



## Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

**To:** The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications (for decision)

**Subject:** Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) Round 3 (including Regional Mobile Black Spot opportunities) – approval of Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines for public consultation.

**Critical Date:** 14 December 2022 - to enable the draft Guidelines to be released for public consultation by 16 December 2022.

### Recommendations:

1. **Approve** the release of the Regional Connectivity Program - Round 3 (including Regional Mobile Black Spot opportunities) Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines at **Attachment A** for a public consultation period of around 8 weeks, noting that the consultation period will fall over the Christmas – New Year period.

Approved / Not Approved

2. **Agree** the draft Guidelines advise that funding of \$150 million (GST exclusive) will be available for Round 3, including indicative funding of \$22.5 million for improving telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities.

Agreed / Not Agreed

*M. Rowland*  
The Hon Michelle Rowland MP

Date: 14/12/22

### Comments:

*Dept to settle final changes with MO to ensure a consistent approach to a wide range of multi-carrier approaches & to resolve uncertainties for communities until NBN FTTP/FWA upgrade locations & schedule settled.*

### Key Issues:

1. We seek your approval to release the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) Round 3 (including Regional Mobile Black Spot opportunities) Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines at **Attachment A** for a public consultation period of around 8 weeks. Assuming the draft Guidelines are released in the week ending 16 December, the consultation period would close in the week ending 10 February 2023.
  - a. A consultation period of 8 weeks is proposed to reflect that the consultation will run over the Christmas-New Year industry shutdown and holiday period, which would otherwise limit the time most stakeholders have to review and provide feedback on the draft Guidelines.
2. Subject to your approval, the Department will make the draft Guidelines available for comment on the Department's website. The Department will also email relevant stakeholders to advise that the draft Guidelines are available for comment.

- a. Following the consultation process, we will refine the Guidelines if appropriate, then seek your approval of the final Guidelines and the commencement of the Round 3 application process.
3. Following the Deep Dive meeting with you on 24 November 2022 on the sequencing of regional communications programs, we have revised the RCP guidelines for Round 3 to include a Mobile Black Spot stream that encourages and preferences multi-carrier proposals.
4. The draft Guidelines note that Round 3 of the Program comprises two funding streams:
  - a. \$100 million Regional Connectivity Solutions stream for place-based solutions that deliver new or upgraded broadband services or upgraded mobile services (capacity increases); and
  - b. \$50 million stream for Mobile Coverage Solutions that deliver New Handheld Coverage to regional, rural and remote Australia (i.e. coverage not capacity solutions), with parties encouraged to work together to develop multi-Mobile Network Operator (MNO) solutions.
5. s47C [REDACTED] an indicative amount of \$30 million of the RCP funding would be allocated to projects in remote First Nations communities (notionally split between the two rounds of RCP). For consistency in the draft Guidelines, we have proposed a proportional amount for First Nations is also applied to the Mobile Coverage Solutions stream in this round. As such, the draft Guidelines propose that indicative funding of \$22.5 million (15 percent of funding) will be for projects in First Nations communities (that is, \$15 million and \$7.5 million for the respective streams).
6. An overview of key amendments to the draft Round 3 Guidelines from the RCP Round 3 Guidelines is provided at **Attachment B**.

#### **Financial impacts:**

7. Up to \$150 million (GST exclusive) in funding is allocated to Round 3 of the RCP competitive grant opportunity. Funding will be allocated under the *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* measure, announced in the October 2022 Budget, with \$100 million allocated from the \$200 million Regional Connectivity Program and \$50 million from the \$400 million program to expand regional mobile coverage and improve resilience.

#### **Stakeholder Implications:**

8. The Department does not anticipate any negative implications for stakeholders but some may seek an extension of time to provide feedback. s47C [REDACTED]
9. The counting of each individual coverage outcome from multi-provider solutions (i.e. each participating MNO's coverage outcomes are counted and then all outcomes added together), while also prioritising multi-provider solutions in the assessment process s47C [REDACTED] There is the opportunity to reconsider the range of measures following the consultation process (or alternatively changes could be made now if you wish).

#### **Consultation:**

10. The Department has consulted with the National Indigenous Australians Agency on the definition of First Nations communities and with the National Broadband Network Branch on the treatment of applications in the NBN Fixed Wireless network.
11. Subject to your approval, the Department will email relevant stakeholders to make them aware of the opportunity to comment on the draft Guidelines. A noticeboard will also be provided on the Department's website to facilitate linkages between infrastructure providers, telecommunications carriers and communities to identify potential RCP applications.



**Media Opportunities:**

12. A draft media release on the publication of the draft Guidelines for consultation will be provided separately to your office via the Media Team.

**Attachments:**

**Attachment A:** Draft Guidelines – Round 3 – Regional Connectivity Program

**Attachment B:** Overview of RCP Guideline changes from Round 2

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Date: 9 December 2022

Contact Officer: s22(1)(a)(ii)  
Section: Regional Connectivity  
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**Instructions for MPS:** Nil

**Responsible Adviser:** s22(1)(a)(ii)

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## Regional Connectivity Program – Round 3 DRAFT Guidelines

## Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (including Mobile Black Spot opportunities) Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines

<b>Opening date:</b>	xx xx xxxx
<b>Closing date and time:</b>	17.00 AEDT on xx xx 2023 (10 weeks after opening)
<b>Commonwealth policy entity:</b>	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
<b>Enquiries:</b>	<p>If you have any questions, please email us at <a href="mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au">regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au</a>.</p> <p>Questions should be sent no later than two weeks before close.</p>
<b>Date guidelines released:</b>	xx xx xxxx
<b>Type of grant opportunity:</b>	Targeted competitive



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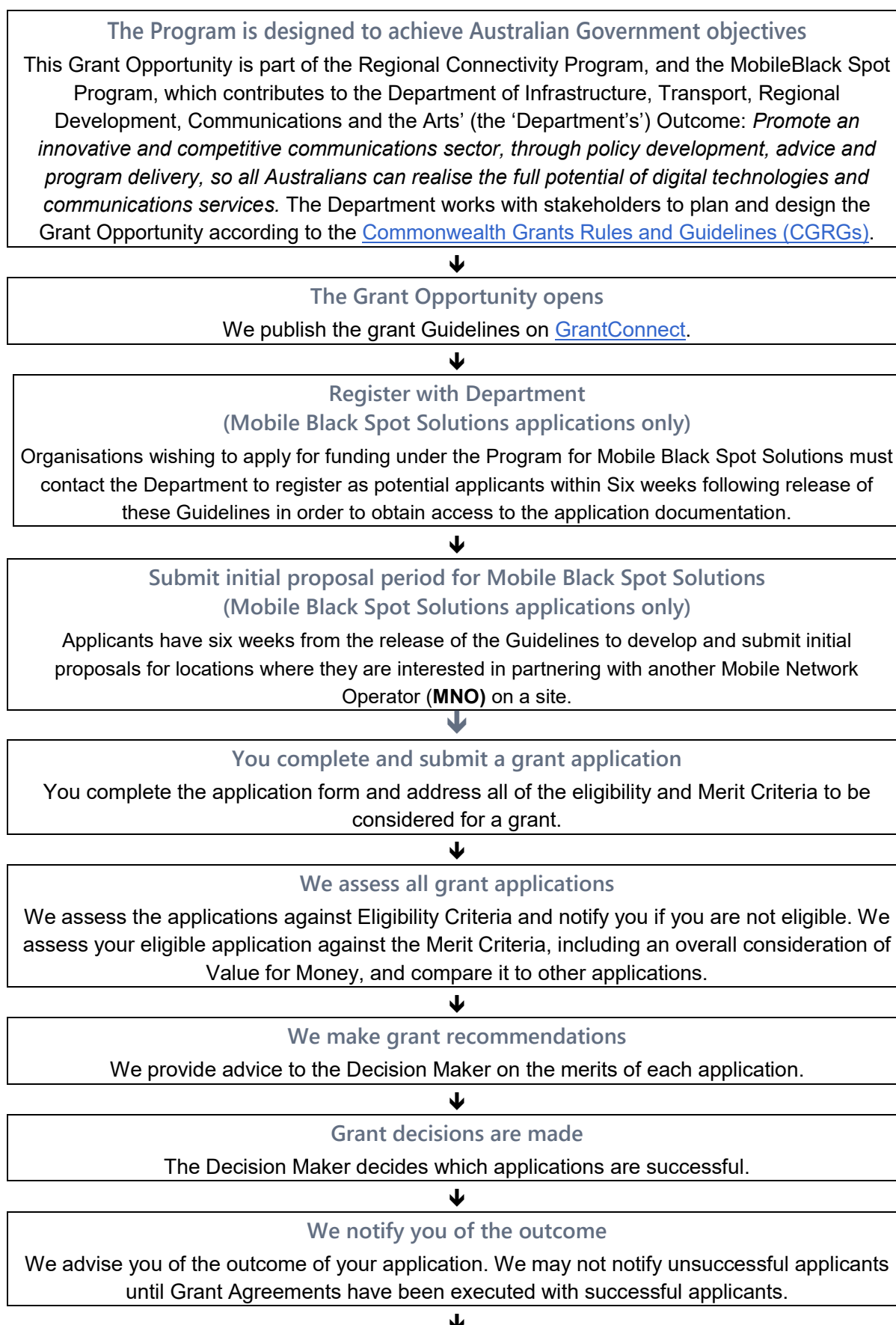
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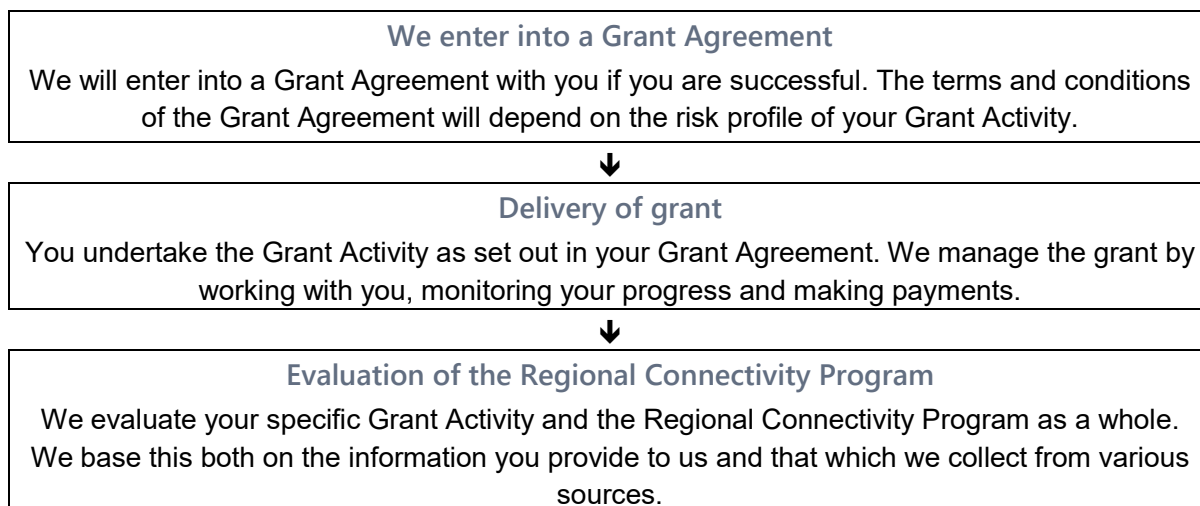
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# 1 Regional Connectivity Program: Round 3 processes





## 2 About the Program

These Grant Opportunity Guidelines ('Guidelines') contain information about Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program (including Regional Mobile Black Spot opportunities) ('Program') and the Program's Round 3 Grant Opportunity and set out:

- the purpose of the Program/Grant Opportunity
- the Eligibility Criteria and Merit Criteria
- how grant applications are considered and selected
- how Grantees are notified and receive grant payments
- how Grantees will be monitored and evaluated; and
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the Grant Opportunity.

**You must read these Guidelines before filling out an application.**

We have defined key terms used in these Guidelines in the [Glossary at section 22](#).

### 2.1 Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile coverage and protecting communities against natural disaster. The *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia*, announced in the October 2022 Budget will see more than \$1.1 billion delivered to communities across regional and rural Australia, including:

- \$400 million to expand regional mobile coverage and improve the resilience of communication systems;
- \$200 million for two further rounds of the *Regional Connectivity Program* to improve connectivity in regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- \$30 million over three years to accelerate Australia's agricultural sector through the *On Farm Connectivity Program*;
- \$20 million for an independent audit of mobile coverage to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities;
- a further \$6 million over three years to extend the Regional Tech Hub to support better consumer awareness and better information regarding digital services; and
- \$480 million already delivered to upgrade the NBN Fixed Wireless network, with associated benefits to NBN satellite services.

The Government's new funding commitment for the *Regional Connectivity Program* (the Program) builds on previous investment of \$230 million (GST exclusive) in Rounds 1 and 2 of the Program, which is generating a total investment of around \$413 million (GST exclusive) in 223



telecommunications projects in regional, rural and remote Australia. Further information on previous Program rounds is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/internet/regional-connectivity-program](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/internet/regional-connectivity-program).

Indicative funding of around \$30 million of the Government's \$200 million commitment towards further rounds of the Program will be set aside to improve telecommunications access in First Nations communities. This funding will assist progress towards Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to ensure First Nations people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.

The Better Connectivity Plan will deliver the funding for expanded regional mobile coverage through additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program. This includes the \$50 million for Mobile Black Spot Solutions available through this Regional Connectivity Program Round.

The Better Connectivity Plan mobile coverage commitment will build on the outcomes delivered under the first six rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, including funding for over 1,200 new mobile based stations across regional and remote Australia. Further information on previous rounds of the Mobile Black Spot is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbsp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbsp).

## 2.2 About Round 3

Round 3 of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- A \$100 million **Regional Connectivity Solutions** stream for place-based solutions that deliver new or upgraded broadband services or upgraded mobile services. It will enable bespoke telecommunications projects to be specifically tailored to the particular economic and/or social requirements of a region; and
- An additional \$50 million stream (allocated from the expanding regional mobile coverage component of the Better Connectivity Plan) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that deliver **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and remote Australia.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, applicants and **Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application development period to develop **multi-MNO solutions**.

Both streams will include dedicated funding for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities (see Section 3.1).

- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services will apply under the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** funding stream.
- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new mobile coverage will apply under the **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** funding stream.

Further information about the types of solutions that can be funded under each stream is provided at section 5.1.

Your application may include a combination of Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions or propose only Regional Connectivity Solutions or only Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

The objectives of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- use a place-based approach to target telecommunications infrastructure investment that will respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and First Nations communities; and
- expand mobile coverage in regional, rural, and First Nations communities.

The intended outcomes of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- Provide **place-based solutions** to regional digital connectivity issues through a range of new or improved broadband services and/or improved mobile services;
- Provide **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** to expand mobile coverage and competition across regional and rural Australia; and
- Complement the National Broadband Network, the NBN fixed wireless upgrade, and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

The Program's Round 3 Grant Opportunity will support projects that deliver new telecommunications infrastructure or the upgrade of existing telecommunications infrastructure to provide:

- economic and social benefits in regional, rural and First Nations areas; and / or
- **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and First Nations areas.

For Regional Connectivity Solutions, the Round 3 Grant Opportunity will focus on areas:

- of high economic and/or social value
- outside the NBN Fixed-line; and
- where better connectivity and increased data have a clear benefit to a local region.

The Australian Government has recently provided \$480 million (GST exclusive) to upgrade the NBN Fixed Wireless network. Consumers in the NBN fixed wireless footprint will benefit from access to increased download speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps). Fixed wireless coverage will also be expanded to cover a further 120,000 currently satellite-only premises.

For areas that NBN Co predominantly services with fixed wireless technologies, only projects that propose mobile voice and data, fixed-line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions, will be eligible for funding (see Section 5.2 below). For example, a fixed-wireless proposal in the NBN fixed wireless areas will not be eligible.

The opening and closing dates and any other relevant information will be published on the [Regional Connectivity Program](#)<sup>1</sup> webpage and [GrantConnect](#)<sup>2</sup>. Where there is any discrepancy between these two publications, GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

The Grant Opportunity will be administered according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#) (CGRGs)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Services and deliverables

The services to be delivered, as a result of the proposed projects, must be a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications solutions in the relevant area.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/internet/regional-connectivity-program>

<sup>2</sup> [www.grants.gov.au/](http://www.grants.gov.au/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines.pdf>



For broadband access technologies, a like-for-like technology where there is an existing Fixed Wireless service would only meet this requirement if the proponent can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the project would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed.

These service improvements may include, but are not limited to, upgrades to address seasonal congestion, backhaul capacity upgrades to improve quality of service or additional mobile towers in areas where there is existing but patchy coverage.

For services delivering **New Handheld Coverage**, the service will enable consumers to perform a range of functions using mobile devices, such as making and receiving phone calls, sending emails and text messages, browsing the internet, accessing online services, downloading files, using mobile apps, and accessing emergency communications services. To meet this expectation all proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- deliver at least 4G broadband data services and a voice service; and
- provide coverage modelling based on a New Handheld Coverage level with a Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP) at a 90 per cent confidence level for the cell area, as per the following table.

Table 1: RSRP Coverage Modelling Requirements

Coverage category	Channel bandwidth	Threshold (dBm)
Handheld	5	>-100
Handheld	10	>-103
Handheld	15	>-105
Handheld	20	>-106

### 2.2.2 Local community priority

During the application period, **applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with state, territory and local governments and local communities regarding the Proposed Solutions.**

These consultations should involve the identification of priority areas to be covered by the Proposed Solution. Priority areas may include specific roads, health or education facilities, industrial areas, community sites, high-value production areas, or areas with a demonstrable need for improved public safety (for example, where people are unable to call 000 because of limited coverage or lack of infrastructure).

To give effect to the place-based objective of the Program, **applicants will need to provide evidence that their Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution is a priority for the local community** (*This is not required for **Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, although any information provided will be considered in the value for money stage*).

A local priority project could be identified through a regional digital plan or similar strategy by local government or letters of support accompanying the grant application. This could be demonstrated by evidence of support from groups such as: state and territory governments; local government; Regional Development Australia committees; industry, business, and community groups; not-for-profits (registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and First Nations community organisations.

State, territory and local governments may own infrastructure in areas that could potentially be used for Funded Projects. These governments may have specific requirements in relation to the

use of their infrastructure that will need to be identified in the applications put forward by applicants for relevant Proposed Solutions.

### 2.2.3 Operational period

All Funded **Regional Connectivity Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of seven (7) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of ten (10) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

### 2.2.4 Application and selection process

Applicants may apply individually or jointly (as part of a consortium). Joint applications must be underpinned by commercially binding arrangements or a clear intention to enter into such arrangements, should the application be successful. Grants to joint applicants may be granted on the condition that the parties enter into a binding agreement, approved by the Department, prior to finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

Grant recipients will be selected by the Department through a competitive, merit-based Selection Process against Eligibility Criteria and Merit Criteria as set out in these Guidelines and a final value for money consideration. In applying for grants, applicants will outline their specific proposal, and demonstrate support from the local community. The most overt form of support will be financial co-contributions (such as contributions from state, territory or local governments or other third parties). **The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria and also demonstrate its claims against the merit criteria.**

Applicants seeking dedicated First Nations funding will need to demonstrate that its proposed solution will benefit a First Nations community. For the purposes of the Program, a First Nations community is defined as *a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents) by First Nations peoples, with housing or infrastructure (power, water, sewerage) that is managed on a community basis. First Nations communities have populations of (but not limited to) 50 or more First Nations people<sup>4</sup>.* Applicants are encouraged to consult with the local First Nations community and provide evidence of support for the project from that community (for example, through letters of support from First Nations community leaders).

For communities that don't meet this definition, applicants can still apply for the general funding through the Program.

## 3 Grant amount and grant period

### 3.1 Grants available

Round 3 of the Program has up to \$150 million (GST exclusive) of funding available, including:

- \$100 million for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$15 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities; and
- \$50 million for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$7.5 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that provide new mobile coverage in First Nations communities.

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<sup>4</sup> This definition is based on ABS Release — 2901.0 — Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016 – Discrete Community.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to extend the funding available for eligible projects to fund further meritorious projects.

The Project Period for Funded Projects will run from July 2023 to 30 June 2026. Grantees will also be required to provide retail services from the Funded Project for the Operational Period as identified in section 2.2.3 'Project Period' of these Guidelines.

In terms of the grant amount:

- There is no minimum grant amount
- There is no maximum grant amount, but total Round 3 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

All eligible applications under the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** stream will be grouped into three categories for both the overall Program merit list and the First Nations communities merit list, according to the amount of Program funding requested, to ensure that smaller projects are given due consideration during the assessment process. There is no minimum or maximum number of projects that the Government is seeking to fund in any category. The categories are:

- Category 1: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of less than \$300,000 (GST exclusive)
- Category 2: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of \$300,000 to \$2 million (GST exclusive)
- Category 3: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of greater than \$2 million (GST exclusive).

All eligible **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** will be grouped into a **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** merit list.

### 3.1.1 Financial co-contribution

To increase the reach of the Program, **applicants are encouraged to seek financial co-contributions (cash) toward each Proposed Solution from state, territory or local governments, local communities and/or other third parties.**

Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and negotiating contributions with any relevant third parties, and for testing and/or verifying any advice received from these third parties.

For Funded Projects that include a co-contribution from a state or territory government, the Department expects that Grantees will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth and a separate agreement with the respective state or territory government.

For Funded Projects that include co-contributions from other parties, the Grantee will bear any costs, and cover the other parties' funding if the other parties' funding is not secured following execution of the Grant Agreement between the Grantee and the Commonwealth.

For Proposed Solutions that include co-contributions from third parties, a copy of the terms of the third parties' commitment to the applicant is to be attached to the application for funding.

## 3.2 Project period

You must complete all of your Funded Projects by 30 June 2026. Grantees will be required to maintain the services for an Operational Period of:

- seven (7) years for Regional Connectivity Projects; and
- ten (10) years for Mobile Coverage Projects;



following the Date of Asset(s) Completion(s) for each Funded Project. If you consider that additional time is required to complete your project, please advise the Department in your application.

## 4 Eligibility criteria

We cannot consider your application if you do not satisfy all the Eligibility Criteria.

### 4.1 Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

For applicants applying for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)

And must be one of the following entity types, a:

- licensed telecommunications carrier under the *Telecommunications Act 1997*; or
- owner or intended owner of the Proposed Solution infrastructure who holds or intends to hold a Nominated Carrier Declaration (NCD) under the *Telecommunications Act 1997* in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded; or

For a joint (consortia) application:

- At least one organisation<sup>5</sup> must be a licensed telecommunications carrier or infrastructure owner who holds/intends to hold a NCD in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded. The licensed carrier or infrastructure owner (in the case a NCD applies) must be the entity that enters into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. However, such an application may be led by any of the following entity types:
  - Licensed carriers or infrastructure owner (in the case a NCD applies)
  - State and territory governments
  - Local government, local governing bodies, and regional development bodies
  - Industry, business, and community groups
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community-controlled organisations.

For applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)
- be one of the following entity types:
  - a national **Mobile Network Operator (MNO)**; or
  - a **Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)**.
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNO** means a company that:
  - Supplies a public mobile telecommunications service within the meaning of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (Cth); and
  - Holds an apparatus or a spectrum licence (or both) for the supply of public mobile telecommunications services under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* (Cth).
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNIP** means a company, other than an **MNO**, that provides communications infrastructure in Australia or overseas, including the installation and operation of infrastructure to be used by one or more national **MNOs** to provide public mobile telecommunications services.

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<sup>5</sup> The Australian Government recognises that some organisations may seek to form consortia in order to apply for a grant. Consortia are eligible to apply and the relevant conditions applicable to consortia are at [6](#) 'Joint (consortia) Applications'.

- **MNIP** applications must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from at least one national **MNO**, that offers national mobile coverage, to enter into a commercially binding commitment to use the infrastructure to deliver mobile services as described at section 2.2.1 for the Operational Period of the Proposed Solution. Funding may be awarded to eligible **MNIPs** on the condition that the **MNIP** and relevant national **MNO/s** enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

## 4.2 Multi-MNO, co-location and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, applicants and **MNOs**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application period to develop **multi-MNO solutions**. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and discussions with any relevant third parties.

If you put forward a Proposal for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** that offers services from more than one **MNO**, you may include in the Proposal the eligible expenditure, found at section 5.3, for all of the **MNOs** offer services from the solution. However, the Department will only enter into an agreement with you as the lead applicant if the Proposed Solution is successful. All payments including any components for the other participating parties will be made to the lead applicant only.

In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an **MNO** confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution**, each Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must offer co-location to other **MNOs**, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional **MNO** for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

**Co-locating MNOs** who are not included in the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as submitted in your application will be responsible for meeting their own expenses for co-locating.

The requirements for the **MNO** to offer co-locations to other **MNOs** not participating in the lead proposal are set out in **Attachment A**.

# 5 What the grant money can be used for

## 5.1 Eligible grant activities

Round 3 of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- the Regional Connectivity Solutions funding stream; and
- the Mobile Black Spot Solutions funding stream.

Solutions under the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** stream are limited to broadband connectivity solutions **and** mobile capacity improvement solutions in Eligible Areas.

Solutions under the **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** stream are limited to mobile infrastructure in Eligible Areas that extends the coverage of one or more **national MNO's** mobile network to an area without **Existing Handheld Coverage**.

To be eligible your Proposed Solution must:

- provide access to mobile or broadband services in Eligible Areas as set out in Section 5.2; and
- not have started construction or be part of the participating telecommunications provider's forward build network or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027;

- for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, include an auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours for macro cell solutions and, where technically feasible, for other funded solutions, in the event of the loss of external power to the site; and
- show evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for the relevant operational period at section 2.2.3.

In addition, your Proposed **Regional Connectivity Solutions** must:

- provide place-based telecommunications solutions to regional digital connectivity issues;
- deliver new infrastructure or the upgrade or improvement of existing infrastructure; and
- not overbuild a like-for-like service unless you can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the project would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability or speed.

Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- provide New Mobile Coverage to a location in regional, rural or remote Australia.

Your Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Regional Connectivity Solution** in your application. Similarly, your **Regional Connectivity Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** in your application.

## 5.2 Eligible locations

Your application can include projects at different locations, as long as they are all in Eligible Areas. Each Proposed Solution will be individually assessed according to the Merit Criteria. Part or all of the Asset may be located in an Ineligible Area provided it supports services in Eligible Areas. Eligible Areas are all parts of Australia that do not fall within one or more of these Ineligible Areas.

Ineligible Areas are:

- Urban Centres and Localities geographical units classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 'Major Urban', i.e. with a population of 100,000 or more<sup>6</sup>. The Department will provide map overlays showing Ineligible Areas on request.

In addition, for Regional Connectivity Solutions, Ineligible Areas also include::

- Areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with a Fixed-Line service. Information on NBN Co's rollout is available at [www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map](http://www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map).

For areas that NBN Co predominantly services with fixed wireless technologies, only projects that propose mobile voice and data, fixed-line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions will be eligible for funding. The existing indicative NBN Fixed Wireless footprint is available on the National Map at <https://nationalmap.gov.au/>. It is expected that the expansion of coverage following NBN Co's Fixed Wireless upgrade will be up to 29km from the existing footprint.

## 5.3 Eligible expenditure

You can only spend the grant on eligible expenditure you have incurred on an approved project as defined in your Grant Agreement.

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<sup>6</sup> Based on ABS Release — 1270.0.55.004 — Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 4 — Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2016.

Grant funding will be available for the capital costs of building or installing Funded Projects. This may include site acquisition and planning approval costs. Grantees will be responsible for any actual capital costs which exceed estimated costs.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, you may seek funding for up to 50% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded Mobile Black Spot Solutions, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Solution. Not all expenditure on your Funded Projects may be eligible for grant funding. The program delegate makes the final decision on what is eligible expenditure and may give additional guidance on eligible expenditure if required.

You must incur the expenditure on your Funded Project between the start date and completion date for your Grant Agreement for the expenditure to be eligible.

### 5.3.1 Eligible backhaul costs

For both Mobile Black Spot Solutions and Regional Connectivity Solutions, funding may be sought for the capitalised cost of Backhaul over the Operational Period of Funded Projects, regardless of Backhaul technology. For remote locations where existing fibre or microwave Backhaul (or a combination of both) is not available or readily accessible, satellite Backhaul technology may be utilised to deliver the Funded Project. If satellite Backhaul technology is put forward for a Proposed Solution, the applicant should clearly define the level of service or connectivity to be provided.

In addition to upfront capital costs related to the installation and deployment of Backhaul (such as special linkage charges), the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of operational costs relating to leased optical fibre, microwave, or satellite Backhaul over the minimum Operational Period of a solution may be included in the estimated asset capital cost of building the solution. These capitalised operational costs for Backhaul must be clearly identified separately in the application.

## 5.4 What the grant money cannot be used for

To ensure that applicants do not seek Program funding for Proposed Solutions in areas where they have already planned to invest commercially, all applicants must certify that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**:

- Operating and maintenance expenditure for Funded Projects is ineligible for grant funding.

The Department will not in any circumstances meet any costs or expenses incurred by an applicant in connection with their application. Applicants must bear their own costs and expenses associated with the application and assessment process, and the preparation, negotiation and execution of the Grant Agreement and of other documentation.

The Department may audit a Grantee's compliance with requirements.

## 6 Merit criteria

### 6.1 Assessment Criteria for Regional Connectivity Solutions

Applications will need to address the following criteria:



1. Merit Criterion one (economic benefits)
2. Merit Criterion two (social benefits)
3. Merit Criterion three (competition, capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project)
4. Merit Criterion four (financial co-contribution).

The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate how the Proposed Solution meets each merit criteria. Applicants should provide a response to each merit criteria, as well as evidence of support to reinforce the claims made in its responses. We will assess eligible applications against each Merit Criterion using the weighting indicated to develop an overall score. Each application will also undergo an overall Value for Money assessment to determine whether the Proposed Solution represents Value for Money to the Commonwealth.

The application form asks questions that relate to the Merit Criteria below. You should provide sufficient evidence to support your answers, including evidence of community support for any proposed economic and/or social benefits offered by your Proposed Solution (see section 6.1.1 and section 6.1.2 for more information) in response to the merit criteria. In addition, you should provide evidence that your project provides a demonstrable improvement in connectivity levels over existing telecommunications services in the proposed project area. The extent of this improvement will impact the assessment of the project's ability to deliver the economic and/or social benefits.

We encourage you to seek the support of the local government and/or state or territory government in preparing your application. For example, they may be able to assist you in identifying the expected outcomes of the project, particularly the economic and social benefits that would be available to the local community, if the project is funded.

## Merit Criterion 1 – Economic Benefit

### 6.1.1 Economic benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Economic benefits** for a region may cover increases in employment opportunities or economic activity, improvements in productivity, wider access to markets or fairer and more equitable economic outcomes. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to economic benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your project could demonstrate these economic benefits include:

- a. increasing the number or value of jobs, creating new businesses or efficiencies in the production of goods and services in the region beyond the construction phase (this includes direct and indirect opportunities created through the project)
- b. providing opportunities for growth in existing sectors, e.g. tourism, agriculture, manufacturing
- c. facilitating greater competition in telecommunication retail services
- d. whether the Proposed Solution provides an innovative approach to improve productivity, efficiency or addresses an identified problem; and/or
- e. evidence of the community/local intent to employ the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - i. State and territory governments
  - ii. Local government and regional development authorities
  - iii. Industry, business, and community groups
  - iv. Not-for-profits; or
  - v. First Nations community-controlled organisations.

## Merit Criteria 2 – Social Benefit

### 6.1.2 Social benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Social benefits** for a region may cover improving access to health and education services, improving public safety and improving regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to social benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your project could demonstrate these social benefits include:

- a. facilitating provision of more efficient and effective health or education services, including improved access to health or education resources in the home
- b. improving public safety and network resilience in a defined area. This may include the ability to call 000 from more locations, providing alternative technologies with which to do so, or improving the effectiveness, resilience or safety of Public Safety Premises
- c. improving retail competition, regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. This may include improving affordability, providing services that help to attract and retain a workforce or enhancing cultural heritage; and/or
- d. addressing disadvantage within the community. This may include addressing low digital inclusion, providing affordable services to places with entrenched disadvantage, or providing people who are excluded with improved opportunities to access support services.

## Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery

### 6.1.3 Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project (10 points)

You should demonstrate this through identifying:

- the maturity of the Proposed Solution and technology being adopted; including case studies of where the same or a similar solution has been implemented
- your access, or future access to, any necessary infrastructure, power or backhaul
- your track record delivering similar projects and access to personnel and/or partners with the right skills and experience
- evidence of a robust project plan for project delivery including implementation methodology, key personnel timeframes, budget and risk
- evidence of contingency planning that mitigates the risk of delays in getting the necessary approvals to commence work, particularly for greenfield and remote projects
- your readiness to commence the project including availability of key personnel, equipment and finance
- your capacity to deliver the project with respect to your organisation's broader program of work (including in the context any pipeline of works through Commonwealth and state or territory government programs such as MBSP and previous Program rounds); and
- how you will maintain the infrastructure and benefits of the project during the Operational Period, including the ability to manage expected increased data demands over the course of the Operational Period.

## Merit Criterion 4 – Financial Co-contributions

### 6.1.4 Total investment the grant funding will leverage (10 points)

You should demonstrate this through identifying the total investment the grant will leverage. Under this criterion, a higher level of contribution from other sources, comparative to the cost of the Proposed Solution, will help drive a higher score in the assessment process for this criterion.

## 6.2 Assessment Criteria for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that offer coverage outcomes from three **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than solutions that only offer service from two **MNOs**, all other things being equal. All solutions that offer services from two **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than solutions with a single **MNO**.

Solutions within these **MNO** groupings (i.e. three **MNO**, two **MNO** and single **MNO**) will be ranked using the **New Coverage Assessment Formula** to derive the cost to the Commonwealth per weighted square kilometre of **New Handheld Coverage**, and coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with another **MNO's** network.

Solutions with a lower cost per square kilometre will rank higher than solutions with a high cost per square kilometre.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)}}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

**Mobile Black Spot Solutions** located in Remote and Very Remote areas (based on the ABS remoteness structure)<sup>7</sup> will also be assessed against the **New Coverage Assessment Formula**, however, only 75 per cent of the cost to the Commonwealth will be used in the calculation for these solutions, as it is recognised that there is a higher cost to delivering mobile services in these areas.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** for Remote and Very Remote proposed solutions is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$) x 0.75}}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

The New Coverage Assessment Formula is based on the following components:

- a. **Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)** refers to the Commonwealth portion of the estimated Total Cost for the Proposed Solution (see section 5.3), including capitalised Operational Costs.
- b. **New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld mobile coverage where there is no **Existing Handheld Coverage**.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3 - Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2021

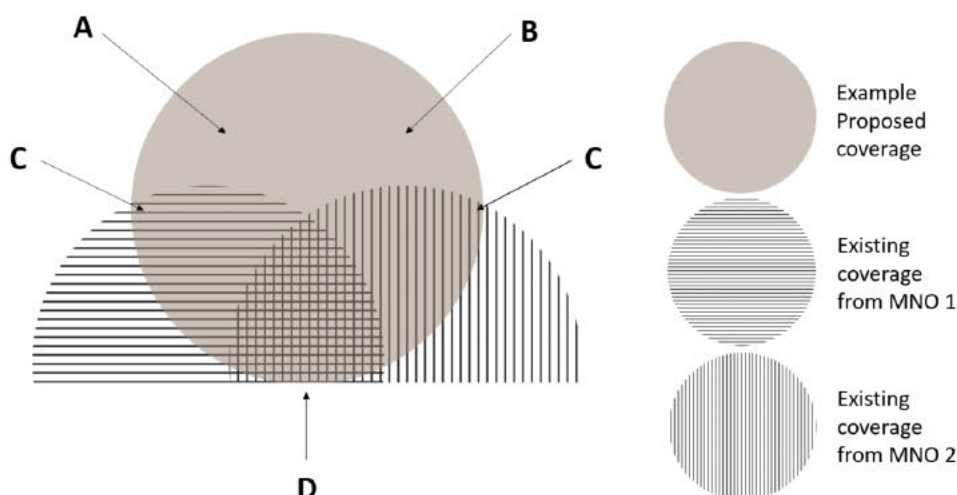
- Where a Proposed Solution provides **New Handheld Coverage** from more than one participating **MNO**, each participating **MNO's New Handheld Coverage** will be counted cumulatively, regardless of whether the **New Handheld Coverage** areas overlap.
  - This is in recognition of the benefits of multi-MNO solutions, and to ensure that these solutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to the higher costs that may be incurred for these solutions.
- c. **Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with **Existing Handheld Coverage** from another **MNO**, divided by a weighting factor of 2.
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement of a single **MNO**, overlapping coverage with the **MNO's** own existing network is not eligible for assessment.
  - For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement (e.g. co-location) of two or more **MNOs**, overlapping coverage that is new for at least one participating **MNO** is eligible for assessment, but counted only once. Coverage located in an area within the existing network of all participating **MNOs** will not be eligible for assessment.

**New Handheld Coverage** and Overlapping Coverage will be measured by comparing the 4G handheld coverage provided by the solution against existing 4G handheld coverage (including as-yet unbuilt base stations funded under other Commonwealth and/or state government programs), as per the **MNOs'** submitted coverage maps at the handheld coverage levels set out in section 2.2.1.

Table 2: Example assessment of New Handheld Coverage and Overlapping Coverage

<p>A Proposed Solution has confirmed participation of two MNOs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A. The solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 1, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.</li> <li>▪ B. The solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 2, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.</li> <li>▪ C. The solution provides 20km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage, but is new for at least one of the participating MNOs.</li> <li>▪ D. The solution provides 10km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage in the networks of both participating MNOs (not eligible for assessment).</li> </ul> <p>The assessed coverage for this solution is A+B+(C/2)</p> <p>Equalling: 30km<sup>2</sup> + 30km<sup>2</sup> + (20km<sup>2</sup> / 2) = 70km<sup>2</sup></p>
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A graphical representation of this example is below:



## 7 How to apply

Before applying, you must read and understand these Guidelines.

All application documents may be found at [GrantConnect](#). Any alterations and addenda<sup>8</sup> will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If you need further guidance around the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online, contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

To apply you must:

- complete the Grant Opportunity application form
- provide all information requested
- address all Eligibility Criteria
- provide responses to the Merit Criteria
- include all necessary attachments; and
- submit your application/s before the due date

Table 1: Expected timing for this grant opportunity

Activity	Timeframe
Guidelines released and applications open	xx xx 2023
Applicant registration and pre-application documentation for applicants applying for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by XXXX (6 weeks after opening)

<sup>8</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.



Activity	Timeframe
Submit initial proposal period for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by XXXX (6 weeks after opening)
Applications close	5pm AEDT xx xx 2023
Announcement on Round 3 Applications	
Commencement date of Grant Activity	From xxx 2023
End date of Grant Activity	30 June, 2026
End date of Asset Operational Period	7 years from asset completion for <b>Regional Connectivity Projects</b> 10 years from asset completion for <b>Mobile Coverage Projects</b>

### 7.1 Applicant registration (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Potential applicants who intend to propose **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must register their interest with the Department and sign and provide a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to being granted access to the Program documentation.

### 7.2 Pre-application lodgement (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Upon registering as a potential applicant, **MNOs** who intend to submit applications for funding, or are partnering with potential applicants, for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must first submit their existing handheld 4G coverage information, incorporating the coverage from base stations funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program, the Peri-Urban Mobile Program and the Regional Connectivity Program and any base station funded under a State or Territory program, regardless of the stage of construction.

**Existing Handheld Coverage** information required above must be submitted to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), Day Month Year. The Department may, at its absolute discretion, accept mobile coverage information submitted by **MNOs** after this date.

The **Existing Handheld Coverage** information required in accordance with this section must be supplied as two separate layers as follows:

- Handheld Coverage Maps: being a layer modelled to the Handheld Coverage levels as set out in section 2.2.1; and
- Existing Public Coverage Maps: being a layer representing the predictive handheld coverage modelling standards which underpin the publicly available coverage maps on the **MNO's** website.

For avoidance of doubt, the **Existing Public Coverage Maps** are requested for information purposes only. Assessment will only consider the **New Handheld Coverage Maps** (i.e. a "like-for-like" comparison).

Pre-application information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

### 7.3 Submit initial proposals for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should lodge any initial proposal locations where they are interested in partnering with another **MNO** on a site under the Program to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), **day month 2023**.

The registered applicants should provide this information using the “Initial Proposals” template provided in the Application Pack.

The Department will collate the lists of initial proposal locations and provide a consolidated list to all registered applicants. The consolidated list will include the following information for each initial proposal:

- an unique identifier;
- the location;
- type of base stations being considered (small cell / macro); and
- the proponent’s contact details.

The Department will also distribute a contact list of all pre-registered applicants to facilitate discussions regardless of whether a pre-registered applicant has identified potential partnering locations.

Applicants and other interested parties have until closing of the application period to discuss and plan co-development and co-funding opportunities at these sites prior to finalising applications.

The list of locations will be treated as Confidential Information by the registered applicants.

Initial proposal information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

### 7.4 Completing and lodging an application

Your application must provide:

- The location of the project and all Assets.
- Mapping data, where applicable, outlining the predictive coverage for the Proposed Solution.
- The total estimated capital cost of construction (GST inclusive).
- The amount of co-contribution (GST inclusive) being provided by the applicant.
- The amount of Commonwealth co-contribution sought under the Proposed Solution (GST Inclusive).
- The amount of any of co-contributions (GST Inclusive) to be received from all third parties, including but not limited to state, territory or local governments, local communities, or any combination of these, and any specific requirements or conditions tied to the co-contributions.
- Evidence of any co-contributions to be received from all third parties. For example, a letter of support from a suitably senior official from the relevant third party, which outlines the amount of co-contributions to be received and any conditions attached to the co-contributions. The department may ask for additional evidence of co-contributions if it considers the evidence you provide is unsatisfactory.
- Evidence of the extent to which the project meets the Merit Criteria.
- Whether the Proposed Solution is dependent on the construction of one or more of the applicants' other Proposed Solutions, including explaining the specific dependencies.

You must agree that the predictive coverage mapping data can be used by the Department to prepare promotional material for the Program or for policy development and advice as needed.

Applicants must indicate their ability to comply with the sample Grant Agreement (available on GrantConnect) at the time of submitting their applications.

As outlined in [section 5.4](#) of these Guidelines, applicants must warrant that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

You are responsible for ensuring that your application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information is a serious offence under the [Criminal Code 1995 \(Cth\)](#). We will investigate any false or misleading information and may exclude your application from further consideration.

If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact us immediately at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au). We may, at our sole discretion, accept additional information from you or a request to correct the error. However, we are under no obligation to accept any additional information or a request from you to correct your application after the closing time.

If we identify an error in your application, you may be contacted to correct or explain the error. However, we can refuse to accept any additional information from you that would change your application after the closing time.

You should keep a copy of your application and any supporting documents.

All applications lodged will be acknowledged by the Department by email. Applicants lodging an application who do not receive acknowledgement of their application should contact the Department. Applications which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. If you need further guidance about the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

Applications can be lodged by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au). Application files lodged by email must not exceed a combined size of 10 megabytes per email. Applications may also be lodged using GovTEAMS, the Australian Government's secure online document sharing and project management system. Potential applicants can be provided with information about lodging applications using GovTEAMS upon request to the Department. Potential applicants may also request to use alternative online secure document sharing systems by agreement with the Department.

You should advise the Department if you intend to lodge your application using GovTeams, or if you need to use an alternative electronic lodgement platform. You should do this **at least two weeks before the closing date** via email to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au). If you wish to change the electronic lodgement platform after notifying the Department, you should advise the Department of the change and the reasons why. The Department may, at its discretion, accept changes to the lodgement method.

All electronic files, regardless of transmission method, should be provided in an appropriate Microsoft compatible format (Microsoft Office 2007 or later or PDF files preferred): Geo-spatial information such as maps should be provided in either Mapinfo TAB or MID/MIF; ESRI Shape; GML; or KML format.

The Department may also accept applications via hard copy and/or physical electronic media, in addition to electronic applications.

Where physical electronic media is to be provided, such as a USB stick, the media must be PC-formatted. Applicants should include an index of all electronic documents on the physical electronic media.

Applications provided in hard copy and physical electronic media formats should be delivered via registered post or by hand prior to the closing date.

Applications via post are to be addressed and delivered to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
 GPO Box 594  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

Applications via hand delivery are to be addressed and delivered by the closing date to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
 2 Phillip Law Street  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

## 7.5 Attachments to application

We require the following documents to be included with your application:

- an estimated budget for the Proposed Solution
- evidence of a Funding Strategy, e.g. financial statements, loan agreements, cash flow documents
- accountant declaration that you are able to fund your share of the cost of the project (sample template provided on GrantConnect)
- evidence of commitment to financial co-contributions as detailed in [section 6.1.4](#) of these Guidelines
- certification of the application by a duly authorised representative of your organisation, for example a senior executive, director, or company secretary
- evidence to demonstrate your ability to successfully construct and operate the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of ability to deliver a retail service on the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for at least the operational period detailed in [section 2.2.1](#)
- for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, evidence of the local need for the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - State and territory governments
  - Local government and regional development authorities
  - Industry, business, and community groups
  - Not-for-profits
  - First Nations community controlled organisations; and
- other evidence, as necessary to support your claims against the Merit Criteria.
- Predictive coverage mapping data for each Proposed Solution.

You must attach supporting documentation to the application form in line with the instructions provided within the form.

## 7.6 Joint (consortia) applications

We recognise that some organisations may want to join together as a group to deliver a Proposed Solution.

In these circumstances, you must appoint a 'lead organisation'. Only the lead organisation can submit the application form, but the lead organisation will not necessarily be the entity entering into



any agreement with the Commonwealth (refer to [section 4.1](#) of these Guidelines). The application must identify all other members of the proposed group, their role in the project and include a letter of support from each of the partners.

Each letter of support should include:

- details of the partner organisation
- an overview of how the partner organisation will work with the lead organisation, including financial co-contributions and any other partner organisations in the group to successfully complete the Proposed Solution
- an outline of the relevant experience and/or expertise the partner organisation will bring to the group
- the roles/responsibilities of the partner organisation and the resources they will contribute (if any); and
- details of a nominated management level contact officer.

You must have a formal arrangement in place with all partner organisations prior to execution of the Grant Agreement.

## **7.7 Closing date for funding applications**

The closing date for submitting an application for funding under this Grant Opportunity is 5pm (Canberra Time) on day/month/2023.

## **7.8 Timing of Grant Opportunity processes**

You must submit an application between the published opening and closing dates. The Department reserves the right to, in exceptional circumstances, accept a late application to the assessment process at its discretion. Without limiting the Department's discretion, exceptional circumstances may include natural disasters or unforeseen technical issues with application forms or lodgement systems. Any decision by the Department on whether or not to accept a late application to the assessment process shall be final.

If you believe there are circumstances which will affect the timely submission of your application, you must contact us before the application closing date to negotiate an alternative submission due date.

## **7.9 Questions during application process**

All requests for clarification or determination of the meaning of provisions in these Guidelines should be referred to the Department by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au). The Department's written decision on the matter is final.

We will acknowledge and address emailed questions as soon as practicable. Answers to questions will be posted on GrantConnect as Frequently Asked Questions.

# **8 The grant selection process**

## **8.1 Assessment of grant applications**

We will consider eligible applications through a targeted competitive grant process.

The assessment process for the program will be as follows:

1. initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria
2. detailed assessment against Merit Criteria



3. Value for Money assessment and consideration of whether the project supports a Government priority as outlined in [section 8.2](#)
4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.

As part of the Value for Money assessment we will group all eligible solutions by funding stream and for Regional Connectivity Solutions into the funding categories described in [section 3.1](#) to ensure we compare projects of similar size against each other.

There is no separate application process or eligibility criteria to receive dedicated funding for projects in First Nations communities. We will consider eligible First Nations applications, as defined in [section 2.3.5](#) of these Guidelines, under a separate merit list. Eligible First Nations solutions that are not successful in gaining dedicated First Nations projects funding through the First Nations merit list will be considered under the broader Round 3 merit list.

We may seek advice regarding your Proposed Solution from state or territory government agencies, other Australian Government agencies, independent experts and other external parties. This advice may be taken into consideration when assessing the Proposed Solution.

Where the level of information provided in an application is not sufficient for the assessors to make a recommendation they may, but are not obliged to, seek more information from the applicant so long as it does not change the substance of the application. If the assessment process identifies unintentional errors in your application, we may contact you to correct or clarify the errors, but you cannot make any material alteration or addition. It is therefore recommended that you thoroughly address the criteria in your application.

An evaluation committee may seek additional information about your application. They may do this from within the Commonwealth, even if the sources are not nominated by you as referees. The evaluation committee may also consider information about you or your application that is available through the normal course of business.

## 8.2 Value for Money and government priorities

In addition to the merit criteria assessment, an assessment will also be undertaken to consider which of the Proposed Solutions represent the best Value for Money to the Commonwealth and whether they support a government priority. This is to ensure the grant will add value by achieving Program benefits that would not occur without the grant. This assessment will have regard to the overall Program and Grant Opportunity objectives.

Factors that may be considered in the Value for Money assessment include, but are not limited to the:

- cost to the Commonwealth of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which the proposal would contribute to the Program objectives, including addressing an identified local priority or government priority
- for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, the degree to which the solution delivers **multi-MNO** outcomes
- extent to which the proposal will build on investments (aimed at delivering social and economic benefits) already made or planned for the proposed project location
- extent of existing or planned commercial activity/investment that will impact on telecommunications services and the level of connectivity in the proposed project location
- extent to which the proposed project presents a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications services in the proposed project location
- extent to which proposed projects provide overlapping coverage in a given area, and the appropriateness of each solution to local needs
- extent to which the project leverages additional partnerships and in-kind contributions

- ability to meet the needs of end users over the Operational Period
- forecast benefits of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which there is an appropriate spread of project types and Eligible Areas.

Based on the overarching Value for Money assessment, the Department reserves the right to recommend funding one or more Proposed Solutions, which were lower ranked against the Merit Criteria than other eligible Proposed Solutions. This could include lower ranked Proposed Solutions from First Nations communities in recognition of the dedicated funding available for First Nations projects. The Department also reserves the right to recommend not funding one or more Proposed Solutions, which are highly ranked against the Merit Criteria based on the Value for Money assessment.

### **8.3 Who will assess applications?**

The evaluation committee will assess each application on its merits and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which Proposed Solutions should be awarded a grant.

We may ask external advisors to inform the assessment process. Any advisor who is not a Commonwealth Official will be required to perform their duties in accordance with the CGRGs.

The evaluation committee recommends to the Decision Maker which applications to approve for a grant.

### **8.4 Who will approve grants?**

The Minister for Communications (the Decision Maker) decides which grants to approve, taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation committee and the availability of grant funds for the purposes of the Grant Opportunity. The Decision Maker may also consider whether a Proposed Solution supports other Australian government priorities.

The Minister's decision is final in all matters, including the:

- approval of applications for funding
- amount of grant funding awarded; and
- terms and conditions of funding.

There is no appeal mechanism for decisions to approve or not approve a grant. An applicant who is dissatisfied with the outcome may contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman as set out in [section 15](#).

## **9 Notification of application outcomes**

We will advise you of the outcome of your application in writing. If you are successful, we will advise you of any specific conditions attached to the grant.

### **9.1 Feedback on your application**

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a grant, you may ask for feedback within 28 days of being advised of the outcome. We will give written feedback within one month of your request.

## **10 Successful grant applications**

### **10.1 The Grant Agreement**

Each Grantee will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. Each Grant Agreement will set out the Grantee's obligations in respect of the roll-out and service terms for each Funded Project. A sample Grant Agreement will be available shortly after the opening of

the application round. Applicants requesting any changes to the sample Grant Agreement should provide full details of the proposed changes in their application, for consideration by the Department.

The Program's Round 1 and 2 grant recipients may request to use their executed grant agreement from Round 1 or Round 2 as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement. The decision on whether to use the executed grant agreement from the Program's Round 1 or 2 as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement is at the ultimate discretion of the Commonwealth.

We must execute a Grant Agreement with you before we can make any payments to you. We are not responsible for any of your expenditure until a Grant Agreement is executed. You should not start any activities relating to Funded Project until a Grant Agreement is executed. Each successful applicant must enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth prior to the Government's announcement of successful locations and Grantees.

The Commonwealth expects Grant Agreement terms to be reached with a successful Grantee within 60 Business days of the proposed Grantee being advised in writing that the Commonwealth is prepared to financially support the Proposed Solutions/s. If terms have not been agreed within 60 Business days, and without limiting any other rights or discretions, the Commonwealth reserves to the right not to proceed with a Grant Agreement for the Proposed Solution.

### **10.1.1 Standard Grant Agreement**

We will use a standard Grant Agreement for the Program's projects. A sample Grant Agreement will be available shortly after the opening of the application round.

## **10.2 Amendment to these Guidelines**

The Government reserves the right to terminate or vary the program (including via variation of these Guidelines) at its discretion, at any time, for any reason, including without limitation, in the light of changes to Government policy.

Any alterations and addenda<sup>9</sup> to the Program will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment prior to the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department, potential applicants will be advised of the revised or new Guidelines in a timely manner, including any resultant extension that may be applied to the application period.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment following the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department (for example, if the applications received do not achieve the Program objectives), the revised or new Guidelines will set out details of the changes, and all existing applicants will be notified of arrangements impacting existing applications.

An organisation submitting an application acknowledges that neither these Guidelines, nor any application, give rise to a binding agreement or any other binding legal arrangement or legal relationship between the applicant and the Commonwealth. There is no binding agreement on any party until a Grant Agreement is executed by the Commonwealth and the Grantee.

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<sup>9</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

## 11 Specific legislation, policies and industry standards

Whilst you are required to be compliant with all laws and regulations, you may be requested to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation, policies or industry standards. For example, you may be requested to demonstrate your compliance with health, safety or security related legislation, policies or industry standards that are in any way applicable to the project.

### 11.1 Australian Industry Participation (AIP) Plan

Grant applicants should note that for funding of \$20 million or more, subject to advice from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, the Australian Industry Participation National Framework principles, including an AIP plan requirement, may apply to the grant agreement(s). More information on AIP plan requirements can be found at [www.industry.gov.au/aip](http://www.industry.gov.au/aip).

### 11.2 WHS Accreditation Scheme

Building work undertaken as part of the project/s funded under this agreement may be covered by the Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme (WHS Accreditation Scheme). The WHS Accreditation Scheme is established under the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Act 2016* and specified in the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) (Accreditation Scheme) Rules 2019*.

The WHS Accreditation Scheme applies to building work that is indirectly funded by the Commonwealth or a corporate Commonwealth entity if it is carried out under a contract with a value of \$4 million or more (GST inclusive) and the contribution made to the funding of the project that includes the building work by the Commonwealth or corporate Commonwealth entity is at least:

- \$6,000,000 (GST inclusive) and represents at least 50% of the total funding; or
- \$10,000,000 (GST inclusive).

A successful applicant who is the builder must comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation and successful applicants who will be engaging builders to undertake the building work must require builders to comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation.

### 11.3 Building Code

Building work undertaken as part of the project/s funded under this agreement may be covered by the Code for the Tendering and Performance of Building Work Amendment Instrument 2020 (Building Code). The Building Code is established under the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Act 2016*.

The Building Code applies to building work that is indirectly funded by the Commonwealth by a grant or other program in circumstances in which funding for the building work is an explicit component of the grant or program; and:

- the value of the Commonwealth's contribution to the project that includes the building work is at least \$5,000,000 and represents at least 50% of the total construction project value; or
- the Commonwealth's contribution to the project that includes the building work is at least \$10,000,000 (irrespective of its proportion of the total construction project value).

A successful applicant who is the builder must comply with all conditions of Building Code accreditation and successful applicants who will be engaging builders to undertake the building work must require builders to comply with all conditions of Building Code accreditation.

## 11.4 How we pay the grant

The Grant Agreement will state:

- the maximum grant amount to be paid
- the proportion of eligible expenditure covered by the grant
- any financial contributions provided by you or a third party
- any in-kind contributions you will make; and
- any other requirements.

We will not exceed the maximum grant amount under any circumstances. If you incur extra costs, you must meet them yourself.

We may make an initial payment on execution of the Grant Agreement. We will make subsequent payments as you achieve Asset completion demonstrated by a satisfactory report, based on your actual eligible expenditure. These payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the project.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, an upfront operational expense payment will be made once the operational period has commenced.

## 11.5 Maintaining project benefits

In your Grant Agreement, you will be required to commit to operate your project infrastructure and deliver project benefits over the Operational Period. You may be required to report on the ongoing benefits delivered by the Funded Project.

## 11.6 Grants payments and GST

Payments will be made as set out in the Grant Agreement.

# 12 Announcement of grants

If successful, your grant will be listed on the GrantConnect website 21 calendar days after the date of effect as required by Section 5.3 of the [CGRGs](#).

# 13 How we monitor your grant activity

## 13.1 Keeping us informed

You should let us know if anything is likely to affect your project or organisation.

We need to know of any key changes to your organisation or its business activities which may affect your ability to complete your project, carry on business and pay debts due.

You must also inform us of any changes to your:

- name
- addresses
- nominated contact details; and
- bank account details.

If you become aware of a breach of terms and conditions under the Grant Agreement, you must contact us immediately.

You must notify us of events relating to your grant and provide an opportunity for the Minister or their representative to attend.



## **13.2 Reporting**

You must submit reports in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will expect you to report on such matters as:

- progress against agreed activity and outcomes
- contributions of participants directly related to the project including scheduled co-contributions (if any); and
- expenditure of the grant.

The amount of detail you provide in your reports should be relative to the project size, complexity and grant amount.

We will monitor progress by assessing reports you submit and may conduct site visits or request records to confirm details of your reports if necessary. Occasionally we may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments. We may also inspect the records you are required to keep under the Grant Agreement.

## **13.3 Asset completion report**

For each completed Asset, you must submit an asset completion report as specified in the Grant Agreement.

## **13.4 Financial declaration or audited financial acquittal report**

We will ask you to provide a declaration that the grant money was spent in accordance with the Grant Agreement and to report on any underspends of the grant money. We may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments.

## **13.5 Independent audit report**

The Department may request an independently audited financial report for your project at your expense. The financial audit report will verify that you spent the grant in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will assess the report and may re-examine your claims or conduct site visits if necessary.

## **13.6 Compliance visits**

The Department (including entities acting on our behalf) may visit you during the development and construction of your project, or at the completion of your project to review your compliance with the Grant Agreement. We may also inspect the records you are required to keep under the Grant Agreement. For large or complex projects, we may visit you after you finish your project. We will provide you with reasonable notice of any compliance visit.

## **13.7 Evaluation**

We will evaluate the Grant Opportunity to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from your application and reports for this purpose. We may also interview you, or ask you for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted you and to evaluate how effective the Program was in achieving its outcomes. Grantees may be required to participate in Program reviews and evaluations.

We may contact you up to one year after the Date of Asset Completion for each Funded Project for more information to assist with this evaluation.

## 13.8 Acknowledgement

The Program logo should be used on all materials related to grants under the Program. Whenever the logo is used, the publication must also acknowledge the Commonwealth as follows:

‘Regional Connectivity Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Regional Connectivity Solutions and ‘Mobile Black Spot Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

If you make a public statement about a project funded under the Program, we require you to acknowledge the grant by using the following:

‘This project received grant funding from the Australian Government.’

## 14 Probity

The Australian Government will make sure that the Grant Opportunity process is fair, conducted according to these Guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct, and is consistent with the CGRGs.

External advisors may also be asked to inform the assessment and evaluation process. All external advisors must comply with the CGRGs.

## 15 Enquiries and feedback

The Department’s [Client Service Charter](#) applies to complaints about this Grant Opportunity. All complaints about a grant process must be provided in writing.

Any questions you have about grant decisions for this Grant Opportunity should be sent to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

If you do not agree with the way the Department has handled your complaint, you may complain to the [Commonwealth Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman will not usually look into a complaint unless the matter has first been raised directly with the Department.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on:

Phone (Toll free): 1300 362 072  
Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)  
Website: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

## 16 Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the Grant Opportunity or Program. There may be a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, if Department staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or you or any of your personnel has a:

- Professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the application Selection Process, such as an Australian Government officer or external advisor;
- Relationship with or interest in an organisation that is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently; or
- Relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain because the organisation receives a grant under the Grant Opportunity.

You will be asked to declare, as part of your application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interests or that, to the best of your knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If you later identify an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest, you must inform the Department in writing immediately.

Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Australian [Public Service Code of Conduct \(Section 13\(7\)\)](#) of the [Public Service Act 1999](#). Committee members and other officials including the decision maker must also declare any conflicts of interest.

## 17 Privacy

We treat your personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#). This includes letting you know:

- what personal information we collect
- why we collect your personal information; and
- who we give your personal information to.

Your personal information can only be disclosed to someone else for the primary purpose for which it was collected, unless an exemption applies under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

The Australian Government may use and disclose information about grant applicants and grant recipients under this Grant Opportunity. This includes disclosing grant information on GrantConnect as required for reporting purposes and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.

We may share the information you give us with other Commonwealth entities for purposes including government administration, research or service delivery, according to Australian laws.

As part of your application, you declare your ability to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Australian Privacy Principles and impose the same privacy obligations on officers, employees, agents and subcontractors that you engage to assist with the eligible Grant Activity, in respect of personal information you collect, use, store, or disclose in connection with the Grant Activity. Accordingly, you must not do anything which if done by the Department would breach an [Australian Privacy Principle](#) as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988*.

For further information about our privacy obligations (including in relation to how to access or correct personal information or make a complaint) and our contact details for privacy matters, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

## 18 Confidential Information

The Department will treat the applicant's commercially sensitive information provided in the applicant's application as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information (Applicant Confidential Information).

The Department's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Applicant Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed
- disclosed by the Department to its advisers, officers, employees, or other agencies' officers or employees, for the purpose of evaluating the applicant's application and during any Grant Agreement negotiations
- disclosed by the Department in response to a request by a house or a committee of the Parliament of Australia, or a house or a committee of the Parliament of a state or territory
- disclosed by the Department to its responsible Minister or the Auditor-General

- shared by the Commonwealth within the Commonwealth's entity (for example, another Commonwealth agency), where this serves the Commonwealth's legitimate interests
- disclosed to the Department's officers to enable the effective management or auditing of the Program; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the Department's confidentiality obligation.

The applicant will treat any information provided by the Department as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information. (Commonwealth Confidential Information).

The applicant's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Commonwealth Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the applicant's confidentiality obligation.

The Department may share with state or territory governments (on a confidential basis) any or all information contained in applications which it considers relevant to the respective jurisdiction based on the location of the Proposed Solution(s), including costings for Proposed Solutions that are not successful in receiving funding through the Program, subject to agreement on confidentiality with applicants.

## 19 Intellectual property rights

By submitting an application under the Program, to the extent the applicant's application contains:

- its Intellectual Property; or
- a third party's Intellectual Property,

the applicant grants (or will procure for) the Commonwealth a permanent, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide, non-exclusive licence (including a right of sublicense) to use, reproduce, adapt, and communicate the applicant's Intellectual Property contained in its application under the Program provided the use, reproduction, adaptation, or communication is in connection with any assessment processes under, or the evaluation of, the Program.

Any licence granted to the Commonwealth in relation to Intellectual Property rights does not include a right to exploit the Intellectual Property for commercial purposes.

## 20 Freedom of information

All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#) (FOI Act).

The purpose of the FOI Act is to give members of the public rights of access to information held by the Australian Government and its entities. Under the FOI Act, members of the public can seek access to documents held by the Australian Government. This right of access is limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary to protect essential public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

All Freedom of Information requests must be referred to the Freedom of Information Coordinator in writing.

By mail: Freedom of Information Coordinator  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications  
and the Arts

GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: <mailto:FOI@infrastructure.gov.au>

## 21 Consultation

These Guidelines are informed by the submissions received as part of consultation on the draft Guidelines.

## 22 Glossary

Term	Definition
4G	Fourth generation mobile telecommunications service.
5G	Fifth generation mobile telecommunications service.
Asset	The component of telecommunications infrastructure to be constructed or upgraded at (or in connection to) a site through the Program.
Date of Asset Completion	The date on which the Grantee has delivered the contracted service for a particular Asset.
Backhaul	A link between the core or backbone of a network and sub-networks, transporting data from a series of disparate locations to a more centralised location.
<a href="#">Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines or CGRGs</a>	Guidelines issued by the Finance Minister under section 105C of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> , which establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration.
Commonwealth Official	A Commonwealth representative who is working or consulting on the Program.
Decision Maker	As set out in <a href="#">section 8.4</a> , the Minister for Communications.
Eligible Area	As described in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Eligibility Criteria	The mandatory criteria set out in <a href="#">section 4</a> which applicants must meet in order for their application for the Grant Opportunity to be considered.



Term	Definition
Existing Handheld Coverage	<p>Coverage able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device within the applicant's mobile network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>that is currently available;</li> <li>that will be provided by any base station that will be delivered by the applicant under a round of the Mobile Black Spot Program, Peri-Urban Mobile Program or other Commonwealth grant program; or</li> </ul> <p>that will be provided by any applicant base station funded under a State or Territory program.</p>
Fixed-line	A type of internet connection that uses a physical line (including but not limited to fibre, Hybrid Fibre-Coaxial and copper) to provide services to a premises.
Fixed Wireless	A type of internet connection that uses fixed transmission towers or base stations to provide wireless services to a premises via antennas.
Funded Project	A telecommunications infrastructure project found suitable during the assessment process and selected for funding under Round 3 of the Program.
Funding Strategy	A written plan that outlines the financial capacity of the applicant to deliver a Proposed Solution through the Program.
Grant Activity	All the projects that the Grantee is required to undertake as set out in the Grant Agreement.
Grant Agreement	A document with contractual effect that sets out the relationship between the Grantee and the Commonwealth, and specifies the details of the grant.
<a href="#">GrantConnect</a>	The Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CGRGs.
Grant Opportunity	The Program Grant Opportunity as described in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Grantee	An applicant who has been selected to receive a grant under the Grant Opportunity.
Guidelines	These Regional Connectivity Grant Opportunity Guidelines.
Ineligible Areas	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .

Term	Definition
Intellectual Property	Includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts);</li> <li>2. all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and</li> <li>3. all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.</li> </ol>
Macrocell	The widest range of cell sizes used in a mobile phone network served by a mobile base station, often used in rural areas and along highways. Macrocells generally provide larger coverage than small cell base stations or microcells, with a typical power output of tens of watts.
Merit Criteria	The specified principles or standards set out in <a href="#">section 6</a> , against which applications will be judged. The Merit Criteria will be used to assess the merits of proposals and to determine application rankings.
Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve and extend mobile coverage in regional, rural and remote Australia.
Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
National Broadband Network (NBN)	The national wholesale-only, open access telecommunications network that is being built by, or in conjunction with, NBN Co (including any existing network incorporated into the NBN).
New Handheld Coverage	Coverage Proposed Solution that will be able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device in areas that do not receive Existing Handheld Coverage, in accordance with the meaning given in section 2.2.1.
Operational Period	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 3.2</a> .
Operational Costs (OPEX)	Costs for additional goods or services that are purchased for the ongoing operation of an asset.
Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve mobile coverage and capacity in peri-urban fringe areas at risk of bushfire and natural disaster.
Program	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2</a> .
Proposed Solution	Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.
Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Mobile Black Spot Solutions funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Regional Connectivity Solutions funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .



Term	Definition
Public Safety Premises	Places including emergency services facilities (i.e. including ambulance and Rural Fire Service (RFS) depots, hospitals, police facilities, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and related facilities (which may include airstrips).
Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP)	The 4G received signal power in a long-term evolution (LTE) network measured in decibels per milliwatt (dBm).
Selection Process	The method used to select Grantees, which will include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria;</li> <li>2. a detailed assessment against Merit Criteria;</li> <li>3. a Value for Money assessment and consideration of other government priorities; and</li> <li>4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.</li> </ol>
Small Cell	A 'small cell' in a mobile phone network, with a typical range less than two kilometres. Often used to add network capacity in areas of dense population or very remote locations, utilising power control to limit coverage area. These are also known as microcells.
Value for Money	Refers to achieving 'value with relevant money' which is a judgement based on the grant proposal representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public resources and determined from a variety of considerations in accordance with the CGRGs. When administering a grant opportunity, a Commonwealth Official should consider the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each proposal including, but not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the quality of the project proposal and activities;</li> <li>b. fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to Government objectives;</li> <li>c. that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the applicant's and the Government's objectives being achieved; and</li> <li>d. the applicant's relevant experience and performance history.</li> </ol>
We/us	The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts/or Commonwealth Officials administering the Program.

## Attachment A

### A1. Co-location and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an MNO confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed Solution, each Proposed Solution must offer co-location to other MNOs, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

If a Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO other than those already participating or is not capable of supporting co-location, applicants must provide a detailed explanation of why it is not technically feasible to reconfigure the Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution to support an additional MNO at incremental cost to the Co-locating MNO, or why it is not otherwise possible to offer co-location at the site. The Department's technical advisor may review any technical advice from the applicant. If the Department's view is that co-location is technically possible, then the applicant must be prepared to offer co-location at incremental cost to an MNO seeking to co-locate on the Proposed Solution, or the Department may remove the Proposed Solution from the assessment process.

Once an applicant is selected to build a Proposed Solution, it must give any other MNO(s) not already participating in the solution the opportunity to co-locate and to participate in the detailed design phase for that Funded Solution using the process set out in this paragraph.

- The incremental cost for a Funded Solution to support an additional MNO will be provided to the other participating MNOs to allow for greater transparency in co-location negotiations.
- For Funded Solutions where other MNOs are interested in co-locating, the costs can be shared more broadly and efficiencies achieved if the interested MNOs can participate in the design and build phases, which should ensure that their reasonable specifications are accommodated in the design and construction of the Funded Solution. This opportunity relates to all the requirements necessary for co-location to efficiently occur, including (but not limited to) the height and robustness of the Funded Solution, as well as site space for housing equipment and providing access to power and Backhaul.
- The Government is supportive of Grantees offering other MNOs the opportunity to co-invest in Funded Solutions including (but not limited to) provision of Backhaul.

For the purpose of providing the incremental cost of supporting an additional MNO, a Funded Solution must meet the following minimum specifications to be considered capable of supporting two or three MNOs:

- The structure is based on one of the following configurations:

Table 2: Minimum specification configurations for co-location of multiple MNOs

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
3 x 1 panel antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2533mm (h) x 353mm (w) x 209mm (d), Weight 32kg); or equivalent load	3 x 6 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2680mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 146mm (d), Weight: 39.5kg)	3 x 10 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2688mm (h) x 349mm (w) x 166mm (d), Weight 36.5kg)

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
3 x Tower Mounted Amplifiers Dimensions: (457mm (h) x 275mm (w) x 208mm (d), Weight 25kg); or equivalent load	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 150mm (d), Weight 20kg)	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 100mm (d), Weight 13.5kg)
6 x feeders + 300mm cable gantry for monopole structure type sites	6 x combiners (Dimensions: 330mm (h) x 200mm (w) x 130mm (d), Weight 3.2kg)	2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load
2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load	2 x 600mm transmission dishes; or equivalent load	
	Other DC Cables and Junction Boxes	

- There is sufficient mains AC power provision to support the requirements of additional MNO equipment. This requirement does not apply to solar powered sites, however, solar powered sites must have sufficient space for the additional MNO(s) to install additional solar panels.
- There is a communications hut of sufficient size (or space available on the site for further huts) to accommodate additional MNO equipment.
- For macrocell solutions, the Grantee must ensure sufficient space is available to allow any participating MNOs to install auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power in the event of the loss of external power to the site up to the Program's minimum 12 hours standard.

MNOs interested in co-locating on a Funded Solution (i.e. the MNO expresses an interest in co-locating on Funded Solutions after funding has been awarded) will be required to express interest prior to the start of the detailed design stage for that Funded Solution. All parties will be required to negotiate in good faith with each other in relation to the Funded Solution access and price terms, and enter into commercial arrangements. The capital contribution to be made by the co-locating parties in respect of a Funded Solution must, at least, equal the incremental cost incurred by reason of provisioning co-location for that Funded Solution.

In accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined at section A3, any disagreements regarding co-location matters will be determined by an independent third party, to be appointed at the MNOs'/MNIPs' shared cost, and in accordance with the dispute resolution process.

Following the process set out above, if it is ascertained that there is no interest in co-location from another MNO, the Grantee will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location.

## A2. Backhaul access and pricing for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Where a Grantee selected to build a Funded Solution reaches an agreement under section A.1 for an MNO not already participating in the Funded Solution (the Co-locating MNO) to co-locate on the Funded Solution, and subject to the microwave backhaul requirements below, the Grantee must offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee is in a position to do so.



The Grantee will be taken to be in a position to offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee owns or controls an optical fibre or microwave link which connects the Funded Solution to the Grantee's network.

The price at which the Grantee offers Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO must be more favourable than the regulated prices set under the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination (DTCS FAD), for example, by offering a defined rent-free period or other discounting mechanism.

The ACCC has released the DTCS FAD 202010, including a DTCS pricing calculator that may assist interested parties to calculate the regulated price for Backhaul.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Solution using an optical fibre connection, it must ensure that it provides sufficient Backhaul capacity, transmission and interfacing equipment to meet the Backhaul requirements of any Co-locating MNO on the Funded Solution.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Solution using a microwave connection, the Grantee must provide Backhaul services to a Co-locating MNO over that microwave connection, unless:

- the Funded Solution is designed and built to allow the Co-locating MNO to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Solution; and
- the Co-locating MNO is permitted to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Solution.

The terms and pricing of Backhaul services provided by a Grantee to a Co-locating MNO must be negotiated commercially between the Grantee and Co-locating MNO in accordance with the principles set out in sections A.2.

### **A3. Dispute resolution for Mobile Black Spot Solutions**

Disputes between parties in relation to co-location and Backhaul for a Funded Solution will be referred for determination to an independent third party expert, at the parties' own shared cost.

The Grantee and Co-locating MNO will be bound by the determination made by the independent third party expert.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report](http://www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report)

## Attachment B – Overview of RCP draft Guidelines Round 3 changes from Round 2

The structure and design of the RCP Round 3 draft guidelines are based on the RCP Round 2 guidelines, with the following changes:

### A. General changes from the Round 2 to Round 3 Guidelines

A number of minor consequential changes and amendments, based on lessons learnt from Round 2 of RCP, including:

- a. Outlining the Government's Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia announced in the October 2022 Budget (Section 2.1);
- b. Noting that only regional connectivity solutions that propose mobile voice and data, fixed-line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions will be eligible for funding in NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade areas (Sections 2.2 and 5.2);
- c. Guidance to applicants on the definition of remote First Nations communities for the purposes of Round 3 of the Program (Section 2.2.4);
- d. \$15 million has been indicatively reserved for solutions benefiting First Nations communities (section 3.1);
- e. Extending project delivery timeframes from two to three years (Section 3.2); and
- f. Minor amendments to clarify requirements for applicants to respond to the merit criteria (Section 6).

### B. Design elements implementing the regional mobile black spot stream.

The department has added a second funding stream to the guidelines covering Mobile Coverage Solutions. The stream is based on the key design elements of the Improving Mobile Coverage Round (IMCR) of the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP). The key features are:

- g. \$50 million for a dedicated stream for solutions that deliver New Handheld Coverage to regional, rural and remote Australia e.g. Mobile Coverage Solutions.
- h. \$7.5 million has been indicatively reserved for solutions benefiting First Nations communities (section 3.1);
- i. Inclusion of specific service level requirements for Mobile Coverage Solutions (section 2.2.1), including appropriate 4G signal levels based on those included in Round 5A of the MBSP;
- j. Also consistent with the MBSP, all funded Mobile Coverage Solutions must offer an operational period of 10 years, compared to Regional Connectivity Solutions only requiring 7 years. This reflects the typical life expediency difference between mobile base stations and cheaper wireless broadband solutions (section 3.2);
- k. Applicant eligibility requirements for Mobile Coverage Solutions, recognising a mobile network operator (MNO) must be willing to offer service from Mobile Coverage Solutions (section 4.2);
- l. Consistent with recent MBSP rounds, mobile coverage proposals are permitted to claim up to 50% of the operational costs and 50% of the capital costs (sections 5.3 and 5.4);
- m. New assessment criteria for Mobile Coverage Solutions (section 6.2), this includes an additional weighting to favour solutions in remote and very remote areas (based on the IMCR); and
- n. Specific requirements to strongly encourage multi-MNO outcomes, building on successful features from MBSP and Peri-Urban Mobile Program (based on the PUMP):

- i. Text clarifying that proposals can include the eligible costs of all MNOs proposing to offer services from a proposal (section 4.2). (This is new text intended to incentivise multi-MNO proposals and clarify that co-locating MNOs can claim eligible expenses, not just the MNO who is the funded applicant);
- ii. Applicants must allow co-location on funded sites at incremental cost, with discounted backhaul, unless it is technically infeasible (e.g. a small cell site) (section 4.2) (based on the MBSP and PUMP);
- iii. Solutions that provide multi-MNO outcomes are prioritised through the assessment process. All multi-MNO solutions will be placed above single-MNO solutions on the draft merit list (section 6.2.3). (This is a new requirement);
- iv. The cost over coverage formula used to rank solutions has been weighted to favour multi-MNO solutions including favouring solution with three MNOs over solutions with two MNOs (section 6.2.3) (based on the IMCR). In effect, the coverage provided by each MNO is counted in the assessment formula;
- v. The application period includes a nomination stage where applicants can identify locations where other applicants may be interested in partnering (section 7.3) (based on the PUMP two-stage application process); and
- vi. Multi-MNO outcomes have been identified as a key value for money factor (section 8.2) (based on the IMCR).

**Pidgeon, Karly**

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**From:** Paterson, Lachlann  
**Sent:** Monday, 16 January 2023 6:26 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii); Betts, Jim  
**Cc:** Sullivan, Pauline; Caruso, Daniel; Sparreboom, Shanyin; s22(1)(a)(ii); Gannon, Bridget; DLO Rowland; French, Angela  
**Subject:** Material s22(1)(a)(ii) [SEC=OFFICIAL]  
**Attachments:** Comms and Media Plans and Priorities.docx; s22(1)(a)(ii)

**OFFICIAL**

s22(1)(a)(ii)

As discussed last week we have pulled together some material s22(1)(a)(ii).

Attached is the Communications and Media Plans and Priorities document – updated and extended to 2025.

We have also drafted some talking points for consideration, s22(1)(a)(ii). We can further refine these talking points as the Minister's proposed approach s22(1)(a)(ii).

s22(1)(a)(ii)

A thank you to the FAS' for all their work on this, noting Bridget Gannon did some heavy lifting on this last week.

Regards, Lachlann

**Lachlann Paterson** (he/him)

Acting Deputy Secretary / Communications & Media  
P s22(1)(a)(ii) • M s22(1)(a)(ii)

**OFFICIAL**

s22(1)(a)(ii)

s22(1)(a)(ii)



January s22(1)(a)(ii) – Minister Rowland  
Communications and Media Group

Notes –

- Ministers in brackets indicate cross-portfolio implications and interests.
- The Minister for Finance is co-shareholder minister for NBN Co and Australia Post.
- Central agencies are interested in all significant policy, especially where there are financial and/or cross portfolio implications

s22(1)(a)(ii)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

**MARCH 2023****Regional Communications**

s22(1)(a)(ii)

- Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 approach to market

s22(1)(a)(ii)

**Pidgeon, Karly**

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Sent:** Friday, 3 March 2023 3:51 PM  
**To:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Cc:** Paterson, Lachlann; s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** RE: For info: RCP 3 submissions [SEC=OFFICIAL]

**OFFICIAL**

Many thanks indeed – very clear. Will talk through with s22(1)(a)(ii) and s22(1)(a)(ii) but I think that works well. Re the timeframe for applications, I seem to recall that industry were asking for at least 12 weeks? What sort of range of timeframes for the applications are you thinking – below says 10 but potentially longer? 10-12 or longer than 12? I don't have a strong view so would be good just know what you think the appropriate range of "bookends" might be?

s47C

Let me know what you think, but next week fine as you've answer the priority question below.

Cheers

s22(1)(a)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Adviser

Office of the Minister for Communications, Hon Michelle Rowland MP

s22(1)(a)(ii)

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, work and live.  
 I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities.  
 I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

**OFFICIAL**

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 3 March 2023 1:11 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Paterson, Lachlann s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: For info: RCP 3 submissions [SEC=OFFICIAL]

**OFFICIAL**

Got it, it looks like this

- Should be a copy to you next week for review (w/C 6 March)
- Send copy to Finance next week for review (they can take up to 10 days but we will keenly follow up)

- Team are concurrently finalising the application pack and updated template contracts that must (app pack) and should (contracts) go out with the Guidelines on opening
- expect to submit to the Minister formally for review the week after (w/c 13 March, subject to Finance clearance on risk)
- Can open once Minister clears, so open late March (open for 10 weeks)

A note that we should discuss further

- o we're also exploring a request from Richard W to look at wider options to promote the First Nations funding in the program and how to connect these communities and industry
- o given that quality proposals can take time to develop, we're considering related aspects like whether the application period should be open longer to allow for greater on ground FN interaction with industry, or launch the Guidelines (to provide certainty) but delay the opening of applications to encourage more interaction with FN communities

Would be good to discuss these aspects to get your view. The timing of launching and the number of weeks open doesn't have to change, but it could be an option depending on how much you want to promote the new FN stream.

KP

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 3 March 2023 12:50 PM  
**To:** Pidgeon, Karly <[redacted]@communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Paterson, Lachlann <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: For info: RCP 3 submissions [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Many thanks. Can't quite figure out what range of time-frames this adds up to for target final issuance? (You can assume for the purposes of calculations a week for MO turn-around of final approvals but hopefully much faster with this one...)

Cheers

s22(1)(a)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Adviser

Office of the Minister for Communications, Hon Michelle Rowland MP

s22(1)(a)(ii)

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, work and live.  
 I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities.  
 I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

OFFICIAL

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly <[redacted]@communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 3 March 2023 12:47 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@MO.communications.gov.au>

**Cc:** Paterson, Lachlann s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>

**Subject:** For info: RCP 3 submissions [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi s22(1)(a)

Following on your request for material RCP Round 3 submissions, in summary:

- 42 submissions were received from industry, state and local governments and community/advocacy groups
  - 11 are happy for their submission to be published
  - 13 do not want their submission published
  - 18 have not yet advised
- Attached is a list and brief summary of all of the submissions received.
- We also received a further 13 comments from local residents about poor mobile or broadband connectivity (we then asked each if they would like to provide a short submission of the issues on the RCP Noticeboard – 3 have done this)

s45 we've attached some of the other significant submissions FYI. If there's others on the list that you'd like to see, let me know and we'll send forward them also.

In terms of where we're at:

- we've reviewed all of the submissions and have been making proposed amendments to the guidelines where we think the issues raised need addressing
- we've also had our contracted technical communications advisers review the guidelines to determine if any further amendments would be useful
- we expect to be in a position to share the updated draft with you (ie by email) for review next week, ahead of submitting final draft guidelines to the Minister for her consideration and approval.
- Note we also need to provide a copy of the updated guidelines to Finance to determine if the guidelines are low risk or, if not, they will require approval from the Minister for Finance (following Minister Rowland's approval). We have been consulting with DoF and PM&C officials on the draft guidelines since their release for public consultation so we hope this extra step won't be needed.

Happy to discuss.

Cheers,  
KP

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>

**Sent:** Wednesday, 1 March 2023 11:08 AM

**To:** PIDGEON Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @infrastructure.gov.au>

**Subject:** s45 [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi, I don't think I got the other material submissions on RCP/MBSP guidelines? Could you send when you get a chance?

Cheers

s22(1)(a)



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OFFICIAL

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**From:** "Paterson, Lachlann" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>

**Date:** Wednesday, 1 March 2023 at 11:04:27

**To:** "Windeyer, Richard" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@communications.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii)

<@MO.communications.gov.au>, "Pidgeon, Karly" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@communications.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii)

<@communications.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) <@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>

**Subject:** s45

[SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Apologies – I didn't realise this had not been distributed more widely.

I am setting up a time with s45 to discuss.

s47C

Regards, Lachlann

**Lachlann Paterson** (he/him)

First Assistant Secretary / Communication Services & Consumer

P s22(1)(a)(ii) • M s22(1)(a)(ii)

OFFICIAL

s45

s45



OFFICIAL

**Pidgeon, Karly**

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 7 March 2023 1:00 PM  
**To:** Paterson, Lachlann; Silleri, Kathleen; Caruso, Daniel; s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** RE: draft agenda - weekly catch-up 7 March 2023 [SEC=OFFICIAL]  
[SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET]  
**Attachments:** For info: RCP 3 submissions [SEC=OFFICIAL]; RE: For info: RCP 3 submissions  
[SEC=OFFICIAL]; s22(1)(a)(ii)

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

s22(1)(a)(ii)

**RCP3/MBSP**

- RCP submissions - summary email attached to s22(1)(a) that starts with "For info..."
- RCP timeline at the RCP email attached that starts with "RE: For info...". Short version is:
  - o Copy of updated Guidelines to s22(1)(a) and Finance this week
  - o Pending Finance agreement that Guidelines are low risk, send Min sub to MO next week
  - o Minister open RCP3 in either week of 20 or 27 March (pending DoF agreement on whether Min for Fin approval needed)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

**From:** Paterson, Lachlann s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 7 March 2023 11:24 AM  
**To:** Silleri, Kathleen s22(1)(a)(ii) @infrastructure.gov.au>; Pidgeon, Karly  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii)  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @infrastructure.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Re: draft agenda - weekly catch-up 7 March 2023 [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Thanks, LP

OFFICIAL

**From:** "Paterson, Lachlann" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Date:** Tuesday, 7 March 2023 at 10:43:52 am  
**To:** "Silleri, Kathleen" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@infrastructure.gov.au>, "Pidgion, Karly" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <@infrastructure.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Fwd: draft agenda - weekly catch-up 7 March 2023 [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Karly - can you get me some papers this morning on RCP and MBSP - timeline and submission summary should be enough.

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Thanks, LP

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Date:** Tuesday, 7 March 2023 at 10:37:00 am  
**To:** "Windeyer, Richard" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@communications.gov.au>, "Brine, Matthew" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@infrastructure.gov.au>, "Sullivan, Pauline" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@communications.gov.au>, "Paterson, Lachlann" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>, "French Angela" s22(1)(a)(ii) <@infrastructure.gov.au>  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <@MO.communications.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) <@MO.communications.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) <@MO.communications.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) <@MO.COMMUNICATIONS.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) <@MO.Communications.gov.au>  
**Subject:** draft agenda - weekly catch-up 7 March 2023 [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Dear all,

Draft agenda for the weekly catch-up later today is below

s22(1)(a)(ii)

- Next round of RCP and Mobile Black Spot Program

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Cheers

s2  
2(

OFFICIAL

*Released under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 by the Department of  
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts*



**Pidgeon, Karly**

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**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Friday, 10 March 2023 6:20 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Cc:** Caruso, Daniel; s22(1)(a)(ii); Windeyer, Richard; McMullan, Kate; s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** Regional comms high-level timeline [SEC=OFFICIAL:Sensitive]  
**Attachments:** Regional comms highlevel timelines.docx

**OFFICIAL:Sensitive**

Hi s22(1)(a)

Please see attached a program timetable in the sort of format you proposed.

Please let me know if this works for you. If so, we will update it monthly, or more regularly if there is a change to the timeline in any of the programs.

Cheers,  
Karly

**OFFICIAL:Sensitive**

## Regional Communications Programs – Estimated high-level timeline (as at 10 March 2023)

	Preparation	Consultation on Guidelines / design	Final Guidelines/ Call for Tenders	Applications due	Assessment and recommendations finalised	Announcements	Rollout/delivery
s22(1)(a)(ii)							
Regional Connectivity Program - Round 3 (including MBSP Opportunities)	Completed	Completed Feb 23	Q1 2023	Q2 2023	Q3 2023	Q3 2023	2024-2027
s22(1)(a)(ii)							

**Pidgeon, Karly**

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 14 March 2023 5:12 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii)  
 ; Caruso, Daniel; Windeyer, Richard  
**Subject:** RCP3 - Actions to launch Grant Opportunity [SEC=OFFICIAL]  
**Categories:** Ministerial

**OFFICIAL**

Hi s22(1)(a)

Please see the table of actions below for this week.

The priority items we will need from you this week are:

- Settle any last MO comments/queries on the guidelines (Wednesday COB, as we will be finalising and submitting the brief Thursday)
  - o We have been working through your comments on the draft Guidelines today and will come back on to you on this shortly.
- Confirm the 'go live' time as 12.01am Monday 20 March so we can lock in the services to enable this
- Prioritise the Minister's review of the brief on Friday, where possible, to confirm final content of guidelines/media etc

The **risk points** in the process to go live on time are:

- If Dept of Finance do not assess the guidelines in time
  - o We updated them last Friday about the new timeframes
  - o We will keep following up with them and advise you on Wednesday COB if we haven't heard back (so that you can coordinate with Minister for Finance's office as appropriate)
- If Dept of Finance assesses the guidelines require approval from the Minister for Finance
  - o we can turn a letter around on this fast, and you would need to coordinate with Minister for Finance's office to receive a response prior to releasing the Guidelines
- PM&C are reviewing s47C
  - o We have alerted them to the launch timeframe and they have committed to get back to us on this in time
- Any late changes to the guidelines (i.e. after working hours on Friday but before midday Saturday)
  - o The Dept's Finance Branch has to load the guidelines into Grants Connect. They can do this on Friday and set a publication time for 12.01 am Monday 20 March.
  - o If the Minister wishes to amend the content of the guidelines after hours on Friday or on Saturday morning, we would need to:
    - review the changes to determine if any changes are required to the Application Pack
    - provide a new final version to Finance Branch to load into Grants Connect
  - o We are following up with Finance Branch on any weekend protocols they already have, or can put in place.
    - If this isn't an option, some alternatives would be to announce the program opening and:
      - put the final Guidelines on our website for any interested parties to access pending the information going onto Grants Connect on Monday; OR
      - state a time that it will be open on Grants Connect – e.g. 12pm Monday

Please give me a call if you'd like to discuss.

Cheers,  
KP

Final Guidelines	
Actions:	Due by:
Probity and legal review of draft guidelines	Due COB Wednesday 15/3
Department of Finance review of draft guidelines	Due COB Wednesday 15/3
RCB consider and respond to MO comments on draft guidelines	Under review, some amendments proposed
RCB to submit final guidelines and approval Minute to Minister	COB Thursday (earlier if possible)
Minister to consider and approve final guidelines	2pm Friday 17/3 (where possible) Note – if any further changes guidelines will need to be re-sent to Grants team
Application Pack	
RCB to update and consolidate application pack for RCP and MBSP streams.	COB Wednesday 15/3
RCB to provide final application pack and final draft guidelines (as submitted to Minister for approval) to the Dept Grants team	COB Thursday 16/3 (Note - if any further changes guidelines will need to be re-sent to Grants team)
Media and advertising material	
RCB to provide draft media releases to MO	COB Tuesday 14/3
RCB to provide updated RCP3 Webpage (incl Dept social media and News Story posts) to the Department's Web Services team	Noon Fri 17/3
Approach to Market (12.01am Monday 20 March)	
Minister/Minister's Office organise distribution of media release	As appropriate
Finance Branch to publish complete application pack and guidelines on GrantsConnect	Set publication time for Monday 12.01am
Department's Web Services team to publish Webpage update	Set publication time for Monday 12.01am
RCB to send email to stakeholder contact list to alert stakeholders that RCP 3 is open for applications	Monday 20 March at opening of business (~9.00am)

OFFICIAL

**Pidgeon, Karly**

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 14 March 2023 7:52 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Cc:** Caruso, Daniel; s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** RCP3 incl MBSP - PM&C s47C

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

Hi s22(1)(a)(ii) – FYI emails with PM&C below as mentioned on Friday. No resolution from their end yet, they are aware of the Minister's timeframes to launch Sunday night. You may want to talk to the PMO.

The gist - PM&C have been reviewing the RCP R3 Guidelines s34(3)  
 s47C

s47C MBSP is leveraging a known program design, it has strong branding with industry, s47C s34(3)  
 as it is delivering mobile coverage to under-served regional communities s34(3)

s47C  
 funding will delivered using additional rounds of the MBSP and RCP as well as other resilience/farms measures (see *Budget Related Paper NO. 1.12* Table 2.5.2 Program components of Outcome 5 on page 75 and footnote (a) at the bottom of page 76).

s47C

Will keep you posted.

KP

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Sent:** Friday, 10 March 2023 6:08 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii); Pidgeon, Karly  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii); BFR - AAU - Communications and Regional Development; CommsPolicy; s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** RE: Advice on draft Regional Connectivity Program (including mobile black spot opportunities) Grant Opportunity Round 3 Guidelines [SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET] [SEC=PROTECTED]

PROTECTED

s22(1)(a)(ii)



I have drafted answer to your questions in your email below. Happy to talk through them if you have any further concerns.

For your heads up, our MO has advised that Minister Rowland is intending to release the Grant Guidelines for application on Sunday evening 19 March. This timing will enable her to promote the release the Guidelines s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED]. I understand our Office has discussed this with the FMO, and I expect will discuss it with PMO.

Regards

s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED]

s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@infrastructure.gov.au)

s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED]

## PROTECTED

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@pmc.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@pmc.gov.au)>

**Sent:** Friday, 10 March 2023 2:47 PM

**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au)>; Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@communications.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@communications.gov.au)>

**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@infrastructure.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au)>; BFR - AAU - Communications and Regional Development s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@finance.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@finance.gov.au)>; CommsPolicy s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@pmc.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@pmc.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] [@finance.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@finance.gov.au)>

**Subject:** RE: Advice on draft Regional Connectivity Program (including mobile black spot opportunities) Grant Opportunity Round 3 Guidelines [SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET]

Hi s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED], s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED], Karly

As discussed with s22(1)(a)(ii) [REDACTED] earlier, we're reviewing the RCP R3 Guidelines s34(3) [REDACTED] as part of the risk rating process. Grateful if you could please assist with the following questions:

1) s34(3) [REDACTED]

However, the Guidelines (s. 2.1, pg 7) state that "The Better Connectivity Plan will deliver the funding for expanded regional mobile coverage through additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program."

s47C [REDACTED]

s47C [REDACTED]

s34(3) [REDACTED]

s34(3) [REDACTED]

s34(2) [REDACTED]

s47C [REDACTED]

*The Portfolio Budget Statements 2022-23, Budget Related Paper NO. 1.12 Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, includes a note against that Better Connectivity Plan budget line item stating "This line item includes funding for additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program and the Regional Connectivity Program ..." See footnote (a) at the bottom of Table 2.5.2 Program components of Outcome 5, page 76.* s47C [REDACTED]

As discussed on the phone, the MBSP is a well understood program s47C  
Public consultation with industry and other stakeholders on the  
design of RCP Round 3 showed strong support for, and a clear understanding of, the proposed approach s47C

- 2) s34(2) s34(3) s34(2) s34(3)  
keeping the PM and Minister for Finance informed s47C

- a. Could you please advise whether the Minister intends to write to the PM and Minister for Finance s47C

At this stage, the Minister was not intending to write to the PM and the Minister s47C

Appreciate there's some time pressure on getting the Guidelines squared away – very happy to discuss further to make sure we can cover these issues off as soon as possible and grateful for any advice you can provide.

Thanks

s22(1)

(a)(iii)  
s22(1)(a)(ii)

| Adviser

Communications and Arts | Industry, Innovation, Science and Communications

p. s22(1)(a)(ii)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 3:13 PM  
**To:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Cc:** Windeyer, Richard ; Caruso, Daniel ; s22(1)(a)(ii) ; s22(1)(a)(ii) ; s22(1)(a)(ii) ; DLO Rowland  
**Subject:** RE: RCP3-MBSP7 - Letter to PM [SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET]

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

All good to go.

Just ran s22(1)(a)(ii) and the Minister through this and confirmed good to go. Signed version will be with you shortly. Just one tiny amendment which was to take out the possessive apostrophe after the Committee name.

Cheers

s22(1)(a)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Adviser

Office of the Minister for Communications, Hon Michelle Rowland MP

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, work and live.  
I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities.  
I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

---

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 2:27 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Windeyer, Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@MO.communications.gov.au>; DLO Rowland s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: RCP3-MBSP7 - Letter to PM [SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET]  
**Importance:** High

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

Hi s22(1)(a) – Please find attached the proposed letter to the PM and the Finance Minister, incorporating the feedback from PM&C.

We planned to include this in the Ministerial pack on the Guidelines. However, if you want to split it off to send early, that's no problem. We can just note it in the brief and attach a signed copy to the PDMS item for reference.

s47C

s34(3)

s47C

Please let me know how you'd like to proceed (i.e. in the pack or separately).

Regards,  
KP

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

---

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 1:13 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Windeyer, Richard <Richard.Windeyer@communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[redacted]@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: RCP3-MBSP7 Revised MR and Website text [SEC=OFFICIAL] [SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET]

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

Update – confirming draft letter is with PM&C. They will review as a priority and revert today with any comments.

Note I've also included in the letter the intention to open consultation on the upcoming MNHP round. s47C

s34(3)

s47C

KP

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly

**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 10:34 AM

**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>

**Cc:** Windeyer, Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel

s22(1)(a)(ii) [@INFRASCTURE.gov.au](mailto:communications.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii) [@INFRASCTURE.gov.au](mailto:communications.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii)

@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii)

@MO.communications.gov.au>

**Subject:** RE: RCP3-MBSP7 Revised MR and Website text [SEC=OFFICIAL] [SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET]

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

Hi s22(1)(a)

I'm looking at the letter now. Once I've cleared we need to send it to PM&C first to ensure it addresses their concerns, before we can send it your way for action. We will ask PM&C to expedite their review. If you wish, I can provide you a copy at that time for review, but it should not be actioned until PM&C have come back to us on it.

Please note, the letter will not be seeking agreement. PM&C's advice is that the Minister's letter should "inform" the PM and Minister for Finance "of the proposed arrangements" for the new round s34(3)

s34(2)

s34(3)

).

Regards,

KP

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>

**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 9:10 AM

**To:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>

**Cc:** Windeyer, Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) [richard.windeyer@communications.gov.au](mailto:richard.windeyer@communications.gov.au); Caruso, Daniel

s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)

@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii)

@MO.communications.gov.au>; Media <media@communications.gov.au>

**Subject:** Re: RCP3-MBSP7 Revised MR and Website text [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Many thanks Karly and team, really appreciate all the efforts to get this over the line.

s47C

. I know you're all juggling a dozen things but eta on that? (And as discussed, happy to have that separately from and in advance of the brief).



Cheers

s22(1)(a)

OFFICIAL

s22(1)(a)(ii)

**Pidgeon, Karly**

---

**From:** DLO Rowland  
**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 3:23 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) ; Pidgeon, Karly  
**Cc:** Windeyer, Richard; Caruso, Daniel; s22(1)(a)(ii) ; s22(1)(a)(ii) ; s22(1)(a)(ii) ;  
DLO Rowland  
**Subject:** RE: RCP3-MBSP7 - Letter to PM [SEC=PROTECTED, CAVEAT=SH:CABINET]  
**Attachments:** SIGNED MS23-000435 - Letter to the PM - RCP3 MBSP7 - Final.pdf

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

Signed version.

I am dispatching now to the PM and Gallagher

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Department Liaison Officer

P s22(1)(a)(ii) M s22(1)(a)(ii)

PROTECTED, SH:CABINET

s22(1)(a)(ii)



## The Hon Michelle Rowland MP

Minister for Communications  
Federal Member for Greenway

MC23-000435

The Hon Mr Anthony Albanese MP  
Prime Minister  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

s34(3)

s34(2)

s34(3)

s34(3)

is the key element of the \$656 million *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* (Better Connectivity Plan) delivered through the 2022-23 October Budget. <sup>s47C</sup> providing \$600 million to improve mobile and place-based connectivity, and resilience in rural and regional Australia, including:

- \$400 million <sup>s47C</sup> to boost multi-carrier mobile coverage on regional roads, improve mobile coverage in under-served regional and remote communities, and increase the resilience of communications services and public safety communications facilities, and
- \$200 million for two additional rounds of the RCP to invest in place-based digital connectivity infrastructure projects in regional communities.

s34(3)

I also intend to deliver Round 3 of the RCP through two funding streams that combine the RCP and the MBSP in a single approach to the market. The first funding stream will provide \$100 million for traditional RCP-type solutions. The second stream will provide \$50 million for Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities to improve mobile coverage in under-served regional and remote communities, funded from the \$400 million <sup>s34(3)</sup>.

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP  
PO Box 6022, Parliament House Canberra  
Suite 101C, 130 Main Street, Blacktown NSW 2148 | (02) 9671 4780

The combined approach, using the RCP Round 3 as a vehicle, will significantly streamline the grants process for both streams and provides an effective and efficient way to deliver early results for <sup>s47C</sup> components of the Better Connectivity Plan. It leverages the strong branding and known program design elements of both the MBSP and the RCP. It will reduce the application process overhead for industry, the assessment process, and avoid unnecessary competition between two separate approaches to market.

Feedback from industry, through the public consultation process, supported the approach. I am confident that, given their different objectives, running the two streams concurrently will not impact industry's capacity to deliver high-value proposals.

I intend to open applications for RCP Round 3, including the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunity, on the evening of 19 March 2023, subject to final clearances. It can take several years for funding recipients to complete connectivity and mobile projects. Hence, there is a need to open this two-stream Round as a priority to ensure we are delivering on our Better Connectivity Plan commitments in a timely manner.

Work is well underway on implementing other elements of the Better Connectivity Plan. For example, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts inquiry into co-investment in multi-carrier regional mobile infrastructure is underway and expected to report soon. This will inform the development of program design options to address multi-carrier mobile coverage on the broader regional road aspect <sup>s47C</sup>.

I have also undertaken stakeholder consultation on the initial design for the On Farm Connectivity Program, with the release of a Discussion Paper in December 2022. I also expect to open consultation on the draft guidelines for a new round of the Mobile Network Hardening Program, a resilience element <sup>s47C</sup>, by early April 2023.

I thank you for your time considering this matter, and undertake to keep you informed on the progress of implementing the Government's Better Connectivity Plan commitments.

I have provided a copy of this letter to the Minister for Finance.

Yours sincerely



Michelle Rowland MP

16/ 03/2023

cc Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance

s22(1)(a)(ii)

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 3:35 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>;  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>;  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: RCP3 Guidelines - updated - FYI [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Team are working on the edits for the Finance, legal and probity feedback now.

Aiming for today still, but it may be after hours. We'll push forward as much as we can.

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 3:00 PM  
**To:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>;  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>;  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: RCP3 Guidelines - updated - FYI [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Sounds like a plan. ETA on final guidelines and brief?

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Adviser

Office of the Minister for Communications, Hon Michelle Rowland MP

s22(1)(a)(ii)

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, work and live.  
I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities.  
I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

OFFICIAL

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 2:56 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>;  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard  
s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>;



s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>

**Subject:** RE: RCP3 Guidelines - updated - FYI [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Thanks s22(1)(a), I appreciate that confirmation.

I've spoken to PM&C to advise that there will be changes to the guidelines to reflect discussions with our MO during the finalisation and approval process (no surprises approach).

I've noted to PM&C that the changes being made do not conflict with the advice that Finance has provided which focuses on process aspects of the guidelines and not on program design (PM&C do not have comments on either element, s47C

When we have a settled version that addresses the Finance comments and incorporates the most recent amendments we have suggested in our email exchanges, we will finalise the ministerial brief. Once submitted, we will provide an updated version of the guidelines to both PM&C and Finance to keep them informed.

Thanks,  
KP

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>

**Sent:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 2:40 PM

**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>

**Subject:** Re: RCP3 Guidelines - updated - FYI [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Many thanks indeed. Just ran through with s22(1)(a) and we're good to go ahead with your recommended approach as per below and the draft last night, ie the increase to 75% for RRFN.

Anything we need to do/change/flag with FMO or PMO as a result of this change or you'll update Finance and PM&C?

Many thanks

s22(1)(a)

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>

**Date:** Thursday, 16 March 2023 at 13:50:03

**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>, "Pidgeon, Karly" s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>, "Windeyer, Richard" s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>, "Caruso, Daniel" s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii)

Subject: RE: RCP3 Guidelines - updated - FYI [SEC=OFFICIAL]

## OFFICIAL

s22(1)  
(a)(ii)

I understand your concerns. I think the current approach will achieve the balance you are after regarding incentives and the increased costs of solutions under the program. I have tried to answer your questions below. Happy to discuss.

50 % CAPEX/OPEX

The 50% CAPEX/OPEX cap is more generous than the \$500,000 cap used in Round 1-5A. We used it under PUMP and were significantly oversubscribed to the point we redirected unspent funding from MBSP to fund additional sites.

On this basis, I would argue the 50% cap is appropriate for more commercial inner and outer regional areas where there is still higher interest from the MNOs. Increasing the percentage would also remove some of the incentives to target remote and very remote areas and First Nations communities.

As discussed further below, the 75 % OPEX/CAPEX cap is an appropriate for remote and very remote areas, and First Nations communities that are less commercially viable compared to other areas.

Costs estimates

Below is a table that show the total CAPEX costs in the applications of microcell base stations across different regional that have been funded under Round 1-5A of MSBP for your background. Note, I have removed the round 5 data because of some oddities with what applicants applied for under that round.

Round	1	2	3	4	5A
<b>Average of Total cost of base station</b>					
Major Cities of Australia	\$ 632,299	\$ 894,755	\$ 778,594	\$ 755,325	
Inner Regional Australia	\$ 738,451	\$ 818,995	\$ 775,537	\$ 716,610	\$ 664,110
Outer Regional Australia	\$ 741,965	\$ 917,544	\$ 915,654	\$ 767,413	\$ 732,109
Remote Australia	\$ 820,329	\$ 939,814	\$1,269,902	\$ 834,588	\$ 801,922
Very Remote Australia	\$ 928,616	\$1,048,554	\$ 777,169	\$ 912,050	\$ 792,081
<b>Max of Total cost of base station</b>					
Major Cities of Australia	\$ 632,299	\$ 894,755	\$ 970,535	\$ 966,400	
Inner Regional Australia	\$1,349,569	\$1,322,127	\$1,603,966	\$1,460,800	\$ 784,234
Outer Regional Australia	\$1,816,068	\$1,492,960	\$1,632,813	\$1,156,500	\$1,592,800
Remote Australia	\$1,334,279	\$1,496,281	\$1,895,489	\$1,230,100	\$1,137,800
Very Remote Australia	\$2,040,873	\$1,778,331	\$ 793,211	\$ 976,600	\$1,102,600

The key observations about the costing data are:

- On average and maximum costs of base stations typically increases as you move from metro out to remote areas.
- The total cost macro base stations in remote and very remote area is trending downwards from Round 1-5A.
- Under later rounds, the MNOs typically favoured small cells in very remote areas to reduce costs.

s45

Regarding the OPEX cost, it is hard to estimate. Under PUMP, the costs were as high as \$300,000 over ten years, partly because of high land rate in metro areas. Under MBSP, the satellite back haul cost was a significant cost driver, can be \$200,000-\$300,000 over ten years depending on the bandwidth.

In worst case under the 75% model applicants could seek upwards between \$900,000 to \$1.7 million for the highest cost regional and remote, and First Nations sites. However, I expect co-contributions from State Governments and competition pressures will result in lower claims in practice. The MNOs will also be conscious of the Value for Money consideration.

#### Remote and very remote areas, and First Nations

The MNOs claim they have largely picked off all of the low hanging locations in the remote and very remote areas. I think there is truth to this claim. This also applies to First Nations communications.

It is likely that the \$500,000 cap on Commonwealth contributions used in Round 1-5A may have discourage applicants from proposing more expensive base stations in these areas, where the revenue potential / commercial viability is very low. The MNOs have increasingly favoured deploying lower cost small cell in these areas over higher cost macro cells. While small cells are cost effective solutions, they offer significantly less coverage and mobile capacity.

The increase to 75% for these areas should provide a significant incentive to target them by offsetting their uncommercial nature.

#### Discretion on the cap

Regarding, the use of discretion to increase the cap, we already include a line to that effect in the VFM section. This is consistent with the approach used since round 2. However applicants haven't taken up this opportunity in past rounds. I suspect there is too greater risk of a proposal being not considered so they haven't wanted to risk it.

While we could provide additional guidance, it would add a substantial amount of additional subjectivity to the assessment process, and it is unlikely that it would provide much additional certainty to applicants. There are also potential probity risks around increasing the subjectivity in the proposal eligibility criteria. We would need to consult with our Probity Adviser further, if we went down this path.

s22(1)(a)(ii)  
s22(1)(a)(ii) [@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:@infrastructure.gov.au)  
s22(1)(a)(ii)

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) [@MO.communications.gov.au](mailto:@MO.communications.gov.au)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 15 March 2023 11:00 PM  
**To:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) [@communications.gov.au](mailto:@communications.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii) [@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au](mailto:@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii) [@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au](mailto:@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au)>; Windeyer, Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) [@communications.gov.au](mailto:@communications.gov.au)>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) [@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au](mailto:@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au)>; s22(1)(a)(ii) [@MO.communications.gov.au](mailto:@MO.communications.gov.au)>  
**Subject:** FW: RCP3 Guidelines - updated - FYI [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Many thanks indeed for all the work on all this. Much appreciated.

Copying s22(1)(a)(ii) at this stage as we're all keen for quick turnarounds.

To summarise: we'd asked whether the 50% capex contribution cap could or should be reconsidered and potentially revised upwards and you've articulated an option which does that in the attached (which is very useful indeed as the decision is now clear).

The other missing piece for us was which of the other incentives had increased since round 5/5a (with capitalised operational expenses added in for PUMP but not previous rounds), so we're now clear that this already adds a material incentive and increases the Cth funding already.

With that additional cost included in this round, the question is then whether we need to push it even further across the board or, as in the version attached, in relation to sites which are rural, remote or First Nations (RRFN). The attached further upweights the prospects for RRFN projects as follows (but correct any if incorrect) since it gives:

- a. additional benefits in terms of increase in max % of capex from 50% to 75%, and
- b. greater benefit in the ranking through the new coverage assessment cost formula which only takes 50% of the cost to the Commonwealth into account (instead of 75% in previous rounds, and both compared to 100% for sites not in RRFN)?

Do you have any sense of how material these changes, esp the max % of capex are likely to be based on insights/costs from previous rounds? I've done a very very rough and ready model attached but the inputs are from the top of my head and not for more recent MBSP sites, so if there is a way to put in some more accurate rules of thumb or averages, that would be very useful. If the numbers attached aren't out by order of magnitude then it looks like it could be a ~30% increase?

Is there any alternative where we reserve some discretion as per my original email or does that get too complex? At this stage just looking for a quick view as we don't have time to scope out alternatives if they're not worth the candle.

Cheers

s22(1)(a)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Adviser

Office of the Minister for Communications, Hon Michelle Rowland MP

s22(1)(a)(ii)

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, work and live.  
I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities.  
I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

OFFICIAL

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 15 March 2023 6:24 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RCP3 Guidelines - updated - FYI [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi s22(1)(a)

Attached are the updated RCP Round 3 Guidelines with the revisions following your comments. Note for ease of reading, this version is only the most recent changes (and not all of the post-consultation changes).

Please note, these are not the final Guidelines as we are still expecting probity and legal comments tonight, Dept of Finance advice may come tonight or tomorrow morning, and we may need to make amendments in the morning based on these comments.

When we submit the final guidelines to the Minister, they will capture all changes made to the guidelines since the public consultation draft.

Cheers,  
KP

## OFFICIAL

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 15 March 2023 2:12 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]> @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]> @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]> @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard <[REDACTED]> @communications.gov.au>; Caruso, Daniel <[REDACTED]> @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Subject:** FW: RCP3 Guidelines - for early review [SEC=OFFICIAL]  
**Importance:** High

## OFFICIAL

Hi s22(1)(a)(ii),

Apologies for the delay getting back to you. The questions engendered much work at our end on how to give effect to some of the intended changes (some are more complicated than others), analysing the impacts in case of unintended outcomes, and cross checking as changes in one part can impact other parts of the Guidelines and application pack. We are comfortable with most of what you'd proposed or queried, with one or two exceptions as outlined in the responses below.

Attached is the table filled in on the differences as requested. Below we have responded to your questions and are updating the guidelines to reflect, and will get you back another version in track.

I would note we are at the pointy end now, and need to limit any further changes to the Guidelines for a few reasons

- Any proposed change takes time for us to work through, analyse and cross reference between the streams
- We risk invalidating Finance's risk assessment process if there are material changes to the content of the Guidelines that they are assessing at the moment
- The tighter the timeframe now, the higher the risk of making mistakes at the last minute that may have unintended consequences

Please give me a call if you'd like to discuss the responses below. We'll get you the new version of the Guidelines in track today.

KP

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]> @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, 13 March 2023 3:11 PM  
**To:** Pidgeon, Karly <[REDACTED]> @communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Caruso, Daniel <[REDACTED]> @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]> @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]> @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard <[REDACTED]> @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>



Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>

**Subject:** RE: RCP3 Guidelines - for early review [SEC=OFFICIAL]

## OFFICIAL

Hi All

Many thanks indeed for all your hard work on these. Keen to finalise so we can get them out overnight on 19/3!

Have had a good chance to go through in detail. A couple of more minor things marked up in attached, generally have tried to use [square brackets] to mark.

No showstoppers, but a couple of significant ones – keen to balance those with speed of release so let me know if easier to have a quick call in the morning so sort which ones to address/leave?

1. Main one is the one we were discussing on Friday - whether there is a discretion to go above 50% of capex for MBSP? I can't see any discretion which would allow it? The addition of operational costs as well as backhaul and multi-carrier additions should all help a lot, but we're not quite sure how this will play out, so if we don't have a discretion already, keen to see if there is a way to insert a subtle but effective discretion so we have maximum options available?

This was in Round 5A and PUMP. It appears to have been inadvertently missed from the RCP R3 guidelines. We have added an equivalent line into the VFM section.

8.4.4The Department may, at its absolute discretion, recommend increasing the level of Commonwealth funding for one or more Proposed Solutions above the maximum amount per Proposed Solution as outlined in section 3.1.2, should it be considered of higher Value for Money.

2. Think the same question arises for the 75% multiplier for remote and very remote but I have a less clear view on that. Is there any value in a direction that potentially gives even more opportunity for sites in these locations?

See discussion at point 3 below.

3. Also have a broader question re whether/how carriers might optimise/game between RCP and MBSP... what would happen eg if a carrier put in a proposal under RCP for new mobile coverage but pitched it as new broadband coverage with a mobile coverage side benefit? It doesn't contain a mobile capacity improvement because it's in an area without existing mobile coverage, but does deliver a broadband connectivity solution which happens to be through eg 4G/5G mobile... is that permitted? Not suggesting it shouldn't be, just keen to test the boundaries of the schemes and whether there is a potential for optimisation and if so whether you're comfortable with that or we need to tighten the boundaries between the two schemes? As much for my own reference as anything I've put together the attached table based on the discussion on Friday with Karly and s22(1)(a)(ii) to remind myself of how the different schemes work. If I could grab 15 mins on the phone with s22(1)(a)(ii) I could complete it and think it would be a very useful quick guide for the MO as I brief s22(1)(a)(ii) and s22(1)(a)(ii). (I have completed the table, see attached.)

We have made changes to the text about multi-MNO and co-location requirements for RCP solutions to address your concerns about applicants potentially gaming between MBS and RC streams. The simplest way to do this is change the 'will' to 'must' under section 2.2.

### Section 2.2

Both streams will include dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities (see Section 3.1).

- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services **must** apply under the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** funding stream.



- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new mobile coverage **must** apply under the **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** funding stream.

We have updated section 4.2 to make it clear that where a National MNO proposes a new mobile coverage solution under the RCP stream, it must comply with the same multi-MNO and co-location obligations that apply to MBSP solutions. This will prevent a National MNO from avoiding these obligations, while still allowing it to still propose capacity upgrades. It also allows small WISPs to offer broadband services using LTE/5G technologies.

#### Section 4.2

If a **Regional Connectivity Solution** delivers material new mobile coverage outcomes (e.g. a new mobile base station that delivers new mobile coverage to an area rather than an upgrade to an existing base station) to an area (i.e. it is not solely a mobile broadband or capacity upgrade to the **MNO** existing coverage in the area), and the applicant is a **National MNO**, then the solution is required to meet the **Multi-MNO** and co-locations requirements set out in this section.

We are also proposing two additional changes for MBSP solutions in remote and very remote areas, or seeking First Nations funding:

- an increase to the funding cap for these solutions; and
- an increase to the discount applied to the cost over coverage formula for these solutions.

These changes crystalized a lot of our recent discussions about ensuring the MBSP stream encourages solutions that expand coverage to these new areas, without discouraging capacity upgrades under the RCP stream. This also reflects our thinking following the Alice Springs discussions.

#### A. Increased funding cap

As you are aware, the draft guidelines already included a 25% discount factor in the cost over coverage formula for solutions in remote and very remote areas. This discount prioritises MBSP solutions in remote and very remote areas above other solutions. However, solutions in these areas can be significantly higher cost than solutions in inner areas, while offering lower economic return. The absolute costs of these solutions can discourage proposals in these areas.

We are proposing a change to increase the funding cap for solutions in these areas to 75% of the total cost to offset some of this economic disadvantage. I have provided examples in tables 1 and 2 that demonstrate how these changes can benefit these types of solutions.

#### B. Discount applied to the cost over coverage formula

We are also proposing a change to the weighting in the cost over coverage formula for solutions in these areas to balance the disadvantage of the increased cost to the Commonwealth of these solutions. We have increased the discount factor from 25% to 50% for solutions in remote and very remote areas, or seeking First Nations funding. Again, the examples in tables 1 and 2 show how this works in practice.

Table 1 Comparison of an equivalent solution in inner and remote areas using the new cap and weighting

Area	Inner Regional	Remote Australia	Remote Australia (new cap and weighting)
Total cost of solution	\$1 million		
Funding cap (max cost to the Cwth)	\$500,000 50% of total cost		

Proposed revised cap for Remote, Very Remote and First Nations			\$750,000 75% of total cost
Coverage outcome	10 km2		
Cost over coverage formula – draft guidelines	50,000\$/km2	37,500 \$/km2	56,250 \$/km2
Proposed revised weighting			37,500 \$/km2

**Table 2 Comparison between higher cost solution in remote and inner regional areas**

Area	Inner Regional solution	Remote solution (macro)	Remote solution (small cell)
Total cost of solution	\$1 million	\$3 million	\$500,000
Funding cap – proposed (max cost to the Cwth)	\$500,000 50% of total cost	\$2.25 million 75% of total costs	\$475,000 75% of total cost
Coverage outcome	10 km2		1 km2
Cost over coverage formula – proposed 50% weighting	50,000\$/km2	225,000 \$/km2	237,500 \$/km2

4. We've been having a long discussion re the potential to use predicative coverage on the national map and I thought there was an issue with carrier consent to use it, but we do have this condition and I would have thought we could use this to publish? If not, how might we make a subtle but significant amendment so that we can publish? "You must agree that the predictive coverage mapping data can be used by the Department to prepare promotional material for the Program or for policy development and advice as needed."

s47C

5. Competition has been taken out as a relevant criterion under 3?

This was just in the wrong spot, which is why we took it out. The benefits of increased retail service competition are addressed under Merit Criterion 1 (Economic Benefits) and Merit Criterion 2 (Social Benefits), rather than Merit Criterion 3 (Project delivery), which focusses on the applicant's capacity to deliver the proposed project. See Sections 6.1.1 (c) and 6.1.2 (c) regarding competition.

The Round 2 Guidelines included competition under Criterion 3 (Project Delivery), however this was revised in the Draft Round 3 Guidelines to reflect that competition benefits are better considered as part of the Merit Criterion 1 (Economic Benefits) and Merit Criterion 2 (Social Benefits).

6. We have a different description of/\$ total for the Better Connectivity Plan in the Guidelines vs the Budget Media Release? In the media release we grouped the \$656m with the NBN FWA \$480m for a total of \$1.1bn?: [Albanese Government to better connect, inform and empower Australians | Ministers for the Department of Infrastructure](#)

We can align the words. The BCP *as appropriated* does not include the NBN Fixed Wireless - the NBN aspect was originally messaged by the then opposition during the election as being a [complementary](#) initiative to the BCP, however the initiatives are all related and wrapped up together as part of the Govt's commitment to regional Australia now. We suggest to remain consistent with the MR you linked, but without muddying the waters, we reframe it to be just about what the \$656m is for (i.e. improving mobile and place-based connectivity, and resilience in rural and regional Australia).

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile coverage and protecting communities against natural disaster. The *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* (Better Connectivity Plan) ~~announced in~~ is providing \$656 million, through the October 2022 Budget, to improve mobile and place-based connectivity, and resilience in rural and regional Australia ~~will see \$656 million delivered to communities across regional and rural Australia, including:~~

7. A couple of additional areas where I think affordability is worth mentioning, but I don't have a hard view – let me know if any that you think better left out? It is eg listed in the economic criteria, but it's not 100% clear whether/how the other requirements/rules sit alongside or supersede. Eg for proposals within current or expected future NBN FWA zones, we say we'd only contemplate proposals where: "The Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability, and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade." Should that say affordability as well? Ie would we contemplate ones which offered eg x years free community wifi, especially for First Nations communities? A couple of other locations marked throughout where same question arises.

Suggest we retain emphasis on "affordability" under economic and social criteria. However, we suggest not extending this to either a requirement for a proposed solution or to enable a proposed solution to duplicate an existing service if it proposes to make a service more affordable. On the latter, it would be difficult for the Department to ensure and verify that the "more affordable" services are in place/maintained for at least 7 years after construction.

8. Do we need a definition of National MNO?

We have included the following definition

National MNO	An MNO who operates a mobile network that provides mobile coverage to at least 80% of the Australian population.
--------------	--

Cheers

s22(1)(a)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Adviser

Office of the Minister for Communications, Hon Michelle Rowland MP

s22(1)(a)(ii)

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, work and live. I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

OFFICIAL

---

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]@communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 10 March 2023 1:58 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]@MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Cc:** Caruso, Daniel s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]@INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>; Windeyer, Richard s22(1)(a)(ii) <[REDACTED]@communications.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RCP3 Guidelines - for early review [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi s22(1)(a) <[REDACTED]>

Attached are the

- updated RCP3 Guidelines in track change, for your review ahead of the brief coming up late next week
- a summary of changes resulting from the consultation feedback

Please note following your email yesterday about pricing, we've also made a minor change to the social benefits criterion to amplify what was already included on providing affordable services in FN communities, as follows.

- addressing disadvantage within the community including First Nations. This may include addressing low digital inclusion, providing affordable services to places with entrenched disadvantage (including benefits such as community free wifi or discounted pricing models), or providing people who are excluded with improved opportunities to access support services.

Cheers,  
Karly

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Released under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Regional Connectivity Program – Round 3 DRAFT Guidelines

## Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (including Mobile Black Spot opportunities) Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines

Opening date:	xx xx xxxx
Closing date and time:	17.00 AEDT on xx xx 2023 (10 weeks after opening)
Commonwealth policy entity:	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
Enquiries:	<p>If you have any questions, please email us at <a href="mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au">regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au</a>.</p> <p>Questions should be sent no later than two weeks before close.</p>
Date guidelines released:	xx xx xxxx
Type of grant opportunity:	Targeted competitive

Style Definition: Heading 1

Field Code Changed

Regional Connectivity Program – Round 3 Final Guidelines

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## 1 Regional Connectivity Program: Round 3 processes

The Program is designed to achieve Australian Government objectives

This Grant Opportunity is part of the Regional Connectivity Program, and the Mobile Black Spot Program, which contributes to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' (the 'Department's') Outcome: *Promote an innovative and competitive communications sector, through policy development, advice and program delivery, so all Australians can realise the full potential of digital technologies and communications services.* The Department works with stakeholders to plan and design the Grant Opportunity according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines \(CGRGs\)](#).

Field Code Changed

The Grant Opportunity opens

We publish the grant Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#).

Field Code Changed

Register with Department and pre-application documentation  
(Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Organisations wishing to apply for funding under the Program for Mobile Black Spot Solutions must contact the Department to register as potential applicants within four weeks following release of these Guidelines in order to obtain access to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions specific application documentation. At this time, applicants must submit their coverage maps as outlined in section 7.2.

The application documentation outlines the requirements on potential applicants prior to submitting an application for funding.

Organisations can register their interest with the department by emailing [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) and providing the following information:

- (a) Organisation name;
- (b) Contact name;
- (c) Contact phone number; and
- (d) Contact email address.

Submit initial proposal period for Mobile Black Spot Solutions  
(Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

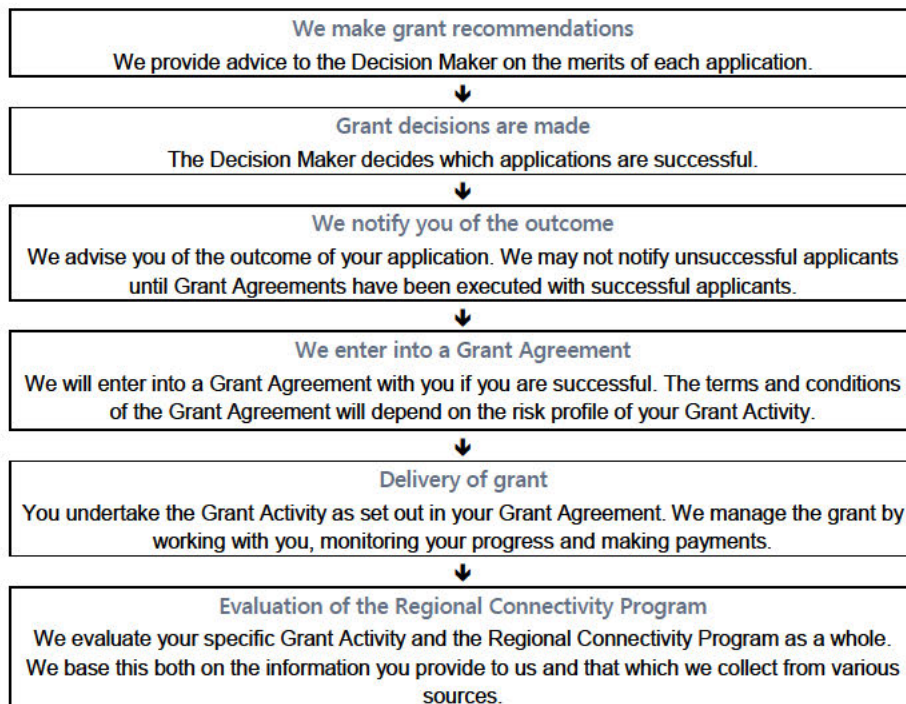
Applicants have six weeks from the release of the Guidelines to develop and submit initial proposals for locations where they are interested in partnering with another Mobile Network Operator (MNO) on a site.

You complete and submit a grant application

You complete the application form and address all of the eligibility and Merit Criteria to be considered for a grant.

We assess all grant applications

We assess the applications against Eligibility Criteria and notify you if you are not eligible. We assess your eligible application against the Merit Criteria, including an overall consideration of Value for Money, and compare it to other applications.



## 2 About the Program

These Grant Opportunity Guidelines ('Guidelines') contain information about Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program (including Regional Mobile Black Spot opportunities) ('Program') and the Program's Round 3 Grant Opportunity and set out:

- the purpose of the Program/Grant Opportunity;
- the Eligibility Criteria and Merit Criteria;
- how grant applications are considered and selected;
- how Grantees are notified and receive grant payments;
- how Grantees will be monitored and evaluated; and
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the Grant Opportunity.

**You must read these Guidelines before filling out an application.**

We have defined key terms used in these Guidelines in the [Glossary at section 22](#).

Field Code Changed

### 2.1 Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile coverage and protecting communities against natural disaster. The Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia (Better Connectivity Plan), announced in the October 2022 Budget, providing \$656 million, through the October 2022 Budget, to improve mobile and place-based connectivity, and resilience in rural and regional Australia. The Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia (Better Connectivity Plan), announced in the October 2022 Budget will see \$656 million delivered to communities across regional and rural Australia, including:



- \$400 million to expand regional mobile coverage and improve the resilience of communication systems;
- \$200 million for two further rounds of the *Regional Connectivity Program* to improve connectivity in regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- \$30 million over three years to accelerate Australia's agricultural sector through the *On Farm Connectivity Program*;
- \$20 million for an independent audit of mobile coverage to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities; and
- a further \$6 million over three years to extend the Regional Tech Hub to support better consumer awareness and better information regarding digital services:

In addition, the Australian Government has provided \$480 million to support NBN Co to upgrade its NBN Fixed Wireless network, with associated benefits to NBN satellite services.

The Government's new funding commitment for the *Regional Connectivity Program* (the Program) builds on previous investment of \$230 million (GST exclusive) in Rounds 1 and 2 of the Program, which is generating a total investment of around \$413 million (GST exclusive) in 223 telecommunications projects in regional, rural and remote Australia. Further information on previous Program rounds is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/internet/regional-connectivity-program](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/internet/regional-connectivity-program).

Field Code Changed

Indicative funding of around \$30 million of the Government's \$200 million commitment towards further rounds of the Program will be set aside to improve telecommunications access in First Nations communities. This funding will assist progress towards Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to ensure First Nations people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.

The Better Connectivity Plan will deliver the funding for expanded regional mobile coverage through additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program. This includes the \$50 million for Mobile Black Spot Solutions available through this Regional Connectivity Program Round.

The Better Connectivity Plan mobile coverage commitment will build on the outcomes delivered under the first six rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, including funding for over 1,200 new mobile based stations across regional and remote Australia. Further information on previous rounds of the Mobile Black Spot is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp).

Field Code Changed

## 2.2 About Round 3

Round 3 of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- A \$100 million **Regional Connectivity Solutions** stream for place-based solutions that deliver new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services. It will enable bespoke telecommunications projects to be specifically tailored to the particular economic and/or social requirements of a region; and
- An additional \$50 million stream (allocated from the expanding regional mobile coverage component of the Better Connectivity Plan) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that deliver **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and remote Australia.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, applicants and **Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application development period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including Proposed Solutions that use active sharing technologies and/or mobile roaming.

Both streams will include dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities (see Section 3.1).

- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services ~~will~~must apply under the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** funding stream.
- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new mobile coverage ~~will~~shouldmust apply under the **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** funding stream.

Further information about the types of Proposed Solutions that can be funded under each stream is provided at section 5.1.

Your application may include a combination of **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** or propose only **Regional Connectivity Solutions** or only **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

The objectives of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- use a place-based approach to target telecommunications infrastructure investment that will respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- expand mobile coverage in regional, rural, and First Nations communities; and
- assist progress towards Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.

The intended outcomes of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- Provide **place-based solutions** to regional digital connectivity issues through a range of new or improved broadband services and/or improved mobile services;
- Provide **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** to expand mobile coverage and competition across regional and rural Australia; and
- Complement the National Broadband Network, including the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see below), and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

The Program's Round 3 Grant Opportunity will support Funded Projects that deliver new telecommunications infrastructure or the upgrade of existing telecommunications infrastructure to provide:

- economic and social benefits in regional, rural and First Nations areas; and/or
- **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and First Nations areas.

For **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, the Round 3 Grant Opportunity will focus on areas:

- of high economic and/or social value;
- outside the NBN fixed-line footprint; and
- where better connectivity and increased data have a clear benefit to a local region.

The Australian Government has recently provided \$480 million (GST exclusive) towards upgrading the NBN Fixed Wireless network. Consumers in the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint will benefit from access to increased download speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps). Fixed wireless coverage will also be expanded to cover a further 120,000 currently satellite-only premises.

A Proposed Solution to deliver Fixed Wireless broadband in the NBN Fixed Wireless coverage areas will only be eligible under the Program if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and that the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see Section 5.2 below).

Commented s22(1)(a)(ii) affordability?

Commented s22(1)(a)(ii) [As per my other question – how would we assess an application from a private sector company that offered eg 7 years free community wifi in a current or future NBN Fixed Wireless area ?]

Commented s22(1) Suggest we retain emphasis on "affordability" under economic and social criteria, but not extend this to either a requirement for a proposed solution or to enable a proposed solution to duplicate an existing service if it proposes to make a service more affordable. On the latter, it would be difficult for the Department to ensure and verify that the "more affordable" services are in place/maintained for at least 7 years after construction.



The opening and closing dates and any other relevant information will be published on the [Regional Connectivity Program](#)<sup>1</sup> webpage and [GrantConnect](#)<sup>2</sup>. If there is any discrepancy between these two publications, GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

The Grant Opportunity will be administered according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#) (CGRGs)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Services and deliverables

The services to be delivered, as a result of the Proposed Solution, must be a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications solutions in the relevant area.

For broadband access technologies, a like-for-like technology where there is an existing broadband service would only meet this requirement if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in:

- Service Quality: eg. latency, packet loss, contention ratio
- Coverage: eg. area, people, percentage of residential and/or business properties that will be covered by the Proposed Service
- Reliability: eg. service availability, service restoration times, backup and redundancy; and/or
- Speed: eg. latency, upload and download speeds

These service improvements may include, but are not limited to, upgrades to address seasonal congestion, backhaul capacity upgrades to improve quality of service or additional mobile [towers base stations](#) in areas where there is existing but patchy coverage.

For services delivering **New Handheld Coverage**, the service will enable consumers to perform a range of functions using mobile devices, such as making and receiving phone calls, sending emails and text messages, browsing the internet, accessing online services, downloading files, using mobile apps, and accessing emergency communications services. To meet this expectation all proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- deliver at least 4G [and preferably also 5G](#), broadband data services and a voice service; and
- provide coverage modelling based on a New Handheld Coverage level with a Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP) at a 90 per cent confidence level for the cell area, as per the following table.

Table 1: RSRP Coverage Modelling Requirements

Coverage category	Channel bandwidth	Threshold (dBm)
Handheld	5	>-100
Handheld	10	>-103
Handheld	15	>-105
Handheld	20	>-106

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/internet/regional-connectivity-program>

<sup>2</sup> [www.grants.gov.au/](http://www.grants.gov.au/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines.pdf>

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### 2.2.2 Local community priority

During the application period, **applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with state, territory and local governments and local communities regarding the Proposed Solutions (especially in relation to projects for First Nations communities)**. These consultations should involve the identification of priority areas to be covered by the Proposed Solution. Priority areas may include specific roads, health or education facilities, **communities with significant First Nations populations**, industrial areas, community sites, high-value production areas, or areas with a demonstrable need for improved public safety (for example, where people are unable to call 000 because of limited coverage or lack of infrastructure).

To give effect to the place-based objective of the Program, **applicant will need to provide evidence that their Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution is a priority for the local community** (*This is not required for **Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, although any information provided will be considered in the value for money stage*).

A local priority project could be identified through a regional digital plan or similar strategy by local government or letters of support accompanying the grant application. This could be demonstrated by evidence of support from groups such as: state and territory governments; local government; Regional Development Australia committees; industry, business, and community groups; not-for-profits (registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and First Nations community organisations.

State, territory and local governments may own infrastructure in areas that could potentially be used for Proposed Solutions. These governments may have specific requirements in relation to the use of their infrastructure that will need to be identified in the applications put forward by applicants for relevant Proposed Solutions.

### 2.2.3 Operational period

All Funded **Regional Connectivity Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of seven (7) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of ten (10) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

### 2.2.4 Application and selection process

Applicants may apply individually or jointly (as part of a consortium). Joint applications must be underpinned by commercially binding arrangements or a clear intention to enter into such arrangements, should the application be successful. Grants to joint applicants may be granted on the condition that the parties enter into a binding agreement, approved by the Department, prior to finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

Grant recipients will be selected by the Department through a competitive, merit-based Selection Process against Eligibility Criteria and Merit Criteria as set out in these Guidelines and a final value for money consideration. In applying for grants, applicants will outline their specific Proposed Solution, and demonstrate support from the local community. The most overt form of support will be financial co-contributions (such as contributions from state, territory or local governments or other third parties). **The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria and also demonstrate its claims against the merit criteria.**

Applicants seeking dedicated First Nations funding will need to demonstrate that its Proposed Solution will benefit a First Nations community. For the purposes of the Program, applicant may use the following definition of a First Nations community as a guide for areas that the Government

is looking to target with dedicated First Nations funding: *a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents) by First Nations peoples, with housing or infrastructure (power, water, sewerage) that is managed on a community basis. First Nations communities have populations of (but not limited to) 50 or more First Nations people*<sup>4</sup>.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the local First Nations community and provide evidence of support for the Proposed Solution from that community (for example, through letters of support from First Nations community leaders). Applicants should also demonstrate how their Proposed Solution will help the Government meet Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (outlined at section 2.1 above).

For communities not eligible for dedicated First Nations funding, applicant can still apply for the general funding through the Program.

### 3 Grant amount and grant period

#### 3.1 Grants available

Round 3 of the Program has up to \$150 million (GST exclusive) of funding available, including:

- \$100 million for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$15 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities; and
- \$50 million for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$7.5 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that provide new mobile coverage in First Nations communities.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to extend the funding available for eligible Proposed Solutions to fund further meritorious projects.

The Project Period for Funded Projects will run from July 2023 to 30 June 2026. Grantees will also be required to provide retail services from the Funded Project for the Operational Period as identified in section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines.

In terms of the grant amount:

- There is no minimum grant amount
- There is no maximum grant amount, but total Round 3 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

All eligible applications under the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** stream will be grouped into three categories for both the overall Program merit list and the First Nations communities merit list, according to the amount of Program funding requested, to ensure that smaller Proposed Solutions are given due consideration during the assessment process. There is no minimum or maximum number of Proposed Solutions that the Government is seeking to fund in any category. The categories are:

- Category 1: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of less than \$300,000 (GST exclusive)
- Category 2: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of \$300,000 to \$2 million (GST exclusive)

<sup>4</sup> This definition is based on ABS Release — 2901.0 — Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016 – Discrete Community.

- Category 3: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of greater than \$2 million (GST exclusive).

All eligible **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** will be grouped into a **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** merit list.

### 3.1.1 Financial co-contribution

To increase the reach of the Program, **applicant are encouraged to seek financial co-contributions (cash) towards each Proposed Solution from state, territory or local governments, local communities and/or other third parties.**

Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and negotiating contributions with any relevant third parties, and for testing and/or verifying any advice received from these third parties.

For Funded Projects that include a co-contribution from a state or territory government, the Department expects that Grantees will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth and a separate agreement with the respective state or territory government.

For Funded Projects that include co-contributions from other parties, the Grantee will bear any costs, and cover the other parties' funding if the other parties' funding is not secured following execution of the Grant Agreement between the Grantee and the Commonwealth.

For Proposed Solutions that include co-contributions from third parties, a copy of the terms of the third parties' commitment to the Applicant is to be attached to the application for funding.

## 3.2 Project period

You-Grantees must complete all of your Funded Projects by 30 June 2026. Grantees will be required to maintain the services for an Operational Period of:

- seven (7) years for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**; and
- ten (10) years for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If you consider that additional time is required to complete your Funded Project, please advise the Department in your application including providing justification for the additional time.

## 4 Eligibility criteria

We cannot consider your application if you do not satisfy all the Eligibility Criteria.

### 4.1 Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

For Applicants applying for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)

And must be one of the following entity types, a:

- licensed telecommunications carrier under the *Telecommunications Act 1997*; or
- owner or intended owner of the Proposed Solution infrastructure who holds or intends to hold a Nominated Carrier Declaration (NCD) under the *Telecommunications Act 1997* in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded; or

For a joint (consortia) application:



- At least one organisation<sup>5</sup> must be a licensed telecommunications carrier or infrastructure owner who holds/intends to hold a NCD in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgrade. The licensed carrier or infrastructure owner (in the case a NCD applies) must be the entity that enters into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. However, such an application may be led by any of the following entity types:
  - Licensed carriers or infrastructure owner (in the case a NCD applies);
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local government, local governing bodies, and regional development bodies;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community-controlled organisations.

For applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN);
- be one of the following entity types:
  - a national **Mobile Network Operator (MNO)**; or
  - a **Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)**.
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNO** means a company that:
  - Supplies a public mobile telecommunications service within the meaning of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (Cth); and
  - Holds an apparatus or a spectrum licence (or both) for the supply of public mobile telecommunications services under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* (Cth).
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNIP** means a company, other than an **MNO**, that provides communications infrastructure in Australia or overseas, including the installation and operation of infrastructure to be used by one or more **National MNOs** to provide public mobile telecommunications services.
- **MNIP** applications must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from at least one **National MNO**, that offers national mobile coverage, to enter into a commercially binding commitment to use the infrastructure to deliver mobile services as described at section 2.2.3 for the Operational Period of the Proposed Solution. Funding may be awarded to eligible **MNIPs** on the condition that the **MNIP** and relevant **National MNO/s** enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

#### 4.2 **Multi-MNO and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions and Regional Connectivity Solutions to deliver mobile service from a National MNO**

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, applicants and **MNOs**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including active sharing solutions. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and discussions with any relevant third parties.

If a **Regional Connectivity Solution** delivers material new mobile coverage outcomes (e.g. a new mobile base station that delivers new mobile coverage to an area rather than an upgrade to an existing base station) to an area (i.e. it is not solely a mobile broadband or capacity upgrade to the **MNO** existing coverage in the area), and the applicant is a **National MNO**, then the solution is required to meet the **Multi-MNO** and co-locations requirements set out in this section.

<sup>5</sup> The Australian Government recognises that some organisations may seek to form consortia in order to apply for a grant. Consortia are eligible to apply and the relevant conditions applicable to consortia are at 6 'Joint (consortia) Applications'.

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If you put forward a proposal for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** that offers services from more than one **MNO**, you may include in the proposal the eligible expenditure, found at section 5.3, for all of the **MNOs** which will offer services from the Proposed Solution. However, the Department will only enter into an agreement with you as the lead applicant if the Proposed Solution is successful. All payments including any components for the other participating parties will be made to the lead applicant only.

In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an **MNO** confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution**, each Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must offer:

- to **MNOs**, the option of offering services from the Proposed Solution using active sharing on commercial terms, if the Proposed Solution is an active sharing solution; and
- co-location to **MNOs**, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional **MNO** for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

**MNOs** who are not included in the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as submitted in your application will be responsible for meeting their own expenses for active sharing and / or co-locating at the site.

The detailed requirements for the **MNO** to offer the option of co-location to other **MNOs** not participating in the lead proposal are set out in **Attachment A**. Other **MNOs** will be provided with an opportunity to express interest in co-location before the detailed design phase. The **MNO** will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location if no such expressions of interest are received.

## 5 What the grant money can be used for

### 5.1 Eligible grant activities

Round 3 of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** funding stream; and
- the **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** funding stream.

Proposed Solutions under the **Regional Connectivity Solutions** stream are limited to broadband connectivity solutions **and/or** mobile capacity improvement solutions in Eligible Areas.

Proposed Solutions under the **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** stream are limited to mobile infrastructure in Eligible Areas that extends the coverage of one or more **National MNO's** mobile network to an area without **Existing Handheld Coverage**.

To be eligible your Proposed Solution must:

- provide access to mobile or broadband services in Eligible Areas as set out in Section 5.2; and
- not have started construction or be part of the participating telecommunications provider's forward build network or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027;
- for all macro cell mobile solutions (under both the **Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot solutions streams**), include a back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours and, where technically feasible, for other Proposed Solutions, in the event of the loss of external power to the site; and
- show evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for the relevant Operational Period at section 2.2.3.



In addition, your Proposed **Regional Connectivity Solutions** must:

- provide place-based telecommunications solutions to regional digital connectivity issues;
- deliver new infrastructure or the upgrade or improvement of existing infrastructure; and
- not overbuild a like-for-like service unless you can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability or speed.

Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- provide New Mobile Coverage to a location in regional, rural or remote Australia.

Your Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Regional Connectivity Solution** in your application. Similarly, your **Regional Connectivity Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** in your application.

## 5.2 Eligible locations

Your application can include Proposed Solutions at different locations, as long as they are all in Eligible Areas. Each Proposed Solution will be individually assessed according to the Merit Criteria. Part or all of the Asset may be located in an Ineligible Area provided it supports services in Eligible Areas. Eligible Areas are all parts of Australia that do not fall within one or more of these Ineligible Areas.

Ineligible Areas are:

- Urban Centres and Localities geographical units classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 'Major Urban', i.e. with a population of 100,000 or more<sup>6</sup>. The Department will provide map overlays showing Ineligible Areas on request.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, Ineligible Areas also include:

- Areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with a Fixed-Line service. Information on NBN Co's rollout is available at [www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map](http://www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map).

For areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with Fixed Wireless technologies, Proposed Solutions that deliver mobile voice and data, Fixed-Line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions will be eligible for funding. Fixed Wireless broadband Proposed Solutions will only be eligible within the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade.

The existing indicative NBN Fixed Wireless footprint is available on the National Map at <https://nationalmap.gov.au/>. While it is expected that the expansion of coverage following NBN Co's Fixed Wireless upgrade will be substantial, applicants should assume this will extend the existing coverage area by up to 15km. Applicants should note that updated coverage maps of the expanded NBN upgrade footprint may not be available during the Round 3 application or assessment period. The Commonwealth reserves the right to delay the assessment and/or funding

<sup>6</sup> Based on ABS Release — 1270.0 55.004 — Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 4 — Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2016.

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of the Proposed Solution until it is known whether the Proposed Solution area will be within the upgraded NBN Fixed Wireless footprint or within an area where NBN announces FTTP upgrades.

### 5.3 Eligible expenditure

You can only spend the grant on eligible expenditure you have incurred on a Funded Project as defined in your Grant Agreement.

Grant funding will be available for the capital costs of building or installing Funded Projects. This may include site acquisition and planning approval costs. Grantees will be responsible for any actual capital costs which exceed estimated costs.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in a Remote or a Very Remote areas (based on the ABS remoteness structure)<sup>7</sup>, or is seeking First Nations funding, you may seek funding up to 75% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Solution.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in other locations, you may seek funding for up to 50% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Solution.

Note The installation expenditure can also include the reasonable incremental one-off costs associated with configuring participating MNOs' networks to connect to a Mobile Black Spot Solution if the Proposed Solution utilises active sharing and/or mobile roaming, provided that such costs have not already been subsidised by another funding program of the Commonwealth or States/Territories.

Not all expenditure on your Funded Projects may be eligible for grant funding. The program delegate makes the final decision on what is eligible expenditure and may give additional guidance on eligible expenditure if required.

You must incur the expenditure on your Funded Project between the start date and completion date for your Grant Agreement for the expenditure to be eligible.

#### 5.3.1 Eligible backhaul costs

For both **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** and **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, funding may be sought for the capitalised cost of Backhaul over the Operational Period of Funded Projects, regardless of Backhaul technology. For remote locations where existing fibre or microwave Backhaul (or a combination of both) is not available or readily accessible, satellite Backhaul technology may be utilised to deliver the Funded Project. If satellite Backhaul technology is put forward for a Proposed Solution, the applicant should clearly define the level of service or connectivity to be provided.

<sup>7</sup> [1270.0.55.005 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure July 2016](#)  
[Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3 - Significant Urban Areas Urban Centres and Localities - Section of State July 2021](#)

In addition to upfront capital costs related to the installation and deployment of Backhaul (such as special linkage charges), the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of operational costs relating to leased optical fibre, microwave, or satellite Backhaul over the minimum Operational Period of a Proposed Solution may be included in the estimated asset capital cost of building the Proposed Solution. These capitalised operational costs for Backhaul must be clearly identified separately in the application.

#### 5.4 What the grant money cannot be used for

To ensure that applicant do not seek Program funding for Proposed Solutions in areas where they have already planned to invest commercially, all applicants must certify that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**:

- Operating and maintenance expenditure for Funded Projects is ineligible for grant funding.

The Department will not in any circumstances meet any costs or expenses incurred by an applicant in connection with any of their applications. Applicants must bear their own costs and expenses associated with the application and assessment process, and the preparation, negotiation and execution of the Grant Agreement and of other documentation.

The Department may audit a Grantee's compliance with requirements.

## 6 Merit criteria

### 6.1 Assessment Criteria for Regional Connectivity Solutions

Applications for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** will need to address the following criteria:

- Merit Criterion one (economic benefits)
- Merit Criterion two (social benefits)
- Merit Criterion three (capacity, capability and resources to deliver the Proposed Solution)
- Merit Criterion four (financial co-contribution).

The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate how the Proposed Solution meets each merit criteria. Applicants should provide a response to each merit criteria, as well as evidence of support to reinforce the claims made in its responses. We will assess eligible applications against each Merit Criterion using the weighting indicated to develop an overall score. Each application will also undergo an overall Value for Money assessment to determine whether the Proposed Solution represents Value for Money to the Commonwealth.

The application form asks questions that relate to the Merit Criteria below. You should provide sufficient evidence to support your answers, including evidence of community support for any proposed economic and/or social benefits offered by your Proposed Solution (see section 6.1.1 and section 6.1.2 for more information) in response to the merit criteria. In addition, you should provide evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in connectivity levels over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area (as outlined at section 2.2.1). The extent of this improvement will impact the assessment of the Proposed Solution's ability to deliver the economic and/or social benefits.

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Commented s22(1) The benefits of increased retail service competition are addressed under Merit Criterion 1 (Economic Benefits) and Merit Criterion 2 (Social Benefits), rather than Merit Criterion 3 (Project Delivery), which focus on the applicant's capacity to deliver the proposed project. See Sections 6.1.1 (c) and 6.1.2 (c) regarding competition.

The Round 2 Guidelines included competition under Criterion 3, however this was revised in the Draft Round 3 Guidelines to reflect that competition benefits are better considered as part of the Merit Criterion 1 (Economic Benefits) and Merit Criterion 2 (Social Benefits).



We encourage you to seek the support of the local government and/or state or territory government in preparing your application. For example, they may be able to assist you in identifying the expected outcomes of the Proposed Solution, particularly the economic and social benefits that would be available to the local community, if the Proposed Solution is funded.

## Merit Criterion 1 – Economic Benefit

### 6.1.1 Economic benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Economic benefits** for a region may cover increases in employment opportunities or economic activity, improvements in productivity, wider access to markets or fairer and more equitable economic outcomes. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to economic benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these economic benefits include:

- a. increasing the number or value of jobs, creating new businesses or efficiencies in the production of goods and services in the region beyond the construction phase (this includes direct and indirect opportunities created through the Proposed Solution);
- b. providing opportunities for growth in existing sectors, e.g. tourism, agriculture, manufacturing;
- c. facilitating greater competition in telecommunication retail services;
- d. whether the Proposed Solution provides an innovative approach to improve productivity, efficiency or addresses an identified problem; and/or
- e. evidence of the community/local intent to employ the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - i. State and territory governments;
  - ii. Local government and regional development authorities;
  - iii. Industry, business, and community groups;
  - iv. Not-for-profits; or
  - v. First Nations community-controlled organisations.

## Merit Criterion 2 – Social Benefit

### 6.1.2 Social benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Social benefits** for a region may cover improving access to health and education services, improving public safety and improving regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to social benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these social benefits include:

- a. facilitating provision of more efficient and effective health or education services, including improved access to health or education resources in the home;
- b. improving public safety and network resilience in a defined area. This may include the ability to call 000 from more locations, providing alternative technologies with which to do so, or improving the effectiveness, resilience or safety of Public Safety Premises;
- c. improving retail competition, regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. This may include improving affordability, providing services that help to attract and retain a workforce or enhancing cultural heritage; and/or
- d. addressing disadvantage within the community including First Nations. This may include addressing low digital inclusion, providing affordable services to places with entrenched

disadvantage (including benefits such as community free wifi or discounted pricing models), or providing people who are excluded with improved opportunities to access support services.

Applicants applying for First Nations funding should highlight how the Proposed Solution will address Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (as outlined in section 2.1 above), or any other targets under the Closing the Gap initiative.

### Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery

#### 6.1.3 Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project (10 points)

You should demonstrate your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution within the specified cost and timeframe, including through identifying:

- a. Your track record and your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution, including
  - a. examples of delivering similar projects and solutions;
  - b. your resources and access to personnel and/or partners with the right skills and experience;
  - c. your ability to deliver in the context of your organisation's broader program of work (including in any pipeline of works through Commonwealth and state or territory government programs such as MBSP and previous Program rounds); and
  - d. your access, or future access to, any necessary infrastructure, power or backhaul.
- b. The maturity of the Proposed Solution, including outlining
  - a. the key technical components of the solution, a comprehensive project cost budget and breakdown;
  - b. a robust project delivery plan and schedule;
  - c. approvals that will be required and any steps taken to progress these; and
  - d. evidence of contingency planning that mitigates the risk of delays in getting the necessary approvals to commence work, particularly for greenfield and remote projects.

In addition, you should outline how you will maintain the infrastructure and the benefits provided by the Proposed Solution during the Operational Period, including the ability to manage expected increased data demands over the course of the Operational Period.

### Merit Criterion 4 – Financial Co-contributions

#### 6.1.4 Total investment the grant funding will leverage (10 points)

You should demonstrate this through identifying the total investment the grant will leverage. Under this criterion, a higher level of contribution from non-Commonwealth sources, comparative to the cost of the Proposed Solution, will help drive a higher score in the assessment process for this criterion.

While financial contributions from other Commonwealth sources will be considered as part of the Value for Money assessment, those contributions will not count towards the score for this merit criteria.

## 6.2 Assessment Criteria for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that offer coverage outcomes from three **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions that only offer service from two **MNOs**, all other things being equal. All Proposed Solutions that offer services from two **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions with a single **MNO**.

Proposed Solutions within these **MNO** groupings (i.e. three **MNOs**, two **MNOs** and single **MNO**) will be ranked using the **New Coverage Assessment Formula** to derive the cost to the Commonwealth per weighted square kilometre of **New Handheld Coverage**, and coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with another **MNO's** network.

Proposed Solutions with a lower cost per square kilometre will rank higher than Proposed Solutions with a high cost per square kilometre.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)}}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

**Mobile Black Spot Solutions** located in Remote and Very Remote areas ~~(based on the ABS remoteness structure)~~<sup>8</sup>, or is seeking First Nations funding, will also be assessed against the **New Coverage Assessment Formula**, however, only 50.75 per cent of the cost to the Commonwealth will be used in the calculation for these solutions, as it is recognised that there is a higher cost to delivering mobile services in these areas.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** for Remote and Very Remote Proposed Solutions is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)} \times 0.75}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** is based on the following components:

- a. **Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)** refers to the Commonwealth portion of the estimated Total Cost for the Proposed Solution (see section 5.3), including capitalised Operational Costs.
- b. **New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld mobile coverage where there is no **Existing Handheld Coverage**.
  - Where a Proposed Solution provides **New Handheld Coverage** from more than one participating **MNO**, each participating **MNO's New Handheld Coverage** will be counted cumulatively, regardless of whether the **New Handheld Coverage** areas overlap.
  - This is in recognition of the benefits of **Multi-MNO** solutions, and to ensure that these Proposed Solutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to the higher costs that may be incurred for these Proposed Solutions.
- c. **Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with **Existing Handheld Coverage** from another **MNO**, divided by a weighting factor of 2.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3 - Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2021

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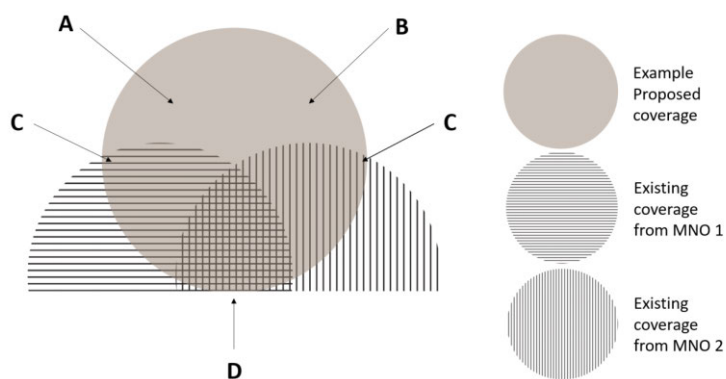
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement of a single **MNO**, overlapping coverage with the **MNO**'s own existing network is not eligible for assessment.
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement (e.g. active sharing) of two or more **MNOs**, overlapping coverage that is new for at least one participating **MNO** is eligible for assessment, but counted only once. Coverage located in an area within the existing network of all participating **MNOs** will not be eligible for assessment.

**New Handheld Coverage** and Overlapping Coverage will be measured by comparing the 4G handheld coverage provided by the Proposed Solution against existing 4G handheld coverage (including as-yet unbuilt base stations funded under other Commonwealth and/or state government programs), as per the **MNOs'** submitted coverage maps at the handheld coverage levels set out in section 2.2.1.

Table 2: Example assessment of New Handheld Coverage and Overlapping Coverage

A Proposed Solution has confirmed participation of two MNOs.	
▪ A.	The Proposed Solution provides 30km <sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 1, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
▪ B.	The Proposed Solution provides 30km <sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 2, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
▪ C.	The Proposed Solution provides 20km <sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage, but is new for at least one of the participating MNOs.
▪ D.	The Proposed Solution provides 10km <sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage in the networks of both participating MNOs (not eligible for assessment).
The assessed coverage for this Proposed Solution is $A+B+(C/2)$	
Equalling: $30\text{km}^2 + 30\text{km}^2 + (20\text{km}^2 / 2) = 70\text{km}^2$	

A graphical representation of this example is below:



## 7 How to apply

Before applying, you must read and understand these Guidelines.

All application documents may be found at [GrantConnect](#). Any alterations and addenda<sup>9</sup> will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If you need further guidance around the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online, contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

To apply you must:

- complete the Grant Opportunity application form;
- provide all information requested;
- address all Eligibility Criteria;
- provide responses to the Merit Criteria;
- include all necessary attachments; and
- submit your application/s before the due date.

Table 1: Expected timing for this grant opportunity

Activity	Timeframe
Guidelines released and applications open	xx xx 2023
Applicant registration and pre-application documentation for applicants applying for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by XXXX (6 weeks after opening)
Submit initial proposal period for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by XXXX (6 weeks after opening)
Applications close	5pm AEDT xx xx 2023
Announcement on Round 3 Applications	
Commencement date of Grant Activity	From xxx 2023
End date of Grant Activity	30 June, 2026
End date of Asset Operational Period	As defined at section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines

### 7.1 Applicant registration (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Potential applicants who intend to propose **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must register their interest with the Department and sign and provide a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to being granted access to the confidential Program documentation.

<sup>9</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

## 7.2 Pre-application lodgement (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Upon registering as a potential applicant, **MNOs** who intend to submit applications for funding, or are partnering with potential applicants, for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must first submit their existing handheld 4G coverage information, incorporating the coverage from base stations funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program, the Peri-Urban Mobile Program and the Regional Connectivity Program and any base station funded under a State or Territory program, regardless of the stage of construction.

**Existing Handheld Coverage** information required above must be submitted to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), **Day Month Year**. The Department may, at its absolute discretion, accept mobile coverage information submitted by **MNOs** after this date.

The **Existing Handheld Coverage** information required in accordance with this section must be supplied as two separate layers as follows:

- Handheld Coverage Maps: being a layer modelled to the Handheld Coverage levels as set out in section 2.2.1; and
- Existing Public Coverage Maps: being a layer representing the predictive handheld coverage modelling standards which underpin the publicly available coverage maps on the **MNO's** website.

For avoidance of doubt, the **Existing Public Coverage Maps** are requested for information purposes only. Assessment will only consider the **New Handheld Coverage Maps** (i.e. a "like-for-like" comparison).

Pre-application information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.3 Submit initial proposals for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should lodge any initial proposal locations where they are interested in partnering with another **MNO** on a site under the Program to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), **day month 2023**.

The registered applicants should provide this information using the "Initial Proposals" template provided in the Application Pack.

The Department will collate the lists of initial proposal locations and provide a consolidated list to all registered applicants. The consolidated list will include the following information for each initial proposal:

- an unique identifier;
- the location;
- type of base stations being considered (small cell / macro); and
- the applicant's contact details.

The Department will also distribute a contact list of all pre-registered applicants to facilitate discussions regardless of whether a pre-registered applicant has identified potential partnering locations.

Applicants and other interested parties have until closing of the application period to discuss and plan co-development and co-funding opportunities at these sites prior to finalising applications.

The list of locations will be treated as Confidential Information by the registered applicants.

Initial proposal information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.4 Completing and lodging an application

Your application must provide:

- An outline of the key technical components of the Proposed Solution, including any required supporting infrastructure and services, (including appropriate diagrams) and detail how the overall 'system' will deliver the proposed services to the stated quality.
- The location of the Proposed Solution and all Assets.
- Mapping data, where applicable, outlining the predictive coverage for the Proposed Solution.
- The total estimated capital cost of construction (GST inclusive).
- The amount of co-contribution (GST inclusive) being provided by the applicant.
- The amount of Commonwealth co-contribution sought under the Proposed Solution (GST Inclusive).
- The amount of any of co-contributions (GST Inclusive) to be received from all third parties, including but not limited to state, territory or local governments, local communities, or any combination of these, and any specific requirements or conditions tied to the co-contributions.
- Evidence of any co-contributions to be received from all third parties. For example, a letter of support from a suitably senior official from the relevant third party, which outlines the amount of co-contributions to be received and any conditions attached to the co-contributions. The department may ask for additional evidence of co-contributions if it considers the evidence you provide is unsatisfactory.
- Evidence of the extent to which the Proposed Solution meets the Merit Criteria.
- Evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area.
- Whether the Proposed Solution is dependent on the construction of one or more of the applicants' other Proposed Solutions, including explaining the specific dependencies.

You must agree that the predictive coverage mapping data can be used by the Department to prepare promotional material for the Program or for policy development and advice as needed.

Applicants must indicate their ability to comply with the sample Grant Agreement (available on GrantConnect) at the time of submitting their applications.

As outlined in [section 5.4](#) of these Guidelines, applicants must warrant that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

You are responsible for ensuring that your application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information is a serious offence under the [Criminal Code 1995 \(Cth\)](#). We will investigate any false or misleading information and may exclude your application from further consideration.

If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact us immediately at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**~~regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au~~. We may, at our sole discretion, accept additional information from you or a request to correct the error. However, we are under no obligation to accept any additional information or a request from you to correct your application after the closing time.

If we identify an error in your application, you may be contacted to correct or explain the error. However, we can refuse to accept any additional information from you that would change your application after the closing time.

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You should keep a copy of your application and any supporting documents.

All applications lodged will be acknowledged by the Department by email. Applicants lodging an application who do not receive acknowledgement of their application should contact the Department. Applications which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. If you need further guidance about the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

Applications can be lodged by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au). Application files lodged by email must not exceed a combined size of 10 megabytes per email. Applications may also be lodged using GovTEAMS, the Australian Government's secure online document sharing and project management system. Potential applicants can be provided with information about lodging applications using GovTEAMS upon request to the Department. Potential applicants may also request to use alternative online secure document sharing systems by agreement with the Department.

You should advise the Department if you intend to lodge your application using GovTeams, or if you need to use an alternative electronic lodgement platform. You should do this **at least two weeks before the closing date** via email to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au). If you wish to change the electronic lodgement platform after notifying the Department, you should advise the Department of the change and the reasons why. The Department may, at its discretion, accept changes to the lodgement method.

All electronic files, regardless of transmission method, should be provided in an appropriate Microsoft compatible format (Microsoft Office 2007 or later or PDF files preferred): Geo-spatial information such as maps should be provided in either Mapinfo TAB or MID/MIF; ESRI Shape; GML; or KML format.

The Department may also accept applications via hard copy and/or physical electronic media, in addition to electronic applications.

Where physical electronic media is to be provided, such as a USB stick, the media must be PC-formatted. Applicants should include an index of all electronic documents on the physical electronic media.

Applications provided in hard copy and physical electronic media formats should be delivered via registered post or by hand prior to the closing date.

Applications via post are to be addressed and delivered to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Applications via hand delivery are to be addressed and delivered by the closing date to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
 2 Phillip Law Street  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

## 7.5 Attachments to application

We require the following documents to be included with your application:

- a comprehensive budget for the Proposed Solution including itemised costs of all the key items such as material, equipment and software licenses (linked to a Bill of Material), costs of key labour, contractor activities and tasks, and other overhead costs such as project management, administration, transport, travel & accommodation
- evidence of a Funding Strategy, e.g. financial statements, loan agreements, cash flow documents
- accountant declaration that you are able to fund your share of the cost of the Proposed Solution (sample template provided on GrantConnect)
- evidence of commitment to financial co-contributions as detailed in [section 6.1.4](#) of these Guidelines
- certification of the application by a duly authorised representative of your organisation, for example a senior executive, director, or company secretary
- evidence to demonstrate your ability to successfully construct and operate the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of ability to deliver a retail service on the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for at least the Operational Period
- for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, evidence of the local need for the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local government and regional development authorities;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits;
  - First Nations community controlled organisations; and
- other evidence, as necessary to support your claims against the Merit Criteria.
- Predictive coverage mapping data for each Proposed Solution.

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You must attach supporting documentation to the application form in line with the instructions provided within the form.

## 7.6 Joint (consortia) applications

We recognise that some organisations may want to join together as a group to deliver a Proposed Solution.

In these circumstances, you must appoint a 'lead organisation'. Only the lead organisation can submit the application form, but the lead organisation will not necessarily be the entity entering into any agreement with the Commonwealth (refer to [section 4.1](#) of these Guidelines). The application must identify all other members of the proposed group, their role in the Proposed Solution and include a letter of support from each of the partners.

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Each letter of support should include:

- details of the partner organisation;



- an overview of how the partner organisation will work with the lead organisation, including financial co-contributions and any other partner organisations in the group to successfully complete the Proposed Solution;
- an outline of the relevant experience and/or expertise the partner organisation will bring to the group;
- the roles/responsibilities of the partner organisation and the resources they will contribute (if any); and
- details of a nominated management level contact officer.

You must have a formal arrangement in place with all partner organisations prior to execution of the Grant Agreement.

### 7.7 Closing date for funding applications

The closing date for submitting an application for funding under this Grant Opportunity is 5pm (Canberra Time) on **day/month/2023**.

### 7.8 Timing of Grant Opportunity processes

You must submit an application between the published opening and closing dates. The Department reserves the right to, in exceptional circumstances, accept a late application to the assessment process at its discretion. Without limiting the Department's discretion, exceptional circumstances may include natural disasters or unforeseen technical issues with application forms or lodgement systems. Any decision by the Department on whether or not to accept a late application to the assessment process shall be final.

If you believe there are circumstances which will affect the timely submission of your application, you must contact us before the application closing date to negotiate an alternative submission due date.

### 7.9 Questions during application process

All requests for clarification or determination of the meaning of provisions in these Guidelines should be referred to the Department by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. The Department's written decision on the matter is final.

We will acknowledge and address emailed questions as soon as practicable. Answers to questions will be posted on GrantConnect as Frequently Asked Questions.

## 8 The grant selection process

### 8.1 Assessment of grant applications

We will consider eligible applications through a targeted competitive grant process.

The assessment process for the program will be as follows:

1. initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria
2. detailed assessment against Merit Criteria
3. Value for Money assessment and consideration of whether the Proposed Solution supports a Government priority as outlined in [section 8.2](#)
4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.

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As part of the Value for Money assessment we will group all eligible Proposed Solutions by funding stream and for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** into the funding categories described in [section 3.1](#) to ensure we compare Proposed Solutions of similar size against each other.

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There is no separate application process or eligibility criteria to receive dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions in First Nations communities. We will consider eligible First Nations applications, as defined in [section 2.3.5](#) of these Guidelines, under a separate merit list. Eligible First Nations solutions that are not successful in gaining dedicated First Nations funding through the First Nations merit list will be considered under the broader Round 3 merit list.

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We may seek advice regarding your Proposed Solution from state or territory government agencies, other Australian Government agencies, independent experts and other external parties. This advice may be taken into consideration when assessing the Proposed Solution.

Where the level of information provided in an application is not sufficient for the assessors to make a recommendation they may, but are not obliged to, seek more information from the applicant so long as it does not change the substance of the application. If the assessment process identifies unintentional errors in your application, we may contact you to correct or clarify the errors, but you cannot make any material alteration or addition. It is therefore recommended that you thoroughly address the criteria in your application.

An evaluation committee may seek additional information about your application. They may do this from within the Commonwealth, even if the sources are not nominated by you as referees. The evaluation committee may also consider information about you or your application that is available through the normal course of business.

## 8.2 Value for Money and government priorities

In addition to the merit criteria assessment, an assessment will also be undertaken to consider which of the Proposed Solutions represent the best Value for Money to the Commonwealth and whether they support a government priority. This is to ensure the grant will add value by achieving Program benefits that would not occur without the grant. This assessment will have regard to the overall Program and Grant Opportunity objectives.

Factors that may be considered in the Value for Money assessment include, but are not limited to the:

- cost to the Commonwealth of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which the Proposed Solution would contribute to the Program objectives, including addressing an identified local priority or government priority
- for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, the degree to which the Proposed Solution delivers **Multi-MNO** outcomes
- extent to which the Proposed Solution will build on investments (aimed at delivering social and economic benefits) already made or planned for the Proposed Solution location
- extent of existing or planned commercial activity/investment that will impact on telecommunications services and the level of connectivity in the Proposed Solution location
- extent to which the Proposed Solution presents a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area
- extent to which Proposed Solutions provide overlapping coverage in a given area, and the appropriateness of each Proposed Solution to local needs
- extent to which the Proposed Solution leverages additional partnerships and in-kind contributions



- extent to which the Proposed Solution supports broader Commonwealth objectives or priorities, including through written support or financial co-contributions from other Commonwealth Departments or agencies
- ability to meet the needs of end users over the Operational Period
- forecast benefits of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which there is an appropriate spread of Proposed Solution types and Eligible Areas.

Based on the overarching Value for Money assessment, the Department reserves the right to recommend funding one or more Proposed Solutions, which were lower ranked against the Merit Criteria than other eligible Proposed Solutions. This could include lower ranked Proposed Solutions from First Nations communities in recognition of the dedicated funding available for First Nations communities. The Department also reserves the right to recommend not funding one or more Proposed Solutions, which are highly ranked against the Merit Criteria based on the Value for Money assessment.

The Department may, at its absolute discretion, recommend increasing the level of Commonwealth funding for one or more Mobile Black Spot Solution above the maximum percentage per Mobile Black Spot Solution as outlined in section 5.3, should it be considered of higher Value for Money.

### 8.3 Who will assess applications?

The evaluation committee will assess each application on its merits and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which Proposed Solutions should be awarded a grant.

We may ask external advisors to inform the assessment process. Any advisor who is not a Commonwealth Official will be required to perform their duties in accordance with the CGRGs.

The evaluation committee recommends to the Decision Maker which applications to approve for a grant.

### 8.4 Who will approve grants?

The Minister for Communications (the Decision Maker) decides which grants to approve, taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation committee and the availability of grant funds for the purposes of the Grant Opportunity. The Decision Maker may also consider whether a Proposed Solution supports other Australian government priorities.

The Minister's decision is final in all matters, including the:

- approval of applications for funding;
- amount of grant funding awarded; and
- terms and conditions of funding.

There is no appeal mechanism for decisions to approve or not approve a grant. An applicant who is dissatisfied with the outcome may contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman as set out in [section 15](#).

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## 9 Notification of application outcomes

We will advise you of the outcome of your application in writing. If you are successful, we will advise you of any specific conditions attached to the grant.

### 9.1 Feedback on your application

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a grant, you may ask for feedback within 28 days of being advised of the outcome. We will give written feedback within one month of your request.

## 10 Successful grant applications

### 10.1 The Grant Agreement

Each Grantee will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. Each Grant Agreement will set out the Grantee's obligations in respect of the roll-out and service terms for each Funded Project. A sample Grant Agreement will be available shortly after the opening of the application round. Applicants requesting any changes to the sample Grant Agreement should provide full details of the proposed changes in their application, for consideration by the Department.

A previous funding recipient under either stream of the Program may request to use their most recent Grant Agreement as the basis for their Round 3 Agreement. The decision to use a former Grant Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement is at the ultimate discretion of the Commonwealth.

We must execute a Grant Agreement with you before we can make any payments to you. We are not responsible for any of your expenditure until a Grant Agreement is executed. You should not start any activities relating to a Funded Project until a Grant Agreement is executed. Each successful applicant must enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth prior to the Government's announcement of successful locations and Grantees.

The Commonwealth expects Grant Agreement terms to be reached with a successful Grantee within 60 Business days of the proposed Grantee being advised in writing that the Commonwealth is prepared to financially support the Proposed Solutions/s. If terms have not been agreed within 60 Business days, and without limiting any other rights or discretions, the Commonwealth reserves to the right not to proceed with a Grant Agreement for the Proposed Solution.

#### 10.1.1 Standard Grant Agreement

We will use a standard Grant Agreement for the Program's Funded Projects. A sample Grant Agreement will be available shortly after the opening of the application round.

### 10.2 Amendment to these Guidelines

The Government reserves the right to terminate or vary the program (including via variation of these Guidelines) at its discretion, at any time, for any reason, including without limitation, in the light of changes to Government policy.

Any alterations and addenda<sup>10</sup> to the Program will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment prior to the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department, potential applicants will be advised of the revised or new Guidelines in a timely manner, including any resultant extension that may be applied to the application period.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment following the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department (for example, if the applications received do not achieve the Program objectives), the revised or new Guidelines will

<sup>10</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

set out details of the changes, and all existing applicants will be notified of arrangements impacting existing applications.

An organisation submitting an application acknowledges that neither these Guidelines, nor any application, give rise to a binding agreement or any other binding legal arrangement or legal relationship between the applicant and the Commonwealth. There is no binding agreement on any party until a Grant Agreement is executed by the Commonwealth and the Grantee.

## 11 Specific legislation, policies and industry standards

Whilst you are required to be compliant with all laws and regulations, you may be requested to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation, policies or industry standards. For example, you may be requested to demonstrate your compliance with health, safety or security related legislation, policies or industry standards that are in any way applicable to the Funded Project.

### 11.1 Australian Industry Participation (AIP) Plan

Grant applicants should note that for funding of \$20 million or more, subject to advice from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, the Australian Industry Participation National Framework principles, including an AIP plan requirement, may apply to the grant agreement(s). More information on AIP plan requirements can be found at [www.industry.gov.au/aip](http://www.industry.gov.au/aip).

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### 11.2 WHS Accreditation Scheme

Building work undertaken as part of the Funded Project/s funded under this agreement may be covered by the Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme (WHS Accreditation Scheme). The WHS Accreditation Scheme is established under the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Act 2016* and specified in the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) (Accreditation Scheme) Rules 2019*.

The WHS Accreditation Scheme applies to building work that is indirectly funded by the Commonwealth or a corporate Commonwealth entity if it is carried out under a contract with a value of \$4 million or more (GST inclusive) and the contribution made to the funding of the project that includes the building work by the Commonwealth or corporate Commonwealth entity is at least:

- \$6,000,000 (GST inclusive) and represents at least 50% of the total funding; or
- \$10,000,000 (GST inclusive).

A successful applicant who is the builder must comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation and successful applicants who will be engaging builders to undertake the building work must require builders to comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation.

### 11.3 How we pay the grant

The Grant Agreement will state:

- the maximum grant amount to be paid;
- the proportion of eligible expenditure covered by the grant;
- any financial contributions provided by you or a third party;
- any in-kind contributions you will make; and
- any other requirements.

We will not exceed the maximum grant amount under any circumstances. If you incur extra costs, you must meet them yourself.



We may make an initial payment on execution of the Grant Agreement. We will make subsequent payments as you achieve Asset completion demonstrated by a satisfactory report, based on your actual eligible expenditure. These payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, an upfront operational expense payment will be made once the Operational Period has commenced.

#### 11.4 Maintaining project benefits

In your Grant Agreement, you will be required to commit to operate your Funded Project infrastructure and deliver Funded Project benefits over the Operational Period. You may be required to report on the ongoing benefits delivered by the Funded Project.

#### 11.5 Grants payments and GST

Payments will be made as set out in the Grant Agreement.

### 12 Announcement of grants

If successful, your grant will be listed on the GrantConnect website 21 calendar days after the date of effect as required by Section 5.3 of the [CGRGs](#).

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### 13 How we monitor your grant activity

#### 13.1 Keeping us informed

You should let us know if anything is likely to affect your Funded Project or organisation.

We need to know of any key changes to your organisation or its business activities which may affect your ability to complete your Funded Project, carry on business and pay debts due.

You must also inform us of any changes to your:

- name;
- addresses;
- nominated contact details; and
- bank account details.

If you become aware of a breach of terms and conditions under the Grant Agreement, you must contact us immediately.

You must notify us of events relating to your grant and provide an opportunity for the Minister or their representative to attend.

#### 13.2 Reporting

You must submit reports in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will expect you to report on such matters as:

- progress against agreed activity and outcomes;
- contributions of participants directly related to the Funded Project including scheduled co-contributions (if any); and
- expenditure of the grant.

The amount of detail you provide in your reports should be relative to the Funded Project size, complexity and grant amount.

We will monitor progress by assessing reports you submit and may conduct site visits or request records to confirm details of your reports if necessary. Occasionally we may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments. We may also inspect the records you are required to keep under the Grant Agreement.

### **13.3 Asset completion report**

For each completed Asset, you must submit an asset completion report as specified in the Grant Agreement. Assets will be defined in your Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth.

### **13.4 Financial declaration or audited financial acquittal report**

We will ask you to provide a declaration that the grant money was spent in accordance with the Grant Agreement and to report on any underspends of the grant money. We may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments.

### **13.5 Independent audit report**

The Department may request an independently audited financial report for your Funded Project at your expense. The financial audit report will verify that you spent the grant in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will assess the report and may re-examine your claims or conduct site visits if necessary.

### **13.6 Compliance visits**

The Department (including entities acting on our behalf) may visit you during the development and construction of your Funded Project, or at the completion of your Funded Project to review your compliance with the Grant Agreement. We may also inspect the records you are required to keep under the Grant Agreement. For large or complex Funded Projects, we may visit you after you finish your Funded Project. We will provide you with reasonable notice of any compliance visit.

### **13.7 Evaluation**

We will evaluate the Grant Opportunity to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from your application and reports for this purpose. We may also interview you, or ask you for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted you and to evaluate how effective the Program was in achieving its outcomes. Grantees may be required to participate in Program reviews and evaluations.

We may contact you up to one year after the Date of Asset Completion for each Funded Project for more information to assist with this evaluation.

### **13.8 Acknowledgement**

The Program logo should be used on all materials related to grants under the Program. Whenever the logo is used, the publication must also acknowledge the Commonwealth as follows:

'Regional Connectivity Program – an Australian Government initiative' for Regional Connectivity Solutions and 'Mobile Black Spot Program – an Australian Government initiative' for Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

If you make a public statement about a Funded Project funded under the Program, we require you to acknowledge the grant by using the following:

'This project received grant funding from the Australian Government.'

## 14 Probity

The Australian Government will make sure that the Grant Opportunity process is fair, conducted according to these Guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct, and is consistent with the CGRGs.

External advisors may also be asked to inform the assessment and evaluation process. All external advisors must comply with the CGRGs.

## 15 Enquiries and feedback

The Department's [Client Service Charter](#) applies to complaints about this Grant Opportunity. All complaints about a grant process must be provided in writing.

Any questions you have about grant decisions for this Grant Opportunity should be sent to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions and MBSP** or [infrastructure@communications.gov.au](mailto:infrastructure@communications.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If you do not agree with the way the Department has handled your complaint, you may complain to the [Commonwealth Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman will not usually look into a complaint unless the matter has first been raised directly with the Department.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on:

Phone (Toll free): 1300 362 072

Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)

Website: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

## 16 Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the Grant Opportunity or Program. There may be a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, if Department staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or you or any of your personnel has a:

- Professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the application Selection Process, such as an Australian Government officer or external advisor;
- Relationship with or interest in an organisation that is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently; or
- Relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain because the organisation receives a grant under the Grant Opportunity.

You will be asked to declare, as part of your application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interests or that, to the best of your knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If you later identify an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest, you must inform the Department in writing immediately.

Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Australian [Public Service Code of Conduct \(Section 13\(7\)\)](#) of the [Public Service Act 1999](#). Committee members and other officials including the decision maker must also declare any conflicts of interest.

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## 17 Privacy

We treat your personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#). This includes letting you know:

- what personal information we collect;
- why we collect your personal information; and
- who we give your personal information to.

Your personal information can only be disclosed to someone else for the primary purpose for which it was collected, unless an exemption applies under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

The Australian Government may use and disclose information about grant applicants and grant recipients under this Grant Opportunity. This includes disclosing grant information on GrantConnect as required for reporting purposes and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.

We may share the information you give us with other Commonwealth entities for purposes including government administration, research or service delivery, according to Australian laws.

As part of your application, you declare your ability to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Australian Privacy Principles and impose the same privacy obligations on officers, employees, agents and subcontractors that you engage to assist with the eligible Grant Activity, in respect of personal information you collect, use, store, or disclose in connection with the Grant Activity. Accordingly, you must not do anything which if done by the Department would breach an [Australian Privacy Principle](#) as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988*.

For further information about our privacy obligations (including in relation to how to access or correct personal information or make a complaint) and our contact details for privacy matters, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

## 18 Confidential Information

The Department will treat the applicant's commercially sensitive information provided in the applicant's application as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information (applicant Confidential Information).

The Department's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any applicant Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed;
- disclosed by the Department to its advisers, officers, employees, or other agencies' officers or employees, for the purpose of evaluating the applicant's application and during any Grant Agreement negotiations;
- disclosed by the Department in response to a request by a house or a committee of the Parliament of Australia, or a house or a committee of the Parliament of a state or territory;
- disclosed by the Department to its responsible Minister or the Auditor-General;
- shared by the Commonwealth within the Commonwealth's entity (for example, another Commonwealth agency), where this serves the Commonwealth's legitimate interests;
- disclosed to the Department's officers to enable the effective management or auditing of the Program; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the Department's confidentiality obligation.

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The applicant will treat any information provided by the Department as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information. (Commonwealth Confidential Information).

The applicant's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Commonwealth Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the applicant's confidentiality obligation.

The Department may share with state or territory governments (on a confidential basis) any or all information contained in applications which it considers relevant to the respective jurisdiction based on the location of the Proposed Solution(s), including costings for Proposed Solutions that are not successful in receiving funding through the Program, subject to agreement on confidentiality with applicants.

## 19 Intellectual property rights

By submitting an application under the Program, to the extent the applicant's application contains:

- its Intellectual Property; or
- a third party's Intellectual Property,

the applicant grants (or will procure for) the Commonwealth a permanent, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide, non-exclusive licence (including a right of sublicense) to use, reproduce, adapt, and communicate the applicant's Intellectual Property contained in its application under the Program provided the use, reproduction, adaptation, or communication is in connection with any assessment processes under, or the evaluation of, the Program.

Any licence granted to the Commonwealth in relation to Intellectual Property rights does not include a right to exploit the Intellectual Property for commercial purposes.

## 20 Freedom of information

All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#) (FOI Act).

The purpose of the FOI Act is to give members of the public rights of access to information held by the Australian Government and its entities. Under the FOI Act, members of the public can seek access to documents held by the Australian Government. This right of access is limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary to protect essential public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

All Freedom of Information requests must be referred to the Freedom of Information Coordinator in writing.

By mail: Freedom of Information Coordinator  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications  
and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: <mailto:FOI@infrastructure.gov.au>

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## 21 Consultation

These Guidelines are informed by the submissions received as part of consultation on the draft Guidelines.

## 22 Glossary

Term	Definition
4G	Fourth generation mobile telecommunications service.
5G	Fifth generation mobile telecommunications service.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Active sharing	Arrangements where MNOs share the active layer of mobile network infrastructure to deliver services to a location, including through Radio Access Network Sharing, and/or mobile roaming.
AEDT	Australian Eastern Daylight Time
AC	Alternating Current
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
Asset	"The component of Proposed Solution to be constructed or upgraded at (or in connection to) a site".
Date of Asset Completion	The date on which the Grantee has delivered the contracted service for a particular Asset.
Backhaul	A link between the core or backbone of a network and sub-networks, transporting data from a series of disparate locations to a more centralised location.
<a href="#">Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines or CGRGs</a>	Guidelines issued by the Finance Minister under section 105C of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> , which establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration.
Commonwealth Official	A Commonwealth representative who is working or consulting on the Program.
Decision Maker	As set out in <a href="#">section 8.4</a> , the Minister for Communications.
DC	Direct Current
DTCS FAD	Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination
Eligible Area	As described in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .

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Term	Definition
Eligibility Criteria	The mandatory criteria set out in <a href="#">section 4</a> which applicants must meet in order for their application for the Grant Opportunity to be considered.
Existing Handheld Coverage	Coverage able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device within the applicant's mobile network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>that is currently available;</li> <li>that will be provided by any base station that will be delivered by the applicant under a round of the Mobile Black Spot Program, Peri-Urban Mobile Program or other Commonwealth grant program; or</li> </ul> that will be provided by any applicant base station funded under a State or Territory program.
Fixed-line	A type of internet connection that uses a physical line (including but not limited to fibre, Hybrid Fibre-Coaxial and copper) to provide services to a premises.
Fixed Wireless	A type of internet connection that uses fixed transmission towers or base stations to provide wireless services to a premises via antennas.
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTTP	Fibre To the Premises
Funded Project	A telecommunications infrastructure project found suitable during the assessment process and selected for funding under Round 3 of the Program.
Funding Strategy	A written plan that outlines the financial capacity of the applicant to deliver a Proposed Solution through the Program.
Grant Activity	All the projects that the Grantee is required to undertake as set out in the Grant Agreement.
Grant Agreement	A document with contractual effect that sets out the relationship between the Grantee and the Commonwealth, and specifies the details of the grant.
<a href="#">GrantConnect</a>	The Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CGRGs.
Grant Opportunity	The Program Grant Opportunity as described in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Grantee	An applicant who has been selected to receive a grant under the Grant Opportunity.
Guidelines	These Regional Connectivity Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

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Term	Definition
GST	Goods and Service Tax
Ineligible Areas	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Intellectual Property	Includes: 1. all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts); 2. all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and 3. all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.
Macrocell	The widest range of cell sizes used in a mobile phone network served by a mobile base station, often used in rural areas and along highways. Macrocells generally provide larger coverage than small cell base stations or microcells, with a typical power output of tens of watts.
Merit Criteria	The specified principles or standards set out in <a href="#">section 6</a> , against which applications will be judged. The Merit Criteria will be used to assess the merits of proposals and to determine application rankings.
Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve and extend mobile coverage in regional, rural and remote Australia.
Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
<u>National MNO</u>	<u>An MNO who operates a mobile network that provides mobile coverage to at least 80-% of the Australian population.</u>
National Broadband Network (NBN)	The national wholesale-only, open access telecommunications network that is being built by, or in conjunction with, NBN Co (including any existing network incorporated into the NBN).
New Handheld Coverage	Coverage Proposed Solution that will be able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device in areas that do not receive Existing Handheld Coverage, in accordance with the meaning given in section 2.2.1.
NCD	Nominated Carrier Declaration
Operational Period	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2.2.3</a> .
Operational Costs (OPEX)	Costs for additional goods or services that are purchased for the ongoing operation of an asset.
Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve mobile coverage and capacity in peri-urban fringe areas at risk of bushfire and natural disaster.
Program	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2</a> .

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Term	Definition
Proposed Solution	Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.
Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Mobile Black Spot Solutions funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Regional Connectivity Solutions funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Public Safety Premises	Places including emergency services facilities (i.e. including ambulance and Rural Fire Service (RFS) depots, hospitals, police facilities, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and related facilities (which may include airstrips).
Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP)	The 4G received signal power in a long-term evolution (LTE) network measured in decibels per milliwatt (dBm).
RRU	Remote Radio Unit
Selection Process	The method used to select Grantees, which will include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria;</li> <li>2. a detailed assessment against Merit Criteria;</li> <li>3. a Value for Money assessment and consideration of other government priorities; and</li> <li>4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.</li> </ol>
Small Cell	A 'small cell' in a mobile phone network, with a typical range less than two kilometres. Often used to add network capacity in areas of dense population or very remote locations, utilising power control to limit coverage area. These are also known as microcells.
Value for Money	Refers to achieving 'value with relevant money' which is a judgement based on the grant proposal representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public resources and determined from a variety of considerations in accordance with the CGRGs. When administering a grant opportunity, a Commonwealth Official should consider the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each proposal including, but not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the quality of the project proposal and activities;</li> <li>b. fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to Government objectives;</li> <li>c. that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the applicant's and the Government's objectives being achieved; and</li> <li>d. the applicant's relevant experience and performance history.</li> </ol>
We/us	The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts/or Commonwealth Officials administering the Program.
WHS	Work Health and Safety

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## Attachment A

### A1. Co-location and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

**Subject to 4.2 above,** in addition to any arrangements negotiated with an MNO confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed Solution, each Proposed Solution must offer the option of co-location to other MNOs, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

If a Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO other than those already participating or is not capable of supporting co-location, applicants must provide a detailed explanation of why it is not technically feasible to reconfigure the Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution to support an additional MNO at incremental cost to the Co-locating MNO, or why it is not otherwise possible to offer co-location at the site. The Department's technical advisor may review any technical advice from the applicant. If the Department's view is that co-location is technically possible, then the applicant must be prepared to offer the option of co-location at incremental cost to an MNO seeking to co-locate on the Proposed Solution, or the Department may remove the Proposed Solution from the assessment process.

Once an applicant is selected to build a Proposed Solution, it must if other parties express interest, give any other MNO(s) not already participating in the Proposed Solution the opportunity to co-locate and to participate in the detailed design phase for that Funded Solution using the process set out in this paragraph.

- The incremental cost for a Funded Solution to support an additional MNO will be provided to the other participating MNOs to allow for greater transparency in co-location negotiations.
- For Funded Solutions where other MNOs are interested in co-locating, the costs can be shared more broadly and efficiencies achieved if the interested MNOs can participate in the design and build phases, which should ensure that their reasonable specifications are accommodated in the design and construction of the Funded Solution. This opportunity relates to all the requirements necessary for co-location to efficiently occur, including (but not limited to) the height and robustness of the Funded Solution, as well as site space for housing equipment and providing access to power and Backhaul.
- The Government is supportive of Grantees offering other MNOs the opportunity to co-invest in Funded Solutions including (but not limited to) provision of Backhaul.

For the purpose of providing the incremental cost of supporting an additional MNO, a Funded Solution must meet the following minimum specifications to be considered capable of supporting two or three MNOs:

- The structure is based on one of the following configurations:

**Table 2: Minimum specification configurations for co-location of multiple MNOs**

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
3 x 1 panel antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2533mm (h) x 353mm (w) x 209mm)	3 x 6 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2680mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 146mm (d), Weight: 39.5kg)	3 x 10 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2688mm (h) x 349mm (w) x 166mm (d), Weight 36.5kg)



Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
(d), Weight 32kg); or equivalent load		
3 x Tower Mounted Amplifiers Dimensions: (457mm (h) x 275mm (w) x 208mm (d), Weight 25kg); or equivalent load	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 150mm (d), Weight 20kg)	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 100mm (d), Weight 13.5kg)
6 x feeders + 300mm cable gantry for monopole structure type sites	6 x combiners (Dimensions: 330mm (h) x 200mm (w) x 130mm (d), Weight 3.2kg)	2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load
2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load	2 x 600mm transmission dishes; or equivalent load	
	Other DC Cables and Junction Boxes	

- There is sufficient mains AC power provision to support the requirements of additional MNO equipment. This requirement does not apply to solar powered sites, however, solar powered sites must have sufficient space for the additional MNO(s) to install additional solar panels.
- There is a communications hut of sufficient size (or space available on the site for further huts) to accommodate additional MNO equipment.
- For macrocell solutions, the Grantee must ensure sufficient space is available to allow any participating MNOs to install auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power in the event of the loss of external power to the site up to the Program's minimum 12 hours standard.

MNOs interested in co-locating on a Funded Solution (i.e. the MNO expresses an interest in co-locating on Funded Solutions after funding has been awarded) will be required to express interest prior to the start of the detailed design stage for that Funded Solution. All parties will be required to negotiate in good faith with each other in relation to the Funded Solution access and price terms, and enter into commercial arrangements. The capital contribution to be made by the co-locating parties in respect of a Funded Solution must, at least, equal the incremental cost incurred by reason of provisioning co-location for that Funded Solution.

In accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined at section A3, any disagreements regarding co-location matters will be determined by an independent third party, to be appointed at the MNOs'/MNIPs' shared cost, and in accordance with the dispute resolution process.

Following the process set out above, if it is ascertained that there is no interest in co-location from another MNO, the Grantee will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location.

## A2. Backhaul access and pricing for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Where a Grantee selected to build a Funded Solution reaches an agreement under section A.1 for an MNO not already participating in the Funded Solution (the Co-locating MNO) to co-locate on the Funded Solution, and subject to the microwave backhaul requirements below, the Grantee must offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee is in a position to do so.

The Grantee will be taken to be in a position to offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee owns or controls an optical fibre or microwave link which connects the Funded Solution to the Grantee's network.

The price at which the Grantee offers Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO must be more favourable than the regulated prices set under the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination (DTCS FAD), for example, by offering a defined rent-free period or other discounting mechanism.

The ACCC has released the DTCS FAD 2020<sup>11</sup>, including a DTCS pricing calculator that may assist interested parties to calculate the regulated price for Backhaul.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Solution using an optical fibre connection, it must ensure that it provides sufficient Backhaul capacity, transmission and interfacing equipment to meet the Backhaul requirements of any Co-locating MNO on the Funded Solution.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Solution using a microwave connection, the Grantee must provide Backhaul services to a Co-locating MNO over that microwave connection, unless:

- the Funded Solution is designed and built to allow the Co-locating MNO to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Solution; and
- the Co-locating MNO is permitted to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Solution.

The terms and pricing of Backhaul services provided by a Grantee to a Co-locating MNO must be negotiated commercially between the Grantee and Co-locating MNO in accordance with the principles set out in sections A.2.

### **A3. Dispute resolution for Mobile Black Spot Solutions**

Disputes between parties in relation to co-location and Backhaul for a Funded Solution will be referred for determination to an independent third party expert, at the parties' own shared cost.

The Grantee and Co-locating MNO will be bound by the determination made by the independent third party expert.

<sup>11</sup> [www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report](http://www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report)

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**Pidgeon, Karly**

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Friday, 17 March 2023 3:03 AM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii); DLO Rowland  
**Cc:** Windeyer, Richard; Caruso, Daniel; s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** For action: MS23-003156 - RCP3/MBSP7 Brief and Guidelines Pack for Ministerial consideration [SEC=OFFICIAL]  
**Attachments:** MS23-003156 - Brief - RCP Rd 3 (incl MBS7) - Approval of Guidelines for Approach to Market.docx; Attachment B - Summary of submissions on draft Guidelines.docx; Attachment C - Departmental response to submissions.docx; Attachment A - Grant Opportunity Guidelines TRACK.docx; Attachment A - Grant Opportunity Guidelines.docx  
**Importance:** High

**OFFICIAL**

s22(1)(a)(ii) Grateful if you could please print the attached pack of documents for urgent consideration on Friday morning.

Hi s22(1)( )

This email submits the attached brief, Guidelines and related feedback summaries for the Minister's consideration to approve and launch the combined RCP and MBSP grant opportunity.

There is also a version of the Guidelines attached in track change for your information and ease of reviewing.

We will upload the attached documents here into PDMS in the morning and a copy of this email submitting the brief. (PDMS was not functioning this evening due to monthly security patching from 8pm - 2am).

A big thanks to the RCB teams led by s22(1) and s22(1) for pulling together the many elements to expedite the launch of the program.

Happy to discuss tomorrow as needed. We will liaise with you throughout the day on progress to finalise web text and the final Guidelines in order to load these into systems to release at 12.01am 20 March 2023. Please advise if that time is what you are seeking. I note the MR was embargoed for release at 10.30pm so we have marked the Guidelines as opening on the 19th to align with that timing. Easy to adjust that opening date one way or the other in the final Guidelines based on the Minister's preference.

Regards,  
 Karly

**Karly Pidgeon**

Assistant Secretary • Regional Communications Branch • Communications Services & Consumer Division

s22(1)(a)(ii) [s22\(1\)\(a\)\(ii\)@communications.gov.au](mailto:s22(1)(a)(ii)@communications.gov.au)

Ps22(1)(a)(ii) • Ms22(1)(a)(ii)

GPO Box 594 Canberra, ACT 2601

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
 CONNECTING AUSTRALIANS • ENRICHING COMMUNITIES • EMPOWERING REGIONS

[infrastructure.gov.au](http://infrastructure.gov.au)

*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land on which we meet, work and live.  
I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities.  
I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

## OFFICIAL

## Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines

<b>Opening date:</b>	<b>19 March 2023</b>
<b>Closing date and time:</b>	<b>17.00 AEDT on 31 May 2023 (10 weeks after opening)</b>
<b>Commonwealth policy entity:</b>	<b>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts</b>
<b>Enquiries:</b>	<p>If you have any questions, please email us at <a href="mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au">regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au</a>.</p> <p>Questions should be sent no later than two weeks before the closing date.</p>
<b>Date guidelines released:</b>	<b>19 March 2023</b>
<b>Type of grant opportunity:</b>	<b>Targeted competitive</b>



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# 1 Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities: processes

The Program is designed to achieve Australian Government objectives

This Grant Opportunity brings together the Regional Connectivity Program, and the Mobile Black Spot Program in two streams, which contributes to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' (the 'Department's')

Outcome: *Promote an innovative and competitive communications sector, through policy development, advice and program delivery, so all Australians can realise the full potential of digital technologies and communications services.* The Department works with stakeholders to plan and design the Grant Opportunity according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines \(CGRGs\)](#).



The Grant Opportunity opens

We publish the grant Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#).



Register with Department and pre-application documentation  
(Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Organisations wishing to apply for funding under the Program for Mobile Black Spot Solutions must contact the Department to register as potential applicants within four weeks following release of these Guidelines in order to obtain access to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions specific application documentation. At this time, applicants must submit their coverage maps as outlined in section 7.2. The application documentation outlines the requirements on potential applicants prior to submitting an application for funding.

Organisations can register their interest with the department by emailing MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au and providing the following information:

- (a) Organisation name;
- (b) Contact name;
- (c) Contact phone number; and
- (d) Contact email address.



Submit initial proposal period for Mobile Black Spot Solutions  
(Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Applicants have six weeks from the release of the Guidelines to develop and submit initial proposals for locations where they are interested in partnering with another Mobile Network Operator (**MNO**) on a site.



You complete and submit a grant application

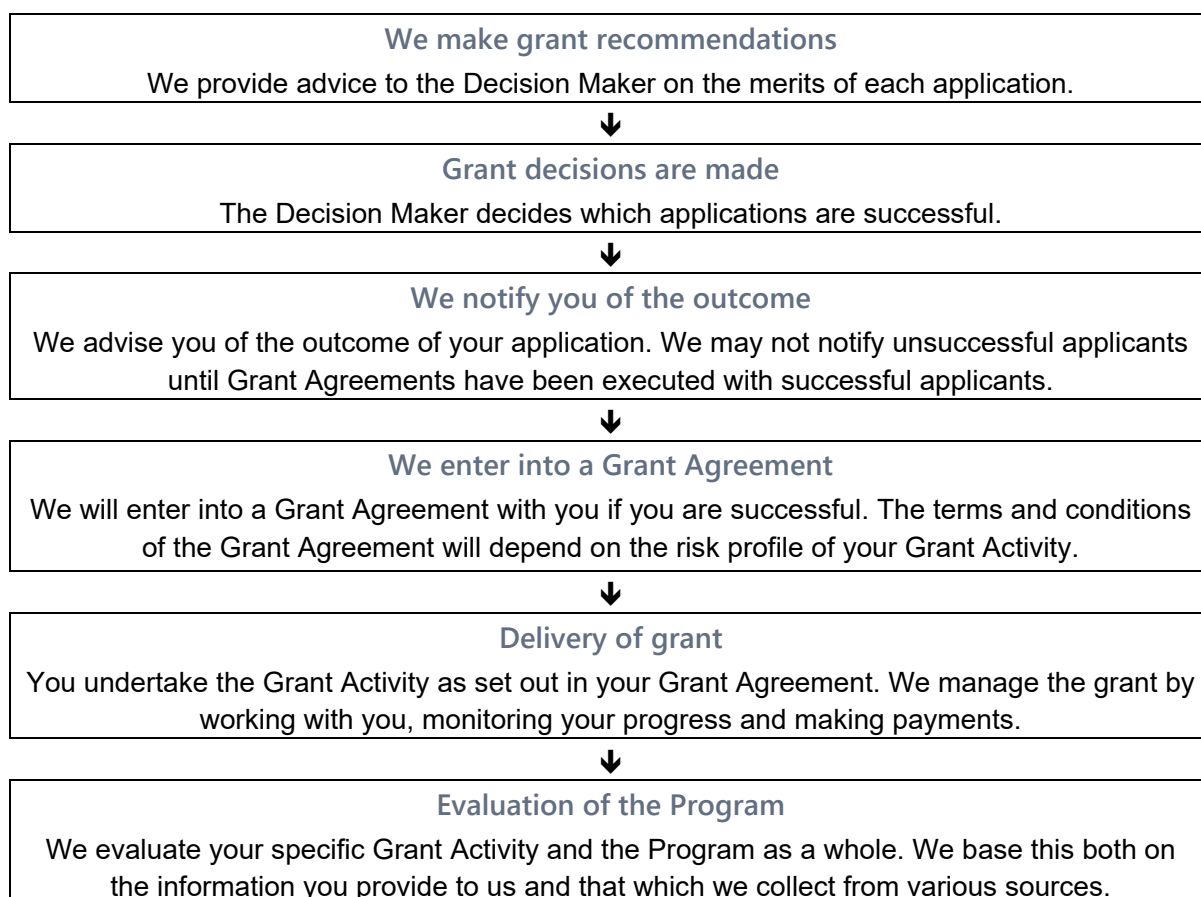
You complete the application form and address all of the Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria to be considered for a grant.



We assess all grant applications

We assess the applications against Eligibility Criteria and notify you if you are not eligible. We assess your eligible application against the Assessment Criteria, including an overall consideration of Value for Money, and compare it to other applications.





## 2 About the Program

These Grant Opportunity Guidelines ('Guidelines') contain information about Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program - with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities ('the Program') and the Program's Grant Opportunity and set out:

- the purpose of the Program/Grant Opportunity;
- the Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria;
- how grant applications are considered and selected;
- how Grantees are notified and receive grant payments;
- how Grantees will be monitored and evaluated; and
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the Grant Opportunity.

**You must read these Guidelines before filling out an application.**

We have defined key terms used in these Guidelines in the [Glossary at section 22](#).

### 2.1 Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile coverage and protecting communities against natural disaster. This opportunity is part of the *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* (Better Connectivity Plan) which is providing more than \$1.1 billion to rural and regional communities. Through the October 2022 Budget, the Government provided \$656 million for the Better Connectivity Plan to improve mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience in rural and regional Australia, including:

- \$400 million to expand regional mobile coverage and improve the resilience of communication systems;



- \$200 million for two further rounds of the *Regional Connectivity Program* to improve connectivity in regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- \$30 million over three years to accelerate Australia's agricultural sector through the *On Farm Connectivity Program*;
- \$20 million for an independent audit of mobile coverage to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities; and
- a further \$6 million over three years to extend the Regional Tech Hub to support better consumer awareness and better information regarding digital services:

This \$1.1 billion also includes the \$480 million already delivered by the Government to support NBN Co to upgrade the NBN Fixed Wireless network, with associated benefits to NBN satellite services.

The Government's new funding commitment for the Program builds on previous investment of \$230 million (GST exclusive) in Rounds 1 and 2 of the Program, which is generating a total investment of around \$413 million (GST exclusive) in 223 telecommunications projects in regional, rural and remote Australia. Further information on previous Program rounds is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp).

Indicative funding of around \$30 million of the Government's \$200 million commitment towards further rounds of the Regional Connectivity Program will be set aside to improve telecommunications access in First Nations communities. This funding will assist progress towards Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to ensure First Nations people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.

The Better Connectivity Plan will deliver funding for expanded regional mobile coverage through additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program. This includes the \$50 million for the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities available through this current Program Round.

The Better Connectivity Plan mobile coverage commitment will build on the outcomes delivered under the first six rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, including funding for over 1,200 new mobile base stations across regional and remote Australia. Further information on previous rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp).

## 2.2 About Round 3

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- A \$100 million (GST exclusive) **Regional Connectivity** (Round 3) stream for place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions that deliver new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services. It will enable bespoke telecommunications projects to be specifically tailored to the particular economic and/or social requirements of a region; and
- A \$50 million (GST exclusive) Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream (allocated from the expanding regional mobile coverage component of the Better Connectivity Plan) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that deliver **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and remote Australia.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, applicants and **Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application development period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including Proposed Solutions that use active sharing technologies and/or mobile roaming.

Both streams will include dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities (see Section 3.1).

- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services must apply under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** funding stream.
- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new mobile coverage must apply under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Further information about the types of Proposed Solutions that can be funded under each stream is provided at section 5.1.

Your application may include a combination of **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** or propose only **Regional Connectivity Solutions** or only **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

The objectives of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- use a place-based approach to target telecommunications infrastructure investment that will respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- expand mobile coverage in regional, rural, and First Nations communities; and
- assist progress towards Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.

The intended outcomes of this Round of the Program are to:

- Provide **place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions** to regional digital connectivity issues through a range of new or improved broadband services and/or improved mobile services;
- Provide **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** to expand mobile coverage and competition across regional and rural Australia; and
- Complement the National Broadband Network, including the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see below), and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

The Program Round's Grant Opportunity will support Funded Projects that deliver new telecommunications infrastructure or the upgrade of existing telecommunications infrastructure to provide:

- economic and social benefits in regional, rural and First Nations areas; and/or
- **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and First Nations areas.

For **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, the Round 3 Grant Opportunity will focus on areas:

- of high economic and/or social value;
- outside the NBN fixed-line footprint; and
- where better connectivity and increased data have a clear benefit to a local region.

The Australian Government has recently provided \$480 million (GST exclusive) towards upgrading the NBN Fixed Wireless network. Consumers in the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint will benefit from access to increased download speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps). Fixed wireless coverage will also be expanded to cover a further 120,000 currently satellite-only premises.

A Proposed Solution to deliver fixed wireless broadband in the NBN Fixed Wireless coverage areas will only be eligible under the Program if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and that the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see Section 5.2 below).

The opening and closing dates and any other relevant information will be published on the [Regional Connectivity Program](#)<sup>1</sup> webpage and [GrantConnect](#)<sup>2</sup>. If there is any discrepancy between these two publications, GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

The Grant Opportunity will be administered according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#) (CGRGs)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Services and deliverables

The services to be delivered, as a result of the Proposed Solution, must be a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications solutions in the relevant area.

For broadband access technologies, a like-for-like technology where there is an existing broadband service would only meet this requirement if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in:

- Service Quality: eg. latency, packet loss, contention ratio
- Coverage: eg. area, people, percentage of residential and/or business properties that will be covered by the Proposed Service
- Reliability: eg. service availability, service restoration times, backup and redundancy; and/or
- Speed: eg. latency, upload and download speeds.

These service improvements may include, but are not limited to, upgrades to address seasonal congestion, backhaul capacity upgrades to improve quality of service or additional mobile base stations in areas where there is existing but patchy coverage.

For services delivering **New Handheld Coverage**, the service will enable consumers to perform a range of functions using mobile devices, such as making and receiving phone calls, sending emails and text messages, browsing the internet, accessing online services, downloading files, using mobile apps, and accessing emergency communications services. To meet this expectation all proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- deliver at least 4G, and preferably also 5G, broadband data services and a voice service; and
- provide coverage modelling based on a New Handheld Coverage level with a Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP) at a 90 per cent confidence level for the cell area, as per the following table.

Table 1: RSRP Coverage Modelling Requirements

Coverage category	Channel bandwidth	Threshold (dBm)
Handheld	5	>-100
Handheld	10	>-103
Handheld	15	>-105
Handheld	20	>-106

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/internet/regional-connectivity-program>

<sup>2</sup> [www.grants.gov.au/](http://www.grants.gov.au/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines.pdf>

### 2.2.2 Local community priority

During the application period, **applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with state, territory and local governments and local communities regarding the Proposed Solutions.** (especially in relation to projects for First Nations communities). These consultations should involve the identification of priority areas to be covered by the Proposed Solution. Priority areas may include specific roads, health or education facilities, communities with significant First Nations populations, industrial areas, community sites, high-value production areas, or areas with a demonstrable need for improved public safety (for example, where people are unable to call 000 because of limited coverage or lack of infrastructure).

To give effect to the place-based objective of the Program, **applicants should provide evidence that their Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution is a priority for the local community** (*This is not required for **Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, although any information provided will be considered in the value for money stage*).

A local priority project could be identified through a regional digital plan or similar strategy by local government or letters of support accompanying the grant application. This could be demonstrated by evidence of support from groups such as: state and territory governments; local government; Regional Development Australia committees; industry, business, and community groups; not-for-profits (registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and First Nations community organisations.

State, territory and local governments may own infrastructure in areas that could potentially be used for Proposed Solutions. These governments may have specific requirements in relation to the use of their infrastructure that will need to be identified in the applications put forward by applicants for relevant Proposed Solutions.

### 2.2.3 Operational period

All Funded **Regional Connectivity Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of seven (7) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of ten (10) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

### 2.2.4 Application and selection process

Applicants may apply individually or jointly (as part of a consortium). Joint applications must be underpinned by commercially binding arrangements or a clear intention to enter into such arrangements, should the application be successful. Grants to joint applicants may be granted on the condition that the parties enter into a binding agreement, approved by the Department, prior to finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

Grant recipients will be selected through a competitive, merit-based Selection Process against Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria as set out in these Guidelines and a final value for money consideration. In applying for grants, applicants will outline their specific Proposed Solution, and demonstrate support from the local community. The most overt form of support will be financial co-contributions (such as contributions from state, territory or local governments or other third parties). **The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria and also demonstrate its claims against the assessment criteria.**

An applicant seeking dedicated First Nations funding will need to demonstrate that its Proposed Solution will benefit a First Nations community. For the purposes of the Program, applicants may use the following definition of a First Nations community as a guide for areas that the Government

is looking to target with dedicated First Nations funding: *a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents) by First Nations peoples, with housing or infrastructure (power, water, sewerage) that is managed on a community basis. First Nations communities have populations of (but not limited to) 50 or more First Nations people*<sup>4</sup>.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the local First Nations community and provide evidence of support for the Proposed Solution from that community (for example, through letters of support from First Nations community leaders). Applicants should also demonstrate how their Proposed Solution will help the Government meet Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (outlined at section 2.1 above).

For communities not eligible for dedicated First Nations funding, applicants can still apply for the general funding through the Program.

## 3 Grant amount and project period

### 3.1 Grants available

This Round of the Program has up to \$150 million (GST exclusive) of funding available, including:

- \$100 million for **Regional Connectivity (Round 3) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$15 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities; and
- \$50 million for **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$7.5 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that provide new mobile coverage in First Nations communities.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to extend the funding available for eligible Proposed Solutions to fund further meritorious projects.

The Project Period for Funded Projects will run from July 2023 to 30 June 2026. Grantees will also be required to provide retail services from the Funded Project for the Operational Period as identified in section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines.

In terms of the grant amount:

- There is no minimum grant amount
- There is no maximum grant amount, but total Round 3 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

All eligible Regional Connectivity Solutions applications under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream will be grouped into three categories for both the overall Program merit list and the First Nations communities merit list, according to the amount of Program funding requested, to ensure that smaller Proposed Solutions are given due consideration during the assessment process. There is no minimum or maximum number of Proposed Solutions that the Government is seeking to fund in any category. The categories are:

- Category 1: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of less than \$300,000 (GST exclusive)
- Category 2: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of \$300,000 to \$2 million (GST exclusive)

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<sup>4</sup> This definition is based on ABS Release — 2901.0 — Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016 – Discrete Community.



- Category 3: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of greater than \$2 million (GST exclusive).

All eligible **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream will be grouped into a **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** merit list and a First Nations communities merit list.

### 3.1.1 Financial co-contribution

To increase the reach of the Program, **applicants are encouraged to seek financial co-contributions (cash) towards each Proposed Solution from state, territory or local governments, local communities and/or other third parties.**

Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and negotiating contributions with any relevant third parties, and for testing and/or verifying any advice received from these third parties.

For Funded Projects that include a co-contribution from a state or territory government, the Department expects that Grantees will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth and a separate agreement with the respective state or territory government.

For Funded Projects that include co-contributions from other parties, the Grantee will bear any costs, and cover the other parties' funding if the other parties' funding is not secured following execution of the Grant Agreement between the Grantee and the Commonwealth.

For Proposed Solutions that include co-contributions from third parties, a copy of the terms of the third parties' commitment to the Applicant is to be attached to the application for funding.

## 3.2 Project period

Grantees must complete all of your Funded Projects by 30 June 2026. Grantees will be required to maintain the services for an Operational Period of:

- seven (7) years for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**; and
- ten (10) years for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If you consider that additional time is required to complete your Funded Project, please advise the Department in your application including providing justification for the additional time.

## 4 Eligibility criteria

We cannot consider your application if you do not satisfy all the Eligibility Criteria.

### 4.1 Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

For applicants applying for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)

And must be one of the following entity types, a:

- licensed telecommunications carrier under the *Telecommunications Act 1997*; or
- owner or intended owner of the Proposed Solution infrastructure who holds or intends to hold a Nominated Carrier Declaration (NCD) under the *Telecommunications Act 1997* in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded; or

For a joint (consortia) application:

- At least one organisation<sup>5</sup> must be a licensed telecommunications carrier or infrastructure owner who holds/intends to hold an NCD in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded. The licensed carrier or infrastructure owner (in the case an NCD applies) must be the entity that enters into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. However, such an application may be led by any of the following entity types:
  - Licensed carriers or infrastructure owners (in the case an NCD applies);
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local governments, local governing bodies, and regional development bodies;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community-controlled organisations.

For applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN); and
- be one of the following entity types:
  - a national **Mobile Network Operator (MNO)**; or
  - a **Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)**.
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNO** means a company that:
  - Supplies a public mobile telecommunications service within the meaning of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (Cth); and
  - Holds an apparatus or a spectrum licence (or both) for the supply of public mobile telecommunications services under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* (Cth).
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNIP** means a company, other than an **MNO**, that provides communications infrastructure in Australia or overseas, including the installation and operation of infrastructure to be used by one or more **National MNOs** to provide public mobile telecommunications services.
- **MNIP** applications must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from at least one **National MNO**, that offers national mobile coverage, to enter into a commercially binding commitment to use the infrastructure to deliver mobile services as described at section 2.2.3 for the Operational Period of the Proposed Solution. Funding may be awarded to eligible **MNIPs** on the condition that the **MNIP** and relevant **National MNO/s** enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

## 4.2 Multi-MNO and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions and Regional Connectivity Solutions to deliver mobile service from a National MNO

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, applicants and **MNOs**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including active sharing solutions. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and discussions with any relevant third parties.

If a **Regional Connectivity Solution** delivers new mobile coverage outcomes (e.g. a new mobile base station that delivers new mobile coverage to an area rather than an upgrade to an existing base station) to an area (i.e. it is not solely a mobile broadband or capacity upgrade to the **MNO** existing coverage in the area), and the applicant is a **National MNO**, then the solution is required to meet the **Multi-MNO** and co-locations requirements set out in this section.

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<sup>5</sup> The Australian Government recognises that some organisations may seek to form consortia in order to apply for a grant. Consortia are eligible to apply and the relevant conditions applicable to consortia are at [6](#) 'Joint (consortia) Applications'.

If you put forward a proposal for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** that offers services from more than one **MNO**, you may include in the proposal the eligible expenditure, found at section 5.3, for all of the **MNOs** that will offer services from the Proposed Solution. However, the Department will only enter into an agreement with you as the lead applicant if the Proposed Solution is successful. All payments including any components for the other participating parties will be made to the lead applicant only.

In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an **MNO** confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution**, each Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must offer:

- to **MNOs**, the option of offering services from the Proposed Solution using active sharing on commercial terms, if the Proposed Solution is an active sharing solution; and
- co-location to **MNOs**, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional **MNO** for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

**MNOs** who are not included in the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as submitted in your application will be responsible for meeting their own expenses for active sharing and / or co-locating at the site.

The detailed requirements for the **MNO** to offer the option of co-location to other **MNOs** not participating in the lead proposal are set out in **Attachment A**. Other **MNOs** will be provided with an opportunity to express interest in co-location before the detailed design phase. The **MNO** will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location if no such expressions of interest are received.

## 5 What the grant money can be used for

### 5.1 Eligible grant activities

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- the **Regional Connectivity (Round3)** funding stream; and
- the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Proposed Regional Connectivity Solutions under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream are limited to broadband connectivity solutions **and/or** mobile capacity improvement solutions in Eligible Areas.

Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** stream are limited to mobile infrastructure in Eligible Areas that extends the coverage of one or more **National MNO's** mobile network to an area without **Existing Handheld Coverage**.

To be eligible your Proposed Solution must:

- provide access to mobile or broadband services in Eligible Areas as set out in Section 5.2; and
- not have started construction or be part of the participating telecommunications provider's forward build network or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027;
- for all macro cell mobile solutions (under both **streams**), include a back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours and, where technically feasible, for other Proposed Solutions, in the event of the loss of external power to the site; and
- show evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for the relevant Operational Period at section 2.2.3.

In addition, your Proposed **Regional Connectivity Solutions** must:

- provide place-based telecommunications solutions to regional digital connectivity issues;
- deliver new infrastructure or the upgrade or improvement of existing infrastructure; and
- not overbuild a like-for-like service unless you can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability or speed.

Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- provide New Mobile Coverage to a location in regional, rural or remote Australia.

Your Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Regional Connectivity Solution** in your application. Similarly, your **Regional Connectivity Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** in your application.

## 5.2 Eligible Areas

Your application can include Proposed Solutions at different locations, as long as they are all in Eligible Areas. Each Proposed Solution will be individually assessed according to the Assessment Criteria. Part or all of the Asset may be located in an Ineligible Area provided it supports services in Eligible Areas. Eligible Areas are all parts of Australia that do not fall within one or more of these Ineligible Areas.

Ineligible Areas are:

- Urban Centres and Localities geographical units classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 'Major Urban', i.e. with a population of 100,000 or more<sup>6</sup>. The Department will provide map overlays showing Ineligible Areas on request.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, Ineligible Areas also include:

- Areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with a Fixed-Line service. Information on NBN Co's rollout is available at [www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map](http://www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map).

For areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with Fixed Wireless technologies, Proposed Solutions that deliver mobile voice and data, Fixed-Line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions will be eligible for funding. Fixed Wireless broadband Proposed Solutions will only be eligible within the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade.

The existing indicative NBN Fixed Wireless footprint is available on the National Map at [nationalmap.gov.au](http://nationalmap.gov.au). While it is expected that the expansion of coverage following NBN Co's Fixed Wireless upgrade will be substantial, applicants should assume this will extend the existing coverage area by up to 15km. Applicants should note that updated coverage maps of the expanded NBN upgrade footprint may not be available during the Round 3 application or assessment period. The Commonwealth reserves the right to delay the assessment and/or funding

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<sup>6</sup> Based on ABS Release — 1270.0.55.004 — Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 4 — Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2016.

of a Proposed Solution until it is known whether the Proposed Solution area will be within the upgraded NBN Fixed Wireless footprint or within an area where NBN announces FTTP upgrades.

### 5.3 Eligible expenditure

You can only spend the grant on eligible expenditure you have incurred on a Funded Project as defined in your Grant Agreement.

Grant funding will be available for the capital costs of building or installing Funded Projects. This may include site acquisition and planning approval costs. Grantees will be responsible for any actual capital costs which exceed estimated costs.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in a Remote or a Very Remote area (based on the ABS remoteness structure)<sup>7</sup>, or a Mobile Black Spot Solution seeking First Nations funding, applicants may seek funding up to 75% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in other locations, you may seek funding for up to 50% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Project.

Note: The installation expenditure can also include the reasonable incremental one-off costs associated with configuring participating MNOs' networks to connect to a Mobile Black Spot Solution if the Proposed Solution utilises active sharing and/or mobile roaming, provided that such costs have not already been subsidised by another funding program of the Commonwealth or States/Territories.

Not all expenditure on your Funded Projects may be eligible for grant funding. The program delegate makes the final decision on what is eligible expenditure and may give additional guidance on eligible expenditure if required.

You must incur the expenditure on your Funded Project between the start date and completion date for your Grant Agreement for the expenditure to be eligible.

#### 5.3.1 Eligible backhaul costs

For both **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** and **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, funding may be sought for the capitalised cost of Backhaul over the Operational Period of Funded Solutions, regardless of Backhaul technology. For remote locations where existing fibre or microwave Backhaul (or a combination of both) is not available or readily accessible, satellite Backhaul technology may be utilised to deliver the Funded Project. If satellite Backhaul technology is put forward for a Proposed Solution, the applicant should clearly define the level of service or connectivity to be provided.

In addition to upfront capital costs related to the installation and deployment of Backhaul (such as special linkage charges), the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of operational costs relating to leased optical fibre, microwave, or satellite Backhaul over the minimum Operational Period of a

<sup>7</sup> 1270.0.55.005 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure, July 2016



Proposed Solution may be included in the estimated asset capital cost of building the Proposed Solution. These capitalised operational costs for Backhaul must be clearly identified separately in the application.

## 5.4 What the grant money cannot be used for

To ensure that applicants do not seek Program funding for Proposed Solutions in areas where they have already planned to invest commercially, all applicants must certify that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**:

- Operating and maintenance expenditure for Funded Solutions is ineligible for grant funding.

The Department will not in any circumstances meet any costs or expenses incurred by an applicant in connection with their application. Applicants must bear their own costs and expenses associated with the application and assessment process, and the preparation, negotiation and execution of the Grant Agreement and of other documentation.

The Department may audit a Grantee's compliance with requirements.

## 6 Assessment criteria

### 6.1 Assessment Criteria for Regional Connectivity Solutions

Applications for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** will need to address each of the following criteria:

1. Merit Criterion one (economic benefits) (15 points)
2. Merit Criterion two (social benefits) (15 points)
3. Merit Criterion three (capacity, capability and resources to deliver the Proposed Solution) (10 points)
4. Merit Criterion four (financial co-contribution) (10 points).

The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate how the Proposed Solution meets each Merit Criterion. Applicants should provide a response to each Merit Criterion, as well as evidence of support to reinforce the claims made in its responses. We will assess eligible applications against each Merit Criterion using the weighting indicated to develop an overall score. Each application will also undergo an overall Value for Money assessment to determine whether the Proposed Solution represents Value for Money to the Commonwealth.

The application form asks questions that relate to the Merit Criteria below. You should provide sufficient evidence to support your answers, including evidence of community support for any proposed economic and/or social benefits offered by your Proposed Solution (see section 6.1.1.1 and section 6.1.2.1 for more information) in response to the Merit Criteria. In addition, you should provide evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in connectivity levels over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area (as outlined at section 2.2.1). The extent of this improvement will impact the assessment of the Proposed Solution's ability to deliver the economic and/or social benefits.

We encourage you to seek the support of the local government and/or state or territory government in preparing your application. For example, they may be able to assist you in identifying the

expected outcomes of the Proposed Solution, particularly the economic and social benefits that would be available to the local community, if the Proposed Solution is funded.

## 6.1.1 Merit Criterion 1 – Economic Benefit

### 6.1.1.1 Economic benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Economic benefits** for a region may cover increases in employment opportunities or economic activity, improvements in productivity, wider access to markets or fairer and more equitable economic outcomes. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to economic benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these economic benefits include:

- a. increasing the number or value of jobs, creating new businesses or efficiencies in the production of goods and services in the region beyond the construction phase (this includes direct and indirect opportunities created through the Proposed Solution);
- b. providing opportunities for growth in existing sectors, e.g. tourism, agriculture, manufacturing;
- c. facilitating greater competition in telecommunication retail services;
- d. whether the Proposed Solution provides an innovative approach to improve productivity, efficiency or addresses an identified problem; and/or
- e. evidence of the community/local intent to employ the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - i. State and territory governments;
  - ii. Local government and regional development authorities;
  - iii. Industry, business, and community groups;
  - iv. Not-for-profits; or
  - v. First Nations community-controlled organisations.

## 6.1.2 Merit Criterion 2 – Social Benefit

### 6.1.2.1 Social benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Social benefits** for a region may cover improving access to health and education services, improving public safety and improving regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to social benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these social benefits include:

- a. facilitating provision of more efficient and effective health or education services, including improved access to health or education resources in the home;
- b. improving public safety and network resilience in a defined area. This may include the ability to call 000 from more locations, providing alternative technologies with which to do so, or improving the effectiveness, resilience or safety of Public Safety Premises;
- c. improving retail competition, regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. This may include improving affordability, providing services that help to attract and retain a workforce or enhancing cultural heritage; and/or
- d. addressing disadvantage within the community including First Nations communities. This may include addressing low digital inclusion, providing affordable services to places with entrenched disadvantage (including benefits such as community free wifi or discounted pricing models), or providing people who are excluded with improved opportunities to access support services.

Applicants applying for First Nations funding should highlight how the Proposed Solution will address Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (as outlined in section 2.1 above), or any other targets under the Closing the Gap initiative.

### 6.1.3 Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery

#### 6.1.3.1 Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project (10 points)

You should demonstrate your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution within the specified cost and timeframe, including through identifying:

- a. Your track record and your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution, including
  - a. examples of delivering similar projects and solutions;
  - b. your resources and access to personnel and/or partners with the right skills and experience;
  - c. your ability to deliver in the context of your organisation's broader program of work (including any pipeline of works through Commonwealth and state or territory government programs such as MBSP and previous Program rounds); and
  - d. your access, or future access to, any necessary infrastructure, power or backhaul.
- b. The maturity of the Proposed Solution, including outlining
  - a. the key technical components of the solution, and a comprehensive project cost budget and breakdown;
  - b. a robust project delivery plan and schedule;
  - c. approvals that will be required and any steps taken to progress these; and
  - d. evidence of contingency planning that mitigates the risk of delays in getting the necessary approvals to commence work, particularly for greenfield and remote projects.

In addition, you should outline how you will maintain the infrastructure and the benefits provided by the Proposed Solution during the Operational Period, including managing expected increased data demands over the course of the Operational Period.

### 6.1.4 Merit Criterion 4 – Financial Co-contributions

#### 6.1.4.1 Total investment the grant funding will leverage (10 points)

You should demonstrate this through identifying the total investment the grant will leverage. A higher level of contribution from non-Commonwealth sources, comparative to the cost of the Proposed Solution, will help drive a higher score in the assessment process for this criterion.

While financial contributions from other Commonwealth sources will be considered as part of the Value for Money assessment, those contributions will not count towards the score for this Merit Criterion.

## 6.2 Assessment Criteria for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that offer coverage outcomes from three **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions that only offer service from two **MNOs**, all other things being equal. All Proposed Solutions that offer services from two **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions with a single **MNO**, all other things being equal.

Proposed Solutions within these **MNO** groupings (i.e. three **MNOs**, two **MNOs** and single **MNO**) will be ranked using the **New Coverage Assessment Formula** to derive the cost to the Commonwealth per weighted square kilometre of **New Handheld Coverage**, and coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is an **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with another **MNO's** network.

Proposed Solutions with a lower cost per square kilometre will rank higher than Proposed Solutions with a high cost per square kilometre.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)}}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

**Mobile Black Spot Solutions** located in Remote and Very Remote areas<sup>8</sup>, or seeking First Nations funding, will also be assessed against the **New Coverage Assessment Formula**, however, only 50 per cent of the cost to the Commonwealth will be used in the calculation for these solutions, as it is recognised that there is a higher cost to delivering mobile services in these areas.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** for Remote and Very Remote Proposed Solutions is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$) x 0.50}}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

The New Coverage Assessment Formula is based on the following components:

- a. **Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)** refers to the Commonwealth portion of the estimated Total Cost for the Proposed Solution (see section 5.3), including capitalised Operational Costs.
- b. **New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld mobile coverage where there is no **Existing Handheld Coverage**.
  - Where a Proposed Solution provides **New Handheld Coverage** from more than one participating **MNO**, each participating **MNO's New Handheld Coverage** will be counted cumulatively, regardless of whether the **New Handheld Coverage** areas overlap.
  - This is in recognition of the benefits of **Multi-MNO** solutions, and to ensure that these Proposed Solutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to the higher costs that may be incurred for these Proposed Solutions.
- c. **Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with **Existing Handheld Coverage** from another **MNO**, divided by a weighting factor of 2.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3 - Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2021

- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement of a single **MNO**, overlapping coverage with the **MNO**'s own existing network is not eligible for assessment.
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement (e.g. active sharing) of two or more **MNOs**, overlapping coverage that is new for at least one participating **MNO** is eligible for assessment, but counted only once. Coverage located in an area within the existing network of all participating **MNOs** will not be eligible for assessment.

**New Handheld Coverage** and Overlapping Coverage will be measured by comparing the 4G handheld coverage provided by the Proposed Solution against existing 4G handheld coverage (including as-yet unbuilt base stations funded under other Commonwealth and/or state government programs), as per the **MNOs**' submitted coverage maps at the handheld coverage levels set out in section 2.2.1.

Table 2: Example assessment of New Handheld Coverage and Overlapping Coverage

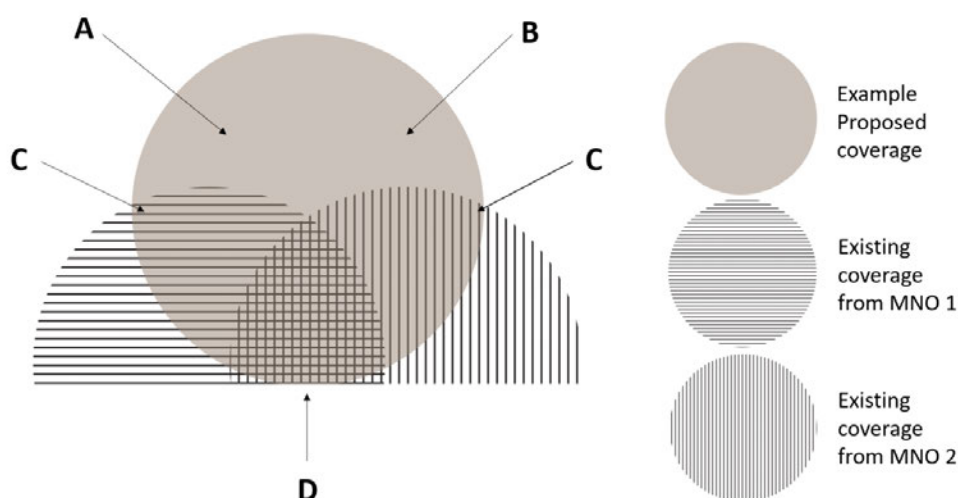
A Proposed Solution has confirmed participation of two MNOs.

- A. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 1, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
- B. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 2, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
- C. The Proposed Solution provides 20km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage, but is new for at least one of the participating MNOs.
- D. The Proposed Solution provides 10km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage in the networks of both participating MNOs (not eligible for assessment).

The assessed coverage for this Proposed Solution is  $A+B+(C/2)$

Equalling:  $30\text{km}^2 + 30\text{km}^2 + (20\text{km}^2 / 2) = 70\text{km}^2$

A graphical representation of this example is below:





## 7 How to apply

Before applying, you must read and understand these Guidelines.

All application documents may be found on [GrantConnect](#). Any alterations and addenda<sup>9</sup> will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on the GrantConnect website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If you need further guidance around the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online, contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

To apply you must:

- complete the Grant Opportunity application form;
- provide all information requested;
- demonstrate that you meet all Eligibility Criteria;
- provide responses to the Assessment Criteria;
- include all necessary attachments; and
- submit your application/s before the due date.

Table 3: Expected timing for this grant opportunity

Activity	Timeframe
Guidelines released and applications open	19 March 2023
Applicant registration and pre-application documentation for applicants applying for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)
Submit initial proposal period for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)
Applications close	5pm AEDT 31 May 2023
Announcement on Successful Applications	
Commencement date of Grant Activity	On Execution of Grant Agreement
End date of Grant Activity	30 June, 2026
End date of Asset Operational Period	As defined at section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines

### 7.1 Applicant registration (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Potential applicants who intend to propose **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must register their interest with the Department and sign and provide a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to being granted access to the confidential Program documentation.

<sup>9</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

## 7.2 Pre-application lodgement (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Upon registering as a potential applicant, **MNOs** who intend to submit applications for funding, or are partnering with potential applicants, for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must first submit their existing handheld 4G coverage information, incorporating the coverage from base stations funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program, the Peri-Urban Mobile Program and the Regional Connectivity Program and any base station funded under a State or Territory program, regardless of the stage of construction.

**Existing Handheld Coverage** information required above must be submitted to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), **1 May 2023**. The Department may, at its absolute discretion, accept mobile coverage information submitted by **MNOs** after this date.

The **Existing Handheld Coverage** information required in accordance with this section must be supplied as two separate layers as follows:

- Handheld Coverage Maps: being a layer modelled to the Handheld Coverage levels as set out in section 2.2.1; and
- Existing Public Coverage Maps: being a layer representing the predictive handheld coverage modelling standards which underpin the publicly available coverage maps on the **MNO's** website.

For avoidance of doubt, the **Existing Public Coverage Maps** are requested for information purposes only. Assessment will only consider **the New Handheld Coverage Maps** (i.e. a “like-for-like” comparison).

Pre-application information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.3 Submit initial proposals for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should lodge any initial proposal locations where they are interested in partnering with another **MNO** on a site under the Program to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), **1 May 2023**.

The registered applicants should provide this information using the “Initial Proposals” template provided in the Application Pack.

The Department will collate the lists of initial proposal locations and provide a consolidated list to all registered applicants. The consolidated list will include the following information for each initial proposal:

- an unique identifier;
- the location;
- type of base stations being considered (small cell / macro); and
- the applicant's contact details.

The Department will also distribute a contact list of all pre-registered applicants to facilitate discussions regardless of whether a pre-registered applicant has identified potential partnering locations.

Applicants and other interested parties have until closing of the application period to discuss and plan co-development and co-funding opportunities at these sites prior to finalising applications.

The list of locations will be treated as Confidential Information by the registered applicants.

Initial proposal information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.4 Completing and lodging an application

Your application must provide:

- An outline of the key technical components of the Proposed Solution, including any required supporting infrastructure and services, (including appropriate diagrams) and detail how the overall 'system' will deliver the proposed services to the stated quality.
- The location of the Proposed Solution and all Assets.
- Mapping data, where applicable, outlining the predictive coverage for the Proposed Solution.
- The total estimated capital cost of construction (GST inclusive).
- The amount of co-contribution (GST inclusive) being provided by the applicant.
- The amount of Commonwealth co-contribution sought under the Proposed Solution (GST Inclusive).
- The amount of any co-contributions (GST Inclusive) to be received from all third parties, including but not limited to state, territory or local governments, local communities, or any combination of these, and any specific requirements or conditions tied to the co-contributions.
- Evidence of any co-contributions to be received from all third parties. For example, a letter of support from a suitably senior official from the relevant third party, which outlines the amount of co-contributions to be received and any conditions attached to the co-contributions. The department may ask for additional evidence of co-contributions if it considers the evidence you provide is unsatisfactory.
- Evidence of the extent to which the Proposed Solution meets the Assessment Criteria.
- Evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area.
- Whether the Proposed Solution is dependent on the construction of one or more of the applicants' other Proposed Solutions, including explaining the specific dependencies.

You must agree that the predictive coverage mapping data can be used by the Department to prepare promotional material for the Program or for policy development and advice as needed.

Applicants must indicate their ability to comply with the applicable sample Grant Agreement(s) for the relevant stream(s) (to be made available on GrantConnect shortly after Program opening) at the time of submitting their applications. There will be separate sample Grant Agreements for Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions. Where the terms of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) are not accepted in full, applicants are required to submit a revision-marked version of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) reflecting their proposed drafting, their position, and their reasons for requesting the change.

Applicants who have previously agreed a funding agreement with the Commonwealth under Round 2 of the Regional Connectivity Program (for Regional Connectivity Solutions) or the Mobile Black Spot Program (for Mobile Black Spot Solutions) and wish to use that Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the applicable stream) must request to do so at the time of submitting their application. However, applicants must still indicate their ability to comply with the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) as mentioned above. The Commonwealth may, at its sole discretion, agree to use the Previous Funding Agreement as a basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the relevant stream). The Commonwealth will indicate any updates to be made to the Previous Funding Agreement for the purposes of this round. The updates will be drawn from the applicable sample Grant Agreement for the relevant stream.

As outlined in [section 5.4](#) of these Guidelines, applicants must warrant that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward

build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

You are responsible for ensuring that your application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information is a serious offence under the [Criminal Code Act 1995 \(Cth\)](#). We will investigate any false or misleading information and may exclude your application from further consideration.

If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact us immediately at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. We may, at our sole discretion, accept additional information from you or a request to correct the error. However, we are under no obligation to accept any additional information or agree to a request from you to correct your application after the closing time.

If we identify an error in your application, you may be contacted to correct or explain the error. However, we can refuse to accept any additional information from you that would change your application after the closing time.

You should keep a copy of your application and any supporting documents.

All applications lodged will be acknowledged by the Department by email. Applicants lodging an application who do not receive acknowledgement of their application should contact the Department. Applications that are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. If you need further guidance about the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

Applications can be lodged by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. Application files lodged by email must not exceed a combined size of 10 megabytes per email. Applications may also be lodged using GovTEAMS, the Australian Government's secure online document sharing and project management system. Potential applicants can be provided with information about lodging applications using GovTEAMS upon request to the Department. Potential applicants may also request to use alternative online secure document sharing systems by agreement with the Department.

You should advise the Department if you intend to lodge your application using GovTEAMS, or if you need to use an alternative electronic lodgement platform. You should do this **at least two weeks before the closing date** via email to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. If you wish to change the electronic lodgement platform after notifying the Department, you should advise the Department of the change and the reasons why. The Department may, at its discretion, accept changes to the lodgement method.

All electronic files, regardless of transmission method, should be provided in an appropriate Microsoft compatible format (Microsoft Office 2007 or later or PDF files preferred): Geo-spatial information such as maps should be provided in either Mapinfo TAB or MID/MIF; ESRI Shape; GML; or KML format.

The Department may also accept applications via hard copy and/or physical electronic media, in addition to electronic applications.



Where physical electronic media is to be provided, such as a USB stick, the media must be PC-formatted. Applicants should include an index of all electronic documents on the physical electronic media.

Applications provided in hard copy and physical electronic media formats should be delivered via registered post or by hand prior to the closing date.

Applications via post are to be addressed and delivered to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
 GPO Box 594  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

Applications via hand delivery are to be addressed and delivered by the closing date to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
 2 Phillip Law Street  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

## 7.5 Attachments to application

The following details must also be provided as attachments to your application:

- a comprehensive budget for the Proposed Solution including itemised costs of all the key items such as material, equipment and software licenses (linked to a Bill of Material), costs of key labour, contractor activities and tasks, and other overhead costs such as project management, administration, transport, travel & accommodation
- evidence of a Funding Strategy, e.g. financial statements, loan agreements, cash flow documents
- accountant declaration that you are able to fund your share of the cost of the Proposed Solution (sample template provided on GrantConnect)
- evidence of commitment to financial co-contributions as detailed in [section 6.1.4](#) of these Guidelines
- certification of the application by a duly authorised representative of your organisation, for example a senior executive, director, or company secretary
- evidence to demonstrate your ability to successfully construct and operate the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of ability to deliver a retail service on the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for at least the Operational Period
- for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, evidence of the local need for the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local government and regional development authorities;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community controlled organisations
- other evidence, as necessary to support your claims against the Assessment Criteria.
- Predictive coverage mapping data for each Proposed Solution.



Supporting documentation to the application form can be attached in line with the instructions provided within the form.

## 7.6 Joint (consortia) applications

We recognise that some organisations may want to join together as a group to deliver a Proposed Solution.

In these circumstances, you must appoint a 'lead organisation'. Only the lead organisation can submit the application form, but the lead organisation will not necessarily be the entity entering into any agreement with the Commonwealth (refer to [section 4.1](#) of these Guidelines). The application must identify all other members of the group (partner organisations) and their role in the Proposed Solution and include a letter of support from each of the partners organisations.

Each letter of support should include:

- details of the partner organisation;
- an overview of how the partner organisation will work with the lead organisation, including financial co-contributor and any other partner organisations in the group to successfully complete the Proposed Solution;
- an outline of the relevant experience and/or expertise the partner organisation will bring to the group;
- the roles/responsibilities of the partner organisation and the resources they will contribute (if any); and
- details of a nominated management level contact officer.

You must have a formal arrangement in place with all partner organisations prior to execution of the Grant Agreement.

## 7.7 Closing date for funding applications

The closing date for submitting an application for funding under this Grant Opportunity is 5pm (Canberra Time) on 31 May 2023.

## 7.8 Timing of Grant Opportunity processes

You must submit an application between the published opening and closing dates. The Department reserves the right to, in exceptional circumstances, accept a late application to the assessment process at its discretion. Without limiting the Department's discretion, exceptional circumstances may include natural disasters or unforeseen technical issues with application forms or lodgement systems. Any decision by the Department on whether or not to accept a late application to the assessment process shall be final.

If you believe there are circumstances which will affect the timely submission of your application, you must contact us before the application closing date to negotiate an alternative submission due date.

## 7.9 Questions during application process

All requests for clarification or determination of the meaning of provisions in these Guidelines should be referred to the Department by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. The Department's written decision on the matter is final.

We will acknowledge and address emailed questions as soon as practicable. Answers to questions will be posted on GrantConnect as Frequently Asked Questions.

## 8 The grant Selection Process

### 8.1 Assessment of grant applications

We will consider eligible applications through a targeted competitive grant process.

The assessment process for the program will be as follows:

1. initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria
2. detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria
3. Value for Money assessment and consideration of whether the Proposed Solution supports a Government priority as outlined in [section 8.2](#)
4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.

As part of the Value for Money assessment we will group all eligible Proposed Solutions by funding stream and for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** into the funding categories described in [section 3.1](#) to ensure we compare Proposed Solutions of similar size against each other.

There is no separate application process or Eligibility Criteria to receive dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions in First Nations communities. We will consider eligible First Nations applications, as defined in [section 2.2.4](#) of these Guidelines, under a separate merit list. Eligible First Nations solutions that are not successful in gaining dedicated First Nations funding through the First Nations merit list will be considered under the relevant merit list for each funding stream.

We may seek advice regarding your Proposed Solution from state or territory government agencies, other Australian Government agencies, independent experts and other external parties. This advice may be taken into consideration when assessing the Proposed Solution.

Where the level of information provided in an application is not sufficient for the assessors to make a recommendation they may, but are not obliged to, seek more information from the applicant so long as it does not change the substance of the application. If the assessment process identifies unintentional errors in your application, we may contact you to correct or clarify the errors, but you cannot make any material alteration or addition. It is therefore recommended that you thoroughly address the criteria in your application.

An evaluation committee may seek additional information about your application. They may do this from within the Commonwealth, even if the sources are not nominated by you as referees. The evaluation committee may also consider information about you or your application that is available through the normal course of business.

### 8.2 Value for Money and government priorities

Following assessment against the Eligibility and Assessment Criteria, an assessment will also be undertaken to consider which of the Proposed Solutions represent the best Value for Money to the Commonwealth and whether they support a government priority. This is to ensure the grant will add value by achieving Program benefits that would not occur without the grant. This assessment will have regard to the overall Program and Grant Opportunity objectives.

Factors that may be considered in the Value for Money assessment include, but are not limited to the:

- cost to the Commonwealth of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which the Proposed Solution would contribute to the Program objectives, including addressing an identified local priority or government priority
- for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, degree to which the Proposed Solution delivers **Multi-MNO** outcomes

- extent to which the Proposed Solution will build on investments (aimed at delivering social and economic benefits) already made or planned for the Proposed Solution location
- extent of existing or planned commercial activity/investment that will impact on telecommunications services and the level of connectivity in the Proposed Solution location
- extent to which the Proposed Solution presents a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area
- extent to which Proposed Solutions provide overlapping coverage in a given area, and the appropriateness of each Proposed Solution to local needs
- extent to which the Proposed Solution leverages additional partnerships and in-kind contributions
- extent to which the Proposed Solution supports broader Commonwealth objectives or priorities, including through written support or financial co-contributions from other Commonwealth Departments or agencies
- ability to meet the needs of end users over the Operational Period
- forecast benefits of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which there is an appropriate spread of Proposed Solution types and Eligible Areas.

Based on the overarching Value for Money assessment, the Department reserves the right to recommend funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that were lower ranked against the Assessment Criteria than other eligible Proposed Solutions. This could include lower ranked Proposed Solutions from First Nations communities in recognition of the dedicated funding available for First Nations communities. The Department also reserves the right to recommend not funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that are highly ranked against the Assessment Criteria, based on the Value for Money assessment.

The Department may, at its absolute discretion, recommend increasing the level of Commonwealth funding for one or more **Mobile Black Spot Solution** above the maximum percentage per **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as outlined in section 5.3, should it be considered of higher Value for Money.

### 8.3 Who will assess applications?

The evaluation committee will assess each application on its merits and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which Proposed Solutions should be awarded a grant (if any).

We may ask external advisors to inform the assessment process. Any advisor who is not a Commonwealth Official will be required to perform their duties in accordance with the CGRGs.

The evaluation committee recommends to the Decision Maker which applications to approve for a grant.

### 8.4 Who will approve grants?

The Minister for Communications (the Decision Maker) decides which grants to approve, taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation committee and the availability of grant funds for the purposes of the Grant Opportunity.

The Minister's decision is final in all matters, including the:

- approval of applications for funding;
- amount of grant funding awarded; and
- terms and conditions of funding.

There is no appeal mechanism for decisions to approve or not approve a grant. An applicant who is dissatisfied with the outcome may contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman as set out in [section 15](#).

## 9 Notification of application outcomes

We will advise you of the outcome of your application in writing. If you are successful, we will advise you of any specific conditions attached to the grant.

### 9.1 Feedback on your application

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a grant, you may ask for feedback within 28 days of being advised of the outcome. We will give written feedback within one month of your request.

## 10 Successful grant applications

### 10.1 The Grant Agreement

Each Grantee will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement (or Agreements if successful in both streams) with the Commonwealth. Each Grant Agreement will set out the Grantee's obligations in respect of the roll-out and service terms for each Funded Project. Where the Grantee is successful in obtaining funding for both Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions, the Regional Connectivity Solutions will be covered by a separate Grant Agreement to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

A sample Grant Agreement for Regional Connectivity Solutions and a separate sample Grant Agreement for Mobile Black Spot Solutions will be available shortly after the opening of the application round.

Applicants requesting any changes to the applicable sample Grant Agreement should provide full details of the proposed changes in their application, for consideration by the Department (see section 7.4 of these Guidelines). An applicant who was a previous funding recipient under either stream of the Program may, at the time of making their application, request to use a previously agreed funding agreement for that stream, with appropriate updates specified by the Commonwealth, as the basis for their Round 3 Agreement (an Updated Previous Funding Agreement). For RCP Round 2 funding recipients that are successful under Round 3 when seeking funding for a Regional Connectivity Solution, they may request to use their executed Round 2 Grant Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement. The decision to use an Updated Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement is at the ultimate discretion of the Commonwealth.

We must execute a Grant Agreement with the applicant before we can make any payments. We are not responsible for any of the applicant's expenditure until a Grant Agreement is executed. Applicant's should not start any activities relating to a Funded Project until a Grant Agreement is executed. Each successful applicant must enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth prior to the Government's announcement of successful locations and Grantees.

The Commonwealth expects Grant Agreement terms to be reached with a successful Grantee within 60 Business days of the proposed Grantee being advised in writing that the Commonwealth is prepared to financially support the Proposed Solutions/s. If terms have not been agreed within 60 Business days, and without limiting any other rights or discretions, the Commonwealth reserves to the right not to proceed with a Grant Agreement for the Proposed Solution.

## 11 Specific legislation, policies and industry standards

Whilst applicants are required to be compliant with all laws and regulations, they may be requested to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation, policies or industry standards. For example,

applicants may be requested to demonstrate compliance with health, safety or security related legislation, policies or industry standards that are in any way applicable to the Funded Project.

### 11.1.1 Australian Industry Participation (AIP) Plan

Grant applicants should note that for funding of \$20 million or more, subject to advice from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, the Australian Industry Participation National Framework principles, including an AIP plan requirement, may apply to the grant agreement(s). More information on AIP plan requirements can be found at <http://industry.gov.au/aip>.

### 11.1.2 WHS Accreditation Scheme

Building work undertaken as part of the Funded Project/s funded under this agreement may be covered by the Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme (WHS Accreditation Scheme). The WHS Accreditation Scheme is established under the Federal Safety Commissioner Act 2022 and specified in the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) (Accreditation Scheme) Rules 2019*.

The WHS Accreditation Scheme applies to building work that is indirectly funded by the Commonwealth or a corporate Commonwealth entity if it is carried out under a contract with a value of \$4 million or more (GST inclusive) and the contribution made to the funding of the project that includes the building work by the Commonwealth or corporate Commonwealth entity is at least:

- \$6,000,000 (GST inclusive) and represents at least 50% of the total funding; or
- \$10,000,000 (GST inclusive).

A successful applicant who is the builder must comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation and successful applicants who will be engaging builders to undertake the building work must require builders to comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation.

## 11.2 How we pay the grant

The Grant Agreement will state:

- the maximum grant amount to be paid;
- the proportion of eligible expenditure covered by the grant;
- any financial contributions provided by you or a third party;
- any in-kind contributions you will make; and
- any other requirements.

We will not exceed the maximum grant amount under any circumstances. If applicants incur extra costs, they must meet them themselves.

We may make an initial payment on execution of the Grant Agreement. We will make subsequent payments as applicants achieve Asset completion demonstrated by a satisfactory report, based on applicants actual eligible expenditure. These payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, an upfront operational expense payment will be made once the Operational Period has commenced.

## 11.3 Maintaining project benefits

In the Grant Agreement, an applicant will be required to commit to operate its Funded Project infrastructure and deliver Funded Project benefits over the Operational Period. Applicants may be required to report on the ongoing benefits delivered by the Funded Project.



## 11.4 Grants payments and GST

Payments will be made as set out in the Grant Agreement.

## 11.5 Amendment to these Guidelines

The Government reserves the right to terminate or vary the program (including via variation of these Guidelines) at its discretion, at any time, for any reason, including without limitation, in the light of changes to Government policy.

Any alterations and addenda<sup>10</sup> to the Program will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment prior to the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department, potential applicants will be advised of the revised or new Guidelines in a timely manner, including any resultant extension that may be applied to the application period.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment following the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department (for example, if the applications received do not achieve the Program objectives), the revised or new Guidelines will set out details of the changes, and all existing applicants will be notified of arrangements impacting existing applications.

An organisation submitting an application acknowledges that neither these Guidelines, nor any application, give rise to a binding agreement or any other binding legal arrangement or legal relationship between the applicant and the Commonwealth. There is no binding agreement on any party until a Grant Agreement is executed by the Commonwealth and the Grantee.

## 12 Announcement of grants

If successful, applicants grants will be listed on the GrantConnect website 21 calendar days after the date of effect as required by Section 5.3 of the [CGRGs](#).

## 13 How we monitor your grant activity

### 13.1 Keeping us informed

Applicants should let us know if anything is likely to affect the Funded Project or organisation.

We need to know of any key changes to the applicant's organisation or its business activities which may affect its ability to complete the Funded Project, carry on business and pay debts due.

Applicants must also inform us of any changes to:

- name;
- addresses;
- nominated contact details; and
- bank account details.

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<sup>10</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

If applicants become aware of a breach of terms and conditions under the Grant Agreement, they must contact us immediately.

Applicants must notify us of events relating to the grant and provide an opportunity for the Minister or their representative to attend.

### **13.2 Reporting**

Applicants must submit reports in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will expect applicants to report on such matters as:

- progress against agreed activity and outcomes;
- contributions of participants directly related to the Funded Project including scheduled co-contributions (if any); and
- expenditure of the grant.

The amount of detail you provide in your reports should be relative to the Funded Project size, complexity and grant amount.

We will monitor progress by assessing reports applicants submit and may conduct site visits or request records to confirm details of reports if necessary. Occasionally we may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement.

### **13.3 Asset completion report**

For each completed Asset, applicants must submit an asset completion report as specified in the Grant Agreement. Assets will be defined in each applicant's Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth.

### **13.4 Grant agreement variations**

We recognise that unexpected events may affect your progress. In these circumstances, you can request a variation to your grant agreement. Applicants can request a variation by providing written notice to the Department setting out the reasons for the variation and proposing steps that could be taken to better achieve the purpose or address the risks of the Funded Project.

You should not assume that a variation request will be successful. We will consider your request based on provisions in the Grant Agreement and the likely impact on achieving outcomes.

### **13.5 Financial declaration or audited financial acquittal report**

We will ask applicants to provide a declaration that the grant money was spent in accordance with the Grant Agreement and to report on any underspends of the grant money. We may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments.

### **13.6 Independent audit report**

The Department may request an independently audited financial report for Funded Projects at the applicants expense. The financial audit report will verify that applicants spent the grant in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will assess the report and may re-examine applicants claims or conduct site visits if necessary.

### 13.7 Compliance visits

The Department (including entities acting on our behalf) may visit applicants during the development and construction of the Funded Project, or at the completion of the Funded Project to review compliance with the Grant Agreement. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement. For large or complex Funded Projects, we may visit applicants after they finish the Funded Project. We will provide applicants with reasonable notice of any compliance visit.

### 13.8 Evaluation

We will evaluate the Grant Opportunity to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from applications and reports for this purpose. We may also interview applicants, or ask for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted applicants and to evaluate how effective the Program was in achieving its outcomes. Grantees may be required to participate in Program reviews and evaluations.

We may contact applicants up to one year after the Asset Completion Dates for each Funded Project for more information to assist with this evaluation.

### 13.9 Acknowledgement

The Program logo should be used on all materials related to grants under the Program. Whenever the logo is used, the publication must also acknowledge the Commonwealth as follows:

‘Regional Connectivity Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Regional Connectivity Solutions and ‘Mobile Black Spot Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

If applicants make a public statement about a Funded Project under the Program, we require them to acknowledge the grant by using the following:

‘This project received grant funding from the Australian Government.’

## 14 Probity

The Australian Government will make sure that the Grant Opportunity process is fair, conducted according to these Guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct, and is consistent with the CGRGs.

External advisors may also be asked to inform the assessment and evaluation process. All external advisors must comply with the CGRGs.

## 15 Enquiries and feedback

The Department’s [Client Service Charter](#) applies to complaints about this Grant Opportunity. All complaints about a grant process must be provided in writing.

Any questions applicants have about grant decisions for this Grant Opportunity should be sent to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If applicants do not agree with the way the Department has handled its complaint, they may complain to the [Commonwealth Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman will not usually look into a complaint unless the matter has first been raised directly with the Department.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on:

Phone (Toll free): 1300 362 072  
 Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)  
 Website: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

## 15.1 Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the Grant Opportunity or Program. There may be a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, if Department staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or applicant or any of the applicant's personnel has a:

- Professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the application Selection Process, such as an Australian Government officer or external advisor;
- Relationship with or interest in an organisation that is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently; or
- Relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain because the organisation receives a grant under the Grant Opportunity.

Applicants will be asked to declare, as part of your application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interests or that, to the best of your knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If applicants later identify an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest, they must inform the Department in writing immediately.

Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Australian [Public Service Code of Conduct \(Section 13\(7\)\)](#) of the [Public Service Act 1999](#). Committee members and other officials including the Decision Maker must also declare any conflicts of interest.

## 15.2 Privacy

We treat applicant's personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#). This includes letting applicants know:

- what personal information we collect;
- why we collect your personal information; and
- who we give your personal information to.

Applicants personal information can only be disclosed to someone else for the primary purpose for which it was collected, unless an exemption applies under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

The Australian Government may use and disclose information about grant applicants and grant recipients under this Grant Opportunity. This includes disclosing grant information on GrantConnect as required for reporting purposes and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.

We may share the information you give us with other Commonwealth entities for purposes including government administration, research or service delivery, according to Australian laws.

As part of your application, you declare your ability to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Australian Privacy Principles and impose the same privacy obligations on officers, employees, agents and subcontractors that you engage to assist with the eligible Grant Activity, in respect of personal information you collect, use, store, or disclose in connection with the Grant Activity.

Accordingly, you must not do anything which if done by the Department would breach an [Australian Privacy Principle](#) as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988*.

For further information about our privacy obligations (including in relation to how to access or correct personal information or make a complaint) and our contact details for privacy matters, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

### 15.3 Confidential Information

The Department will treat the applicant's commercially sensitive information provided in the applicant's application as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information (applicant Confidential Information).

The Department's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any applicant Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed;
- disclosed by the Department to its advisers, officers, employees, or other agencies' officers or employees, for the purpose of evaluating the applicant's application and during any Grant Agreement negotiations;
- disclosed by the Department in response to a request by a house or a committee of the Parliament of Australia, or a house or a committee of the Parliament of a state or territory;
- disclosed by the Department to its responsible Minister or the Auditor-General;
- shared by the Commonwealth within the Commonwealth's entity (for example, another Commonwealth agency), where this serves the Commonwealth's legitimate interests;
- disclosed to the Department's officers to enable the effective management or auditing of the Program; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the Department's confidentiality obligation.

The applicant will treat any information provided by the Department as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information. (Commonwealth Confidential Information).

The applicant's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Commonwealth Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the applicant's confidentiality obligation.

The Department may share with state or territory governments (on a confidential basis) any or all information contained in applications which it considers relevant to the respective jurisdiction based on the location of the Proposed Solution(s), including costings for Proposed Solutions that are not successful in receiving funding through the Program, subject to agreement on confidentiality with applicants.

### 15.4 Intellectual property rights

By submitting an application under the Program, to the extent the applicant's application contains:

- its Intellectual Property; or
- a third party's Intellectual Property,

the applicant grants (or will procure for) the Commonwealth a permanent, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide, non-exclusive licence (including a right of sublicense) to use, reproduce, adapt, and communicate the applicant's Intellectual Property contained in its application under the Program provided the use, reproduction, adaptation, or communication is in connection with any assessment processes under, or the evaluation of, the Program.



Any licence granted to the Commonwealth in relation to Intellectual Property rights does not include a right to exploit the Intellectual Property for commercial purposes.

## 15.5 Freedom of information

All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#) (FOI Act).

The purpose of the FOI Act is to give members of the public rights of access to information held by the Australian Government and its entities. Under the FOI Act, members of the public can seek access to documents held by the Australian Government. This right of access is limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary to protect essential public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

All Freedom of Information requests must be referred to the Freedom of Information Coordinator in writing.

By mail: Freedom of Information Coordinator  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications  
and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: <mailto:FOI@infrastructure.gov.au>

## 16 Consultation

These Guidelines are informed by the submissions received as part of consultation on the draft Guidelines.

## 17 Glossary

Term	Definition
4G	Fourth generation mobile telecommunications service.
5G	Fifth generation mobile telecommunications service.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Active sharing	Arrangements where MNOs share the active layer of mobile network infrastructure to deliver services to a location, including through Radio Access Network Sharing, and/or mobile roaming.
AEDT	Australian Eastern Daylight Time
AC	Alternating Current
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
Asset	"The component of Proposed Solution to be constructed or upgraded at (or in connection to) a site".
Date of Asset Completion	The date on which the Grantee has delivered the contracted service for a particular Asset.

Term	Definition
Backhaul	A link between the core or backbone of a network and sub-networks, transporting data from a series of disparate locations to a more centralised location.
<a href="#">Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines or CGRGs</a>	Guidelines issued by the Finance Minister under section 105C of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> , which establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration.
Commonwealth Official	A Commonwealth representative who is working or consulting on the Program.
Decision Maker	As set out in <a href="#">section 8.4</a> , the Minister for Communications.
DC	Direct Current
DTCS FAD	Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination
Eligible Area	As described in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Eligibility Criteria	The mandatory criteria set out in <a href="#">section 4</a> which applicants must meet in order for their application for the Grant Opportunity to be considered.
Existing Handheld Coverage	Coverage able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device within the applicant's mobile network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that is currently available;</li> <li>• that will be provided by any base station that will be delivered by the applicant under a round of the Mobile Black Spot Program, Peri-Urban Mobile Program or other Commonwealth grant program; or</li> <li>• that will be provided by any applicant base station funded under a State or Territory program.</li> </ul>
Fixed-line	A type of internet connection that uses a physical line (including but not limited to fibre, Hybrid Fibre-Coaxial and copper) to provide services to a premises.
Fixed Wireless	A type of internet connection that uses fixed transmission towers or base stations to provide wireless services to a premises via antennas.
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTTP	Fibre to the Premises
Funded Project	A telecommunications infrastructure project found suitable during the assessment process and selected for funding under this Round of the Program.



Term	Definition
Funding Strategy	A written plan that outlines the financial capacity of the applicant to deliver a Proposed Solution through the Program.
Grant Activity	All the projects that the Grantee is required to undertake as set out in the Grant Agreement.
Grant Agreement	A document with contractual effect that sets out the relationship between the Grantee and the Commonwealth, and specifies the details of the grant.
<a href="#">GrantConnect</a>	The Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CGRGs.
Grant Opportunity	The Program Grant Opportunity as described in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Grantee	An applicant who has been selected to receive a grant under the Grant Opportunity.
Guidelines	These Grant Opportunity Guidelines for Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities.
GST	Goods and Service Tax
Ineligible Areas	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Intellectual Property	Includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts);</li> <li>2. all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and</li> <li>3. all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.</li> </ol>
Macrocell	The widest range of cell sizes used in a mobile phone network served by a mobile base station, often used in rural areas and along highways. Macrocells generally provide larger coverage than small cell base stations or microcells, with a typical power output of tens of watts.
Assessment Criteria	The specified principles or standards set out in <a href="#">section 6</a> , against which applications will be judged. The Assessment Criteria will be used to assess the merits of proposals and to determine application rankings.
Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve and extend mobile coverage in regional, rural and remote Australia.
Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.

Term	Definition
National MNO	An MNO who operates a mobile network that provides mobile coverage to at least 80% of the Australian population.
National Broadband Network (NBN)	The national wholesale-only, open access telecommunications network that is being built by, or in conjunction with, NBN Co (including any existing network incorporated into the NBN).
New Handheld Coverage	Coverage from a Proposed Solution that will be able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device in areas that do not receive Existing Handheld Coverage, in accordance with the meaning given in section 2.2.1.
NCD	Nominated Carrier Declaration
Operational Period	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2.2.3</a> .
Operational Costs (OPEX)	Costs for additional goods or services that are purchased for the ongoing operation of an asset.
Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve mobile coverage and capacity in peri-urban fringe areas at risk of bushfire and natural disaster.
Program	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2</a> .
Proposed Solution	Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.
Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Regional Connectivity (Round 3) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Public Safety Premises	Places including emergency services facilities (i.e. including ambulance and Rural Fire Service (RFS) depots, hospitals, police facilities, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and related facilities (which may include airstrips).
Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP)	The 4G received signal power in a long-term evolution (LTE) network measured in decibels per milliwatt (dBm).
RRU	Remote Radio Unit
Selection Process	The method used to select Grantees, which will include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria;</li> <li>2. a detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria;</li> <li>3. a Value for Money assessment and consideration of other government priorities; and</li> <li>4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.</li> </ol>
Small Cell	A 'small cell' in a mobile phone network, with a typical range less than two kilometres. Often used to add network capacity in areas of dense population or very remote locations, utilising power control to limit coverage area. These are also known as microcells.



Term	Definition
Value for Money	<p>Refers to achieving 'value with relevant money' which is a judgement based on the grant proposal representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public resources and determined from a variety of considerations in accordance with the CGRGs.</p> <p>When administering a grant opportunity, a Commonwealth Official should consider the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each proposal including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the quality of the project proposal and activities;</li> <li>b. fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to Government objectives;</li> <li>c. that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the applicant's and the Government's objectives being achieved; and</li> <li>d. the applicant's relevant experience and performance history.</li> </ul>
We/us	The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts/or Commonwealth Officials administering the Program.
WHS	Work Health and Safety



## Attachment A

### A1. Co-location and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Subject to 4.2 above, in addition to any arrangements negotiated with an MNO confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed Solution, each Proposed Solution must offer the option of co-location to other MNOs, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

If a Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO other than those already participating or is not capable of supporting co-location, applicants must provide a detailed explanation of why it is not technically feasible to reconfigure the Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution to support an additional MNO at incremental cost to the Co-locating MNO, or why it is not otherwise possible to offer co-location at the site. The Department's technical advisor may review any technical advice from the applicant. If the Department's view is that co-location is technically possible, then the applicant must be prepared to offer the option of co-location at incremental cost to an MNO seeking to co-locate on the Proposed Solution, or the Department may remove the Proposed Solution from the assessment process.

Once an applicant is selected to build a Proposed Solution it must, if other parties express interest, give any other MNO(s) not already participating in the Funded Project the opportunity to co-locate and to participate in the detailed design phase for that Funded Project using the process set out in this paragraph.

- The incremental cost for a Funded Project to support an additional MNO will be provided to the other participating MNOs to allow for greater transparency in co-location negotiations.
- For Funded Project where other MNOs are interested in co-locating, the costs can be shared more broadly and efficiencies achieved if the interested MNOs can participate in the design and build phases, which should ensure that their reasonable specifications are accommodated in the design and construction of the Funded Project. This opportunity relates to all the requirements necessary for co-location to efficiently occur, including (but not limited to) the height and robustness of the Funded Project, as well as site space for housing equipment and providing access to power and Backhaul.
- The Government is supportive of Grantees offering other MNOs the opportunity to co-invest in Funded Project including (but not limited to) provision of Backhaul.

For the purpose of providing the incremental cost of supporting an additional MNO, a Funded Project must meet the following minimum specifications to be considered capable of supporting two or three MNOs:

- The structure is based on one of the following configurations:

**Table 4: Minimum specification configurations for co-location of multiple MNOs**

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
3 x 1 panel antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2533mm (h) x 353mm (w) x 209mm)	3 x 6 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2680mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 146mm (d), Weight: 39.5kg)	3 x 10 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2688mm (h) x 349mm (w) x 166mm (d), Weight 36.5kg)

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
(d), Weight 32kg); or equivalent load		
3 x Tower Mounted Amplifiers Dimensions: (457mm (h) x 275mm (w) x 208mm (d), Weight 25kg); or equivalent load	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 150mm (d), Weight 20kg)	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 100mm (d), Weight 13.5kg)
6 x feeders + 300mm cable gantry for monopole structure type sites	6 x combiners (Dimensions: 330mm (h) x 200mm (w) x 130mm (d), Weight 3.2kg)	2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load
2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load	2 x 600mm transmission dishes; or equivalent load	
	Other DC Cables and Junction Boxes	

- There is sufficient mains AC power provision to support the requirements of additional MNO equipment. This requirement does not apply to solar powered sites, however, solar powered sites must have sufficient space for the additional MNO(s) to install additional solar panels.
- There is a communications hut of sufficient size (or space available on the site for further huts) to accommodate additional MNO equipment.
- For macrocell solutions, the Grantee must ensure sufficient space is available to allow any participating MNOs to install auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power in the event of the loss of external power to the site up to the Program's minimum 12 hours standard.

MNOs interested in co-locating on a Funded Project (i.e. the MNO expresses an interest in co-locating on Funded Project after funding has been awarded) will be required to express interest prior to the start of the detailed design stage for that Funded Project. All parties will be required to negotiate in good faith with each other in relation to the Funded Project access and price terms, and enter into commercial arrangements. The capital contribution to be made by the co-locating parties in respect of a Funded Project must, at least, equal the incremental cost incurred by reason of provisioning co-location for that Funded Project.

In accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined at section A3, any disagreements regarding co-location matters will be determined by an independent third party, to be appointed at the MNOs'/MNIPs' shared cost, and in accordance with the dispute resolution process.

Following the process set out above, if it is ascertained that there is no interest in co-location from another MNO, the Grantee will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location.

## A2. Backhaul access and pricing for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Where a Grantee selected to build a Funded Project reaches an agreement under section A.1 for an MNO not already participating in the Funded Project (the Co-locating MNO) to co-locate on the Funded Project, and subject to the microwave backhaul requirements below, the Grantee must offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee is in a position to do so.

The Grantee will be taken to be in a position to offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee owns or controls an optical fibre or microwave link which connects the Funded Project to the Grantee's network.

The price at which the Grantee offers Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO must be more favourable than the regulated prices set under the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination (DTCS FAD), for example, by offering a defined rent-free period or other discounting mechanism.

The ACCC has released the DTCS FAD 2020<sup>11</sup>, including a DTCS pricing calculator that may assist interested parties to calculate the regulated price for Backhaul.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project using an optical fibre connection, it must ensure that it provides sufficient Backhaul capacity, transmission and interfacing equipment to meet the Backhaul requirements of any Co-locating MNO on the Funded Solution.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project using a microwave connection, the Grantee must provide Backhaul services to a Co-locating MNO over that microwave connection, unless:

- the Funded Solution is designed and built to allow the Co-locating MNO to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Project; and
- the Co-locating MNO is permitted to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Project.

The terms and pricing of Backhaul services provided by a Grantee to a Co-locating MNO must be negotiated commercially between the Grantee and Co-locating MNO in accordance with the principles set out in sections A.2.

### **A3. Dispute resolution for Mobile Black Spot Solutions**

Disputes between parties in relation to co-location and Backhaul for a Funded Project will be referred for determination to an independent third party expert, at the parties' own shared cost.

The Grantee and Co-locating MNO will be bound by the determination made by the independent third party expert.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report](http://www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report)

**Pidgeon, Karly**

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly  
**Sent:** Friday, 17 March 2023 6:34 PM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Cc:** Caruso, Daniel; Windeyer, Richard; s22(1)(a)(ii); s22(1)(a)(ii); DLO Rowland; Media; s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** RCP3-MBSP7 launch status update [SEC=OFFICIAL]  
**Attachments:** Final Round 3 Regional Connectivity Program Grant Opportunity Guidelines.docx

**OFFICIAL**

Hi s22(1)(a)

Status update on the launch:

- **Guidelines and application pack** – Finance Branch are loading the documentation to open on the GrantConnect website at 12.01am Monday 20 March
  - There are some technical limitations (e.g. length of character fields) to what we can write in GrantConnect so our the team are working with Finance Branch on this now.
  - No showstoppers, just some editing down of the text that appears on the GrantConnect page.
- s22(1)(a)(ii)
- **Website changes** – are loaded and scheduled to go live at 12.01am Monday 20 March (will be at these links: [RCP](#) and [MBSP](#))
- s22(1)(a)(ii)

For Monday

- **Letter to MPs/Senators** – DLO & Dept collaborating to prepare and distribute letters
  - s22(1)(a)(ii) is sending you the proposed revised letter template today and some analysis (to inform the letter addressees) about eligible areas across the country
  - On the phone with you just now we agreed to split the letters into 3 tranches by priority order
    1. MPs with a reasonable amount of their electorate being in an eligible location for the RCP3-MBSP7 grant opportunity (s22(1)(a)(ii) will advise a cut-off for % to inform who is in this tranche)
    2. All Senators – letter to include the RCP3-MBSP7 and PUMP as every S&T has eligible locations
    3. Other MPs – that may have small marginal amount of the electorate eligible for RCP3-MBSP7 but they are eligible for PUMP (s22(1)(a)(ii) is working through the mapping but this is more complicated)
- **Email stakeholders** – we will email our stakeholder contact list to advise the grant opportunity has opened

After Monday – please confirm if this one is required

- **Letters to councils** – DLO to work with Dept to prepare and distribute letters to all councils covering eligible areas for the RCP3-MBSP7 grant opportunity (likely to be some boundary line complications again about what % of the LGA is a reasonable amount to warrant advice of the round through a letter)

For information

- **Guidelines** – as discussed earlier, there was a formatting error with the numbering in the Guidelines submitted to the Minister. The corrected final version is attached FYI.

I have a number of the staff on call over the weekend in case issues arise..

Regards,  
KP

OFFICIAL






## Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

**To:** The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications (for decision)

**Subject:** Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Release of Grant Opportunity Guidelines

**Critical Date:** 17 March 2023, to enable you to launch the program overnight on Sunday, 19 March 2023

<b>Recommendations:</b>	
1. That you <b>approve</b> the Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines at <b><u>Attachment A</u></b> .	Approved / Not Approved
2. That you <b>agree</b> to release the Guidelines for a <b>10-week</b> competitive grants process, closing on 31 May 2023.	Agreed / Not Agreed
 <b>The Hon Michelle Rowland MP</b>	
<b>Comments:</b>  	Date: 17/3/23

### Key Issues:

1. We seek your approval to release the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) Round 3 (including Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines (the Guidelines) at **Attachment A** as part of a call for applications to the Program through a competitive grants process.
2. This is a combined grant opportunity up to \$150 million, bringing together the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) Round 7 and the RCP Round 3 in two streams, to improve mobile and broadband connectivity in regional, rural, remote and First Nations communities in Australia.
3. Public consultation on the draft Guidelines (MS22-002127 refers) closed on 10 February 2023. Forty (40) submissions were received, with a further 15 comments from residents about mobile or broadband connectivity issues. Providers of 20 submissions have agreed their submission be published on the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' website. A summary of each submission received is at **Attachment B**.
4. Following our review of these submissions and additional feedback from your Office, the Department of Finance (Finance) and our external probity and technical advisors, we have incorporated the proposed amendments below in the Guidelines. Further information is at **Attachment C**.

MS23-003156

- a. **Definition of a First Nations Community** (Section 2.2.4): Revised wording to clarify that the ABS definition for a First Nations community outlined in the Guidelines is provided as a *guide* to applicants and is not a mandatory definition for the purposes of applying for dedicated funding for First Nations communities.
- b. **Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative** (Sections 2.2.4 and 6.1.2): Additional sentence to encourage applicants to detail how a Proposed Solution will assist the Government to meet Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.
- c. **NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade areas** (Sections 2.2 and 5.2): Revised wording to clarify the eligibility of a proposed fixed wireless broadband solution within the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade area.
- d. **Funding cap for Mobile Black Spot Solutions and weightings** (Section 5.3): The funding cap for these solutions targeting remote and very remote areas, and First Nations communities, has been increased to 75 per cent of the total capital cost and operational cost. The weight factor in the cost over coverage ranking formula has also been increased to 50 per cent to better prioritise these solutions.
- e. **Multi-carrier outcomes and co-location** (Sections 2.2 and 4.2): Clarified wording to ensure, where appropriate, mobile proposals put forward by National Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) under the RCP funding stream meet the multi-carrier and co-location requirements that apply to MBSP funding stream proposals.
- f. **Minimum back-up power** (Section 5.1): Revised wording to clarify that all macro cell mobile solutions (under both streams) must include a back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours.
- g. **Merit Criterion 3 - Project Delivery** (Section 6.1.3): Revised wording to clarify the requirements for applicants in addressing Merit Criterion 3.
- h. **Other amendments:** Other amendments include: updating the Program title to better reflect the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities; revised document headings to ensure consistency with the whole of government grant template; and minor drafting updates throughout the document to improve presentation and consistency.

#### Financial impacts:

5. Up to \$150 million (GST exclusive) is allocated to this competitive grant opportunity. Funding will be allocated under the *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* measure, announced in the October 2022 Budget, with:
  - a. \$100 million allocated from the \$200 million RCP funding, and
  - b. \$50 million allocated from the \$400 million program to expand regional mobile coverage and improve resilience.

#### Sensitivities

6. Following advice from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), you wrote to the Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP and Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance on 16 March 2023, informing them of the approach for this grant opportunity and the delivery of additional rounds of the MBSP (MC23-000435 refers).
7. Feedback on the draft Guidelines has been largely positive and constructive; however, we have not accepted all suggestions made. For example, Pivotal proposed that multi-MNO solutions should be limited to active sharing proposals,<sup>s45</sup> [REDACTED]
8. Finance has advised that the Guidelines can be considered low-risk if they comply with the whole of government grant template. We have actioned this in the proposed amendments. As such, further approval of the Guidelines by the Minister for Finance is not required. We also reviewed but did not accept Finance's further suggested improvements to the Guidelines and have provided information to your Office on this.

**Consultation:**

9. In addition to receiving public submissions, we have consulted with PM&C and Finance. Consultation has also been undertaken with the National Indigenous Australians Agency on the definition of First Nations communities and with the department's National Broadband Network Branch on the treatment of applications in the NBN Fixed Wireless network. The Guidelines have also been reviewed by the department's Legal Branch and our technical (s47G(1)(a)) and probity (s47G(1)(a)) advisers.

**Media Opportunities:**

10. A draft media release has been prepared and provided to your office via the Media Team.
11. We are working with your Office to support opening of the program overnight on Sunday 19 March 2023.

**Attachments:**

Attachment A: Grant Opportunity Guidelines for release

Attachment B: Summary of submissions on the draft Guidelines

Attachment C: Departmental response to submissions

Cleared By: Karly Pidgeon  
Position: Assistant Secretary  
Branch: Regional Communications  
Ph: (s22(1)(a)(ii))  
Date: 16 March 2023

Contact Officer: (s22(1)(a)(ii))  
Section: Regional Connectivity  
Ph: (s22(1)(a)(ii))

**Instructions for MPS:** Nil

**Responsible Adviser:** (s22(1)(a)(ii))

**Distribution CC List:** Mr Jim Betts, Mr Richard Windeyer, Mr Daniel Caruso

## Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines

<b>Opening date:</b>	<b>19 March 2023</b>
<b>Closing date and time:</b>	<b>17.00 AEDT on 31 May 2023 (10 weeks after opening)</b>
<b>Commonwealth policy entity:</b>	<b>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts</b>
<b>Enquiries:</b>	<b>If you have any questions, please email us at <a href="mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au">regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au</a>.</b> <b>Questions should be sent no later than two weeks before the closing date.</b>
<b>Date guidelines released:</b>	<b>19 March 2023</b>
<b>Type of grant opportunity:</b>	<b>Targeted competitive</b>

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# 1 Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities: processes

## The Program is designed to achieve Australian Government objectives

This Grant Opportunity brings together the Regional Connectivity Program, and the Mobile Black Spot Program in two streams, which contributes to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' (the 'Department's')

Outcome: *Promote an innovative and competitive communications sector, through policy development, advice and program delivery, so all Australians can realise the full potential of digital technologies and communications services.* The Department works with stakeholders to plan and design the Grant Opportunity according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines \(CGRGs\)](#).



## The Grant Opportunity opens

We publish the grant Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#).



## Register with Department and pre-application documentation (Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Organisations wishing to apply for funding under the Program for Mobile Black Spot Solutions must contact the Department to register as potential applicants within four weeks following release of these Guidelines in order to obtain access to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions specific application documentation. At this time, applicants must submit their coverage maps as outlined in section 7.2. The application documentation outlines the requirements on potential applicants prior to submitting an application for funding.

Organisations can register their interest with the department by emailing [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) and providing the following information:

- (a) Organisation name;
- (b) Contact name;
- (c) Contact phone number; and
- (d) Contact email address.



## Submit initial proposal period for Mobile Black Spot Solutions (Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Applicants have six weeks from the release of the Guidelines to develop and submit initial proposals for locations where they are interested in partnering with another Mobile Network Operator (**MNO**) on a site.



## You complete and submit a grant application

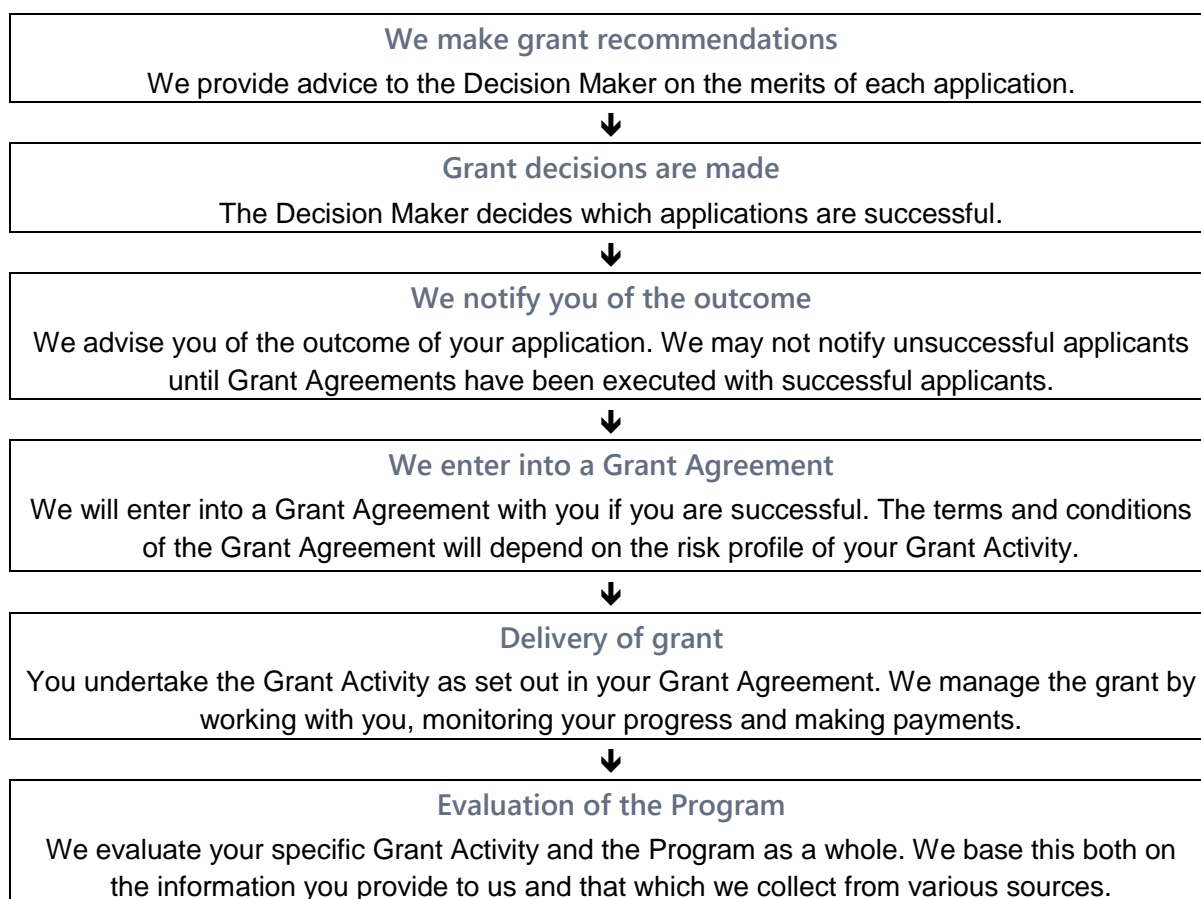
You complete the application form and address all of the Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria to be considered for a grant.



## We assess all grant applications

We assess the applications against Eligibility Criteria and notify you if you are not eligible. We assess your eligible application against the Assessment Criteria, including an overall consideration of Value for Money, and compare it to other applications.





## 2 About the Program

These Grant Opportunity Guidelines ('Guidelines') contain information about Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program - with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities ('the Program') and the Program's Grant Opportunity and set out:

- the purpose of the Program/Grant Opportunity;
- the Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria;
- how grant applications are considered and selected;
- how Grantees are notified and receive grant payments;
- how Grantees will be monitored and evaluated; and
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the Grant Opportunity.

**You must read these Guidelines before filling out an application.**

We have defined key terms used in these Guidelines in the [Glossary at section 22](#).

### 2.1 Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile coverage and protecting communities against natural disaster. This opportunity is part of the *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* (Better Connectivity Plan) which is providing more than \$1.1 billion to rural and regional communities. Through the October 2022 Budget, the Government provided \$656 million for the Better Connectivity Plan to improve mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience in rural and regional Australia, including:

- \$400 million to expand regional mobile coverage and improve the resilience of communication systems;

- \$200 million for two further rounds of the *Regional Connectivity Program* to improve connectivity in regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- \$30 million over three years to accelerate Australia's agricultural sector through the *On Farm Connectivity Program*;
- \$20 million for an independent audit of mobile coverage to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities; and
- a further \$6 million over three years to extend the Regional Tech Hub to support better consumer awareness and better information regarding digital services:

This \$1.1 billion also includes the \$480 million already delivered by the Government to support NBN Co to upgrade the NBN Fixed Wireless network, with associated benefits to NBN satellite services.

The Government's new funding commitment for the Program builds on previous investment of \$230 million (GST exclusive) in Rounds 1 and 2 of the Program, which is generating a total investment of around \$413 million (GST exclusive) in 223 telecommunications projects in regional, rural and remote Australia. Further information on previous Program rounds is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp).

Indicative funding of around \$30 million of the Government's \$200 million commitment towards further rounds of the Regional Connectivity Program will be set aside to improve telecommunications access in First Nations communities. This funding will assist progress towards Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to ensure First Nations people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.

The Better Connectivity Plan will deliver funding for expanded regional mobile coverage through additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program. This includes the \$50 million for the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities available through this current Program Round.

The Better Connectivity Plan mobile coverage commitment will build on the outcomes delivered under the first six rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, including funding for over 1,200 new mobile base stations across regional and remote Australia. Further information on previous rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp).

## 2.2 About Round 3

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- A \$100 million (GST exclusive) **Regional Connectivity** (Round 3) stream for place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions that deliver new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services. It will enable bespoke telecommunications projects to be specifically tailored to the particular economic and/or social requirements of a region; and
- A \$50 million (GST exclusive) Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream (allocated from the expanding regional mobile coverage component of the Better Connectivity Plan) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that deliver **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and remote Australia.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, applicants and **Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application development period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including Proposed Solutions that use active sharing technologies and/or mobile roaming.

Both streams will include dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities (see Section 3.1).



- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services must apply under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** funding stream.
- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new mobile coverage must apply under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Further information about the types of Proposed Solutions that can be funded under each stream is provided at section 5.1.

Your application may include a combination of **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** or propose only **Regional Connectivity Solutions** or only **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

The objectives of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- use a place-based approach to target telecommunications infrastructure investment that will respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- expand mobile coverage in regional, rural, and First Nations communities; and
- assist progress towards Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.

The intended outcomes of this Round of the Program are to:

- Provide **place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions** to regional digital connectivity issues through a range of new or improved broadband services and/or improved mobile services;
- Provide **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** to expand mobile coverage and competition across regional and rural Australia; and
- Complement the National Broadband Network, including the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see below), and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

The Program Round's Grant Opportunity will support Funded Projects that deliver new telecommunications infrastructure or the upgrade of existing telecommunications infrastructure to provide:

- economic and social benefits in regional, rural and First Nations areas; and/or
- **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and First Nations areas.

For **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, the Round 3 Grant Opportunity will focus on areas:

- of high economic and/or social value;
- outside the NBN fixed-line footprint; and
- where better connectivity and increased data have a clear benefit to a local region.

The Australian Government has recently provided \$480 million (GST exclusive) towards upgrading the NBN Fixed Wireless network. Consumers in the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint will benefit from access to increased download speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps). Fixed wireless coverage will also be expanded to cover a further 120,000 currently satellite-only premises.

A Proposed Solution to deliver fixed wireless broadband in the NBN Fixed Wireless coverage areas will only be eligible under the Program if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and that the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see Section 5.2 below).

The opening and closing dates and any other relevant information will be published on the [Regional Connectivity Program](#)<sup>1</sup> webpage and [GrantConnect](#)<sup>2</sup>. If there is any discrepancy between these two publications, GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

The Grant Opportunity will be administered according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#) (CGRGs)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Services and deliverables

The services to be delivered, as a result of the Proposed Solution, must be a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications solutions in the relevant area.

For broadband access technologies, a like-for-like technology where there is an existing broadband service would only meet this requirement if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in:

- Service Quality: eg. latency, packet loss, contention ratio
- Coverage: eg. area, people, percentage of residential and/or business properties that will be covered by the Proposed Service
- Reliability: eg. service availability, service restoration times, backup and redundancy; and/or
- Speed: eg. latency, upload and download speeds.

These service improvements may include, but are not limited to, upgrades to address seasonal congestion, backhaul capacity upgrades to improve quality of service or additional mobile base stations in areas where there is existing but patchy coverage.

For services delivering **New Handheld Coverage**, the service will enable consumers to perform a range of functions using mobile devices, such as making and receiving phone calls, sending emails and text messages, browsing the internet, accessing online services, downloading files, using mobile apps, and accessing emergency communications services. To meet this expectation all proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- deliver at least 4G, and preferably also 5G, broadband data services and a voice service; and
- provide coverage modelling based on a New Handheld Coverage level with a Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP) at a 90 per cent confidence level for the cell area, as per the following table.

Table 1: RSRP Coverage Modelling Requirements

Coverage category	Channel bandwidth	Threshold (dBm)
Handheld	5	>-100
Handheld	10	>-103
Handheld	15	>-105
Handheld	20	>-106

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/internet/regional-connectivity-program>

<sup>2</sup> [www.grants.gov.au/](http://www.grants.gov.au/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines.pdf>

### 2.2.2 Local community priority

During the application period, **applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with state, territory and local governments and local communities regarding the Proposed Solutions.** (especially in relation to projects for First Nations communities). These consultations should involve the identification of priority areas to be covered by the Proposed Solution. Priority areas may include specific roads, health or education facilities, communities with significant First Nations populations, industrial areas, community sites, high-value production areas, or areas with a demonstrable need for improved public safety (for example, where people are unable to call 000 because of limited coverage or lack of infrastructure).

To give effect to the place-based objective of the Program, **applicants should provide evidence that their Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution is a priority for the local community** (*This is not required for **Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, although any information provided will be considered in the value for money stage*).

A local priority project could be identified through a regional digital plan or similar strategy by local government or letters of support accompanying the grant application. This could be demonstrated by evidence of support from groups such as: state and territory governments; local government; Regional Development Australia committees; industry, business, and community groups; not-for-profits (registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and First Nations community organisations.

State, territory and local governments may own infrastructure in areas that could potentially be used for Proposed Solutions. These governments may have specific requirements in relation to the use of their infrastructure that will need to be identified in the applications put forward by applicants for relevant Proposed Solutions.

### 2.2.3 Operational period

All Funded **Regional Connectivity Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of seven (7) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of ten (10) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

### 2.2.4 Application and selection process

Applicants may apply individually or jointly (as part of a consortium). Joint applications must be underpinned by commercially binding arrangements or a clear intention to enter into such arrangements, should the application be successful. Grants to joint applicants may be granted on the condition that the parties enter into a binding agreement, approved by the Department, prior to finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

Grant recipients will be selected through a competitive, merit-based Selection Process against Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria as set out in these Guidelines and a final value for money consideration. In applying for grants, applicants will outline their specific Proposed Solution, and demonstrate support from the local community. The most overt form of support will be financial co-contributions (such as contributions from state, territory or local governments or other third parties). **The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria and also demonstrate its claims against the assessment criteria.**

An applicant seeking dedicated First Nations funding will need to demonstrate that its Proposed Solution will benefit a First Nations community. For the purposes of the Program, applicants may use the following definition of a First Nations community as a guide for areas that the Government

is looking to target with dedicated First Nations funding: *a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents) by First Nations peoples, with housing or infrastructure (power, water, sewerage) that is managed on a community basis. First Nations communities have populations of (but not limited to) 50 or more First Nations people*<sup>4</sup>.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the local First Nations community and provide evidence of support for the Proposed Solution from that community (for example, through letters of support from First Nations community leaders). Applicants should also demonstrate how their Proposed Solution will help the Government meet Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (outlined at section 2.1 above).

For communities not eligible for dedicated First Nations funding, applicants can still apply for the general funding through the Program.

## 3 Grant amount and project period

### 3.1 Grants available

This Round of the Program has up to \$150 million (GST exclusive) of funding available, including:

- \$100 million for **Regional Connectivity (Round 3) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$15 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities; and
- \$50 million for **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$7.5 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that provide new mobile coverage in First Nations communities.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to extend the funding available for eligible Proposed Solutions to fund further meritorious projects.

The Project Period for Funded Projects will run from July 2023 to 30 June 2026. Grantees will also be required to provide retail services from the Funded Project for the Operational Period as identified in section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines.

In terms of the grant amount:

- There is no minimum grant amount
- There is no maximum grant amount, but total Round 3 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

All eligible Regional Connectivity Solutions applications under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream will be grouped into three categories for both the overall Program merit list and the First Nations communities merit list, according to the amount of Program funding requested, to ensure that smaller Proposed Solutions are given due consideration during the assessment process. There is no minimum or maximum number of Proposed Solutions that the Government is seeking to fund in any category. The categories are:

- Category 1: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of less than \$300,000 (GST exclusive)
- Category 2: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of \$300,000 to \$2 million (GST exclusive)

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<sup>4</sup> This definition is based on ABS Release — 2901.0 — Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016 – Discrete Community.

- Category 3: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of greater than \$2 million (GST exclusive).

All eligible **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream will be grouped into a **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** merit list and a First Nations communities merit list.

### 3.1.1 Financial co-contribution

To increase the reach of the Program, **applicants are encouraged to seek financial co-contributions (cash) towards each Proposed Solution from state, territory or local governments, local communities and/or other third parties.**

Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and negotiating contributions with any relevant third parties, and for testing and/or verifying any advice received from these third parties.

For Funded Projects that include a co-contribution from a state or territory government, the Department expects that Grantees will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth and a separate agreement with the respective state or territory government.

For Funded Projects that include co-contributions from other parties, the Grantee will bear any costs, and cover the other parties' funding if the other parties' funding is not secured following execution of the Grant Agreement between the Grantee and the Commonwealth.

For Proposed Solutions that include co-contributions from third parties, a copy of the terms of the third parties' commitment to the Applicant is to be attached to the application for funding.

## 3.2 Project period

Grantees must complete all of your Funded Projects by 30 June 2026. Grantees will be required to maintain the services for an Operational Period of:

- seven (7) years for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**; and
- ten (10) years for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If you consider that additional time is required to complete your Funded Project, please advise the Department in your application including providing justification for the additional time.

## 4 Eligibility criteria

We cannot consider your application if you do not satisfy all the Eligibility Criteria.

### 4.1 Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

For applicants applying for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)

And must be one of the following entity types, a:

- licensed telecommunications carrier under the *Telecommunications Act 1997*; or
- owner or intended owner of the Proposed Solution infrastructure who holds or intends to hold a Nominated Carrier Declaration (NCD) under the *Telecommunications Act 1997* in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded; or

For a joint (consortia) application:



- At least one organisation<sup>5</sup> must be a licensed telecommunications carrier or infrastructure owner who holds/intends to hold an NCD in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded. The licensed carrier or infrastructure owner (in the case an NCD applies) must be the entity that enters into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. However, such an application may be led by any of the following entity types:
  - Licensed carriers or infrastructure owners (in the case an NCD applies);
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local governments, local governing bodies, and regional development bodies;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community-controlled organisations.

For applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN); and
- be one of the following entity types:
  - a national **Mobile Network Operator (MNO)**; or
  - a **Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)**.
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNO** means a company that:
  - Supplies a public mobile telecommunications service within the meaning of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (Cth); and
  - Holds an apparatus or a spectrum licence (or both) for the supply of public mobile telecommunications services under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* (Cth).
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNIP** means a company, other than an **MNO**, that provides communications infrastructure in Australia or overseas, including the installation and operation of infrastructure to be used by one or more **National MNOs** to provide public mobile telecommunications services.
- **MNIP** applications must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from at least one **National MNO**, that offers national mobile coverage, to enter into a commercially binding commitment to use the infrastructure to deliver mobile services as described at section 2.2.3 for the Operational Period of the Proposed Solution. Funding may be awarded to eligible **MNIPs** on the condition that the **MNIP** and relevant **National MNO/s** enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

## 4.2 Multi-MNO and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions and Regional Connectivity Solutions to deliver mobile service from a National MNO

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, applicants and **MNOs**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including active sharing solutions. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and discussions with any relevant third parties.

If a **Regional Connectivity Solution** delivers new mobile coverage outcomes (e.g. a new mobile base station that delivers new mobile coverage to an area rather than an upgrade to an existing base station) to an area (i.e. it is not solely a mobile broadband or capacity upgrade to the **MNO** existing coverage in the area), and the applicant is a **National MNO**, then the solution is required to meet the **Multi-MNO** and co-locations requirements set out in this section.

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<sup>5</sup> The Australian Government recognises that some organisations may seek to form consortia in order to apply for a grant. Consortia are eligible to apply and the relevant conditions applicable to consortia are at [6](#) 'Joint (consortia) Applications'.

If you put forward a proposal for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** that offers services from more than one **MNO**, you may include in the proposal the eligible expenditure, found at section 5.3, for all of the **MNOs** that will offer services from the Proposed Solution. However, the Department will only enter into an agreement with you as the lead applicant if the Proposed Solution is successful. All payments including any components for the other participating parties will be made to the lead applicant only.

In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an **MNO** confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution**, each Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must offer:

- to **MNOs**, the option of offering services from the Proposed Solution using active sharing on commercial terms, if the Proposed Solution is an active sharing solution; and
- co-location to **MNOs**, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional **MNO** for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

**MNOs** who are not included in the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as submitted in your application will be responsible for meeting their own expenses for active sharing and / or co-locating at the site.

The detailed requirements for the **MNO** to offer the option of co-location to other **MNOs** not participating in the lead proposal are set out in **Attachment A**. Other **MNOs** will be provided with an opportunity to express interest in co-location before the detailed design phase. The **MNO** will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location if no such expressions of interest are received.

## 5 What the grant money can be used for

### 5.1 Eligible grant activities

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- the **Regional Connectivity (Round3)** funding stream; and
- the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Proposed Regional Connectivity Solutions under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream are limited to broadband connectivity solutions **and/or** mobile capacity improvement solutions in Eligible Areas.

Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** stream are limited to mobile infrastructure in Eligible Areas that extends the coverage of one or more **National MNO's** mobile network to an area without **Existing Handheld Coverage**.

To be eligible your Proposed Solution must:

- provide access to mobile or broadband services in Eligible Areas as set out in Section 5.2; and
- not have started construction or be part of the participating telecommunications provider's forward build network or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027;
- for all macro cell mobile solutions (under both **streams**), include a back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours and, where technically feasible, for other Proposed Solutions, in the event of the loss of external power to the site; and
- show evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for the relevant Operational Period at section 2.2.3.

In addition, your Proposed **Regional Connectivity Solutions** must:

- provide place-based telecommunications solutions to regional digital connectivity issues;
- deliver new infrastructure or the upgrade or improvement of existing infrastructure; and
- not overbuild a like-for-like service unless you can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability or speed.

Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- provide New Mobile Coverage to a location in regional, rural or remote Australia.

Your Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Regional Connectivity Solution** in your application. Similarly, your **Regional Connectivity Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** in your application.

## 5.2 Eligible Areas

Your application can include Proposed Solutions at different locations, as long as they are all in Eligible Areas. Each Proposed Solution will be individually assessed according to the Assessment Criteria. Part or all of the Asset may be located in an Ineligible Area provided it supports services in Eligible Areas. Eligible Areas are all parts of Australia that do not fall within one or more of these Ineligible Areas.

Ineligible Areas are:

- Urban Centres and Localities geographical units classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 'Major Urban', i.e. with a population of 100,000 or more<sup>6</sup>. The Department will provide map overlays showing Ineligible Areas on request.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, Ineligible Areas also include:

- Areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with a Fixed-Line service. Information on NBN Co's rollout is available at [www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map](http://www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map).

For areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with Fixed Wireless technologies, Proposed Solutions that deliver mobile voice and data, Fixed-Line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions will be eligible for funding. Fixed Wireless broadband Proposed Solutions will only be eligible within the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade.

The existing indicative NBN Fixed Wireless footprint is available on the National Map at [nationalmap.gov.au](http://nationalmap.gov.au). While it is expected that the expansion of coverage following NBN Co's Fixed Wireless upgrade will be substantial, applicants should assume this will extend the existing coverage area by up to 15km. Applicants should note that updated coverage maps of the expanded NBN upgrade footprint may not be available during the Round 3 application or assessment period. The Commonwealth reserves the right to delay the assessment and/or funding

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<sup>6</sup> Based on ABS Release — 1270.0.55.004 — Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 4 — Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2016.

of a Proposed Solution until it is known whether the Proposed Solution area will be within the upgraded NBN Fixed Wireless footprint or within an area where NBN announces FTTP upgrades.

### 5.3 Eligible expenditure

You can only spend the grant on eligible expenditure you have incurred on a Funded Project as defined in your Grant Agreement.

Grant funding will be available for the capital costs of building or installing Funded Projects. This may include site acquisition and planning approval costs. Grantees will be responsible for any actual capital costs which exceed estimated costs.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in a Remote or a Very Remote area (based on the ABS remoteness structure)<sup>7</sup>, or a Mobile Black Spot Solution seeking First Nations funding, applicants may seek funding up to 75% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in other locations, you may seek funding for up to 50% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Project.

Note: The installation expenditure can also include the reasonable incremental one-off costs associated with configuring participating MNOs' networks to connect to a Mobile Black Spot Solution if the Proposed Solution utilises active sharing and/or mobile roaming, provided that such costs have not already been subsidised by another funding program of the Commonwealth or States/Territories.

Not all expenditure on your Funded Projects may be eligible for grant funding. The program delegate makes the final decision on what is eligible expenditure and may give additional guidance on eligible expenditure if required.

You must incur the expenditure on your Funded Project between the start date and completion date for your Grant Agreement for the expenditure to be eligible.

#### 5.3.1 Eligible backhaul costs

For both **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** and **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, funding may be sought for the capitalised cost of Backhaul over the Operational Period of Funded Solutions, regardless of Backhaul technology. For remote locations where existing fibre or microwave Backhaul (or a combination of both) is not available or readily accessible, satellite Backhaul technology may be utilised to deliver the Funded Project. If satellite Backhaul technology is put forward for a Proposed Solution, the applicant should clearly define the level of service or connectivity to be provided.

In addition to upfront capital costs related to the installation and deployment of Backhaul (such as special linkage charges), the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of operational costs relating to leased optical fibre, microwave, or satellite Backhaul over the minimum Operational Period of a

<sup>7</sup> 1270.0.55.005 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure, July 2016

Proposed Solution may be included in the estimated asset capital cost of building the Proposed Solution. These capitalised operational costs for Backhaul must be clearly identified separately in the application.

## 5.4 What the grant money cannot be used for

To ensure that applicants do not seek Program funding for Proposed Solutions in areas where they have already planned to invest commercially, all applicants must certify that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**:

- Operating and maintenance expenditure for Funded Solutions is ineligible for grant funding.

The Department will not in any circumstances meet any costs or expenses incurred by an applicant in connection with their application. Applicants must bear their own costs and expenses associated with the application and assessment process, and the preparation, negotiation and execution of the Grant Agreement and of other documentation.

The Department may audit a Grantee's compliance with requirements.

## 6 Assessment criteria

### 6.1 Assessment Criteria for Regional Connectivity Solutions

Applications for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** will need to address each of the following criteria:

1. Merit Criterion one (economic benefits) (15 points)
2. Merit Criterion two (social benefits) (15 points)
3. Merit Criterion three (capacity, capability and resources to deliver the Proposed Solution) (10 points)
4. Merit Criterion four (financial co-contribution) (10 points).

The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate how the Proposed Solution meets each Merit Criterion. Applicants should provide a response to each Merit Criterion, as well as evidence of support to reinforce the claims made in its responses. We will assess eligible applications against each Merit Criterion using the weighting indicated to develop an overall score. Each application will also undergo an overall Value for Money assessment to determine whether the Proposed Solution represents Value for Money to the Commonwealth.

The application form asks questions that relate to the Merit Criteria below. You should provide sufficient evidence to support your answers, including evidence of community support for any proposed economic and/or social benefits offered by your Proposed Solution (see section 6.1.1.1 and section 6.1.2.1 for more information) in response to the Merit Criteria. In addition, you should provide evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in connectivity levels over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area (as outlined at section 2.2.1). The extent of this improvement will impact the assessment of the Proposed Solution's ability to deliver the economic and/or social benefits.

We encourage you to seek the support of the local government and/or state or territory government in preparing your application. For example, they may be able to assist you in identifying the



expected outcomes of the Proposed Solution, particularly the economic and social benefits that would be available to the local community, if the Proposed Solution is funded.

## 6.1.1 Merit Criterion 1 – Economic Benefit

### 6.1.1.1 Economic benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Economic benefits** for a region may cover increases in employment opportunities or economic activity, improvements in productivity, wider access to markets or fairer and more equitable economic outcomes. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to economic benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these economic benefits include:

- a. increasing the number or value of jobs, creating new businesses or efficiencies in the production of goods and services in the region beyond the construction phase (this includes direct and indirect opportunities created through the Proposed Solution);
- b. providing opportunities for growth in existing sectors, e.g. tourism, agriculture, manufacturing;
- c. facilitating greater competition in telecommunication retail services;
- d. whether the Proposed Solution provides an innovative approach to improve productivity, efficiency or addresses an identified problem; and/or
- e. evidence of the community/local intent to employ the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - i. State and territory governments;
  - ii. Local government and regional development authorities;
  - iii. Industry, business, and community groups;
  - iv. Not-for-profits; or
  - v. First Nations community-controlled organisations.

## 6.1.2 Merit Criterion 2 – Social Benefit

### 6.1.2.1 Social benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Social benefits** for a region may cover improving access to health and education services, improving public safety and improving regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to social benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these social benefits include:

- a. facilitating provision of more efficient and effective health or education services, including improved access to health or education resources in the home;
- b. improving public safety and network resilience in a defined area. This may include the ability to call 000 from more locations, providing alternative technologies with which to do so, or improving the effectiveness, resilience or safety of Public Safety Premises;
- c. improving retail competition, regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. This may include improving affordability, providing services that help to attract and retain a workforce or enhancing cultural heritage; and/or
- d. addressing disadvantage within the community including First Nations communities. This may include addressing low digital inclusion, providing affordable services to places with entrenched disadvantage (including benefits such as community free wifi or discounted pricing models), or providing people who are excluded with improved opportunities to access support services.

Applicants applying for First Nations funding should highlight how the Proposed Solution will address Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (as outlined in section 2.1 above), or any other targets under the Closing the Gap initiative.

### 6.1.3 Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery

#### 6.1.3.1 Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project (10 points)

You should demonstrate your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution within the specified cost and timeframe, including through identifying:

- a. Your track record and your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution, including
  - a. examples of delivering similar projects and solutions;
  - b. your resources and access to personnel and/or partners with the right skills and experience;
  - c. your ability to deliver in the context of your organisation's broader program of work (including any pipeline of works through Commonwealth and state or territory government programs such as MBSP and previous Program rounds); and
  - d. your access, or future access to, any necessary infrastructure, power or backhaul.
- b. The maturity of the Proposed Solution, including outlining
  - a. the key technical components of the solution, and a comprehensive project cost budget and breakdown;
  - b. a robust project delivery plan and schedule;
  - c. approvals that will be required and any steps taken to progress these; and
  - d. evidence of contingency planning that mitigates the risk of delays in getting the necessary approvals to commence work, particularly for greenfield and remote projects.

In addition, you should outline how you will maintain the infrastructure and the benefits provided by the Proposed Solution during the Operational Period, including managing expected increased data demands over the course of the Operational Period.

### 6.1.4 Merit Criterion 4 – Financial Co-contributions

#### 6.1.4.1 Total investment the grant funding will leverage (10 points)

You should demonstrate this through identifying the total investment the grant will leverage. A higher level of contribution from non-Commonwealth sources, comparative to the cost of the Proposed Solution, will help drive a higher score in the assessment process for this criterion.

While financial contributions from other Commonwealth sources will be considered as part of the Value for Money assessment, those contributions will not count towards the score for this Merit Criterion.

## 6.2 Assessment Criteria for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that offer coverage outcomes from three **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions that only offer service from two **MNOs**, all other things being equal. All Proposed Solutions that offer services from two **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions with a single **MNO**, all other things being equal.

Proposed Solutions within these **MNO** groupings (i.e. three **MNOs**, two **MNOs** and single **MNO**) will be ranked using the **New Coverage Assessment Formula** to derive the cost to the Commonwealth per weighted square kilometre of **New Handheld Coverage**, and coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is an **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with another **MNO's** network.

Proposed Solutions with a lower cost per square kilometre will rank higher than Proposed Solutions with a high cost per square kilometre.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** is:

Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)

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New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) + (Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2)

**Mobile Black Spot Solutions** located in Remote and Very Remote areas<sup>8</sup>, or seeking First Nations funding, will also be assessed against the **New Coverage Assessment Formula**, however, only 50 per cent of the cost to the Commonwealth will be used in the calculation for these solutions, as it is recognised that there is a higher cost to delivering mobile services in these areas.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** for Remote and Very Remote Proposed Solutions is:

Cost to the Commonwealth (\$) x 0.50

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New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) + (Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2)

The New Coverage Assessment Formula is based on the following components:

- a. **Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)** refers to the Commonwealth portion of the estimated Total Cost for the Proposed Solution (see section 5.3), including capitalised Operational Costs.
- b. **New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld mobile coverage where there is no **Existing Handheld Coverage**.
  - Where a Proposed Solution provides **New Handheld Coverage** from more than one participating **MNO**, each participating **MNO's** **New Handheld Coverage** will be counted cumulatively, regardless of whether the **New Handheld Coverage** areas overlap.
  - This is in recognition of the benefits of **Multi-MNO** solutions, and to ensure that these Proposed Solutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to the higher costs that may be incurred for these Proposed Solutions.
- c. **Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with **Existing Handheld Coverage** from another **MNO**, divided by a weighting factor of 2.

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3 - Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2021

- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement of a single **MNO**, overlapping coverage with the **MNO**'s own existing network is not eligible for assessment.
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement (e.g. active sharing) of two or more **MNOs**, overlapping coverage that is new for at least one participating **MNO** is eligible for assessment, but counted only once. Coverage located in an area within the existing network of all participating **MNOs** will not be eligible for assessment.

**New Handheld Coverage** and Overlapping Coverage will be measured by comparing the 4G handheld coverage provided by the Proposed Solution against existing 4G handheld coverage (including as-yet unbuilt base stations funded under other Commonwealth and/or state government programs), as per the **MNOs**' submitted coverage maps at the handheld coverage levels set out in section 2.2.1.

Table 2: Example assessment of New Handheld Coverage and Overlapping Coverage

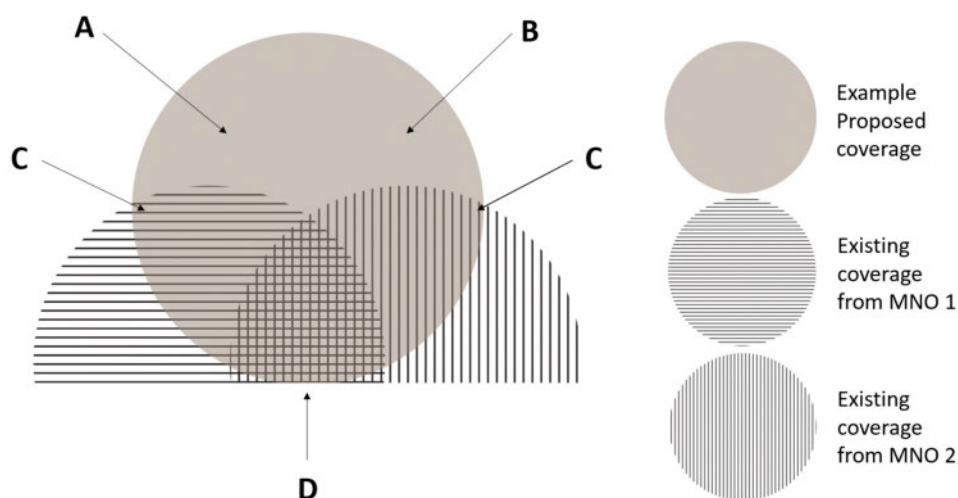
A Proposed Solution has confirmed participation of two MNOs.

- A. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 1, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
- B. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 2, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
- C. The Proposed Solution provides 20km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage, but is new for at least one of the participating MNOs.
- D. The Proposed Solution provides 10km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage in the networks of both participating MNOs (not eligible for assessment).

The assessed coverage for this Proposed Solution is  $A+B+(C/2)$

Equalling:  $30\text{km}^2 + 30\text{km}^2 + (20\text{km}^2 / 2) = 70\text{km}^2$

A graphical representation of this example is below:



## 7 How to apply

Before applying, you must read and understand these Guidelines.

All application documents may be found on [GrantConnect](#). Any alterations and addenda<sup>9</sup> will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on the GrantConnect website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If you need further guidance around the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online, contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

To apply you must:

- complete the Grant Opportunity application form;
- provide all information requested;
- demonstrate that you meet all Eligibility Criteria;
- provide responses to the Assessment Criteria;
- include all necessary attachments; and
- submit your application/s before the due date.

Table 3: Expected timing for this grant opportunity

Activity	Timeframe
Guidelines released and applications open	19 March 2023
Applicant registration and pre-application documentation for applicants applying for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)
Submit initial proposal period for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)
Applications close	5pm AEDT 31 May 2023
Announcement on Successful Applications	
Commencement date of Grant Activity	On Execution of Grant Agreement
End date of Grant Activity	30 June, 2026
End date of Asset Operational Period	As defined at section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines

### 7.1 Applicant registration (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Potential applicants who intend to propose **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must register their interest with the Department and sign and provide a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to being granted access to the confidential Program documentation.

<sup>9</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.



## 7.2 Pre-application lodgement (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Upon registering as a potential applicant, **MNOs** who intend to submit applications for funding, or are partnering with potential applicants, for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must first submit their existing handheld 4G coverage information, incorporating the coverage from base stations funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program, the Peri-Urban Mobile Program and the Regional Connectivity Program and any base station funded under a State or Territory program, regardless of the stage of construction.

**Existing Handheld Coverage** information required above must be submitted to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), 1 May 2023. The Department may, at its absolute discretion, accept mobile coverage information submitted by **MNOs** after this date.

The **Existing Handheld Coverage** information required in accordance with this section must be supplied as two separate layers as follows:

- Handheld Coverage Maps: being a layer modelled to the Handheld Coverage levels as set out in section 2.2.1; and
- Existing Public Coverage Maps: being a layer representing the predictive handheld coverage modelling standards which underpin the publicly available coverage maps on the **MNO's** website.

For avoidance of doubt, the **Existing Public Coverage Maps** are requested for information purposes only. Assessment will only consider **the New Handheld Coverage Maps** (i.e. a “like-for-like” comparison).

Pre-application information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.3 Submit initial proposals for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should lodge any initial proposal locations where they are interested in partnering with another **MNO** on a site under the Program to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), 1 May 2023.

The registered applicants should provide this information using the “Initial Proposals” template provided in the Application Pack.

The Department will collate the lists of initial proposal locations and provide a consolidated list to all registered applicants. The consolidated list will include the following information for each initial proposal:

- an unique identifier;
- the location;
- type of base stations being considered (small cell / macro); and
- the applicant's contact details.

The Department will also distribute a contact list of all pre-registered applicants to facilitate discussions regardless of whether a pre-registered applicant has identified potential partnering locations.

Applicants and other interested parties have until closing of the application period to discuss and plan co-development and co-funding opportunities at these sites prior to finalising applications.

The list of locations will be treated as Confidential Information by the registered applicants.

Initial proposal information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.4 Completing and lodging an application

Your application must provide:

- An outline of the key technical components of the Proposed Solution, including any required supporting infrastructure and services, (including appropriate diagrams) and detail how the overall 'system' will deliver the proposed services to the stated quality.
- The location of the Proposed Solution and all Assets.
- Mapping data, where applicable, outlining the predictive coverage for the Proposed Solution.
- The total estimated capital cost of construction (GST inclusive).
- The amount of co-contribution (GST inclusive) being provided by the applicant.
- The amount of Commonwealth co-contribution sought under the Proposed Solution (GST Inclusive).
- The amount of any co-contributions (GST Inclusive) to be received from all third parties, including but not limited to state, territory or local governments, local communities, or any combination of these, and any specific requirements or conditions tied to the co-contributions.
- Evidence of any co-contributions to be received from all third parties. For example, a letter of support from a suitably senior official from the relevant third party, which outlines the amount of co-contributions to be received and any conditions attached to the co-contributions. The department may ask for additional evidence of co-contributions if it considers the evidence you provide is unsatisfactory.
- Evidence of the extent to which the Proposed Solution meets the Assessment Criteria.
- Evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area.
- Whether the Proposed Solution is dependent on the construction of one or more of the applicants' other Proposed Solutions, including explaining the specific dependencies.

You must agree that the predictive coverage mapping data can be used by the Department to prepare promotional material for the Program or for policy development and advice as needed.

Applicants must indicate their ability to comply with the applicable sample Grant Agreement(s) for the relevant stream(s) (to be made available on GrantConnect shortly after Program opening) at the time of submitting their applications. There will be separate sample Grant Agreements for Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions. Where the terms of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) are not accepted in full, applicants are required to submit a revision-marked version of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) reflecting their proposed drafting, their position, and their reasons for requesting the change.

Applicants who have previously agreed a funding agreement with the Commonwealth under Round 2 of the Regional Connectivity Program (for Regional Connectivity Solutions) or the Mobile Black Spot Program (for Mobile Black Spot Solutions) and wish to use that Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the applicable stream) must request to do so at the time of submitting their application. However, applicants must still indicate their ability to comply with the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) as mentioned above. The Commonwealth may, at its sole discretion, agree to use the Previous Funding Agreement as a basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the relevant stream). The Commonwealth will indicate any updates to be made to the Previous Funding Agreement for the purposes of this round. The updates will be drawn from the applicable sample Grant Agreement for the relevant stream.

As outlined in [section 5.4](#) of these Guidelines, applicants must warrant that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward

build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

You are responsible for ensuring that your application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information is a serious offence under the [Criminal Code Act 1995 \(Cth\)](#). We will investigate any false or misleading information and may exclude your application from further consideration.

If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact us immediately at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. We may, at our sole discretion, accept additional information from you or a request to correct the error. However, we are under no obligation to accept any additional information or agree to a request from you to correct your application after the closing time.

If we identify an error in your application, you may be contacted to correct or explain the error. However, we can refuse to accept any additional information from you that would change your application after the closing time.

You should keep a copy of your application and any supporting documents.

All applications lodged will be acknowledged by the Department by email. Applicants lodging an application who do not receive acknowledgement of their application should contact the Department. Applications that are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. If you need further guidance about the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

Applications can be lodged by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. Application files lodged by email must not exceed a combined size of 10 megabytes per email. Applications may also be lodged using GovTEAMS, the Australian Government's secure online document sharing and project management system. Potential applicants can be provided with information about lodging applications using GovTEAMS upon request to the Department. Potential applicants may also request to use alternative online secure document sharing systems by agreement with the Department.

You should advise the Department if you intend to lodge your application using GovTEAMS, or if you need to use an alternative electronic lodgement platform. You should do this **at least two weeks before the closing date** via email to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. If you wish to change the electronic lodgement platform after notifying the Department, you should advise the Department of the change and the reasons why. The Department may, at its discretion, accept changes to the lodgement method.

All electronic files, regardless of transmission method, should be provided in an appropriate Microsoft compatible format (Microsoft Office 2007 or later or PDF files preferred): Geo-spatial information such as maps should be provided in either Mapinfo TAB or MID/MIF; ESRI Shape; GML; or KML format.

The Department may also accept applications via hard copy and/or physical electronic media, in addition to electronic applications.

Where physical electronic media is to be provided, such as a USB stick, the media must be PC-formatted. Applicants should include an index of all electronic documents on the physical electronic media.

Applications provided in hard copy and physical electronic media formats should be delivered via registered post or by hand prior to the closing date.

Applications via post are to be addressed and delivered to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Applications via hand delivery are to be addressed and delivered by the closing date to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
2 Phillip Law Street  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

## 7.5 Attachments to application

The following details must also be provided as attachments to your application:

- a comprehensive budget for the Proposed Solution including itemised costs of all the key items such as material, equipment and software licenses (linked to a Bill of Material), costs of key labour, contractor activities and tasks, and other overhead costs such as project management, administration, transport, travel & accommodation
- evidence of a Funding Strategy, e.g. financial statements, loan agreements, cash flow documents
- accountant declaration that you are able to fund your share of the cost of the Proposed Solution (sample template provided on GrantConnect)
- evidence of commitment to financial co-contributions as detailed in [section 6.1.4](#) of these Guidelines
- certification of the application by a duly authorised representative of your organisation, for example a senior executive, director, or company secretary
- evidence to demonstrate your ability to successfully construct and operate the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of ability to deliver a retail service on the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for at least the Operational Period
- for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, evidence of the local need for the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local government and regional development authorities;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community controlled organisations
- other evidence, as necessary to support your claims against the Assessment Criteria.
- Predictive coverage mapping data for each Proposed Solution.

Supporting documentation to the application form can be attached in line with the instructions provided within the form.

## 7.6 Joint (consortia) applications

We recognise that some organisations may want to join together as a group to deliver a Proposed Solution.

In these circumstances, you must appoint a 'lead organisation'. Only the lead organisation can submit the application form, but the lead organisation will not necessarily be the entity entering into any agreement with the Commonwealth (refer to [section 4.1](#) of these Guidelines). The application must identify all other members of the group (partner organisations) and their role in the Proposed Solution and include a letter of support from each of the partner organisations.

Each letter of support should include:

- details of the partner organisation;
- an overview of how the partner organisation will work with the lead organisation, including financial co-contributor and any other partner organisations in the group to successfully complete the Proposed Solution;
- an outline of the relevant experience and/or expertise the partner organisation will bring to the group;
- the roles/responsibilities of the partner organisation and the resources they will contribute (if any); and
- details of a nominated management level contact officer.

You must have a formal arrangement in place with all partner organisations prior to execution of the Grant Agreement.

## 7.7 Closing date for funding applications

The closing date for submitting an application for funding under this Grant Opportunity is 5pm (Canberra Time) on 31 May 2023.

## 7.8 Timing of Grant Opportunity processes

You must submit an application between the published opening and closing dates. The Department reserves the right to, in exceptional circumstances, accept a late application to the assessment process at its discretion. Without limiting the Department's discretion, exceptional circumstances may include natural disasters or unforeseen technical issues with application forms or lodgement systems. Any decision by the Department on whether or not to accept a late application to the assessment process shall be final.

If you believe there are circumstances which will affect the timely submission of your application, you must contact us before the application closing date to negotiate an alternative submission due date.

## 7.9 Questions during application process

All requests for clarification or determination of the meaning of provisions in these Guidelines should be referred to the Department by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. The Department's written decision on the matter is final.

We will acknowledge and address emailed questions as soon as practicable. Answers to questions will be posted on GrantConnect as Frequently Asked Questions.



## 8 The grant Selection Process

### 8.1 Assessment of grant applications

We will consider eligible applications through a targeted competitive grant process.

The assessment process for the program will be as follows:

1. initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria
2. detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria
3. Value for Money assessment and consideration of whether the Proposed Solution supports a Government priority as outlined in [section 8.2](#)
4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.

As part of the Value for Money assessment we will group all eligible Proposed Solutions by funding stream and for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** into the funding categories described in [section 3.1](#) to ensure we compare Proposed Solutions of similar size against each other.

There is no separate application process or Eligibility Criteria to receive dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions in First Nations communities. We will consider eligible First Nations applications, as defined in [section 2.2.4](#) of these Guidelines, under a separate merit list. Eligible First Nations solutions that are not successful in gaining dedicated First Nations funding through the First Nations merit list will be considered under the relevant merit list for each funding stream.

We may seek advice regarding your Proposed Solution from state or territory government agencies, other Australian Government agencies, independent experts and other external parties. This advice may be taken into consideration when assessing the Proposed Solution.

Where the level of information provided in an application is not sufficient for the assessors to make a recommendation they may, but are not obliged to, seek more information from the applicant so long as it does not change the substance of the application. If the assessment process identifies unintentional errors in your application, we may contact you to correct or clarify the errors, but you cannot make any material alteration or addition. It is therefore recommended that you thoroughly address the criteria in your application.

An evaluation committee may seek additional information about your application. They may do this from within the Commonwealth, even if the sources are not nominated by you as referees. The evaluation committee may also consider information about you or your application that is available through the normal course of business.

### 8.2 Value for Money and government priorities

Following assessment against the Eligibility and Assessment Criteria, an assessment will also be undertaken to consider which of the Proposed Solutions represent the best Value for Money to the Commonwealth and whether they support a government priority. This is to ensure the grant will add value by achieving Program benefits that would not occur without the grant. This assessment will have regard to the overall Program and Grant Opportunity objectives.

Factors that may be considered in the Value for Money assessment include, but are not limited to the:

- cost to the Commonwealth of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which the Proposed Solution would contribute to the Program objectives, including addressing an identified local priority or government priority
- for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, degree to which the Proposed Solution delivers **Multi-MNO** outcomes

- extent to which the Proposed Solution will build on investments (aimed at delivering social and economic benefits) already made or planned for the Proposed Solution location
- extent of existing or planned commercial activity/investment that will impact on telecommunications services and the level of connectivity in the Proposed Solution location
- extent to which the Proposed Solution presents a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area
- extent to which Proposed Solutions provide overlapping coverage in a given area, and the appropriateness of each Proposed Solution to local needs
- extent to which the Proposed Solution leverages additional partnerships and in-kind contributions
- extent to which the Proposed Solution supports broader Commonwealth objectives or priorities, including through written support or financial co-contributions from other Commonwealth Departments or agencies
- ability to meet the needs of end users over the Operational Period
- forecast benefits of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which there is an appropriate spread of Proposed Solution types and Eligible Areas.

Based on the overarching Value for Money assessment, the Department reserves the right to recommend funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that were lower ranked against the Assessment Criteria than other eligible Proposed Solutions. This could include lower ranked Proposed Solutions from First Nations communities in recognition of the dedicated funding available for First Nations communities. The Department also reserves the right to recommend not funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that are highly ranked against the Assessment Criteria, based on the Value for Money assessment.

The Department may, at its absolute discretion, recommend increasing the level of Commonwealth funding for one or more **Mobile Black Spot Solution** above the maximum percentage per **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as outlined in section 5.3, should it be considered of higher Value for Money.

### 8.3 Who will assess applications?

The evaluation committee will assess each application on its merits and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which Proposed Solutions should be awarded a grant (if any).

We may ask external advisors to inform the assessment process. Any advisor who is not a Commonwealth Official will be required to perform their duties in accordance with the CGRGs.

The evaluation committee recommends to the Decision Maker which applications to approve for a grant.

### 8.4 Who will approve grants?

The Minister for Communications (the Decision Maker) decides which grants to approve, taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation committee and the availability of grant funds for the purposes of the Grant Opportunity.

The Minister's decision is final in all matters, including the:

- approval of applications for funding;
- amount of grant funding awarded; and
- terms and conditions of funding.

There is no appeal mechanism for decisions to approve or not approve a grant. An applicant who is dissatisfied with the outcome may contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman as set out in [section 15](#).

## 9 Notification of application outcomes

We will advise you of the outcome of your application in writing. If you are successful, we will advise you of any specific conditions attached to the grant.

### 9.1 Feedback on your application

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a grant, you may ask for feedback within 28 days of being advised of the outcome. We will give written feedback within one month of your request.

## 10 Successful grant applications

### 10.1 The Grant Agreement

Each Grantee will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement (or Agreements if successful in both streams) with the Commonwealth. Each Grant Agreement will set out the Grantee's obligations in respect of the roll-out and service terms for each Funded Project. Where the Grantee is successful in obtaining funding for both Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions, the Regional Connectivity Solutions will be covered by a separate Grant Agreement to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

A sample Grant Agreement for Regional Connectivity Solutions and a separate sample Grant Agreement for Mobile Black Spot Solutions will be available shortly after the opening of the application round.

Applicants requesting any changes to the applicable sample Grant Agreement should provide full details of the proposed changes in their application, for consideration by the Department (see section 7.4 of these Guidelines). An applicant who was a previous funding recipient under either stream of the Program may, at the time of making their application, request to use a previously agreed funding agreement for that stream, with appropriate updates specified by the Commonwealth, as the basis for their Round 3 Agreement (an Updated Previous Funding Agreement). For RCP Round 2 funding recipients that are successful under Round 3 when seeking funding for a Regional Connectivity Solution, they may request to use their executed Round 2 Grant Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement. The decision to use an Updated Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement is at the ultimate discretion of the Commonwealth.

We must execute a Grant Agreement with the applicant before we can make any payments. We are not responsible for any of the applicant's expenditure until a Grant Agreement is executed. Applicant's should not start any activities relating to a Funded Project until a Grant Agreement is executed. Each successful applicant must enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth prior to the Government's announcement of successful locations and Grantees.

The Commonwealth expects Grant Agreement terms to be reached with a successful Grantee within 60 Business days of the proposed Grantee being advised in writing that the Commonwealth is prepared to financially support the Proposed Solutions/s. If terms have not been agreed within 60 Business days, and without limiting any other rights or discretions, the Commonwealth reserves to the right not to proceed with a Grant Agreement for the Proposed Solution.

### 10.2 Specific legislation, policies and industry standards

Whilst applicants are required to be compliant with all laws and regulations, they may be requested to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation, policies or industry standards. For example,

applicants may be requested to demonstrate compliance with health, safety or security related legislation, policies or industry standards that are in any way applicable to the Funded Project.

### 10.2.1 Australian Industry Participation (AIP) Plan

Grant applicants should note that for funding of \$20 million or more, subject to advice from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, the Australian Industry Participation National Framework principles, including an AIP plan requirement, may apply to the grant agreement(s). More information on AIP plan requirements can be found at [Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. industry.gov.au/aip](https://industry.gov.au/aip).

### 10.2.2 WHS Accreditation Scheme

Building work undertaken as part of the Funded Project/s funded under this agreement may be covered by the Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme (WHS Accreditation Scheme). The WHS Accreditation Scheme is established under the Federal Safety Commissioner Act 2022 and specified in the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) (Accreditation Scheme) Rules 2019*.

The WHS Accreditation Scheme applies to building work that is indirectly funded by the Commonwealth or a corporate Commonwealth entity if it is carried out under a contract with a value of \$4 million or more (GST inclusive) and the contribution made to the funding of the project that includes the building work by the Commonwealth or corporate Commonwealth entity is at least:

- \$6,000,000 (GST inclusive) and represents at least 50% of the total funding; or
- \$10,000,000 (GST inclusive).

A successful applicant who is the builder must comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation and successful applicants who will be engaging builders to undertake the building work must require builders to comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation.

## 10.3 How we pay the grant

The Grant Agreement will state:

- the maximum grant amount to be paid;
- the proportion of eligible expenditure covered by the grant;
- any financial contributions provided by you or a third party;
- any in-kind contributions you will make; and
- any other requirements.

We will not exceed the maximum grant amount under any circumstances. If applicants incur extra costs, they must meet them themselves.

We may make an initial payment on execution of the Grant Agreement. We will make subsequent payments as applicants achieve Asset completion demonstrated by a satisfactory report, based on applicants actual eligible expenditure. These payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, an upfront operational expense payment will be made once the Operational Period has commenced.

## 10.4 Maintaining project benefits

In the Grant Agreement, an applicant will be required to commit to operate its Funded Project infrastructure and deliver Funded Project benefits over the Operational Period. Applicants may be required to report on the ongoing benefits delivered by the Funded Project.

## 10.5 Grants payments and GST

Payments will be made as set out in the Grant Agreement.

## 10.6 Amendment to these Guidelines

The Government reserves the right to terminate or vary the program (including via variation of these Guidelines) at its discretion, at any time, for any reason, including without limitation, in the light of changes to Government policy.

Any alterations and addenda<sup>10</sup> to the Program will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment prior to the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department, potential applicants will be advised of the revised or new Guidelines in a timely manner, including any resultant extension that may be applied to the application period.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment following the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department (for example, if the applications received do not achieve the Program objectives), the revised or new Guidelines will set out details of the changes, and all existing applicants will be notified of arrangements impacting existing applications.

An organisation submitting an application acknowledges that neither these Guidelines, nor any application, give rise to a binding agreement or any other binding legal arrangement or legal relationship between the applicant and the Commonwealth. There is no binding agreement on any party until a Grant Agreement is executed by the Commonwealth and the Grantee.

# 11 Announcement of grants

If successful, applicants grants will be listed on the GrantConnect website 21 calendar days after the date of effect as required by Section 5.3 of the [CGRGs](#).

# 12 How we monitor your grant activity

## 12.1 Keeping us informed

Applicants should let us know if anything is likely to affect the Funded Project or organisation.

We need to know of any key changes to the applicant's organisation or its business activities which may affect its ability to complete the Funded Project, carry on business and pay debts due.

Applicants must also inform us of any changes to:

- name;

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<sup>10</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.



- addresses;
- nominated contact details; and
- bank account details.

If applicants become aware of a breach of terms and conditions under the Grant Agreement, they must contact us immediately.

Applicants must notify us of events relating to the grant and provide an opportunity for the Minister or their representative to attend.

## **12.2 Reporting**

Applicants must submit reports in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will expect applicants to report on such matters as:

- progress against agreed activity and outcomes;
- contributions of participants directly related to the Funded Project including scheduled co-contributions (if any); and
- expenditure of the grant.

The amount of detail you provide in your reports should be relative to the Funded Project size, complexity and grant amount.

We will monitor progress by assessing reports applicants submit and may conduct site visits or request records to confirm details of reports if necessary. Occasionally we may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement.

## **12.3 Asset completion report**

For each completed Asset, applicants must submit an asset completion report as specified in the Grant Agreement. Assets will be defined in each applicant's Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth.

## **12.4 Grant agreement variations**

We recognise that unexpected events may affect your progress. In these circumstances, you can request a variation to your grant agreement. Applicants can request a variation by providing written notice to the Department setting out the reasons for the variation and proposing steps that could be taken to better achieve the purpose or address the risks of the Funded Project.

You should not assume that a variation request will be successful. We will consider your request based on provisions in the Grant Agreement and the likely impact on achieving outcomes.

## **12.5 Financial declaration or audited financial acquittal report**

We will ask applicants to provide a declaration that the grant money was spent in accordance with the Grant Agreement and to report on any underspends of the grant money. We may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments.

## **12.6 Independent audit report**

The Department may request an independently audited financial report for Funded Projects at the applicants expense. The financial audit report will verify that applicants spent the grant in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will assess the report and may re-examine applicants claims or conduct site visits if necessary.

## 12.7 Compliance visits

The Department (including entities acting on our behalf) may visit applicants during the development and construction of the Funded Project, or at the completion of the Funded Project to review compliance with the Grant Agreement. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement. For large or complex Funded Projects, we may visit applicants after they finish the Funded Project. We will provide applicants with reasonable notice of any compliance visit.

## 12.8 Evaluation

We will evaluate the Grant Opportunity to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from applications and reports for this purpose. We may also interview applicants, or ask for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted applicants and to evaluate how effective the Program was in achieving its outcomes. Grantees may be required to participate in Program reviews and evaluations.

We may contact applicants up to one year after the Asset Completion Dates for each Funded Project for more information to assist with this evaluation.

## 12.9 Acknowledgement

The Program logo should be used on all materials related to grants under the Program. Whenever the logo is used, the publication must also acknowledge the Commonwealth as follows:

‘Regional Connectivity Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Regional Connectivity Solutions and ‘Mobile Black Spot Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

If applicants make a public statement about a Funded Project under the Program, we require them to acknowledge the grant by using the following:

‘This project received grant funding from the Australian Government.’

# 13 Probity

The Australian Government will make sure that the Grant Opportunity process is fair, conducted according to these Guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct, and is consistent with the CGRGs.

External advisors may also be asked to inform the assessment and evaluation process. All external advisors must comply with the CGRGs.

## 13.1 Enquiries and feedback

The Department’s [Client Service Charter](#) applies to complaints about this Grant Opportunity. All complaints about a grant process must be provided in writing.

Any questions applicants have about grant decisions for this Grant Opportunity should be sent to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If applicants do not agree with the way the Department has handled its complaint, they may complain to the [Commonwealth Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman will not usually look into a complaint unless the matter has first been raised directly with the Department.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on:

Phone (Toll free): 1300 362 072  
 Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)  
 Website: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

### 13.2 Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the Grant Opportunity or Program. There may be a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, if Department staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or applicant or any of the applicant's personnel has a:

- Professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the application Selection Process, such as an Australian Government officer or external advisor;
- Relationship with or interest in an organisation that is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently; or
- Relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain because the organisation receives a grant under the Grant Opportunity.

Applicants will be asked to declare, as part of your application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interests or that, to the best of your knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If applicants later identify an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest, they must inform the Department in writing immediately.

Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Australian [Public Service Code of Conduct \(Section 13\(7\)\)](#) of the [Public Service Act 1999](#). Committee members and other officials including the Decision Maker must also declare any conflicts of interest.

### 13.3 Privacy

We treat applicant's personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#). This includes letting applicants know:

- what personal information we collect;
- why we collect your personal information; and
- who we give your personal information to.

Applicants personal information can only be disclosed to someone else for the primary purpose for which it was collected, unless an exemption applies under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

The Australian Government may use and disclose information about grant applicants and grant recipients under this Grant Opportunity. This includes disclosing grant information on GrantConnect as required for reporting purposes and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.

We may share the information you give us with other Commonwealth entities for purposes including government administration, research or service delivery, according to Australian laws.

As part of your application, you declare your ability to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Australian Privacy Principles and impose the same privacy obligations on officers, employees, agents and subcontractors that you engage to assist with the eligible Grant Activity, in respect of personal information you collect, use, store, or disclose in connection with the Grant Activity. Accordingly, you must not do anything which if done by the Department would breach an [Australian Privacy Principle](#) as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988*.

For further information about our privacy obligations (including in relation to how to access or correct personal information or make a complaint) and our contact details for privacy matters, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

### 13.4 Confidential Information

The Department will treat the applicant's commercially sensitive information provided in the applicant's application as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information (applicant Confidential Information).

The Department's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any applicant Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed;
- disclosed by the Department to its advisers, officers, employees, or other agencies' officers or employees, for the purpose of evaluating the applicant's application and during any Grant Agreement negotiations;
- disclosed by the Department in response to a request by a house or a committee of the Parliament of Australia, or a house or a committee of the Parliament of a state or territory;
- disclosed by the Department to its responsible Minister or the Auditor-General;
- shared by the Commonwealth within the Commonwealth's entity (for example, another Commonwealth agency), where this serves the Commonwealth's legitimate interests;
- disclosed to the Department's officers to enable the effective management or auditing of the Program; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the Department's confidentiality obligation.

The applicant will treat any information provided by the Department as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information. (Commonwealth Confidential Information).

The applicant's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Commonwealth Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the applicant's confidentiality obligation.

The Department may share with state or territory governments (on a confidential basis) any or all information contained in applications which it considers relevant to the respective jurisdiction based on the location of the Proposed Solution(s), including costings for Proposed Solutions that are not successful in receiving funding through the Program, subject to agreement on confidentiality with applicants.

### 13.5 Intellectual property rights

By submitting an application under the Program, to the extent the applicant's application contains:

- its Intellectual Property; or
- a third party's Intellectual Property,

the applicant grants (or will procure for) the Commonwealth a permanent, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide, non-exclusive licence (including a right of sublicense) to use, reproduce, adapt, and communicate the applicant's Intellectual Property contained in its application under the Program provided the use, reproduction, adaptation, or communication is in connection with any assessment processes under, or the evaluation of, the Program.

Any licence granted to the Commonwealth in relation to Intellectual Property rights does not include a right to exploit the Intellectual Property for commercial purposes.

### 13.6 Freedom of information

All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#) (FOI Act).

The purpose of the FOI Act is to give members of the public rights of access to information held by the Australian Government and its entities. Under the FOI Act, members of the public can seek access to documents held by the Australian Government. This right of access is limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary to protect essential public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

All Freedom of Information requests must be referred to the Freedom of Information Coordinator in writing.

By mail: Freedom of Information Coordinator  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications  
and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: <mailto:FOI@infrastructure.gov.au>

## 14 Consultation

These Guidelines are informed by the submissions received as part of consultation on the draft Guidelines.

## 15 Glossary

Term	Definition
4G	Fourth generation mobile telecommunications service.
5G	Fifth generation mobile telecommunications service.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Active sharing	Arrangements where MNOs share the active layer of mobile network infrastructure to deliver services to a location, including through Radio Access Network Sharing, and/or mobile roaming.
AEDT	Australian Eastern Daylight Time
AC	Alternating Current
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
Asset	"The component of Proposed Solution to be constructed or upgraded at (or in connection to) a site".
Date of Asset Completion	The date on which the Grantee has delivered the contracted service for a particular Asset.



Term	Definition
Backhaul	A link between the core or backbone of a network and sub-networks, transporting data from a series of disparate locations to a more centralised location.
<a href="#">Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines or CGRGs</a>	Guidelines issued by the Finance Minister under section 105C of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> , which establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration.
Commonwealth Official	A Commonwealth representative who is working or consulting on the Program.
Decision Maker	As set out in <a href="#">section 8.4</a> , the Minister for Communications.
DC	Direct Current
DTCS FAD	Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination
Eligible Area	As described in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Eligibility Criteria	The mandatory criteria set out in <a href="#">section 4</a> which applicants must meet in order for their application for the Grant Opportunity to be considered.
Existing Handheld Coverage	Coverage able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device within the applicant's mobile network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that is currently available;</li> <li>• that will be provided by any base station that will be delivered by the applicant under a round of the Mobile Black Spot Program, Peri-Urban Mobile Program or other Commonwealth grant program; or</li> <li>• that will be provided by any applicant base station funded under a State or Territory program.</li> </ul>
Fixed-line	A type of internet connection that uses a physical line (including but not limited to fibre, Hybrid Fibre-Coaxial and copper) to provide services to a premises.
Fixed Wireless	A type of internet connection that uses fixed transmission towers or base stations to provide wireless services to a premises via antennas.
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTTP	Fibre to the Premises
Funded Project	A telecommunications infrastructure project found suitable during the assessment process and selected for funding under this Round of the Program.

Term	Definition
Funding Strategy	A written plan that outlines the financial capacity of the applicant to deliver a Proposed Solution through the Program.
Grant Activity	All the projects that the Grantee is required to undertake as set out in the Grant Agreement.
Grant Agreement	A document with contractual effect that sets out the relationship between the Grantee and the Commonwealth, and specifies the details of the grant.
<a href="#">GrantConnect</a>	The Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CGRGs.
Grant Opportunity	The Program Grant Opportunity as described in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Grantee	An applicant who has been selected to receive a grant under the Grant Opportunity.
Guidelines	These Grant Opportunity Guidelines for Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities.
GST	Goods and Service Tax
Ineligible Areas	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Intellectual Property	Includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts);</li> <li>2. all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and</li> <li>3. all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.</li> </ol>
Macrocell	The widest range of cell sizes used in a mobile phone network served by a mobile base station, often used in rural areas and along highways. Macrocells generally provide larger coverage than small cell base stations or microcells, with a typical power output of tens of watts.
Assessment Criteria	The specified principles or standards set out in <a href="#">section 6</a> , against which applications will be judged. The Assessment Criteria will be used to assess the merits of proposals and to determine application rankings.
Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve and extend mobile coverage in regional, rural and remote Australia.
Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.

Term	Definition
National MNO	An MNO who operates a mobile network that provides mobile coverage to at least 80% of the Australian population.
National Broadband Network (NBN)	The national wholesale-only, open access telecommunications network that is being built by, or in conjunction with, NBN Co (including any existing network incorporated into the NBN).
New Handheld Coverage	Coverage from a Proposed Solution that will be able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device in areas that do not receive Existing Handheld Coverage, in accordance with the meaning given in section 2.2.1.
NCD	Nominated Carrier Declaration
Operational Period	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2.2.3</a> .
Operational Costs (OPEX)	Costs for additional goods or services that are purchased for the ongoing operation of an asset.
Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve mobile coverage and capacity in peri-urban fringe areas at risk of bushfire and natural disaster.
Program	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2</a> .
Proposed Solution	Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.
Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Regional Connectivity (Round 3) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Public Safety Premises	Places including emergency services facilities (i.e. including ambulance and Rural Fire Service (RFS) depots, hospitals, police facilities, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and related facilities (which may include airstrips).
Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP)	The 4G received signal power in a long-term evolution (LTE) network measured in decibels per milliwatt (dBm).
RRU	Remote Radio Unit
Selection Process	The method used to select Grantees, which will include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria;</li> <li>2. a detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria;</li> <li>3. a Value for Money assessment and consideration of other government priorities; and</li> <li>4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.</li> </ol>
Small Cell	A 'small cell' in a mobile phone network, with a typical range less than two kilometres. Often used to add network capacity in areas of dense population or very remote locations, utilising power control to limit coverage area. These are also known as microcells.

Term	Definition
Value for Money	<p>Refers to achieving 'value with relevant money' which is a judgement based on the grant proposal representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public resources and determined from a variety of considerations in accordance with the CGRGs.</p> <p>When administering a grant opportunity, a Commonwealth Official should consider the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each proposal including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the quality of the project proposal and activities;</li> <li>b. fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to Government objectives;</li> <li>c. that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the applicant's and the Government's objectives being achieved; and</li> <li>d. the applicant's relevant experience and performance history.</li> </ul>
We/us	The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts/or Commonwealth Officials administering the Program.
WHS	Work Health and Safety

## Attachment A

### A1. Co-location and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Subject to 4.2 above, in addition to any arrangements negotiated with an MNO confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed Solution, each Proposed Solution must offer the option of co-location to other MNOs, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

If a Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO other than those already participating or is not capable of supporting co-location, applicants must provide a detailed explanation of why it is not technically feasible to reconfigure the Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution to support an additional MNO at incremental cost to the Co-locating MNO, or why it is not otherwise possible to offer co-location at the site. The Department's technical advisor may review any technical advice from the applicant. If the Department's view is that co-location is technically possible, then the applicant must be prepared to offer the option of co-location at incremental cost to an MNO seeking to co-locate on the Proposed Solution, or the Department may remove the Proposed Solution from the assessment process.

Once an applicant is selected to build a Proposed Solution it must, if other parties express interest, give any other MNO(s) not already participating in the Funded Project the opportunity to co-locate and to participate in the detailed design phase for that Funded Project using the process set out in this paragraph.

- The incremental cost for a Funded Project to support an additional MNO will be provided to the other participating MNOs to allow for greater transparency in co-location negotiations.
- For Funded Project where other MNOs are interested in co-locating, the costs can be shared more broadly and efficiencies achieved if the interested MNOs can participate in the design and build phases, which should ensure that their reasonable specifications are accommodated in the design and construction of the Funded Project. This opportunity relates to all the requirements necessary for co-location to efficiently occur, including (but not limited to) the height and robustness of the Funded Project, as well as site space for housing equipment and providing access to power and Backhaul.
- The Government is supportive of Grantees offering other MNOs the opportunity to co-invest in Funded Project including (but not limited to) provision of Backhaul.

For the purpose of providing the incremental cost of supporting an additional MNO, a Funded Project must meet the following minimum specifications to be considered capable of supporting two or three MNOs:

- The structure is based on one of the following configurations:

Table 4: Minimum specification configurations for co-location of multiple MNOs

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
3 x 1 panel antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2533mm (h) x 353mm (w) x 209mm)	3 x 6 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2680mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 146mm (d), Weight: 39.5kg)	3 x 10 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2688mm (h) x 349mm (w) x 166mm (d), Weight 36.5kg)



Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
(d), Weight 32kg); or equivalent load		
3 x Tower Mounted Amplifiers Dimensions: (457mm (h) x 275mm (w) x 208mm (d), Weight 25kg); or equivalent load	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 150mm (d), Weight 20kg)	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 100mm (d), Weight 13.5kg)
6 x feeders + 300mm cable gantry for monopole structure type sites	6 x combiners (Dimensions: 330mm (h) x 200mm (w) x 130mm (d), Weight 3.2kg)	2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load
2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load	2 x 600mm transmission dishes; or equivalent load	
	Other DC Cables and Junction Boxes	

- There is sufficient mains AC power provision to support the requirements of additional MNO equipment. This requirement does not apply to solar powered sites, however, solar powered sites must have sufficient space for the additional MNO(s) to install additional solar panels.
- There is a communications hut of sufficient size (or space available on the site for further huts) to accommodate additional MNO equipment.
- For macrocell solutions, the Grantee must ensure sufficient space is available to allow any participating MNOs to install auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power in the event of the loss of external power to the site up to the Program's minimum 12 hours standard.

MNOs interested in co-locating on a Funded Project (i.e. the MNO expresses an interest in co-locating on Funded Project after funding has been awarded) will be required to express interest prior to the start of the detailed design stage for that Funded Project. All parties will be required to negotiate in good faith with each other in relation to the Funded Project access and price terms, and enter into commercial arrangements. The capital contribution to be made by the co-locating parties in respect of a Funded Project must, at least, equal the incremental cost incurred by reason of provisioning co-location for that Funded Project.

In accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined at section A3, any disagreements regarding co-location matters will be determined by an independent third party, to be appointed at the MNOs'/MNIPs' shared cost, and in accordance with the dispute resolution process.

Following the process set out above, if it is ascertained that there is no interest in co-location from another MNO, the Grantee will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location.

## A2. Backhaul access and pricing for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Where a Grantee selected to build a Funded Project reaches an agreement under section A.1 for an MNO not already participating in the Funded Project (the Co-locating MNO) to co-locate on the Funded Project, and subject to the microwave backhaul requirements below, the Grantee must offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee is in a position to do so.

The Grantee will be taken to be in a position to offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee owns or controls an optical fibre or microwave link which connects the Funded Project to the Grantee's network.

The price at which the Grantee offers Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO must be more favourable than the regulated prices set under the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination (DTCS FAD), for example, by offering a defined rent-free period or other discounting mechanism.

The ACCC has released the DTCS FAD 2020<sup>11</sup>, including a DTCS pricing calculator that may assist interested parties to calculate the regulated price for Backhaul.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project using an optical fibre connection, it must ensure that it provides sufficient Backhaul capacity, transmission and interfacing equipment to meet the Backhaul requirements of any Co-locating MNO on the Funded Solution.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project using a microwave connection, the Grantee must provide Backhaul services to a Co-locating MNO over that microwave connection, unless:

- the Funded Solution is designed and built to allow the Co-locating MNO to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Project; and
- the Co-locating MNO is permitted to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Project.

The terms and pricing of Backhaul services provided by a Grantee to a Co-locating MNO must be negotiated commercially between the Grantee and Co-locating MNO in accordance with the principles set out in sections A.2.

### **A3. Dispute resolution for Mobile Black Spot Solutions**

Disputes between parties in relation to co-location and Backhaul for a Funded Project will be referred for determination to an independent third party expert, at the parties' own shared cost.

The Grantee and Co-locating MNO will be bound by the determination made by the independent third party expert.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report](http://www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report)

## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
<b>Public Submissions</b>	
Australian Communication Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommends taking a forward-looking approach to the uptake of new technologies (LEO and 6G for example).</li> <li>• Supports the emphasis on multi-MNO outcomes under the Mobile Black Spot solutions stream and the continuation of including the capital and operational cost of backhaul as an expense under both streams</li> <li>• Recommends expanding the draft Guidelines to subsidise mobile coverage extension equipment.</li> <li>• Recommends 24-hour auxiliary back up power for solutions funded in isolated communities under both streams. ACCAN further recommends the draft Guidelines include the use of Stand-Alone Power Systems for communities in remote and very remote Australia.</li> <li>• Recommends the Program provide specific funding for facilitators to work with local communities in order to provide evidence around a Proposed Solution's social and economic benefits.</li> <li>• Recommends the Department publish information on the success rate of the program and provided written feedback.</li> </ul>
Field Solutions Group (FSG)	<p>FSG made a number of comments on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backhaul and Capacity Upgrades &amp; Technology Upgrades – proposed stronger restrictions on 3G to 4G upgrades and forward plan builds</li> <li>• Operational Period - Regional Connectivity Stream and Mobile Black Spot Stream should be aligned with a 10-year Operational period)</li> <li>• Encouraging Co-Build and Active Models/Reporting Requirements</li> </ul>
Wireless Internet Service Provider Association of Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted the Productivity commission has advised that the NBN losses are in the \$100's of millions on the wireless and satellite division.</li> <li>• The draft increase in the NBN footprint as detailed in the 5.2 Eligible locations, isolates those customers in the proposed footprints, at an expense to the Commonwealth.</li> <li>• Requests a review of section 5.2 to quash regional location restrictions on grant access to infrastructure builds.</li> </ul>
Pivotel Mobile Pty Ltd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of MBSP and RCP previous funding to Telstra is extending their regional monopoly. NBN FW extension will encroach on RCP 1 and 2 projects being delivered by Pivotel.</li> <li>• Requirements for multi MNO solutions do not go far enough and will not be effective in achieving multi MNO outcomes.</li> <li>• Applying to programs such as the RCP and MBSP is difficult for smaller providers given the administrative burden. Additional points should be provided to smaller providers who provide greater level of competition.</li> </ul>

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March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobile Black Spot eligible providers: include non-national MNO partnering with at least one national MNO, which will allow Pivotal to offer a competitive solution while promoting active sharing.</li> <li>• Multi-MNO and Co-Build for MBSP solutions: Multi MNO solutions should be limited to active sharing. Incremental costs should not be eligible if only active sharing allowed.</li> <li>• Grant Payments for Multi-MNO Solutions: Access Providers and Access Seekers should enter into separate grant agreements with Cwlth.</li> <li>• Eligible grant activities RCP: Pivotal would like Mobile broadband activities to be eligible in Regional Connectivity Stream.</li> <li>• Operating and maintenance expenditure for RCP projects: Make operating and maintenance expenditure consistent with MBSP.</li> <li>• Assessment Criteria for RCP solutions: Extra points should be provided to Multi Use mobile solutions over Fixed Solutions.</li> <li>• Merit Criteria – Competitive Solutions – 6.1 states competition considered under Merit Criterion three however not mentioned under 6.1.3. Pivotal believes there should be far more support for solutions that introduce more competition.</li> <li>• Assessment Criteria for Mobile Black Spot Solutions: Where it can be established that connectivity is poor, areas should still be eligible for new coverage and not hurt by cost over coverage formula.</li> <li>• Application time: Extend application time to 16 weeks</li> <li>• Project Period: July 2023 to 30 June 2026 is sufficient on basis agreements are executed by 30 June 2023.</li> </ul>
Queensland Capacity Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QCN supports the likely mid-year application period.</li> <li>• QCN supports the extension of the project delivery period.</li> <li>• Lack of transparency and disclosure by NBN of the planned FW upgrade area means applicants are potentially preparing proposals in automatically ineligible areas. Where the FW upgrade is in the 5+ year timeframe, Cwlth should support independent WISPs to provide a solution.</li> <li>• QCN recommends that the Department provides NBN planned upgrade areas to applicants or those that register to apply for RCP3, one month prior to the Grant release date.</li> <li>• Given issues with user experience for NBN FTTN and FWB, QCN recommends that DITRDC should not limit the location and potential solutions that are to be provided under the grant based on the type of access technology currently or planned to be provided by NBN (ie “outside the fixed line), and rather should focus on uplift in end-user experience where its sub-optimal, irrespective of the access technology.</li> </ul>

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QCN makes further comments about NBN Co's position as a monopoly provider in regional areas, urging the Department to allow for competition in NBN serviced areas.</li> </ul>
Connected Farms Pty Ltd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connected Farms supports the adoption of digital agriculture and advanced farming technology.</li> <li>• Connected Farms supports the objectives and intended outcomes of Round 3 of the RCP.</li> </ul>
Infrastructure Logic Pty Ltd (trading as OneWiFi and Infrastructure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primary objective of the Program is to address coverage needs, nevertheless the opportunity to address service delivery needs and bring greater competition to regional Australia should not be missed.</li> <li>• Believes the Guidelines are anchored to the status quo and unintended consequences and fail to factor in major shifts in the market.</li> </ul>
Office of Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The share of funds for First Nations communities should be increased to 30 per cent of overall funding, giving the remoteness and difficulty of servicing these areas.</li> <li>• Funds allocated under RCP 3 to be solutions driven and led (or heavily influence) by First Nations peoples.</li> <li>• RCP 3 to include obligations to achieve Indigenous employment outcomes, including the training of local technicians to enable local issues to be identified and resolved more quickly.</li> </ul>
Indara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indara supports the multi-MNO approach in the guidelines and supports the RSRP coverage modelling requirements.</li> <li>• Department should take a more active coordination role to assist various levels of governments to leverage financial support.</li> <li>• Indara suggests the requirement to provide retail MNO services excludes MNIP's that have contracts with MNO's to provide services.</li> <li>• Multi-Carrier solutions should have up to 90% of costs eligible for funding.</li> <li>• Regional Connectivity Solutions should allow funding for operational and maintenance expenditure.</li> <li>• Longer registration of participation for MBSP projects especially of mobile coverage data, up to 60 days should be allowed.</li> <li>• All wording should reflect that the MBSP stream accepts MNIP and MNO applications.</li> </ul>
Regional Development Australia Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-Funding programs should not further entrench market distortions. Aust telecommunications market is characterised by a lack of competition, exacerbating this results in worse outcomes.</li> <li>• The Program's focus on areas of "high economic and/or social value" will undermine investment in disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>• Endorses the prioritisation funding towards First Nations communities.</li> </ul>

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

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Stakeholder	Summary of submission
Internet Association of Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding should be allocated for other telecommunications services to improve regional Australia's overall internet use, namely internet exchange points (IXPs).</li> <li>IXPs provide common points of interconnection between both commercial ISPs and content and digital service providers. IXPs optimise backhaul usage and reduce internet-related costs for users up to 20% by decreasing the operating costs for ISPs.</li> <li>IAA outlines the benefits that neutral IXPs could provide regional internet services in Australia.</li> </ul>
Greater Whitsunday Alliance Mackay/Isaac/Whitsunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider more detailed explanation of the applicability of 'in-kind' contributions.</li> <li>Consider greater clarity of eligibility of smaller townships within Major Urban locations. Ambiguity on eligibility of Major Urban areas may inhibit potential applications.</li> <li>Consider the disadvantage and delay to regional development in areas where 'planned' upgrades (by NBN or other telcos) are not likely to be delivered until 2027 or later. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rather than restrict applications based on telco plans, look to support regionally identified fast-tracked development opportunities.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Consider adding criterion to economic benefits to reflect the role of digital connectivity in reducing environmental impacts and achieving decarbonisation.</li> <li>Consider greater clarification around the purpose of the Project noticeboard.</li> </ul>
Livingstone Shire Local Disaster Management Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeking an emphasis on isolated and vulnerable communities within the guidelines wording.</li> <li>Seeks to extend the targeted funding beyond First Nations Communities to include isolated communities vulnerable to disaster events.</li> </ul>
Rick Wilson MP Federal Member for O'Connor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr Wilson supports section 5.2 of the draft guidelines, specifically where the RCP limits eligible locations to regional and remote areas with urban populations less than 100,000 people.</li> </ul>
Central Highlands Regional Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eligible areas – Guidelines should use the remoteness areas classification index, with only areas classified as Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote included as eligible.</li> <li>It is unclear whether the intent of the definition of "existing handheld coverage" intends to prevent projects from being eligible if they may be funded under another not yet released funding stream.</li> <li>Clarify RCP stream eligible locations as within the satellite and Fixed Wireless footprint.</li> <li>Social benefit should be changed to social/or community benefit. Economic and Social criteria should be combined as one.</li> <li>Ability to work from home should be an example under economic and social benefits.</li> </ul>

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend application period from 6 weeks to 10 weeks.</li> </ul>
Local Government Association of Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IMCR round contains areas that are not believed to be the priority for investment in QLD. Areas with only 3G technology are the highest priority for LGAQ. RCP and MBSP models should be overhauled from the market led model, to the Government determining priority locations based on consultation.</li> <li>MNO's be required to provide competitors with better access to their mobile infrastructure in regional areas.</li> <li>MBSP examine ways mobile roaming may be trialled in regional areas and along regional access roadways and highways to support regional communities and improve safety of tourists travelling in remote areas.</li> <li>That the Federal Government supports third-party infrastructure in remote areas to improve available markets for consumers and more reliable mobile broadband.</li> <li>State and Federal Governments establish co-funding priorities before funding rounds are open, to better ensure projects are developed in the area of highest need.</li> <li>That the Federal Government conduct an audit to determine which communities will be directly affected by the coming shut off of 3G networks and prioritise discussions with network providers on ensuring there is a continuity of service. It should be made clearer that the MBSP stream will upgrade infrastructure in areas that have only 3G services.</li> <li>Speed and usability is as important as coverage. SIP standards (25/5) should be set as the minimum level of service under both streams of the program.</li> <li>Guidelines be reworded to require consultation with local councils at the beginning of any proposed solution under both streams (specifically at section 2.2.2 Local Community Priority).</li> <li>LGA's have many discrete communities that are up to 40 per cent First Nations population, with the areas that are in need of connectivity the most having higher First Nations representation. Guidelines should clarify if the definition in the Guidelines is a hard rule or if there will be consideration around the amount of First Nations representation in a discrete community.</li> </ul>
Royal Flying Doctor Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outlined its service and how poor connectivity reduces the capacity of its service. RFDS suggest that satellite communication services would be an effective solution to its connectivity issues.</li> </ul>
Robin Eckermann	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrastructure based competition is not a relevant end goal for regional areas. Current multi-MNO approaches incentivise infrastructure competition.</li> </ul>

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If subsidies are provided to MNO's they must offer mobile roaming on fair and reasonable grounds. Or appoint a wholesale-only mobile network infrastructure provider to build and operate the network and offer roaming to all MNO's.</li> <li>• MNO's should be invited to table their committed plans for extending network coverage over the next 3 years, with areas excluded from MBSP consideration. MNO's could be penalised if the plans do not materialise.</li> </ul>
NT Government – Office of Digital Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcomes funding for First Nations communities</li> <li>• Supports the prioritisation of improved service delivery</li> <li>• Limited time to complete feasibility studies for projects to improve telecommunications in Indigenous Communities.</li> <li>• NT Gov would encourage sufficient flexibility be built in to submission process to allow for variations to respond to potential changes in details of a project. <b>(Note relevant to guidelines, relates to grant agreement).</b></li> <li>• First Nations projects could outline how project will work towards national Closing the Gap targets.</li> <li>• NT Gov encourages efficient and shared use of existing infrastructure to maximise outcomes in remote and regional Australia.</li> <li>• NT Gov recognises importance of competition, but encourages RCP funding to be prioritise substantially improved connectivity, especially where there is a lack of a single service provider.</li> <li>• NT Gov encourages support for innovative and flexible proposals for remote and hard-to-reach communities.</li> <li>• NT gov supports implementation of multi-network operator solutions under MBSP stream, however, NT is often a single provider area and thus it has been difficult to receive funding under this program.</li> </ul>
Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connectivity literacy skills are required to assist consumers on how to understand Governments Reg Comms commitments.</li> <li>• Lack of connectivity skills will inhibit regional communications improvements.</li> <li>• Improve independent advice and connectivity literacy education. Development of a handbook that can be provided to LGA's and local communities.</li> <li>• Develop a strategic framework and plan, map existing infrastructure and connectivity options. This includes highlighting existing fibre routes and backhaul, plans for future demand and links to connectivity literacy.</li> <li>• Improve Awareness of RCP, through chambers of commerce, LGAs and industry groups.</li> </ul>

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve community consultation and education, communities should be kept informed throughout the whole grant and build process. Applicants should ensure connectivity builds include budgeting for consumer awareness, marketing and connectivity literacy.</li> <li>• Shorten timeframes for project delivery. RCP grants should be able to be delivered within 12months.</li> <li>• RCP Stream should prioritise fixed broadband connectivity and underserved communities outside the NBN fixed line footprint. RCP funding should be focused on fixed broadband rather than mobile projects, except for in First Nations communities.</li> <li>• Encourage neutral host and active network sharing of mobile network funded projects.</li> <li>• Offer incentives for hard to reach and difficult to install locations.</li> <li>• Governance of Wireless Internet Service Provider's to be improved.</li> <li>• Encourage power resiliency – back up power for all projects should be a minimum of 12 hours.</li> <li>• Introduce policies to prevent overbuilding of telco networks.</li> <li>• MBSP funding should not be used for repeaters and boosters, given issues generally revolve around congestion</li> <li>• Financial solutions should be able to clearly demonstrate they have the financial means and management skills to install and provide new services for the 7 years of operation.</li> <li>• BIRRR encourages extensive consultation with First Nations communities and regional connectivity advocates and working groups, it is integral that grant applications for First Nations communities understand the cultural, emotional and social needs of these communities.</li> </ul>

**Private Submissions**

s45

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Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
s45	

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder

Summary of submission

s45

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
s45	
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (DITRDCA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) supports the inclusion of specific funding for First Nations peoples and communities.</li> <li>• The Advisory Group believes RCP 3 application process is at times not accessible or navigable for First Nations Peoples. This results in a process which is weighted against First Nations people/communities and favours large organisations.</li> <li>• Target 17 of Closing the Gap should be reflected in intended outcomes of RCP and should have its own assessment criteria under section 6.1.</li> <li>• Provision of additional support to First Nations applicants could lift numbers of inclusion in the RCP. Support should include robust feedback for those unsuccessful.</li> <li>• First Nations representation should be sought during the assessment phase and/or for the briefing to the decision maker.</li> <li>• RCP heavily relies on GrantConnect without an offline alternative solution.</li> <li>• A fully funded delivery model, based on the USO/human rights approach, rather than a business case model would be the best approach for remote communities.</li> <li>• Department establish a First Nations technical hub to assist First Nations communities navigate the RCP would benefit applicants. Applicant material and advertising of the program should be provided in culturally accessible ways.</li> <li>• Chair of committee would be happy to meet with the Department on these issues and can be contacted by <a href="mailto:FirstNationsDigitalInclusion@infrastructure.gov.au">FirstNationsDigitalInclusion@infrastructure.gov.au</a>.</li> </ul>
s45	

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder

Summary of submission

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder

Summary of submission

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March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
s45	

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission
s45	
National Indigenous Australians Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to consult with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group in order to identify priority areas for allocation of funding.</li> <li>• Applicants for funding need to demonstrate engagement with First Nations communities.</li> <li>• Develop mechanisms that support First Nations communities to initiate partnerships with eligible telecommunications carriers.</li> <li>• Ensure communications on the RCP extend to First Nations organisations.</li> <li>• Concern over the program guidelines not providing for ongoing operational costs for funded projects.</li> <li>• Proposal to prioritise First Nations communities within the Guidelines. Also suggests apportionment of funding split across urban/regional/remote areas.</li> <li>• The financial co-contribution merit criteria potentially cuts out MNOs other than Telstra and unintentionally favours Telstra.</li> <li>• DITRDCA should consider the findings of the ACCC <i>Inquiry into Remote Mobile Infrastructure</i> re implications for the design of the RCP.</li> </ul>
AusTrade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested drafting changes to the economic benefit, social benefit and project delivery merit criteria under the regional connectivity solutions stream.</li> <li>• Suggested amendments to the merit criteria to capture how a project will; impact local businesses and tourism industries, improve amenities for visitors to regional areas and their communities.</li> </ul>

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Feedback from individuals about local mobile/broadband connectivity problems

Stakeholder	Summary of submission	Department's response
s47F		

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission	Department's response
s47F		

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## Attachment B: Summary of submissions on Round 3 Draft RCP Guidelines

March 2023

Stakeholder	Summary of submission	Department's response
s47F		

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Key issues	Proposed By:	Proposed Response
Issues raised to which the Department suggests changes to the Guidelines		
<p><i>Back-up power</i></p> <p>24-hour back-up power minimum for all solutions, not just mobile solutions.</p>	<p>ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network), <sup>s45</sup> [REDACTED], BIRRR (Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia), <sup>s45</sup> [REDACTED]</p>	<p>Propose amendment to guidelines to highlight that “all macro cell mobile solutions (under both the Regional Connectivity solutions and Mobile Black Spot solutions streams), include a back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours”. (Section 5.1)</p> <p>No further amendment required. There is currently no maximum amount of backup power for a Proposed Solution. Applicants are more than welcome to propose more back up power to its solution. For example, Ace Internet Services provided up to 5 days of back-up power for an RCP Round 2 Fixed Wireless Broadband project. Higher minimum back up supply would push out project costs especially in remote areas and may pose a barrier to entry.</p>
<p><i>NBN Fixed Wireless Expansion Eligibility</i></p> <p>Fixed Wireless Broadband projects should be eligible within NBN Fixed Wireless Expansion footprint, given there are currently black spots in the coverage that won't be fixed by the expansion.</p>	<p>WISPAA (Wireless Internet Service Providers Association Australia), Queensland Capacity Network, <sup>s47G(1)(a)</sup> [REDACTED] (Technical Adviser)</p>	<p>Propose amendment to guidelines to reflect that “Fixed wireless broadband Proposed Solutions will only be eligible within the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade.” (Sections 2.2 and 5.2)</p>
<p><i>Addressing progress towards Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.</i></p> <p>Applicants should be urged to address how a Proposed Solution will advance Australia's progress towards meeting Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.</p>	<p><sup>s45</sup> [REDACTED], First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (DITRDCA), NT Government – Office of Digital Government</p>	<p>Propose amendments in guidelines to encourage applicants to detail how a Proposed Solution will assist the Government meet Target 17 of the closing the gap initiative. (Sections 2.2.4 and 6.1.2)</p>
<p><i>First Nations Community Definition</i></p> <p>Some communities may not have at least 50% of population as First Nations, however, the community could still have a significant First Nations population and be excluded from First Nations funding.</p>	<p><sup>s45</sup> [REDACTED] LGAQ (Local Government Association of Queensland)</p>	<p>Propose amending the Guidelines to highlight that the ‘50% of population’ requirement is indicative and not a hard-line restriction to considering a proposal in terms of its benefit to First Nations communities. The Commonwealth will reserve the right to consider communities for First Nations funding that have below the 50% First Nations population description. (Section 2.2.4)</p>
<p><i>Funding cap for Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) solutions and weightings</i></p>	<p>Department/ Min Office</p>	<p>Propose amending the Guidelines: The funding cap for MBSP solutions targeting remote and very remote areas, and First Nations communities has</p>



Key issues	Proposed By:	Proposed Response
		been increased to 75 % of the total CAPEX and OPEX. The weight factor in the cost over coverage ranking formula has also been increased to 50 % to better priorities these solutions (Section 5.3).
<i>Multi-carrier outcomes and co-location</i>	DITRDC/ Min Office	Propose amending the Guidelines to ensure, where appropriate, mobile phone proposals put forward by National MNOs under the RCP funding streams meet the multi-carrier and co-location requirements that apply to MBSP proposals. (Sections 2.2 and 4.2)
<b>Minor Wording Changes</b>		
<p><i>Correcting reference to 'Competition' in Merit Criterion 3 heading "Project Delivery" (which is covered under Merit Criteria 1 and 2)</i></p> <p>A reference to 'Competition' in the draft guidelines had not been removed from Merit Criterion 3: Project Delivery. The Round 2 Guidelines included competition under Criterion 3, however this was revised in the Draft Round 3 Guidelines to reflect that competition benefits are better considered as part of Merit Criterion 1 (Economic Benefits) and Merit Criterion 2 (Social Benefits).</p>	DITRDCA	<p><b>Section 6.1 Assessment Criteria for Regional Connectivity Solutions</b></p> <p>Applications will need to address the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Merit Criterion one (economic benefits)</li> <li>2. Merit Criterion two (social benefits)</li> <li>3. Merit Criterion three (competition, capacity, capability and resources to deliver the Proposed Solution)</li> <li>4. Merit Criterion four (financial co-contribution).</li> </ol> <p>Address typo to delete reference to "competition" as competition benefits now covered as part of economic and social benefits rather than project delivery criteria.</p> <p>The benefits of increased retail service competition are address under Merit Criterion 1 (Economic Benefits) and Merit Criterion 2 (Social Benefits), rather than Merit Criterion 3, which focus on the applicant's capacity to deliver the proposed project. See Sections 6.1.1 (c) and 6.1.2 (c) regarding competition.</p>
<p><i>Updating text under Merit Criterion 3 'Project Delivery'</i></p> <p>The Department's technical adviser's, s47G(1)(a), provided advice around the wording included under Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery. The advice suggested that drafting could better outline the two aspects of the criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An applicant's track record and capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution</li> <li>• The maturity of the Proposed Solution.</li> </ul>	DITRDCA, s47G(1)(a)	<p><b>Propose amendments in guidelines:</b> to provide better clarity on requirements for addressing criterion 3.</p> <p><b>Section 6.1.3 Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project</b></p> <p>"You should demonstrate your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution within the specified cost and timeframe, including through identifying:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Your track record and your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution, including <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. examples of delivering similar projects and solutions;</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

Key issues	Proposed By:	Proposed Response
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. your resources and access to personnel and/or partners with the right skills and experience;</li> <li>c. your ability to deliver in the context of your organisation's broader program of work (including in any pipeline of works through Commonwealth and state or territory government programs such as MBSP and previous Program rounds); and</li> <li>d. your access, or future access to, any necessary infrastructure, power or backhaul.</li> </ul> <p>b. The maturity of the Proposed Solution, including outlining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the key technical components of the solution, a comprehensive project cost budget and breakdown;</li> <li>b. a robust project delivery plan and schedule;</li> <li>c. approvals that will be required and any steps taken to progress these; and</li> <li>d. evidence of contingency planning that mitigates the risk of delays in getting the necessary approvals to commence work, particularly for greenfield and remote projects."</li> </ul>
<i>Other Amendments</i>	DITRDCA, DoF, Probity Advisor (s47G(1)(a))	Other amendments include: updating the Program title to Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities); revised document headings to ensure consistency with the whole of government grant; and minor drafting updates throughout the document to improve the presentation and consistency of the document.
<b>Issued raised to which the Department does not propose changes</b>		
Other Issues Raised in the consultation	Proposed By:	Proposed Response
3G and 4G upgrades should be restricted under the Program	FSG (Field Solutions Group)	Noted – no change recommended. Guidelines already note that upgrades are not eligible if part of a company's forward build plan (application pack will call this out specifically in an applicant's declaration). Backhaul upgrades to enhance 4G capacity are eligible.
Applicants should have to assure that proposed solutions have not been part of a forward 3-year plan.	FSG	Noted – no change recommended. Not relevant to Program Guidelines. Dealt with in Application Pack.

Key issues	Proposed By:	Proposed Response
Greater ability to vary projects to align with First Nations community engagement should be allowed.	FSG	Noted – no change recommended. Not relevant to Program Guidelines. Dealt with in Grant Agreement.
Program Guidelines should be amended to allow subsidies for mobile coverage extension equipment and/or satellite handsets.	ACCAN <sup>s45</sup>	Noted – no change recommended. The program looks to provide, mobile/broadband coverage to areas/communities not individual users.
Application period should be extended beyond 10 weeks	<sup>s45</sup> Central Highlands Regional Council, Pivotel, Queensland Capacity Network	Noted – no change recommended. Application period being proposed is 10 weeks. This is the same amount of time as the Round 2 application period, which ran over the Christmas holiday break. Potential applicants have also had draft Guidelines available to them since 20 December 2022 to guide the development of proposals.
Funding for operating and maintenance expenditure should be eligible under RCP stream to align with MBSP stream and encourage participation.	<sup>s45</sup> NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency), Indara	Noted – no change recommended. The different treatment of capital and operational expenditure is presented this way due to the MBSP and RCP streams coming together. MBSP allows 50% of CAPEX and OPEX while RCP is 100% of capex and nil on Opex.
The following phrase should be removed given there is already an assessment structure and VFM consideration for MBSP projects: <i>'All Mobile Black Spot Solutions that offer coverage outcomes from three MNOs will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than solutions that only offer service from two MNOs, all other things being equal. All solutions that offer services from two MNOs will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than solutions with a single MNO.'</i>	<sup>s45</sup>	Noted – no change recommended. Government has a stated objective to increase Multi-MNO outcomes and the inclusion of this clause works to meet that objective.
Include non-national MNO's partnering with at least one national MNO as eligible applicants under the MBSP stream.	Pivotel	Noted – no change recommended. MBSP stream is focused on extending National mobile coverage. The Department believes a multi-MNO project which contained mobile coverage from a non-National MNO would be a substandard outcome for consumers.
Multi MNO solutions should be limited to active sharing. Incremental costs should not be eligible if only active sharing allowed.	Pivotel	Noted – no change recommended. Government is interested in Multi-MNO outcomes only and is agnostic to the specific process for how this is achieved.
Excluding projects in an applicant's forward plan to 2027 removes potential areas of highest need for improvements and removes the opportunity to fast track sites. Sites	<sup>s45</sup> Greater Whitsunday Alliance	Noted – no change recommended. The RCP works to provide funding to telecommunications projects that are considered not economically viable. Projects that are already on an applicant's forward plan would be considered economically viable.



Key issues	Proposed By:	Proposed Response
excluded should be limited to those under acquisition and/or subject to an approved funding plan.		
Timeframe for an MNO to express interest in co-location should be within 60 days after the award to the Lead Applicant.	s45	Noted – no change recommended. Currently 90 days, increasing the amount of days will push out potential Multi-MNO outcomes. The timeframe is standard across other MBSP related programs.
Backhaul should be required to be provided by each participating MNO in a multi MNO application, utilising existing commercial arrangements, rather than be required to be provided by the lead MNO.	s45	Noted – no change recommended. This is a standard inclusion from the Department and mirrors other MBSP related programs.
The share of funds for First Nations communities be increased to 30 per cent of overall funding, giving the remoteness and difficulty of servicing these areas.	Office of Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group	Noted – no change recommended. Minister has the ability to increase funding towards First Nations communities if required.
There should be a minimum standard for broadband projects (25/5 as per SIP).	s45 Local Government Association of Queensland	Noted – no change recommended. The Program has an intent to uplift communities from the baseline level of services that are available. Given NBN Satellite is legislated to provide 25/5 and is the minimum level of broadband service that a community is able to access, all uplifts in technology should, at a minimum, provide services that are greater than 25/5.
Projects in the Mobile Black Spot stream should have to detail the service level of the end user and not just increased coverage.	s45	Noted – no change recommended. Service levels for mobile services are currently not regulated and are affected by a myriad of factors that are outside of the control of the Government or MNOs (terrain, handset used etc).
First Nations representation should be sought during the assessment phase and/or for the briefing of the Decision Maker.	First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (DITRDCA)	Noted – no change recommended. Can be considered when establishing the evaluation committee and appropriate external advisers (Section 8.3). The Department is currently developing a communication plan that will detail how the program will be promoted to First Nations communities and applicants who wish to apply for First Nations funding.
Applicants for funding need to demonstrate engagement with First Nations communities.	National Indigenous Australians Agency	Noted the request to ensure communication on the RCP with First Nations organisations. This is noted within the Guidelines and applicants are encouraged to engage with local communities, First Nations or otherwise.
Shorten timeframes for project delivery – RCP projects should be able to be delivered within 12 months	BIRRR	Noted – no change recommended, experience through the first two rounds of the program is that this timeframe would be unrealistic.

Key issues	Proposed By:	Proposed Response
Guidelines be reworded to require consultation with local councils at the beginning of any proposed solution under both streams	Local Government Association of Queensland	Noted – no change recommended. The Guidelines already encourage consultation with local communities in the development of project proposals.
Commonwealth Government should establish a separate connectivity program for First Nations communications which would have extended application and project delivery dates to enable greater involvement of Indigenous communities.	s45	Noted – no change recommended. The recommendation is outside of the remit of the guidelines and can be considered during future policy development.
Where an area due to be served under the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade is in the 5+ year timeframe for delivery, the Commonwealth should support independent WISPs to provide a solution	Queensland Capacity Network	Noted – no change recommended. Only change recommended for the treatment of projects in the NBN Co Fixed Wireless upgrade area is as proposed above.
Update the MNIP definition to “MNIP means a company, other than a national MNO, that provides communications infrastructure in Australia or overseas.	s45	Noted – no change recommended. The Commonwealth is interested in proposals that provide mobile coverage from national MNOs. This suggestion would mean that non-national MNO mobile coverage would be eligible under the Program which the Department believes would not be a desirable outcome.
s47G(1)(a) has provided its technical review of the draft guidelines and has made a number of observations, some of which will be incorporated into the draft Guidelines.	s47G(1)(a) (Technical Adviser)	The Department will incorporate some of the comments provided by s47G(1)(a) including the point raised on the NBN Fixed-Wireless Eligibility discussed above.



**Pidgeon, Karly**

**From:** Pidgeon, Karly s22(1)(a)(ii) @communications.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, 20 March 2023 8:14 AM  
**To:** s22(1)(a)(ii) ; PIDGEON Karly; s22(1)(a)(ii) ; s22(1)(a)(ii)  
**Subject:** Re: Grant live? [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi s22(1)(a)

Thanks, s22(1)(a)(ii)

It was definitely live on GrantConnect at about 12.30am s22(1)(a)(ii)

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Cheers,  
Karly

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Date:** Monday, 20 March 2023 at 7:46:07 am  
**To:** "PIDGEON Karly" s22(1)(a)(ii) @infrastructure.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Re: Grant live? [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi, can see it now so must have gone live at some point in the intervening hours.

Many thanks again to you all for the efforts over the last weeks - terrific to see it live.

Cheers

s22(1)(a)

OFFICIAL

**From:** s22(1)(a)(ii) @MO.communications.gov.au>  
**Date:** Monday, 20 March 2023 at 00:20:56  
**To:** "PIDGEON Karly" s22(1)(a)(ii) @infrastructure.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>, s22(1)(a)(ii) @INFRASTRUCTURE.gov.au>  
**Subject:** Grant live? [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi, I can see it live on the Department website but can't see the Guidelines on Grant Connect yet? Probably not searching for it correctly but it did pop up the IMCR and RCP 1 and 2...?

Cheers

OFFICIAL

*Released under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 by the Department of  
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts*

PROTECTED Sensitive: Cabinet

MS23-003293


**Australian Government**
**Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts**
**To: The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications** (for decision)

**Subject:** Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) – inclusion of funding for the First Nations Digital Connectivity for Central Australia measure

**Critical Date:** 4 April 2023, to enable the revised Guidelines to be released as soon as possible  
s34(3)

**Recommendations:**

1. That you **agree**, s34(3) s34(2) [redacted], to update the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines to incorporate the First Nations Digital Connectivity for Central Australia measure, as at **Attachment A**.

☒ **Agreed** / Not agreed

2. That you **agree** to extend the application closing date for RCP Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) by six weeks until 12 July 2023.

☒ **Agreed** / Not Agreed

3. That you **agree** the department will liaise with your Office regarding arrangements for announcements and contacting relevant stakeholders advising of the new funding for First Nations communities in Central Australia.

☒ **Agreed** / Not Agreed



**The Hon Michelle Rowland MP**

Date:

4/4/23

**Comments:**

P/s settle any final Des to Guidelines w/ MO.

**Key Issues:**

1. Noting your upcoming leave, we seek your early agreement to the revised version of the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) Round 3 (including Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines (the Guidelines) at **Attachment A**.
2. The revised Guidelines include an additional \$10 million in funding under the Regional Connectivity (Round 3) Stream, dedicated to solutions that will improve connectivity for First Nations communities in Central Australia. s34(3) [redacted]

PROTECTED Sensitive: Cabinet

**PROTECTED Sensitive: Cabinet****MS23-003293**

s34(3)

s34(2)

s34(3)

3. Based on advice from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), we have included a definition of Central Australia in the revised Guidelines that applies the Northern Territory Government's administrative region of Central Australia defined as:
    - a. the area covered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Statistical Area Level 3 (SA3) under the name 'Alice Springs' and three Local Government Areas (LGAs) Alice Springs, MacDonnell and Central Desert (with the exclusion of the community of Lajamanu and the exclusion of the LGA of Barkly).
    - b. A map is included at Attachment B to the Guidelines.
  4. s34(3)
  5. s34(3)
  6. The revised Guidelines also include minor updates to ABS definitions in the footnotes. The proposed amendments to the Guidelines are highlighted in yellow and in track change for ease of reference.
  7. Following discussion on timings with your Office, we also seek your agreement to extend the closing date for applications to be received under the Program by six weeks until 12 July 2023. This will allow further time for applicants to develop proposals that target First Nations communities in Central Australia and to consult with stakeholders, including local communities.
  8. The extended deadline will also respond to feedback from potential applicants s47C that the current 10-week period for applications is too short and that more time is needed to properly engage with other telecommunications companies about multicarrier options and with communities about possible solutions to local connectivity issues. s47C
  9. Subject to your agreement to the recommendations, s34(3) the Department proposes to work with your Office to write to relevant stakeholders in Central Australia, such as the local councils and land councils, as well as the Federal Member for Lingiari, the Hon Marion Scrymgour MP, and the Northern Territory Government Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Selena Uiibo MLA.
  10. Once timing for announcements has been confirmed, we will update the Guidelines on GrantConnect and also update the department's website.
- Financial impacts:** s47C up to \$160 million (GST exclusive) will now be allocated to this competitive grant opportunity. Funding will be allocated under the Better Connectivity Plan, announced in the October 2022 Budget, with:
- a. \$110 million allocated from the \$200 million RCP funding, and
  - b. \$50 million allocated from the \$400 million program to expand regional mobile coverage and improve resilience.

**Sensitivities:** Nil**PROTECTED Sensitive: Cabinet**

**PROTECTED Sensitive: Cabinet****MS23-003293**

**Consultation:** The Department has consulted with the NIAA s34(3) and on the revision to the Guidelines, which now includes NIAA's definition of Central Australia for this purpose.

**Media Opportunities:** The Department will work with your Office and the NIAA to ensure media announcements are coordinated with the wider package.

**Attachments:**

Attachment A: Revised Grant Opportunity Guidelines Version 1.1

Cleared By: Karly Pidgeon  
Position: Assistant Secretary  
Branch: Regional Communications  
Ph: s22(1)(a)(ii) / s22(1)(a)(ii)  
Date: 3 April 2023

Contact Officer: s22(1)(a)(ii)  
Section: Regional Connectivity  
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**Instructions for MPS:** Nil

**Responsible Adviser:** s22(1)(a)(ii)

**Distribution CC List:** Mr Jim Betts, Mr Richard Windeyer, Mr Daniel Caruso, Karly Pidgeon, s22(1)(a)(ii)

**PROTECTED Sensitive: Cabinet**



# Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines **Version 1.1**

Opening date:	20 March 2023
Closing date and time:	17.00 AEDT on <del>1234 May</del> July 2023 (160 weeks after opening)
Commonwealth policy entity:	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
Enquiries:	<p>If you have any questions, please email us at <a href="mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au">regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au</a>.</p> <p>Questions should be sent no later than two weeks before the closing date.</p>
Date guidelines released:	20 March 2023
Type of grant opportunity:	Targeted competitive

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# 1 Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities: processes

The Program is designed to achieve Australian Government objectives

This Grant Opportunity brings together the Regional Connectivity Program, and the Mobile Black Spot Program in two streams, which contributes to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' (the 'Department's')

Outcome: *Promote an innovative and competitive communications sector, through policy development, advice and program delivery, so all Australians can realise the full potential of digital technologies and communications services.* The Department works with stakeholders to plan and design the Grant Opportunity according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines \(CGRGs\)](#).



The Grant Opportunity opens

We publish the grant Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#).



Register with Department and pre-application documentation  
(Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Organisations wishing to apply for funding under the Program for Mobile Black Spot Solutions must contact the Department to register as potential applicants within four weeks following release of these Guidelines in order to obtain access to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions specific application documentation. At this time, applicants must submit their coverage maps as outlined in section 7.2. The application documentation outlines the requirements on potential applicants prior to submitting an application for funding.

Organisations can register their interest with the department by emailing [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) and providing the following information:

- (a) Organisation name;
- (b) Contact name;
- (c) Contact phone number; and
- (d) Contact email address.



Submit initial proposal period for Mobile Black Spot Solutions  
(Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Applicants have six weeks from the release of the Guidelines to develop and submit initial proposals for locations where they are interested in partnering with another Mobile Network Operator (**MNO**) on a site.



You complete and submit a grant application

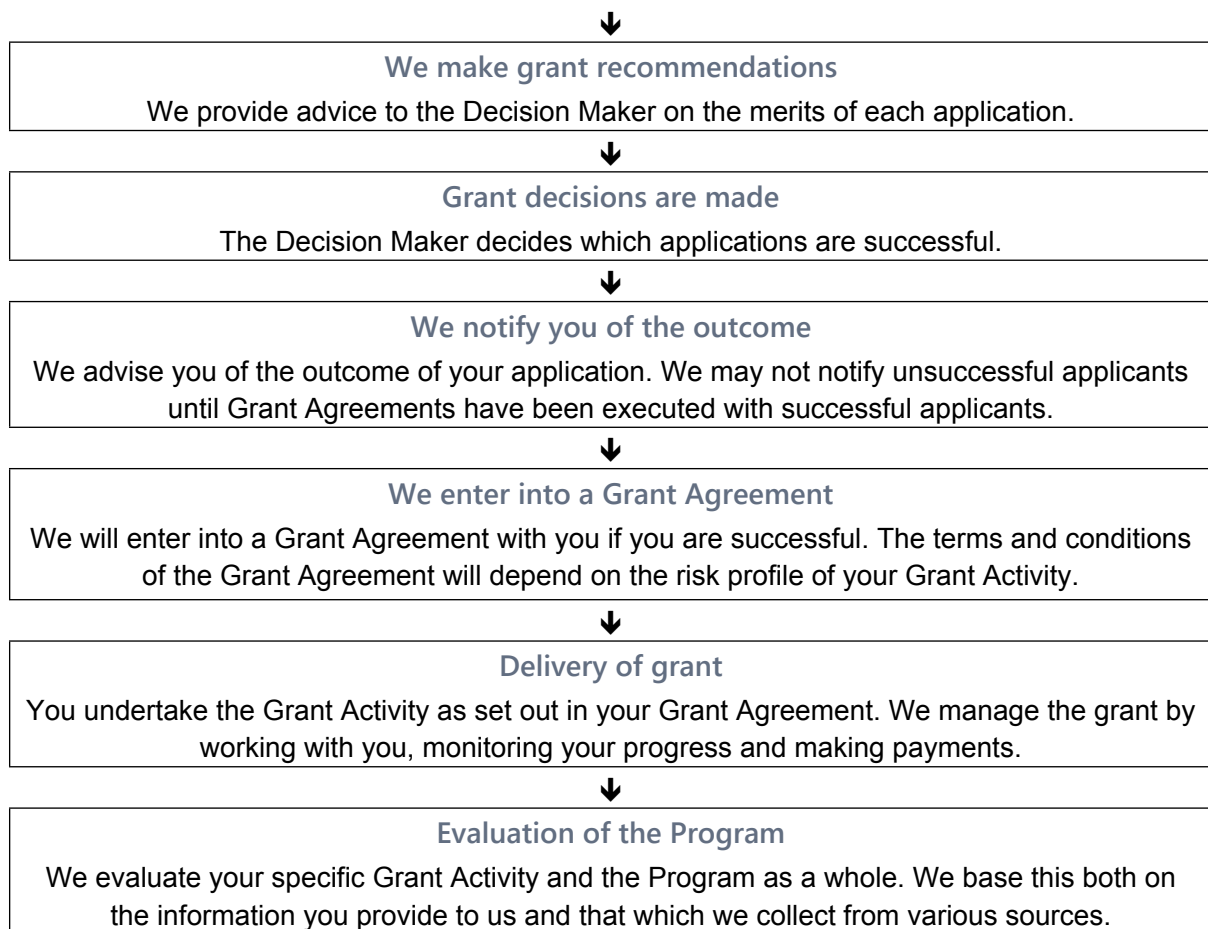
You complete the application form and address all of the Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria to be considered for a grant.



We assess all grant applications

We assess the applications against Eligibility Criteria and notify you if you are not eligible. We assess your eligible application against the Assessment Criteria, including an overall consideration of Value for Money, and compare it to other applications.





## 2 About the Program

These Grant Opportunity Guidelines ('Guidelines') contain information about Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program - with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities ('the Program') and the Program's Grant Opportunity and set out:

- the purpose of the Program/Grant Opportunity;
- the Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria;
- how grant applications are considered and selected;
- how Grantees are notified and receive grant payments;
- how Grantees will be monitored and evaluated; and
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the Grant Opportunity.

**You must read these Guidelines before filling out an application.**

We have defined key terms used in these Guidelines in the [Glossary at section 15](#).

### 2.1 Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile coverage and protecting communities against natural disaster. This opportunity is part of the *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* (Better Connectivity Plan) which is providing more than \$1.1 billion to rural and regional communities. Through the October 2022 Budget, the Government provided \$656 million for the Better Connectivity Plan to improve mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience in rural and regional Australia, including:

- \$400 million to expand regional mobile coverage and improve the resilience of communication systems;
- \$200 million for two further rounds of the *Regional Connectivity Program* to improve connectivity in regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- \$30 million over three years to accelerate Australia's agricultural sector through the *On Farm Connectivity Program*;
- \$20 million for an independent audit of mobile coverage to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities; and
- a further \$6 million over three years to extend the Regional Tech Hub to support better consumer awareness and better information regarding digital services:

This \$1.1 billion also includes the \$480 million already delivered by the Government to support NBN Co to upgrade the NBN Fixed Wireless network, with associated benefits to NBN satellite services.

The Government's new funding commitment for the Program builds on previous investment of \$230 million (GST exclusive) in Rounds 1 and 2 of the Program, which is generating a total investment of around \$413 million (GST exclusive) in 223 telecommunications projects in regional, rural and remote Australia. Further information on previous Program rounds is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp).

Indicative funding of around \$30-40 million of the Government's \$200 million commitment towards further rounds of the Regional Connectivity Program will be set aside to improve telecommunications access in First Nations communities. This includes dedicated funding of \$10 million towards improving digital connectivity for First Nations communities in Central Australia. This funding will assist progress towards Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to ensure First Nations people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.

The Better Connectivity Plan will deliver funding for expanded regional mobile coverage through additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program. This includes the \$50 million for the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities available through this current Program Round.

The Better Connectivity Plan mobile coverage commitment will build on the outcomes delivered under the first six rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, including funding for over 1,200 new mobile base stations across regional and remote Australia. Further information on previous rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbbsp).

## 2.2 About Round 3

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- A **\$1910 million** (GST exclusive) **Regional Connectivity** (Round 3) stream for place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions that deliver new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services. It will enable bespoke telecommunications projects to be specifically tailored to the particular economic and/or social requirements of a region; and
- A \$50 million (GST exclusive) Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream (allocated from the expanding regional mobile coverage component of the Better Connectivity Plan) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that deliver **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and remote Australia.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, applicants and **Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application development period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including Proposed Solutions that use active sharing technologies and/or mobile roaming.

Both streams will include dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities **in eligible areas across Australia** (see Section 3.1). **In addition, the Regional Connectivity (Round 3) stream will include dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions that improve digital connectivity in First Nations communities in Central Australia.**

- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services must apply under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** funding stream.
- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new mobile coverage must apply under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Further information about the types of Proposed Solutions that can be funded under each stream is provided at section 5.1.

Your application may include a combination of **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** or propose only **Regional Connectivity Solutions** or only **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

The objectives of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- use a place-based approach to target telecommunications infrastructure investment that will respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- expand mobile coverage in regional, rural, and First Nations communities; and
- assist progress towards Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.

The intended outcomes of this Round of the Program are to:

- Provide **place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions** to regional digital connectivity issues through a range of new or improved broadband services and/or improved mobile services;
- Provide **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** to expand mobile coverage and competition across regional and rural Australia; and
- Complement the National Broadband Network, including the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see below), and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

The Program Round's Grant Opportunity will support Funded Projects that deliver new telecommunications infrastructure or the upgrade of existing telecommunications infrastructure to provide:

- economic and social benefits in regional, rural and First Nations areas; and/or
- **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and First Nations areas.

For **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, the Round 3 Grant Opportunity will focus on areas:

- of high economic and/or social value;
- outside the NBN fixed-line footprint; and
- where better connectivity and increased data have a clear benefit to a local region.

The Australian Government has recently provided \$480 million (GST exclusive) towards upgrading the NBN Fixed Wireless network. Consumers in the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint will benefit from access to increased download speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps). Fixed wireless coverage will also be expanded to cover a further 120,000 currently satellite-only premises.

A Proposed Solution to deliver fixed wireless broadband in the NBN Fixed Wireless coverage areas will only be eligible under the Program if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and that the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see Section 5.2 below).

The opening and closing dates and any other relevant information will be published on the [Regional Connectivity Program](#)<sup>1</sup> webpage and [GrantConnect](#)<sup>2</sup>. If there is any discrepancy between these two publications, GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

The Grant Opportunity will be administered according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#) (CGRGs)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Services and deliverables

The services to be delivered, as a result of the Proposed Solution, must be a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications solutions in the relevant area.

For broadband access technologies, a like-for-like technology where there is an existing broadband service would only meet this requirement if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in:

- Service Quality: eg. latency, packet loss, contention ratio

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/internet/regional-connectivity-program>

<sup>2</sup> [www.grants.gov.au/](http://www.grants.gov.au/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines.pdf>

- Coverage: eg. area, people, percentage of residential and/or business properties that will be covered by the Proposed Service
- Reliability: eg. service availability, service restoration times, backup and redundancy; and/or
- Speed: eg. latency, upload and download speeds.

These service improvements may include, but are not limited to, upgrades to address seasonal congestion, backhaul capacity upgrades to improve quality of service or additional mobile base stations in areas where there is existing but patchy coverage.

For services delivering **New Handheld Coverage**, the service will enable consumers to perform a range of functions using mobile devices, such as making and receiving phone calls, sending emails and text messages, browsing the internet, accessing online services, downloading files, using mobile apps, and accessing emergency communications services. To meet this expectation all proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- deliver at least 4G, and preferably also 5G, broadband data services and a voice service; and
- provide coverage modelling based on a New Handheld Coverage level with a Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP) at a 90 per cent confidence level for the cell area, as per the following table.

Table 1: RSRP Coverage Modelling Requirements

Coverage category	Channel bandwidth	Threshold (dBm)
Handheld	5	>-100
Handheld	10	>-103
Handheld	15	>-105
Handheld	20	>-106

## 2.2.2 Local community priority

During the application period, **applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with state, territory and local governments and local communities regarding the Proposed Solutions.** (especially in relation to projects for First Nations communities). These consultations should involve the identification of priority areas to be covered by the Proposed Solution. Priority areas may include specific roads, health or education facilities, communities with significant First Nations populations, industrial areas, community sites, high-value production areas, or areas with a demonstrable need for improved public safety (for example, where people are unable to call 000 because of limited coverage or lack of infrastructure).

To give effect to the place-based objective of the Program, **applicants should provide evidence that their Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution is a priority for the local community** (*This is not required for **Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, although any information provided will be considered in the value for money stage*).

A local priority project could be identified through a regional digital plan or similar strategy by local government or letters of support accompanying the grant application. This could be demonstrated by evidence of support from groups such as: state and territory governments; local government; Regional Development Australia committees; industry, business, and community groups; not-for-profits (registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and First Nations community organisations.



State, territory and local governments may own infrastructure in areas that could potentially be used for Proposed Solutions. These governments may have specific requirements in relation to the use of their infrastructure that will need to be identified in the applications put forward by applicants for relevant Proposed Solutions.

### 2.2.3 Operational period

All Funded **Regional Connectivity Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of seven (7) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of ten (10) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

### 2.2.4 Application and selection process

Applicants may apply individually or jointly (as part of a consortium). Joint applications must be underpinned by commercially binding arrangements or a clear intention to enter into such arrangements, should the application be successful. Grants to joint applicants may be granted on the condition that the parties enter into a binding agreement, approved by the Department, prior to finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

Grant recipients will be selected through a competitive, merit-based Selection Process against Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria as set out in these Guidelines and a final value for money consideration. In applying for grants, applicants will outline their specific Proposed Solution, and demonstrate support from the local community. The most overt form of support will be financial co-contributions (such as contributions from state, territory or local governments or other third parties). **The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria and also demonstrate its claims against the assessment criteria.**

An applicant seeking dedicated First Nations funding will need to demonstrate that its Proposed Solution will benefit a First Nations community. For the purposes of the Program, applicants may use the following definition of a First Nations community as a guide for areas that the Government is looking to target with dedicated First Nations funding: *a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents) by First Nations peoples, with housing or infrastructure (power, water, sewerage) that is managed on a community basis. First Nations communities have populations of (but not limited to) 50 or more First Nations people<sup>4</sup>.*

**In addition to the above guide, an applicant seeking dedicated funding for First Nations communities in Central Australia will be eligible if the services from the Proposed Solution fall within the Northern Territory Government administrative region of Central Australia (see section 5.2).**

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the local First Nations community and provide evidence of support for the Proposed Solution from that community (for example, through letters of support from First Nations community leaders). Applicants should also demonstrate how their Proposed Solution will help the Government meet Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (outlined at section 2.1 above).

<sup>4</sup> This definition is based on ABS Release — 2901.0 — Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016 – Discrete Community.

For communities not eligible for dedicated First Nations funding, applicants can still apply for the general funding through the Program.

## 3 Grant amount and project period

### 3.1 Grants available

This Round of the Program has up to **\$1650 million** (GST exclusive) of funding available, including:

- **\$1010 million** for **Regional Connectivity (Round 3) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$15 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities **reliable across across Australia** and **\$10 million for solutions aimed at improving digital connectivity for First Nations communities in Central Australia**; and
- \$50 million for **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$7.5 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that provide new mobile coverage in First Nations communities.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to extend the funding available for eligible Proposed Solutions to fund further meritorious projects.

The Project Period for Funded Projects will run from July 2023 to 30 June 2026. Grantees will also be required to provide retail services from the Funded Project for the Operational Period as identified in section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines.

In terms of the grant amount:

- There is no minimum grant amount
- There is no maximum grant amount, but total Round 3 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

All eligible Regional Connectivity Solutions applications under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream will be grouped into three categories for ~~both~~ the overall Program merit list, and the First Nations communities merit list, according to the amount of Program funding requested, to ensure that smaller Proposed Solutions are given due consideration during the assessment process. There is no minimum or maximum number of Proposed Solutions that the Government is seeking to fund in any category. The categories are:

- Category 1: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of less than \$300,000 (GST exclusive)
- Category 2: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of \$300,000 to \$2 million (GST exclusive)
- Category 3: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of greater than \$2 million (GST exclusive).

All eligible **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream will be grouped into a **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** merit list and a First Nations communities merit list.

#### 3.1.1 Financial co-contribution

To increase the reach of the Program, **applicants are encouraged to seek financial co-contributions (cash) towards each Proposed Solution from state, territory or local governments, local communities and/or other third parties.**

Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and negotiating contributions with any relevant third parties, and for testing and/or verifying any advice received from these third parties.

For Funded Projects that include a co-contribution from a state or territory government, the Department expects that Grantees will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth and a separate agreement with the respective state or territory government.

For Funded Projects that include co-contributions from other parties, the Grantee will bear any costs, and cover the other parties' funding if the other parties' funding is not secured following execution of the Grant Agreement between the Grantee and the Commonwealth.

For Proposed Solutions that include co-contributions from third parties, a copy of the terms of the third parties' commitment to the Applicant is to be attached to the application for funding.

### 3.2 Project period

Grantees must complete all of your Funded Projects by 30 June 2026. Grantees will be required to maintain the services for an Operational Period of:

- seven (7) years for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**; and
- ten (10) years for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If you consider that additional time is required to complete your Funded Project, please advise the Department in your application including providing justification for the additional time.

## 4 Eligibility criteria

We cannot consider your application if you do not satisfy all the Eligibility Criteria.

### 4.1 Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

For applicants applying for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)

And must be one of the following entity types, a:

- licensed telecommunications carrier under the *Telecommunications Act 1997*; or
- owner or intended owner of the Proposed Solution infrastructure who holds or intends to hold a Nominated Carrier Declaration (NCD) under the *Telecommunications Act 1997* in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded; or

For a joint (consortia) application:

- At least one organisation<sup>5</sup> must be a licensed telecommunications carrier or infrastructure owner who holds/intends to hold an NCD in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded. The licensed carrier or infrastructure owner (in the case an NCD applies) must be the entity that enters into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. However, such an application may be led by any of the following entity types:
  - Licensed carriers or infrastructure owners (in the case an NCD applies);
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local governments, local governing bodies, and regional development bodies;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community-controlled organisations.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Australian Government recognises that some organisations may seek to form consortia in order to apply for a grant. Consortia are eligible to apply and the relevant conditions applicable to consortia are at [6](#) 'Joint (consortia) Applications'.

For applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN); and
- be one of the following entity types:
  - a national **Mobile Network Operator (MNO)**; or
  - a **Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)**.
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNO** means a company that:
  - Supplies a public mobile telecommunications service within the meaning of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (Cth); and
  - Holds an apparatus or a spectrum licence (or both) for the supply of public mobile telecommunications services under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* (Cth).
- For the purposes of the Program, **MNIP** means a company, other than an **MNO**, that provides communications infrastructure in Australia or overseas, including the installation and operation of infrastructure to be used by one or more **National MNOs** to provide public mobile telecommunications services.
- **MNIP** applications must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from at least one **National MNO**, that offers national mobile coverage, to enter into a commercially binding commitment to use the infrastructure to deliver mobile services as described at section 2.2.3 for the Operational Period of the Proposed Solution. Funding may be awarded to eligible **MNIPs** on the condition that the **MNIP** and relevant **National MNO/s** enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

## 4.2 Multi-MNO and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions and Regional Connectivity Solutions to deliver mobile service from a National MNO

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, applicants and **MNOs**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including active sharing solutions. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and discussions with any relevant third parties.

If a **Regional Connectivity Solution** delivers new mobile coverage outcomes (e.g. a new mobile base station that delivers new mobile coverage to an area rather than an upgrade to an existing base station) to an area (i.e. it is not solely a mobile broadband or capacity upgrade to the **MNO** existing coverage in the area), and the applicant is a **National MNO**, then the solution is required to meet the **Multi-MNO** and co-locations requirements set out in this section.

If you put forward a proposal for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** that offers services from more than one **MNO**, you may include in the proposal the eligible expenditure, found at section 5.3, for all of the **MNOs** that will offer services from the Proposed Solution. However, the Department will only enter into an agreement with you as the lead applicant if the Proposed Solution is successful. All payments including any components for the other participating parties will be made to the lead applicant only.

In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an **MNO** confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution**, each Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must offer:

- to **MNOs**, the option of offering services from the Proposed Solution using active sharing on commercial terms, if the Proposed Solution is an active sharing solution; and
- co-location to **MNOs**, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional **MNO** for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

**MNOs** who are not included in the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as submitted in your application will be responsible for meeting their own expenses for active sharing and / or co-locating at the site.

The detailed requirements for the **MNO** to offer the option of co-location to other **MNOs** not participating in the lead proposal are set out in **Attachment A**. Other **MNOs** will be provided with an opportunity to express interest in co-location before the detailed design phase. The **MNO** will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location if no such expressions of interest are received.

## 5 What the grant money can be used for

### 5.1 Eligible grant activities

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** funding stream; and
- the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Proposed Regional Connectivity Solutions under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream are limited to broadband connectivity solutions **and/or** mobile capacity improvement solutions in Eligible Areas.

Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** stream are limited to mobile infrastructure in Eligible Areas that extends the coverage of one or more **National MNO's** mobile network to an area without **Existing Handheld Coverage**.

To be eligible your Proposed Solution must:

- provide access to mobile or broadband services in Eligible Areas as set out in Section 5.2; and
- not have started construction or be part of the participating telecommunications provider's forward build network or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027;
- for all macro cell mobile solutions (under both **streams**), include a back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours and, where technically feasible, for other Proposed Solutions, in the event of the loss of external power to the site; and
- show evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for the relevant Operational Period at section 2.2.3.

In addition, your Proposed **Regional Connectivity Solutions** must:

- provide place-based telecommunications solutions to regional digital connectivity issues;
- deliver new infrastructure or the upgrade or improvement of existing infrastructure; and
- not overbuild a like-for-like service unless you can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability or speed.

Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- provide New Mobile Coverage to a location in regional, rural or remote Australia.

Your Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Regional Connectivity Solution** in your application. Similarly, your **Regional Connectivity Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** in your application.



## 5.2 Eligible Areas

Your application can include Proposed Solutions at different locations, as long as they are all in Eligible Areas. Each Proposed Solution will be individually assessed according to the Assessment Criteria. Part or all of the Asset may be located in an Ineligible Area provided it supports services in Eligible Areas. Eligible Areas are all parts of Australia that do not fall within one or more of these Ineligible Areas.

Ineligible Areas are:

- Urban Centres and Localities geographical units classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 'Major Urban', i.e. with a population of 100,000 or more<sup>6</sup>. The Department will provide map overlays showing Ineligible Areas on request.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, Ineligible Areas also include:

- Areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with a Fixed-Line service. Information on NBN Co's rollout is available at [www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map](http://www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map).

Eligible areas for dedicated funding for Regional Connectivity Solutions in First Nations communities in Central Australia, are those within the Northern Territory Government administrative region of Central Australia which is defined as the area covered by the ABS Statistical Area Level 3 (SA3) under the name 'Alice Springs' and three Local Government Areas (LGAs) – Alice Springs, MacDonnell and Central Desert (with the exclusion of the community of Lajamanu and the exclusion of the LGA of Barkly). Please see Attachment B for a map of the Northern Territory Government administrative region of Central Australia.

For areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with Fixed Wireless technologies, Proposed Solutions that deliver mobile voice and data, Fixed-Line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions will be eligible for funding. Fixed Wireless broadband Proposed Solutions will only be eligible within the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade.

The existing indicative NBN Fixed Wireless footprint is available on the National Map at [nationalmap.gov.au](http://nationalmap.gov.au). While it is expected that the expansion of coverage following NBN Co's Fixed Wireless upgrade will be substantial, applicants should assume this will extend the existing coverage area by up to 15km. Applicants should note that updated coverage maps of the expanded NBN upgrade footprint may not be available during the Round 3 application or assessment period. The Commonwealth reserves the right to delay the assessment and/or funding of a Proposed Solution until it is known whether the Proposed Solution area will be within the upgraded NBN Fixed Wireless footprint or within an area where NBN announces FTTP upgrades.

<sup>6</sup> Based on ABS Release — [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3 - Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2021, 1270.0.55.004](#) — [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\): Volume 4 — Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2016](#).

### 5.3 Eligible expenditure

You can only spend the grant on eligible expenditure you have incurred on a Funded Project as defined in your Grant Agreement.

Grant funding will be available for the capital costs of building or installing Funded Projects. This may include site acquisition and planning approval costs. Grantees will be responsible for any actual capital costs which exceed estimated costs.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in a Remote or a Very Remote area (based on the ABS remoteness structure)<sup>7</sup>, or a Mobile Black Spot Solution seeking First Nations funding, applicants may seek funding up to 75% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in other locations, you may seek funding for up to 50% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, and the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Project.

Note: The installation expenditure can also include the reasonable incremental one-off costs associated with configuring participating MNOs' networks to connect to a Mobile Black Spot Solution if the Proposed Solution utilises active sharing and/or mobile roaming, provided that such costs have not already been subsidised by another funding program of the Commonwealth or States/Territories.

Not all expenditure on your Funded Projects may be eligible for grant funding. The program delegate makes the final decision on what is eligible expenditure and may give additional guidance on eligible expenditure if required.

You must incur the expenditure on your Funded Project between the start date and completion date for your Grant Agreement for the expenditure to be eligible.

#### 5.3.1 Eligible backhaul costs

For both **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** and **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, funding may be sought for the capitalised cost of Backhaul over the Operational Period of Funded Solutions, regardless of Backhaul technology. For remote locations where existing fibre or microwave Backhaul (or a combination of both) is not available or readily accessible, satellite Backhaul technology may be utilised to deliver the Funded Project. If satellite Backhaul technology is put forward for a Proposed Solution, the applicant should clearly define the level of service or connectivity to be provided.

In addition to upfront capital costs related to the installation and deployment of Backhaul (such as special linkage charges), the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of operational costs relating to leased optical fibre, microwave, or satellite Backhaul over the minimum Operational Period of a Proposed Solution may be included in the estimated asset capital cost of building the Proposed

<sup>7</sup> [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3 - Remoteness Structure, July 2021 – June 2026](#) 1270.0.55.005 – Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 – Remoteness Structure, July 2016

Solution. These capitalised operational costs for Backhaul must be clearly identified separately in the application.

## 5.4 What the grant money cannot be used for

To ensure that applicants do not seek Program funding for Proposed Solutions in areas where they have already planned to invest commercially, all applicants must certify that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**:

- Operating and maintenance expenditure for Funded Solutions is ineligible for grant funding.

The Department will not in any circumstances meet any costs or expenses incurred by an applicant in connection with their application. Applicants must bear their own costs and expenses associated with the application and assessment process, and the preparation, negotiation and execution of the Grant Agreement and of other documentation.

The Department may audit a Grantee's compliance with requirements.

# 6 Assessment criteria

## 6.1 Assessment Criteria for Regional Connectivity Solutions

Applications for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** will need to address each of the following criteria:

1. Merit Criterion one (economic benefits) (15 points)
2. Merit Criterion two (social benefits) (15 points)
3. Merit Criterion three (capacity, capability and resources to deliver the Proposed Solution) (10 points)
4. Merit Criterion four (financial co-contribution) (10 points).

The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate how the Proposed Solution meets each Merit Criterion. Applicants should provide a response to each Merit Criterion, as well as evidence of support to reinforce the claims made in its responses. We will assess eligible applications against each Merit Criterion using the weighting indicated to develop an overall score. Each application will also undergo an overall Value for Money assessment to determine whether the Proposed Solution represents Value for Money to the Commonwealth.

The application form asks questions that relate to the Merit Criteria below. You should provide sufficient evidence to support your answers, including evidence of community support for any proposed economic and/or social benefits offered by your Proposed Solution (see section 6.1.1.1 and section 6.1.2.1 for more information) in response to the Merit Criteria. In addition, you should provide evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in connectivity levels over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area (as outlined at section 2.2.1). The extent of this improvement will impact the assessment of the Proposed Solution's ability to deliver the economic and/or social benefits.

We encourage you to seek the support of the local government and/or state or territory government in preparing your application. For example, they may be able to assist you in identifying the

expected outcomes of the Proposed Solution, particularly the economic and social benefits that would be available to the local community, if the Proposed Solution is funded.

### 6.1.1 Merit Criterion 1 – Economic Benefit

#### 6.1.1.1 Economic benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Economic benefits** for a region may cover increases in employment opportunities or economic activity, improvements in productivity, wider access to markets or fairer and more equitable economic outcomes. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to economic benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these economic benefits include:

- a. increasing the number or value of jobs, creating new businesses or efficiencies in the production of goods and services in the region beyond the construction phase (this includes direct and indirect opportunities created through the Proposed Solution);
- b. providing opportunities for growth in existing sectors, e.g. tourism, agriculture, manufacturing;
- c. facilitating greater competition in telecommunication retail services;
- d. whether the Proposed Solution provides an innovative approach to improve productivity, efficiency or addresses an identified problem; and/or
- e. evidence of the community/local intent to employ the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - i. State and territory governments;
  - ii. Local government and regional development authorities;
  - iii. Industry, business, and community groups;
  - iv. Not-for-profits; or
  - v. First Nations community-controlled organisations.

### 6.1.2 Merit Criterion 2 – Social Benefit

#### 6.1.2.1 Social benefits of your project for the region (15 points)

**Social benefits** for a region may cover improving access to health and education services, improving public safety and improving regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to social benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these social benefits include:

- a. facilitating provision of more efficient and effective health or education services, including improved access to health or education resources in the home;
- b. improving public safety and network resilience in a defined area. This may include the ability to call 000 from more locations, providing alternative technologies with which to do so, or improving the effectiveness, resilience or safety of Public Safety Premises;
- c. improving retail competition, regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. This may include improving affordability, providing services that help to attract and retain a workforce or enhancing cultural heritage; and/or
- d. addressing disadvantage within the community including First Nations communities. This may include addressing low digital inclusion, providing affordable services to places with entrenched disadvantage (including benefits such as community free wifi or discounted pricing models), or providing people who are excluded with improved opportunities to access support services.

Applicants applying for First Nations funding should highlight how the Proposed Solution will address Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (as outlined in section 2.1 above), or any other targets under the Closing the Gap initiative.

### 6.1.3 Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery

#### 6.1.3.1 Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project (10 points)

You should demonstrate your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution within the specified cost and timeframe, including through identifying:

- a. Your track record and your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution, including
  - a. examples of delivering similar projects and solutions;
  - b. your resources and access to personnel and/or partners with the right skills and experience;
  - c. your ability to deliver in the context of your organisation's broader program of work (including any pipeline of works through Commonwealth and state or territory government programs such as MBSP and previous Program rounds); and
  - d. your access, or future access to, any necessary infrastructure, power or backhaul.
- b. The maturity of the Proposed Solution, including outlining
  - a. the key technical components of the solution, and a comprehensive project cost budget and breakdown;
  - b. a robust project delivery plan and schedule;
  - c. approvals that will be required and any steps taken to progress these; and
  - d. evidence of contingency planning that mitigates the risk of delays in getting the necessary approvals to commence work, particularly for greenfield and remote projects.

In addition, you should outline how you will maintain the infrastructure and the benefits provided by the Proposed Solution during the Operational Period, including managing expected increased data demands over the course of the Operational Period.

### 6.1.4 Merit Criterion 4 – Financial Co-contributions

#### 6.1.4.1 Total investment the grant funding will leverage (10 points)

You should demonstrate this through identifying the total investment the grant will leverage. A higher level of contribution from non-Commonwealth sources, comparative to the cost of the Proposed Solution, will help drive a higher score in the assessment process for this criterion.

While financial contributions from other Commonwealth sources will be considered as part of the Value for Money assessment, those contributions will not count towards the score for this Merit Criterion.

## 6.2 Assessment Criteria for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that offer coverage outcomes from three **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions that only offer service from two **MNOs**, all other things being equal. All Proposed Solutions that offer services from two **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions with a single **MNO**, all other things being equal.



Proposed Solutions within these **MNO** groupings (i.e. three **MNOs**, two **MNOs** and single **MNO**) will be ranked using the **New Coverage Assessment Formula** to derive the cost to the Commonwealth per weighted square kilometre of **New Handheld Coverage**, and coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is an **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with another **MNO's** network.

Proposed Solutions with a lower cost per square kilometre will rank higher than Proposed Solutions with a high cost per square kilometre.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** is:

Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)

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New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) + (Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2)

**Mobile Black Spot Solutions** located in Remote and Very Remote areas<sup>8</sup>, or seeking First Nations funding, will also be assessed against the **New Coverage Assessment Formula**, however, only 50 per cent of the cost to the Commonwealth will be used in the calculation for these solutions, as it is recognised that there is a higher cost to delivering mobile services in these areas.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** for Remote and Very Remote Proposed Solutions is:

Cost to the Commonwealth (\$) x 0.50

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New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) + (Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2)

The New Coverage Assessment Formula is based on the following components:

- a. **Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)** refers to the Commonwealth portion of the estimated Total Cost for the Proposed Solution (see section 5.3), including capitalised Operational Costs.
- b. **New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld mobile coverage where there is no **Existing Handheld Coverage**.
  - Where a Proposed Solution provides **New Handheld Coverage** from more than one participating **MNO**, each participating **MNO's New Handheld Coverage** will be counted cumulatively, regardless of whether the **New Handheld Coverage** areas overlap.
  - This is in recognition of the benefits of **Multi-MNO** solutions, and to ensure that these Proposed Solutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to the higher costs that may be incurred for these Proposed Solutions.
- c. **Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if

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<sup>8</sup> [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3 - Remoteness Structure, July 2021 – June 2026](#) Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3 – Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2021

the applicant is a **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with **Existing Handheld Coverage** from another **MNO**, divided by a weighting factor of 2.

- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement of a single **MNO**, overlapping coverage with the **MNO**'s own existing network is not eligible for assessment.
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement (e.g. active sharing) of two or more **MNOs**, overlapping coverage that is new for at least one participating **MNO** is eligible for assessment, but counted only once. Coverage located in an area within the existing network of all participating **MNOs** will not be eligible for assessment.

**New Handheld Coverage** and Overlapping Coverage will be measured by comparing the 4G handheld coverage provided by the Proposed Solution against existing 4G handheld coverage (including as-yet unbuilt base stations funded under other Commonwealth and/or state government programs), as per the **MNOs**' submitted coverage maps at the handheld coverage levels set out in section 2.2.1.

Table 2: Example assessment of New Handheld Coverage and Overlapping Coverage

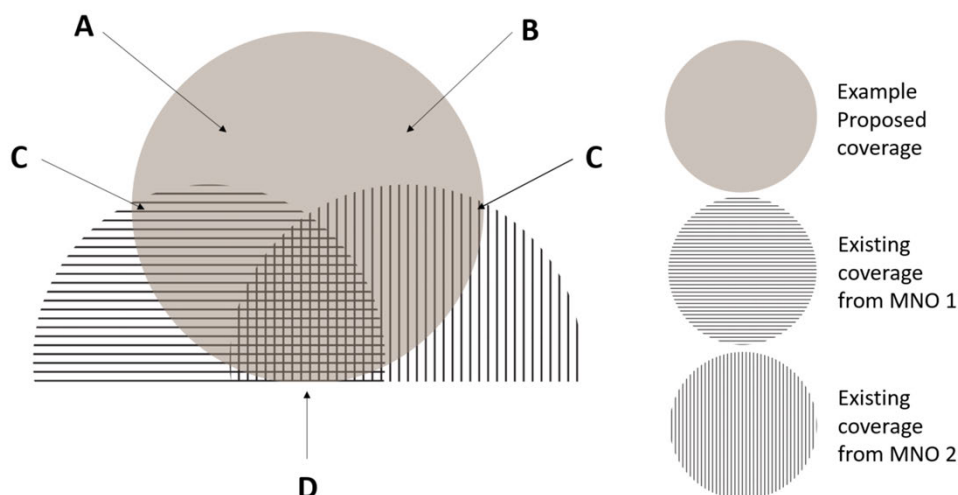
A Proposed Solution has confirmed participation of two MNOs.

- A. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 1, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
- B. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 2, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.
- C. The Proposed Solution provides 20km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage, but is new for at least one of the participating MNOs.
- D. The Proposed Solution provides 10km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage in the networks of both participating MNOs (not eligible for assessment).

The assessed coverage for this Proposed Solution is  $A+B+(C/2)$

Equalling:  $30\text{km}^2 + 30\text{km}^2 + (20\text{km}^2 / 2) = 70\text{km}^2$

A graphical representation of this example is below:



## 7 How to apply

Before applying, you must read and understand these Guidelines.

All application documents may be found on [GrantConnect](#). Any alterations and addenda<sup>9</sup> will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on the GrantConnect website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If you need further guidance around the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online, contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

To apply you must:

- complete the Grant Opportunity application form;
- provide all information requested;
- demonstrate that you meet all Eligibility Criteria;
- provide responses to the Assessment Criteria;
- include all necessary attachments; and
- submit your application/s before the due date.

Table 3: Expected timing for this grant opportunity

Activity	Timeframe
Guidelines released and applications open	20 March 2023
Applicant registration and pre-application documentation for applicants applying for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)

<sup>9</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

Activity	Timeframe
Submit initial proposal period for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)
Applications close	5pm AEDT <b>12 July</b> <del>31 May</del> 2023
Announcement on Successful Applications	To be advised
Commencement date of Grant Activity	On Execution of Grant Agreement
End date of Grant Activity	30 June, 2026
End date of Asset Operational Period	As defined at section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines

### 7.1 Applicant registration (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Potential applicants who intend to propose **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must register their interest with the Department and sign and provide a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to being granted access to the confidential Program documentation.

### 7.2 Pre-application lodgement (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Upon registering as a potential applicant, **MNOs** who intend to submit applications for funding, or are partnering with potential applicants, for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must first submit their existing handheld 4G coverage information, incorporating the coverage from base stations funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program, the Peri-Urban Mobile Program and the Regional Connectivity Program and any base station funded under a State or Territory program, regardless of the stage of construction.

**Existing Handheld Coverage** information required above must be submitted to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), 1 May 2023. The Department may, at its absolute discretion, accept mobile coverage information submitted by **MNOs** after this date.

The **Existing Handheld Coverage** information required in accordance with this section must be supplied as two separate layers as follows:

- Handheld Coverage Maps: being a layer modelled to the Handheld Coverage levels as set out in section 2.2.1; and
- Existing Public Coverage Maps: being a layer representing the predictive handheld coverage modelling standards which underpin the publicly available coverage maps on the **MNO's** website.

For avoidance of doubt, the **Existing Public Coverage Maps** are requested for information purposes only. Assessment will only consider the **New Handheld Coverage Maps** (i.e. a "like-for-like" comparison).

Pre-application information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

### 7.3 Submit initial proposals for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should lodge any initial proposal locations where they are interested in partnering with another **MNO** on a site under the Program to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), 1 May 2023.

The registered applicants should provide this information using the “Initial Proposals” template provided in the Application Pack.

The Department will collate the lists of initial proposal locations and provide a consolidated list to all registered applicants. The consolidated list will include the following information for each initial proposal:

- an unique identifier;
- the location;
- type of base stations being considered (small cell / macro); and
- the applicant’s contact details.

The Department will also distribute a contact list of all pre-registered applicants to facilitate discussions regardless of whether a pre-registered applicant has identified potential partnering locations.

Applicants and other interested parties have until closing of the application period to discuss and plan co-development and co-funding opportunities at these sites prior to finalising applications.

The list of locations will be treated as Confidential Information by the registered applicants.

Initial proposal information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

### 7.4 Completing and lodging an application

Your application must provide:

- An outline of the key technical components of the Proposed Solution, including any required supporting infrastructure and services, (including appropriate diagrams) and detail how the overall ‘system’ will deliver the proposed services to the stated quality.
- The location of the Proposed Solution and all Assets.
- Mapping data, where applicable, outlining the predictive coverage for the Proposed Solution.
- The total estimated capital cost of construction (GST inclusive).
- The amount of co-contribution (GST inclusive) being provided by the applicant.
- The amount of Commonwealth co-contribution sought under the Proposed Solution (GST Inclusive).
- The amount of any co-contributions (GST Inclusive) to be received from all third parties, including but not limited to state, territory or local governments, local communities, or any combination of these, and any specific requirements or conditions tied to the co-contributions.
- Evidence of any co-contributions to be received from all third parties. For example, a letter of support from a suitably senior official from the relevant third party, which outlines the amount of co-contributions to be received and any conditions attached to the co-contributions. The department may ask for additional evidence of co-contributions if it considers the evidence you provide is unsatisfactory.
- Evidence of the extent to which the Proposed Solution meets the Assessment Criteria.
- Evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area.



- Whether the Proposed Solution is dependent on the construction of one or more of the applicants' other Proposed Solutions, including explaining the specific dependencies.

You must agree that the predictive coverage mapping data can be used by the Department to prepare promotional material for the Program or for policy development and advice as needed.

Applicants must indicate their ability to comply with the applicable sample Grant Agreement(s) for the relevant stream(s) (to be made available on GrantConnect shortly after Program opening) at the time of submitting their applications. There will be separate sample Grant Agreements for Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions. Where the terms of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) are not accepted in full, applicants are required to submit a revision-marked version of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) reflecting their proposed drafting, their position, and their reasons for requesting the change.

Applicants who have previously agreed a funding agreement with the Commonwealth under Round 2 of the Regional Connectivity Program (for Regional Connectivity Solutions) or the Mobile Black Spot Program (for Mobile Black Spot Solutions) and wish to use that Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the applicable stream) must request to do so at the time of submitting their application. However, applicants must still indicate their ability to comply with the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) as mentioned above. The Commonwealth may, at its sole discretion, agree to use the Previous Funding Agreement as a basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the relevant stream). The Commonwealth will indicate any updates to be made to the Previous Funding Agreement for the purposes of this round. The updates will be drawn from the applicable sample Grant Agreement for the relevant stream.

As outlined in [section 5.4](#) of these Guidelines, applicants must warrant that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

You are responsible for ensuring that your application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information is a serious offence under the [Criminal Code Act 1995 \(Cth\)](#). We will investigate any false or misleading information and may exclude your application from further consideration.

If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact us immediately at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for Regional Connectivity Solutions and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for Mobile Black Spot Solutions. We may, at our sole discretion, accept additional information from you or a request to correct the error. However, we are under no obligation to accept any additional information or agree to a request from you to correct your application after the closing time.

If we identify an error in your application, you may be contacted to correct or explain the error. However, we can refuse to accept any additional information from you that would change your application after the closing time.

You should keep a copy of your application and any supporting documents.

All applications lodged will be acknowledged by the Department by email. Applicants lodging an application who do not receive acknowledgement of their application should contact the Department. Applications that are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. If you need further guidance about the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

Applications can be lodged by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. Application files lodged by email must not exceed a combined size of 10 megabytes per email. Applications may also be lodged using GovTEAMS, the Australian Government's secure online document sharing and project management system. Potential applicants can be provided with information about lodging applications using GovTEAMS upon request to the Department. Potential applicants may also request to use alternative online secure document sharing systems by agreement with the Department.

You should advise the Department if you intend to lodge your application using GovTEAMS, or if you need to use an alternative electronic lodgement platform. You should do this **at least two weeks before the closing date** via email to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. If you wish to change the electronic lodgement platform after notifying the Department, you should advise the Department of the change and the reasons why. The Department may, at its discretion, accept changes to the lodgement method.

All electronic files, regardless of transmission method, should be provided in an appropriate Microsoft compatible format (Microsoft Office 2007 or later or PDF files preferred): Geo-spatial information such as maps should be provided in either Mapinfo TAB or MID/MIF; ESRI Shape; GML; or KML format.

The Department may also accept applications via hard copy and/or physical electronic media, in addition to electronic applications.

Where physical electronic media is to be provided, such as a USB stick, the media must be PC-formatted. Applicants should include an index of all electronic documents on the physical electronic media.

Applications provided in hard copy and physical electronic media formats should be delivered via registered post or by hand prior to the closing date.

Applications via post are to be addressed and delivered to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Applications via hand delivery are to be addressed and delivered by the closing date to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
2 Phillip Law Street  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

## 7.5 Attachments to application

The following details must also be provided as attachments to your application:

- a comprehensive budget for the Proposed Solution including itemised costs of all the key items such as material, equipment and software licenses (linked to a Bill of Material), costs of key

labour, contractor activities and tasks, and other overhead costs such as project management, administration, transport, travel & accommodation

- evidence of a Funding Strategy, e.g. financial statements, loan agreements, cash flow documents
- accountant declaration that you are able to fund your share of the cost of the Proposed Solution (sample template provided on GrantConnect)
- evidence of commitment to financial co-contributions as detailed in [section 6.1.4](#) of these Guidelines
- certification of the application by a duly authorised representative of your organisation, for example a senior executive, director, or company secretary
- evidence to demonstrate your ability to successfully construct and operate the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of ability to deliver a retail service on the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for at least the Operational Period
- for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, evidence of the local need for the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local government and regional development authorities;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community controlled organisations
- other evidence, as necessary to support your claims against the Assessment Criteria.
- Predictive coverage mapping data for each Proposed Solution.

Supporting documentation to the application form can be attached in line with the instructions provided within the form.

## 7.6 Joint (consortia) applications

We recognise that some organisations may want to join together as a group to deliver a Proposed Solution.

In these circumstances, you must appoint a 'lead organisation'. Only the lead organisation can submit the application form, but the lead organisation will not necessarily be the entity entering into any agreement with the Commonwealth (refer to [section 4.1](#) of these Guidelines). The application must identify all other members of the group (partner organisations) and their role in the Proposed Solution and include a letter of support from each of the partners organisations.

Each letter of support should include:

- details of the partner organisation;
- an overview of how the partner organisation will work with the lead organisation, including financial co-contributor and any other partner organisations in the group to successfully complete the Proposed Solution;
- an outline of the relevant experience and/or expertise the partner organisation will bring to the group;
- the roles/responsibilities of the partner organisation and the resources they will contribute (if any); and
- details of a nominated management level contact officer.

You must have a formal arrangement in place with all partner organisations prior to execution of the Grant Agreement.

## 7.7 Closing date for funding applications

The closing date for submitting an application for funding under this Grant Opportunity is 5pm (Canberra Time) on 31 May 2023.

## 7.8 Timing of Grant Opportunity processes

You must submit an application between the published opening and closing dates. The Department reserves the right to, in exceptional circumstances, accept a late application to the assessment process at its discretion. Without limiting the Department's discretion, exceptional circumstances may include natural disasters or unforeseen technical issues with application forms or lodgement systems. Any decision by the Department on whether or not to accept a late application to the assessment process shall be final.

If you believe there are circumstances which will affect the timely submission of your application, you must contact us before the application closing date to negotiate an alternative submission due date.

## 7.9 Questions during application process

All requests for clarification or determination of the meaning of provisions in these Guidelines should be referred to the Department by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. The Department's written decision on the matter is final.

We will acknowledge and address emailed questions as soon as practicable. Answers to questions will be posted on GrantConnect as Frequently Asked Questions.

# 8 The grant Selection Process

## 8.1 Assessment of grant applications

We will consider eligible applications through a targeted competitive grant process.

The assessment process for the program will be as follows:

1. initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria
2. detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria
3. Value for Money assessment and consideration of whether the Proposed Solution supports a Government priority as outlined in [section 8.2](#)
4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.

As part of the Value for Money assessment we will group all eligible Proposed Solutions by funding stream and for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** into the funding categories described in [section 3.1](#) to ensure we compare Proposed Solutions of similar size against each other.

There is no separate application process or Eligibility Criteria to receive dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions in First Nations communities. We will consider eligible First Nations applications, as defined in [section 2.2.4](#) of these Guidelines, under a separate merit list. Eligible First Nations solutions that are not successful in gaining dedicated First Nations funding through the First Nations merit list will be considered under the relevant merit list for each funding stream.

We may seek advice regarding your Proposed Solution from state or territory government agencies, other Australian Government agencies, independent experts and other external parties. This advice may be taken into consideration when assessing the Proposed Solution.

Where the level of information provided in an application is not sufficient for the assessors to make a recommendation they may, but are not obliged to, seek more information from the applicant so long as it does not change the substance of the application. If the assessment process identifies unintentional errors in your application, we may contact you to correct or clarify the errors, but you cannot make any material alteration or addition. It is therefore recommended that you thoroughly address the criteria in your application.

An evaluation committee may seek additional information about your application. They may do this from within the Commonwealth, even if the sources are not nominated by you as referees. The evaluation committee may also consider information about you or your application that is available through the normal course of business.

## 8.2 Value for Money and government priorities

Following assessment against the Eligibility and Assessment Criteria, an assessment will also be undertaken to consider which of the Proposed Solutions represent the best Value for Money to the Commonwealth and whether they support a government priority. This is to ensure the grant will add value by achieving Program benefits that would not occur without the grant. This assessment will have regard to the overall Program and Grant Opportunity objectives.

Factors that may be considered in the Value for Money assessment include, but are not limited to the:

- cost to the Commonwealth of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which the Proposed Solution would contribute to the Program objectives, including addressing an identified local priority or government priority
- for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, degree to which the Proposed Solution delivers **Multi-MNO** outcomes
- extent to which the Proposed Solution will build on investments (aimed at delivering social and economic benefits) already made or planned for the Proposed Solution location
- extent of existing or planned commercial activity/investment that will impact on telecommunications services and the level of connectivity in the Proposed Solution location
- extent to which the Proposed Solution presents a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area
- extent to which Proposed Solutions provide overlapping coverage in a given area, and the appropriateness of each Proposed Solution to local needs
- extent to which the Proposed Solution leverages additional partnerships and in-kind contributions
- extent to which the Proposed Solution supports broader Commonwealth objectives or priorities, including through written support or financial co-contributions from other Commonwealth Departments or agencies
- ability to meet the needs of end users over the Operational Period
- forecast benefits of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which there is an appropriate spread of Proposed Solution types and Eligible Areas.

Based on the overarching Value for Money assessment, the Department reserves the right to recommend funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that were lower ranked against the Assessment Criteria than other eligible Proposed Solutions. This could include lower ranked Proposed Solutions from First Nations communities in recognition of the dedicated funding available for First Nations communities. The Department also reserves the right to recommend not funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that are highly ranked against the Assessment Criteria, based on the Value for Money assessment.



The Department may, at its absolute discretion, recommend increasing the level of Commonwealth funding for one or more **Mobile Black Spot Solution** above the maximum percentage per **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as outlined in section 5.3, should it be considered of higher Value for Money.

### 8.3 Who will assess applications?

The evaluation committee will assess each application on its merits and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which Proposed Solutions should be awarded a grant (if any).

We may ask external advisors to inform the assessment process. Any advisor who is not a Commonwealth Official will be required to perform their duties in accordance with the CGRGs.

The evaluation committee recommends to the Decision Maker which applications to approve for a grant.

### 8.4 Who will approve grants?

The Minister for Communications (the Decision Maker) decides which grants to approve, taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation committee and the availability of grant funds for the purposes of the Grant Opportunity.

The Minister's decision is final in all matters, including the:

- approval of applications for funding;
- amount of grant funding awarded; and
- terms and conditions of funding.

There is no appeal mechanism for decisions to approve or not approve a grant. An applicant who is dissatisfied with the outcome may contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman as set out in [section 13.1](#).

## 9 Notification of application outcomes

We will advise you of the outcome of your application in writing. If you are successful, we will advise you of any specific conditions attached to the grant.

### 9.1 Feedback on your application

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a grant, you may ask for feedback within 28 days of being advised of the outcome. We will give written feedback within one month of your request.

## 10 Successful grant applications

### 10.1 The Grant Agreement

Each Grantee will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement (or Agreements if successful in both streams) with the Commonwealth. Each Grant Agreement will set out the Grantee's obligations in respect of the roll-out and service terms for each Funded Project. Where the Grantee is successful in obtaining funding for both Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions, the Regional Connectivity Solutions will be covered by a separate Grant Agreement to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

A sample Grant Agreement for Regional Connectivity Solutions and a separate sample Grant Agreement for Mobile Black Spot Solutions will be available shortly after the opening of the application round.

Applicants requesting any changes to the applicable sample Grant Agreement should provide full details of the proposed changes in their application, for consideration by the Department (see section 7.4 of these Guidelines). An applicant who was a previous funding recipient under either stream of the Program may, at the time of making their application, request to use a previously agreed funding agreement for that stream, with appropriate updates specified by the Commonwealth, as the basis for their Round 3 Agreement (an Updated Previous Funding Agreement). For RCP Round 2 funding recipients that are successful under Round 3 when seeking funding for a Regional Connectivity Solution, they may request to use their executed Round 2 Grant Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement. The decision to use an Updated Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement is at the ultimate discretion of the Commonwealth.

We must execute a Grant Agreement with the applicant before we can make any payments. We are not responsible for any of the applicant's expenditure until a Grant Agreement is executed. Applicant's should not start any activities relating to a Funded Project until a Grant Agreement is executed. Each successful applicant must enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth prior to the Government's announcement of successful locations and Grantees.

The Commonwealth expects Grant Agreement terms to be reached with a successful Grantee within 60 Business days of the proposed Grantee being advised in writing that the Commonwealth is prepared to financially support the Proposed Solutions/s. If terms have not been agreed within 60 Business days, and without limiting any other rights or discretions, the Commonwealth reserves to the right not to proceed with a Grant Agreement for the Proposed Solution.

## 10.2 Specific legislation, policies and industry standards

Whilst applicants are required to be compliant with all laws and regulations, they may be requested to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation, policies or industry standards. For example, applicants may be requested to demonstrate compliance with health, safety or security related legislation, policies or industry standards that are in any way applicable to the Funded Project.

### 10.2.1 Australian Industry Participation (AIP) Plan

Grant applicants should note that for funding of \$20 million or more, subject to advice from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, the Australian Industry Participation National Framework principles, including an AIP plan requirement, may apply to the grant agreement(s). More information on AIP plan requirements can be found at <https://industry.gov.au/aip>.

### 10.2.2 WHS Accreditation Scheme

Building work undertaken as part of the Funded Project/s funded under this agreement may be covered by the Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme (WHS Accreditation Scheme). The WHS Accreditation Scheme is established under the Federal Safety Commissioner Act 2022 and specified in the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) (Accreditation Scheme) Rules 2019*.

The WHS Accreditation Scheme applies to building work that is indirectly funded by the Commonwealth or a corporate Commonwealth entity if it is carried out under a contract with a value of \$4 million or more (GST inclusive) and the contribution made to the funding of the project that includes the building work by the Commonwealth or corporate Commonwealth entity is at least:

- \$6,000,000 (GST inclusive) and represents at least 50% of the total funding; or

- \$10,000,000 (GST inclusive).

A successful applicant who is the builder must comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation and successful applicants who will be engaging builders to undertake the building work must require builders to comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation.

### 10.3 How we pay the grant

The Grant Agreement will state:

- the maximum grant amount to be paid;
- the proportion of eligible expenditure covered by the grant;
- any financial contributions provided by you or a third party;
- any in-kind contributions you will make; and
- any other requirements.

We will not exceed the maximum grant amount under any circumstances. If applicants incur extra costs, they must meet them themselves.

We may make an initial payment on execution of the Grant Agreement. We will make subsequent payments as applicants achieve Asset completion demonstrated by a satisfactory report, based on applicants actual eligible expenditure. These payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, an upfront operational expense payment will be made once the Operational Period has commenced.

### 10.4 Maintaining project benefits

In the Grant Agreement, an applicant will be required to commit to operate its Funded Project infrastructure and deliver Funded Project benefits over the Operational Period. Applicants may be required to report on the ongoing benefits delivered by the Funded Project.

### 10.5 Grants payments and GST

Payments will be made as set out in the Grant Agreement.

### 10.6 Amendment to these Guidelines

The Government reserves the right to terminate or vary the program (including via variation of these Guidelines) at its discretion, at any time, for any reason, including without limitation, in the light of changes to Government policy.

Any alterations and addenda<sup>10</sup> to the Program will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment prior to the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department, potential applicants will be advised of the revised or new Guidelines in a timely manner, including any resultant extension that may be applied to the application period.

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<sup>10</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment following the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the Department (for example, if the applications received do not achieve the Program objectives), the revised or new Guidelines will set out details of the changes, and all existing applicants will be notified of arrangements impacting existing applications.

An organisation submitting an application acknowledges that neither these Guidelines, nor any application, give rise to a binding agreement or any other binding legal arrangement or legal relationship between the applicant and the Commonwealth. There is no binding agreement on any party until a Grant Agreement is executed by the Commonwealth and the Grantee.

## 11 Announcement of grants

If successful, applicants grants will be listed on the GrantConnect website 21 calendar days after the date of effect as required by Section 5.3 of the [CGRGs](#).

## 12 How we monitor your grant activity

### 12.1 Keeping us informed

Applicants should let us know if anything is likely to affect the Funded Project or organisation.

We need to know of any key changes to the applicant's organisation or its business activities which may affect its ability to complete the Funded Project, carry on business and pay debts due.

Applicants must also inform us of any changes to:

- name;
- addresses;
- nominated contact details; and
- bank account details.

If applicants become aware of a breach of terms and conditions under the Grant Agreement, they must contact us immediately.

Applicants must notify us of events relating to the grant and provide an opportunity for the Minister or their representative to attend.

### 12.2 Reporting

Applicants must submit reports in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will expect applicants to report on such matters as:

- progress against agreed activity and outcomes;
- contributions of participants directly related to the Funded Project including scheduled co-contributions (if any); and
- expenditure of the grant.

The amount of detail you provide in your reports should be relative to the Funded Project size, complexity and grant amount.

We will monitor progress by assessing reports applicants submit and may conduct site visits or request records to confirm details of reports if necessary. Occasionally we may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement.

### **12.3 Asset completion report**

For each completed Asset, applicants must submit an asset completion report as specified in the Grant Agreement. Assets will be defined in each applicant's Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth.

### **12.4 Grant agreement variations**

We recognise that unexpected events may affect your progress. In these circumstances, you can request a variation to your grant agreement. Applicants can request a variation by providing written notice to the Department setting out the reasons for the variation and proposing steps that could be taken to better achieve the purpose or address the risks of the Funded Project.

You should not assume that a variation request will be successful. We will consider your request based on provisions in the Grant Agreement and the likely impact on achieving outcomes.

### **12.5 Financial declaration or audited financial acquittal report**

We will ask applicants to provide a declaration that the grant money was spent in accordance with the Grant Agreement and to report on any underspends of the grant money. We may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments.

### **12.6 Independent audit report**

The Department may request an independently audited financial report for Funded Projects at the applicants expense. The financial audit report will verify that applicants spent the grant in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will assess the report and may re-examine applicants claims or conduct site visits if necessary.

### **12.7 Compliance visits**

The Department (including entities acting on our behalf) may visit applicants during the development and construction of the Funded Project, or at the completion of the Funded Project to review compliance with the Grant Agreement. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement. For large or complex Funded Projects, we may visit applicants after they finish the Funded Project. We will provide applicants with reasonable notice of any compliance visit.

### **12.8 Evaluation**

We will evaluate the Grant Opportunity to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from applications and reports for this purpose. We may also interview applicants, or ask for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted applicants and to evaluate how effective the Program was in achieving its outcomes. Grantees may be required to participate in Program reviews and evaluations.

We may contact applicants up to one year after the Asset Completion Dates for each Funded Project for more information to assist with this evaluation.

### **12.9 Acknowledgement**

The Program logo should be used on all materials related to grants under the Program. Whenever the logo is used, the publication must also acknowledge the Commonwealth as follows:



'Regional Connectivity Program – an Australian Government initiative' for Regional Connectivity Solutions and 'Mobile Black Spot Program – an Australian Government initiative' for Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

If applicants make a public statement about a Funded Project under the Program, we require them to acknowledge the grant by using the following:

'This project received grant funding from the Australian Government.'

## 13 Probity

The Australian Government will make sure that the Grant Opportunity process is fair, conducted according to these Guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct, and is consistent with the CGRGs.

External advisors may also be asked to inform the assessment and evaluation process. All external advisors must comply with the CGRGs.

### 13.1 Enquiries and feedback

The Department's [Client Service Charter](#) applies to complaints about this Grant Opportunity. All complaints about a grant process must be provided in writing.

Any questions applicants have about grant decisions for this Grant Opportunity should be sent to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If applicants do not agree with the way the Department has handled its complaint, they may complain to the [Commonwealth Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman will not usually look into a complaint unless the matter has first been raised directly with the Department.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on:

Phone (Toll free): 1300 362 072  
Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)  
Website: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

### 13.2 Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the Grant Opportunity or Program. There may be a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, if Department staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or applicant or any of the applicant's personnel has a:

- Professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the application Selection Process, such as an Australian Government officer or external advisor;
- Relationship with or interest in an organisation that is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently; or
- Relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain because the organisation receives a grant under the Grant Opportunity.

Applicants will be asked to declare, as part of your application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interests or that, to the best of your knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If applicants later identify an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest, they must inform the Department in writing immediately.

Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Australian [Public Service Code of Conduct \(Section 13\(7\)\)](#) of the [Public Service Act 1999](#). Committee members and other officials including the Decision Maker must also declare any conflicts of interest.

### 13.3 Privacy

We treat applicant's personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#). This includes letting applicants know:

- what personal information we collect;
- why we collect your personal information; and
- who we give your personal information to.

Applicants personal information can only be disclosed to someone else for the primary purpose for which it was collected, unless an exemption applies under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

The Australian Government may use and disclose information about grant applicants and grant recipients under this Grant Opportunity. This includes disclosing grant information on GrantConnect as required for reporting purposes and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.

We may share the information you give us with other Commonwealth entities for purposes including government administration, research or service delivery, according to Australian laws.

As part of your application, you declare your ability to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Australian Privacy Principles and impose the same privacy obligations on officers, employees, agents and subcontractors that you engage to assist with the eligible Grant Activity, in respect of personal information you collect, use, store, or disclose in connection with the Grant Activity. Accordingly, you must not do anything which if done by the Department would breach an [Australian Privacy Principle](#) as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988*.

For further information about our privacy obligations (including in relation to how to access or correct personal information or make a complaint) and our contact details for privacy matters, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

### 13.4 Confidential Information

The Department will treat the applicant's commercially sensitive information provided in the applicant's application as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information (applicant Confidential Information).

The Department's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any applicant Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed;
- disclosed by the Department to its advisers, officers, employees, or other agencies' officers or employees, for the purpose of evaluating the applicant's application and during any Grant Agreement negotiations;
- disclosed by the Department in response to a request by a house or a committee of the Parliament of Australia, or a house or a committee of the Parliament of a state or territory;
- disclosed by the Department to its responsible Minister or the Auditor-General;
- shared by the Commonwealth within the Commonwealth's entity (for example, another Commonwealth agency), where this serves the Commonwealth's legitimate interests;
- disclosed to the Department's officers to enable the effective management or auditing of the Program; or

- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the Department's confidentiality obligation.

The applicant will treat any information provided by the Department as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information. (Commonwealth Confidential Information).

The applicant's confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Commonwealth Confidential Information is:

- authorised or required by law to be disclosed; or
- in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the applicant's confidentiality obligation.

The Department may share with state or territory governments (on a confidential basis) any or all information contained in applications which it considers relevant to the respective jurisdiction based on the location of the Proposed Solution(s), including costings for Proposed Solutions that are not successful in receiving funding through the Program, subject to agreement on confidentiality with applicants.

### 13.5 Intellectual property rights

By submitting an application under the Program, to the extent the applicant's application contains:

- its Intellectual Property; or
- a third party's Intellectual Property,

the applicant grants (or will procure for) the Commonwealth a permanent, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide, non-exclusive licence (including a right of sublicense) to use, reproduce, adapt, and communicate the applicant's Intellectual Property contained in its application under the Program provided the use, reproduction, adaptation, or communication is in connection with any assessment processes under, or the evaluation of, the Program.

Any licence granted to the Commonwealth in relation to Intellectual Property rights does not include a right to exploit the Intellectual Property for commercial purposes.

### 13.6 Freedom of information

All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#) (FOI Act).

The purpose of the FOI Act is to give members of the public rights of access to information held by the Australian Government and its entities. Under the FOI Act, members of the public can seek access to documents held by the Australian Government. This right of access is limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary to protect essential public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

All Freedom of Information requests must be referred to the Freedom of Information Coordinator in writing.

By mail: Freedom of Information Coordinator  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications  
and the Arts

GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: <mailto:FOI@infrastructure.gov.au>

## 14 Consultation

These Guidelines are informed by the submissions received as part of consultation on the draft Guidelines.

## 15 Glossary

Term	Definition
4G	Fourth generation mobile telecommunications service.
5G	Fifth generation mobile telecommunications service.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Active sharing	Arrangements where MNOs share the active layer of mobile network infrastructure to deliver services to a location, including through Radio Access Network Sharing, and/or mobile roaming.
AEDT	Australian Eastern Daylight Time
AC	Alternating Current
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
Asset	"The component of Proposed Solution to be constructed or upgraded at (or in connection to) a site".
<a href="#">Central Australia</a>	<a href="#">As defined at section 5.2</a>
Date of Asset Completion	The date on which the Grantee has delivered the contracted service for a particular Asset.
Backhaul	A link between the core or backbone of a network and sub-networks, transporting data from a series of disparate locations to a more centralised location.
<a href="#">Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines or CGRGs</a>	Guidelines issued by the Finance Minister under section 105C of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> , which establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration.
Commonwealth Official	A Commonwealth representative who is working or consulting on the Program.
Decision Maker	As set out in <a href="#">section 8.4</a> , the Minister for Communications.
DC	Direct Current
DTCS FAD	Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination
Eligible Area	As described in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .

Term	Definition
Eligibility Criteria	The mandatory criteria set out in <a href="#">section 4</a> which applicants must meet in order for their application for the Grant Opportunity to be considered.
Existing Handheld Coverage	Coverage able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device within the applicant's mobile network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>that is currently available;</li> <li>that will be provided by any base station that will be delivered by the applicant under a round of the Mobile Black Spot Program, Peri-Urban Mobile Program or other Commonwealth grant program; or</li> <li>that will be provided by any applicant base station funded under a State or Territory program.</li> </ul>
Fixed-line	A type of internet connection that uses a physical line (including but not limited to fibre, Hybrid Fibre-Coaxial and copper) to provide services to a premises.
Fixed Wireless	A type of internet connection that uses fixed transmission towers or base stations to provide wireless services to a premises via antennas.
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTTP	Fibre to the Premises
Funded Project	A telecommunications infrastructure project found suitable during the assessment process and selected for funding under this Round of the Program.
Funding Strategy	A written plan that outlines the financial capacity of the applicant to deliver a Proposed Solution through the Program.
Grant Activity	All the projects that the Grantee is required to undertake as set out in the Grant Agreement.
Grant Agreement	A document with contractual effect that sets out the relationship between the Grantee and the Commonwealth, and specifies the details of the grant.
<a href="#">GrantConnect</a>	The Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CGRGs.
Grant Opportunity	The Program Grant Opportunity as described in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Grantee	An applicant who has been selected to receive a grant under the Grant Opportunity.



Term	Definition
Guidelines	These Grant Opportunity Guidelines for Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities.
GST	Goods and Service Tax
Ineligible Areas	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Intellectual Property	Includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts);</li> <li>2. all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and</li> <li>3. all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.</li> </ol>
Macrocell	The widest range of cell sizes used in a mobile phone network served by a mobile base station, often used in rural areas and along highways. Macrocells generally provide larger coverage than small cell base stations or microcells, with a typical power output of tens of watts.
Assessment Criteria	The specified principles or standards set out in <a href="#">section 6</a> , against which applications will be judged. The Assessment Criteria will be used to assess the merits of proposals and to determine application rankings.
Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve and extend mobile coverage in regional, rural and remote Australia.
Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
National MNO	An MNO who operates a mobile network that provides mobile coverage to at least 80% of the Australian population.
National Broadband Network (NBN)	The national wholesale-only, open access telecommunications network that is being built by, or in conjunction with, NBN Co (including any existing network incorporated into the NBN).
New Handheld Coverage	Coverage from a Proposed Solution that will be able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device in areas that do not receive Existing Handheld Coverage, in accordance with the meaning given in section 2.2.1.
NCD	Nominated Carrier Declaration
Operational Period	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2.2.3</a> .
Operational Costs (OPEX)	Costs for additional goods or services that are purchased for the ongoing operation of an asset.

Term	Definition
Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve mobile coverage and capacity in peri-urban fringe areas at risk of bushfire and natural disaster.
Program	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2</a> .
Proposed Solution	Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.
Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Regional Connectivity (Round 3) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Public Safety Premises	Places including emergency services facilities (i.e. including ambulance and Rural Fire Service (RFS) depots, hospitals, police facilities, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and related facilities (which may include airstrips).
Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP)	The 4G received signal power in a long-term evolution (LTE) network measured in decibels per milliwatt (dBm).
RRU	Remote Radio Unit
Selection Process	The method used to select Grantees, which will include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria;</li> <li>2. a detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria;</li> <li>3. a Value for Money assessment and consideration of other government priorities; and</li> <li>4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.</li> </ol>
Small Cell	A 'small cell' in a mobile phone network, with a typical range less than two kilometres. Often used to add network capacity in areas of dense population or very remote locations, utilising power control to limit coverage area. These are also known as microcells.
Value for Money	Refers to achieving 'value with relevant money' which is a judgement based on the grant proposal representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public resources and determined from a variety of considerations in accordance with the CGRGs.  When administering a grant opportunity, a Commonwealth Official should consider the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each proposal including, but not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the quality of the project proposal and activities;</li> <li>b. fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to Government objectives;</li> <li>c. that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the applicant's and the Government's objectives being achieved; and</li> <li>d. the applicant's relevant experience and performance history.</li> </ol>
We/us	The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts/or Commonwealth Officials administering the Program.

Term	Definition
WHS	Work Health and Safety

## Attachment A

### A1. Co-location and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Subject to 4.2 above, in addition to any arrangements negotiated with an MNO confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed Solution, each Proposed Solution must offer the option of co-location to other MNOs, or the applicant must provide evidence that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site).

If a Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO other than those already participating or is not capable of supporting co-location, applicants must provide a detailed explanation of why it is not technically feasible to reconfigure the Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution to support an additional MNO at incremental cost to the Co-locating MNO, or why it is not otherwise possible to offer co-location at the site. The Department's technical advisor may review any technical advice from the applicant. If the Department's view is that co-location is technically possible, then the applicant must be prepared to offer the option of co-location at incremental cost to an MNO seeking to co-locate on the Proposed Solution, or the Department may remove the Proposed Solution from the assessment process.

Once an applicant is selected to build a Proposed Solution it must, if other parties express interest, give any other MNO(s) not already participating in the Funded Project the opportunity to co-locate and to participate in the detailed design phase for that Funded Project using the process set out in this paragraph.

- The incremental cost for a Funded Project to support an additional MNO will be provided to the other participating MNOs to allow for greater transparency in co-location negotiations.
- For Funded Project where other MNOs are interested in co-locating, the costs can be shared more broadly and efficiencies achieved if the interested MNOs can participate in the design and build phases, which should ensure that their reasonable specifications are accommodated in the design and construction of the Funded Project. This opportunity relates to all the requirements necessary for co-location to efficiently occur, including (but not limited to) the height and robustness of the Funded Project, as well as site space for housing equipment and providing access to power and Backhaul.
- The Government is supportive of Grantees offering other MNOs the opportunity to co-invest in Funded Project including (but not limited to) provision of Backhaul.

For the purpose of providing the incremental cost of supporting an additional MNO, a Funded Project must meet the following minimum specifications to be considered capable of supporting two or three MNOs:

- The structure is based on one of the following configurations:

Table 4: Minimum specification configurations for co-location of multiple MNOs

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
3 x 1 panel antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2533mm (h) x 353mm (w) x 209mm)	3 x 6 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2680mm (h))	3 x 10 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2688mm (h))

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
(d), Weight 32kg); or equivalent load	x 300mm (w) x 146mm (d), Weight: 39.5kg)	x 349mm (w) x 166mm (d), Weight 36.5kg)
3 x Tower Mounted Amplifiers Dimensions: (457mm (h) x 275mm (w) x 208mm (d), Weight 25kg); or equivalent load	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 150mm (d), Weight 20kg)	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 100mm (d), Weight 13.5kg)
6 x feeders + 300mm cable gantry for monopole structure type sites	6 x combiners (Dimensions: 330mm (h) x 200mm (w) x 130mm (d), Weight 3.2kg)	2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load
2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load	2 x 600mm transmission dishes; or equivalent load	
	Other DC Cables and Junction Boxes	

- There is sufficient mains AC power provision to support the requirements of additional MNO equipment. This requirement does not apply to solar powered sites, however, solar powered sites must have sufficient space for the additional MNO(s) to install additional solar panels.
- There is a communications hut of sufficient size (or space available on the site for further huts) to accommodate additional MNO equipment.
- For macrocell solutions, the Grantee must ensure sufficient space is available to allow any participating MNOs to install auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power in the event of the loss of external power to the site up to the Program's minimum 12 hours standard.

MNOs interested in co-locating on a Funded Project (i.e. the MNO expresses an interest in co-locating on Funded Project after funding has been awarded) will be required to express interest prior to the start of the detailed design stage for that Funded Project. All parties will be required to negotiate in good faith with each other in relation to the Funded Project access and price terms, and enter into commercial arrangements. The capital contribution to be made by the co-locating parties in respect of a Funded Project must, at least, equal the incremental cost incurred by reason of provisioning co-location for that Funded Project.

In accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined at section A3, any disagreements regarding co-location matters will be determined by an independent third party, to be appointed at the MNOs'/MNIPs' shared cost, and in accordance with the dispute resolution process.

Following the process set out above, if it is ascertained that there is no interest in co-location from another MNO, the Grantee will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location.

## A2. Backhaul access and pricing for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Where a Grantee selected to build a Funded Project reaches an agreement under section A.1 for an MNO not already participating in the Funded Project (the Co-locating MNO) to co-locate on the Funded Project, and subject to the microwave backhaul requirements below, the Grantee must offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee is in a position to do so.



The Grantee will be taken to be in a position to offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee owns or controls an optical fibre or microwave link which connects the Funded Project to the Grantee's network.

The price at which the Grantee offers Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO must be more favourable than the regulated prices set under the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination (DTCS FAD), for example, by offering a defined rent-free period or other discounting mechanism.

The ACCC has released the DTCS FAD 2020<sup>11</sup>, including a DTCS pricing calculator that may assist interested parties to calculate the regulated price for Backhaul.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project using an optical fibre connection, it must ensure that it provides sufficient Backhaul capacity, transmission and interfacing equipment to meet the Backhaul requirements of any Co-locating MNO on the Funded Solution.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project using a microwave connection, the Grantee must provide Backhaul services to a Co-locating MNO over that microwave connection, unless:

- the Funded Solution is designed and built to allow the Co-locating MNO to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Project; and
- the Co-locating MNO is permitted to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Project.

The terms and pricing of Backhaul services provided by a Grantee to a Co-locating MNO must be negotiated commercially between the Grantee and Co-locating MNO in accordance with the principles set out in sections A.2.

### **A3. Dispute resolution for Mobile Black Spot Solutions**

Disputes between parties in relation to co-location and Backhaul for a Funded Project will be referred for determination to an independent third party expert, at the parties' own shared cost.

The Grantee and Co-locating MNO will be bound by the determination made by the independent third party expert.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report](http://www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report)

## Attachment B – Northern Territory Government Administrative Regions

