

## Regional Connectivity Program Round 2 Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines

<b>Opening date:</b>	dd mm 2021
<b>Closing date and time:</b>	<b>00.00 AEST on dd mm 2021 (8 weeks after opening)</b>
<b>Commonwealth policy entity:</b>	<b>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications</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>. Questions should be sent no later than two weeks before close.</b>
<b>Date guidelines released:</b>	dd mm 2021
<b>Type of grant opportunity:</b>	<b>Targeted competitive</b>

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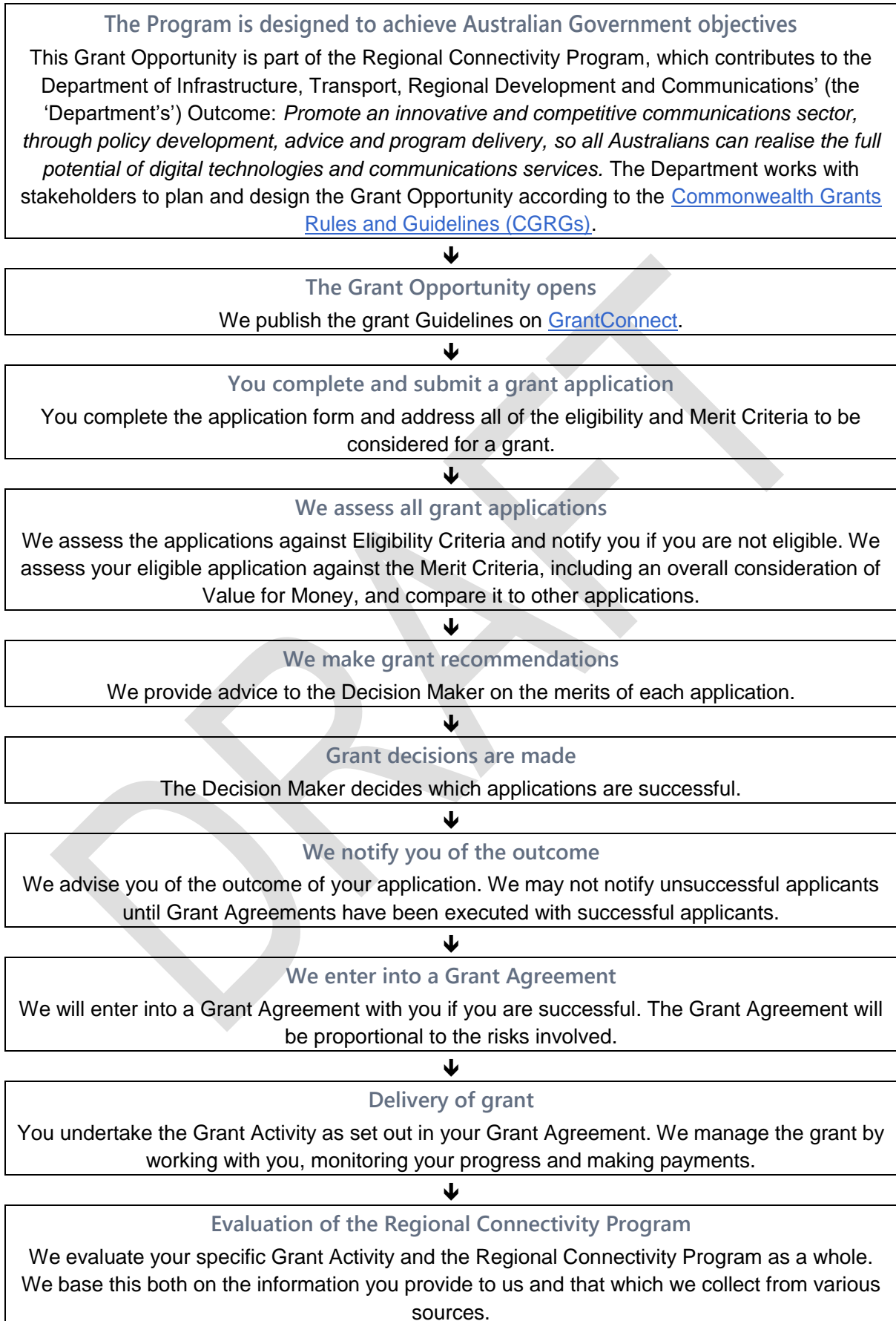
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# 1 Regional Connectivity Program: Round 2 processes



## 2 About the Program

These Grant Opportunity Guidelines ('Guidelines') contain information about Round 2 of the Regional Connectivity Program ('Program') and the Program's Round 2 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 21](#).

### 2.1 About Round 2

The objective of Round 2 of the Program is 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 communities and businesses.

The intended outcomes of Round 2 of the Program are to:

- Provide place-based solutions to regional digital connectivity issues through a range of mobile and/or broadband services; and
- Complement the National Broadband Network, the Mobile Black Spot Program and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

Round 1 of the Program is providing \$117.4 million (GST inclusive) in Commonwealth funding for 132 telecommunications infrastructure projects across Australia, providing regional communities with significant upgrades to voice and data services.

Round 2 of the Program has up to \$112.8 million (GST inclusive) of funding available for a second competitive round of the Program, including dedicated funding of \$46.6 million (GST inclusive) to improve telecommunications infrastructure through the Connecting Northern Australia initiative (CNA initiative). Further information on Round 2 is available on the Department's website at <https://www.communications.gov.au/>.

### 2.2 The Connecting Northern Australia initiative

The CNA initiative was announced in the 2021-22 Budget as part of the [Our North, Our Future: 2021 – 2026](#) white paper. The CNA initiative is providing \$75.3 million (GST inclusive) in dedicated funding to improve telecommunications infrastructure across Northern Australia through the Regional Connectivity Program and the Mobile Black Spot Program.

The CNA initiative will support projects which respond to the specific connectivity needs of rural and remote communities in the north, a vital strategic growth area.

For the purposes of Round 2, Northern Australia is defined as the part of Australia above the Tropic of Capricorn and the whole of the Northern Territory. A detailed map of the eligible area is available on the [Office of Northern Australia's website](#).

There is no separate application process or eligibility criteria to receive funding as part of the CNA initiative. Applications for the Program that provide place-based solutions in Northern Australia will be considered through the Round 2 application process.

## 2.3 The Regional Connectivity Program Round 2 Grant Opportunity

The Program is a place-based program that will give effect to local and national goals through targeted investment in telecommunications infrastructure. It will enable bespoke telecommunications projects to be specifically tailored to the particular economic and/or social requirements of a region.

The Program's Round 2 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 remote areas.

The Round 2 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.

We will publish the opening and closing dates and any other relevant information 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.

We administer the Grant Opportunity according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#) (CGRGs)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.3.1 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. For broadband access technologies, a like-for-like technology such as a Fixed Wireless service 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.

### 2.3.2 Financial co-contribution

All projects will be expected to leverage a substantial financial (cash) co-contribution to the capital costs of building or installing each Funded Project. To increase the reach of the Program, **applicants are encouraged to seek financial co-contributions 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/internet/regional-connectivity-program](http://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/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 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.

### **2.3.3 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 Solution is a priority for the local community.** 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 and 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-controlled 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.

### **2.3.4 Operational period**

All Funded Projects should provide retail services for a minimum period of seven (7) years after the Asset has become operational.

### **2.3.5 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. 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 or local governments).

## 3 Grant amount and grant period

### 3.1 Grants available

The Australian Government is providing up to a total of \$112.8 million (GST inclusive) of funding for a second competitive round of the Program, including dedicated funding of \$46.6 million (GST inclusive) to improve telecommunications infrastructure in Northern Australia.

The Grant period will run from xx xx 2022 to 30 June 2023. Grantees will be required to provide retail services from the Funded Project for the Operational Period as identified in [section 3.2](#) 'Project Period' of these Guidelines.

- There is no minimum grant amount
- There is no maximum grant amount, but total Round 2 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds, being up to \$112.8 million (GST inclusive).
- There is no maximum grant amount for the CNA initiative, but total Round 2 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

We will group all eligible applications into three categories 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.

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

### 3.2 Project period

You must complete all of your Funded Projects by 30 June 2023. Grantees will be required to maintain the services for an Operational Period of seven (7) years following the Date of Asset Completion 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?

To be eligible 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>4</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.

## 5 What the grant money can be used for

### 5.1 Eligible grant activities

To be eligible your Proposed Solution must:

- improve access to mobile and/or broadband services in Eligible Areas of high economic, social, or public safety significance
- provide place-based telecommunications solutions to regional digital connectivity issues
- deliver new infrastructure or the upgrade or improvement of existing infrastructure
- not overbuild a like-for-like service, such as Fixed Wireless where there is an existing Fixed Wireless service (similarly for 4G mobile services), 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;
- 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 2025; and
- for mobile 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.

### 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.

Eligible areas for funding as part of the CNA initiative include the part of Australia above the Tropic of Capricorn and the whole of the Northern Territory.

Ineligible Areas are:

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<sup>4</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 [section 7.3](#) 'Joint (consortia) Applications'.

- 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>5</sup>. The Department will provide map overlays showing Ineligible Areas on request; and
- 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).

### 5.3 Eligible expenditure

You can only spend the grant on eligible expenditure you have incurred on an agreed 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.

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.

### 5.4 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 2025.

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

Applications will need to address **at least one of**:

1. Merit Criterion one (economic benefits)
2. Merit Criterion two (social benefits)

AND both of:

3. Merit Criterion three (competition, capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project)
4. Merit Criterion four (co-contribution).

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<sup>5</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.

You may still respond to both of criterion one and two and the aggregate score will be used when considering your application. Your application may be at a relative advantage if you respond to both criterion one **and** criterion two. 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.

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](#) for more information).

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.

## 6.1 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.

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. whether the Proposed Solution provides an innovative approach to improve productivity, efficiency or addresses an identified problem; and/or
- d. 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.

## 6.2 Merit Criteria 2 – Social Benefit

### 6.2.1 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.

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 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 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.

### **6.3 Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery**

#### **6.3.1 Competition, 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. This should include evidence of sound project planning to manage and monitor the project covering scope, implementation methodology, timeframes, budget and risk;
- your readiness to commence the project including availability of key personnel, equipment and finance;
- 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; and
- the extent to which the Proposed Solution facilitates retail competition.

### **6.4 Merit Criterion 4 – Financial Co-contributions**

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

You should demonstrate this through identifying the total investment the grant will leverage.

### **6.5 Value for Money and government priorities**

In addition to the four 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
- merit of the project proposal and activities
- extent to which the proposal would contribute to the Program objectives, including addressing an identified local priority or government priority
- ability to meet the needs of end users over the Operational Period
- forecast benefits of the Proposed Solution
- the need to ensure an appropriate spread of project types and Eligible Areas
- the extent to which the project leverages additional partnerships; and
- any in-kind contributions.

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 Northern Australia in recognition of the dedicated funding available through the CNA initiative. 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.

## 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>6</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	dd mm 2021
Applications close	00.00pm AEST dd mm 2021
Announcement on Round 2 Applications	dd mm 2022
Commencement date of Grant Activity	From dd mm 2022
End date of Grant Activity	dd mm 2023
End date of Asset Operational Period	7 years from asset completion

### 7.1 Completing and lodging an application

Your application must provide:

- The location of the project and all Assets.
- 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).

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<sup>6</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.

- The amount of any of co-contributions (GST Inclusive) to be received from third parties, including but not limited to state, territory or local governments, local communities, or NBN Co 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 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.

Subject to [section 8.3](#), 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 2025.

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 outlined in [section 7.4](#).

Applications via post are to be addressed and delivered to:

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

Applications via hand delivery are to be addressed and delivered to:

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

## **7.2 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 6.4](#) 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 seven (7) years
- 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.

### **7.3 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.

### **7.4 Closing date for funding applications**

The closing date for submitting an application for funding under this Grant Opportunity is 5pm (Canberra Time) dd mm 2021.

### **7.5 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.



## 7.6 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 6.5](#)
4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.

We will group all eligible applications in 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 funding as part of the CNA initiative.

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.

## 8.2 Who will assess applications?

An 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 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.

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

## 8.3 Who will approve grants?

The Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education (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 14](#).

## 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 14 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 is at Appendix A. 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.

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 Proposed Solutions 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.

#### 10.1.1 Standard Grant Agreement

We will use a standard Grant Agreement for Regional Connectivity Program projects. A sample Grant Agreement is at Appendix A [to be provided with final guidelines].

### 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>7</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.

### **10.3 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.

### **10.4 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.

### **10.5 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.

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<sup>7</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.

## **10.6 Grants payments and GST**

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

## **11 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](#).

## **12 How we monitor your grant activity**

### **12.1 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.

### **12.2 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 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.

### **12.3 Asset completion report**

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

## **12.4 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.

## **12.5 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.

## **12.6 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.

## **12.7 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.

## **12.8 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'.

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.'

# **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.

# **14 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)

## 15 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.

## 16 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](#).

## 17 Confidential Information

Other 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.

## 18 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.

## 19 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 and  
Communications  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: [foi@communications.gov.au](mailto:foi@communications.gov.au)

## 20 Consultation

These Guidelines are informed by the submissions received as part of consultation on the Regional Connectivity Program discussion paper and draft Guidelines.

## 21 Glossary

Term	Definition
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 agreed service for a particular Asset.
<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.



Term	Definition
Commonwealth Official	A Commonwealth representative who is working or consulting on the Regional Connectivity Program.
Decision Maker	As set out in <a href="#">section 8.3</a> , the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government.
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.
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 selected for funding under 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	The project 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 Regional Connectivity Program Grant Opportunity as described in <a href="#">section 2.3</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	<p>Includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts);</li> <li>b. all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and</li> </ol> <p>all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.</p>
Merit Criteria	<p>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.</p>
Mobile Black Spot Program	<p>An Australian Government initiative to improve and extend mobile coverage in regional, rural and remote Australia.</p>
National Broadband Network (NBN)	<p>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).</p>
Operational Period	<p>Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 3.2</a>.</p>
Program	<p>Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2</a>.</p>
Proposed Solution	<p>Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.</p>
Public Safety Premises	<p>Places including emergency services facilities (i.e. including ambulance and RFS depots, hospitals, police facilities, RFDS and related facilities (which may include airstrips).</p>
Selection Process	<p>The method used to select Grantees, which will include:</p> <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>
1. 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> <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>

Term	Definition
We/us	The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and/or Commonwealth Officials administering the Regional Connectivity Program.

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