludes activities outside the Innovation Fund scope or duplicating existing programs including:

- core business as usual (funded elsewhere)
- capital works and major infrastructure purchase
- retrospective cost incurred prior to contract execution

Pitch Presentation (see below for video)

Attach a file:

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

Provide an initial budget

Must be a dollar amount.

Outline key cost categories and a rationale linked to project outcomes

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

CtG Innovation Fund Focus Areas

FOCUS AREA 1: Building and connecting to culturally safe learning and support environments

This focus area is seeking initiatives that strengthen culturally safe learning environments and improve Aboriginal students' sense of belonging and engagement in skills and training.

Examples of initiatives that may be supported:

- culturally responsive mentoring and student support programs

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- development of enhancement of culturally safe learning environments or facilities
- Initiatives that strengthen organisational capability to deliver culturally responsive training and support services

FOCUS AREA 2: Responsive and place-based skills, employment and career development support

This focus area is seeking initiatives that empower Aboriginal students to identify their skills, pursue training pathways and connect with employment opportunities.

Examples of initiatives that may be supported:

- Accredited or non-accredited training pathways
- Foundation skills development programs
- Initiatives connecting students with employers or industry partners
- Career mentoring or aspiration-building programs

FOCUS AREA 3: Outreach initiatives and activities for at risk learners

This focus area is seeking initiatives that increase participation in training among students facing barriers to engagement.

Examples of initiatives that may be supported:

- Outreach initiatives connecting communities and training opportunities
- Programs supporting participation in training and employment pathways
- Initiatives addressing practical barriers to accessing training

Note: Examples of initiatives listed above are indicative only. Applicants are encouraged to propose innovative approaches that align with the objectives of the CtG Innovation Fund.

Projects proposed under these focus areas should respond to following problem statements:

FOCUS AREA 1: How do you create culturally safe learning environments that ensures all Aboriginal learners feel a sense of belonging?

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

FOCUS AREA 1: How do we build organisations physical capacity to enable better access to high quality, best-practice learning environments for Aboriginal learners?

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

FOCUS AREA 2: How can we empower Aboriginal learners to identify their skills and create pathways that better connect Aboriginal learners and employers?

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for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

FOCUS AREA 2: What innovative training products might support Aboriginal learners to better engage and improve longer-term qualification attainment rates?

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

FOCUS AREA 2: • How can we develop and promote clearer aspiration-based pathways, so Aboriginal learners can make informed decisions about their training employment options?

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

FOCUS AREA 3: How do we improve place-based, face-to-face participation of Aboriginal students with skills and training opportunities, including but not limited to regional and remote areas?

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

FOCUS AREA 3: How can we Aboriginal students who have transport barriers to access training and employment opportunities?

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

Capability to deliver your proposed project

* indicates a required field

Capacity to deliver the project

Provide an explanation of your organisation's demonstrated skills and capacity to deliver the project including (if applicable) past performance delivering similar projects. If your organisation has not delivered a similar project, provide details of any internal/external consultation you have done to ensure your organisation has sufficient capacity and that the project is supported by the organisation. *

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Word count:

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

Risk Management

Outline at least three potential risks to the project, the likelihood of occurrence, your organisation's assessment of these risks and the strategies you plan to implement to address or mitigate these risks. *

Word count:

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

Reporting

What strategies will you put in place to measure and report successful project outcomes? *

Word count:

for video submissions, upload to <https://shorturl.at/h4CHB> and include the video filename in the SmartyGrant question response box

Declaration and Authorisation

* indicates a required field

Declaration

The Applicant represents and warrants that this application has been submitted by an authorised representative of the Applicant (e.g. CEO, Chief Financial Officer, General Manager, Director, Chair of the Board, President, authorised manager etc).

Where this Application is submitted in the course of employment by a representative of any kind (e.g. authorised representative or agent) of the Applicant, you: (i) acknowledge and agree that the Applicant is deemed to be jointly and separately bound by this application; and (ii) represent and warrant that you have the authority to represent and bind the Applicant as contemplated by this provision.

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By submitting this application form I hereby declare that:

- I agree for my project to be automatically considered in other NSW funding programs;
- I have read and understood each of the acknowledgements, agreements, representations and warranties provided above, and that each of these are true and correct;
- All information provided including the responses to each question in the relevant sections of this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge;
- Any information contained in this application may be disclosed to other Government agencies, staff administering the program, and to external stakeholders (including consultants, lawyers and other advisers) as part of the assessment of this application;
- I am authorised to submit this application on behalf of, and have the authority to represent and bind the Applicant;
- I understand that any false declaration may render this application ineligible/invalid; and
- All relevant conflicts of interest have been declared

Authorisation

I agree *

Yes

Name of authorised person *

Title First Name Last Name

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Must be a senior staff member, board member or appropriately authorised volunteer

Position *

Position held in applicant organisation (e.g. CEO, Treasurer)

Phone number *

Must be an Australian phone number.

We may contact you to verify that this application is authorised by the applicant organisation

Email *

Must be an email address.

GMS-SGA/Locn/2025 v2.0