



ACT
Government

2025-26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Grant Program

Cultural, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grant Guidelines

Applications open: 12 noon Tuesday 16 December 2025

Applications close: 3 pm Thursday 19 February 2026

Accessibility Information

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- If English is not your first language and you require the **translating and interpreting services** – please telephone **13 14 50**.
- If you are d/Deaf or find it hard to hear or speak to hearing people on the phone, visit the **National Relay Service (NRS)** at www.accesshub.gov.au

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2025-26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Grant Program

1 Introduction

The Health and Community Services Directorate is pleased to announce the opening of the 2025-26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Grant Program (the Grants or the Grant Program) which seeks to address priority areas of the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028* (The ACT Agreement). These guidelines provide information on the objectives of the grant program, and how individuals and organisations can apply.

Successful applications will contribute to the objectives of the ACT Agreement, specifically, the priority areas under the remit of the ACT Government's Health and Community Services Directorate, i.e.: *Cultural Integrity, Connecting Community, Community Leadership, and Lifelong Learning*. The ACT Agreement is the key framework that guides the delivery of equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT and surrounding region. For more information, please see the ACT Agreement at: [ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement](#)

2 Aim

The aim of this program is to increase initiatives in the ACT and surrounding region that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, Community, Leadership and Lifelong Learning, and as a result:

1. **Increased value for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures in the ACT**

- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can celebrate, share, and preserve the world's oldest living cultures, and
- where, as a society, we can increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to build a respectful and fair community that is free of racism and discrimination.

2. **Connected Communities**

- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members are connected to strong families and social support networks, and
- where social inclusion is enhanced, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are experiencing positive generational experiences.

3. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership**

- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a strong voice, are decision makers on issues that impact them, and lead in the achievement of positive life outcomes.

4. **Increased uptake of Lifelong Learning**

- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are building confidence, capability, and general wellbeing through personal growth, fulfilment, self-efficacy, and self-determination, and
- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered through advanced knowledge, skills, expertise, leadership, and an ability to influence.

By funding the community directly to undertake initiatives important to them, the program delivers on the ACT Government’s commitment to provide “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the ability and resources to exercise self-determination over their own solutions”.

3 Government objectives

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

This grant program aligns with the ACT Government’s commitment to Closing the Gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also supports the priorities outlined in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreements 2018-2029.

ACT Health and Wellbeing

Projects and initiatives must demonstrate how they address any of the ACT Health and Wellbeing Framework outcomes.

For more information, visit the [ACT Wellbeing Framework website](#). In particular, this program directly supports the following key priorities of the framework:

- **Lifelong Learning: Learning for life**, for example, post-school education which contributes to overall wellbeing and life satisfaction,
- **identity and belonging**, including belonging to the local area and local communities, particularly those with a lower sense of belonging, such as those that identify as LGBTIQ+, and those living with a disability.
- **Social connection**, including overcoming social isolation and loneliness.

4 Eligibility requirements

Who can apply?

- Individuals
- Organisations
- Partnerships or collaborations.

Profit making businesses and groups, education institutions, government entities and registered political parties are not eligible to apply.

Eligible applicants can only apply once in the 2025-26 round but can apply in both categories.

Applicants must have no overdue acquittal obligations for any previous Health and Community Services Directorate grants. **All overdue acquittals must be completed prior to submitting an application.**

Individual eligibility requirements

Individuals can apply if they:

- Are an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person
- Are over the age of 18 years old
- Reside in the ACT or connecting regions. For the purpose of these grants, the ACT and connecting region includes the following the Australian Capital Territory and the New South Wales Member Councils:
 - ACT
 - Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council
 - Yass Valley Council
 - Snowy Monaro Regional Council
 - Upper Lachlan Shire Council
- Have not received funding from another source to deliver or provide the same or similar project/program
- Have no overdue acquittal obligations for any previous Health and Community Services Directorate grant. All overdue acquittals must be completed prior to submitting an application.
- Have appropriate insurance (public liability, professional indemnity or other appropriate insurance) to undertake the activity or event. Evidence will be required prior to receiving the grant funding.

Documentation Required:

Proof of Age: *ACT Drivers Licence, or proof of identity card*

Proof of Residency: *ACT or NSW Drivers Licence, utility bill, showing an address in the ACT or eligible region.*

Appropriate Insurances (if applicable): *(public liability, professional indemnity or other appropriate insurance) to undertake the activity or event*

Proof of Aboriginality:

Applicants will be asked to provide confirmation of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity as a requirement of grant eligibility criteria

Determination of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural identity is confirmed by a person meeting the following criteria:

- Being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent;
- Identifying as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person; and

- Are accepted as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent in the community where they currently or have previously lived.

Applicants may submit one or more of the below methods of confirmation:

- Confirmation of Aboriginality (COA) – This is a document issued by a registered Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) in accordance with the legal definition.
- Letter of recognition from a registered ACCO identifying that the person is known and accepted as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.
- Letter from a recognised Elder who has relevant cultural authority, that identifies that the person is known and accepted by the community as an Aboriginal person.
 - Communal recognition as an Elder, generally through a registered ACCO, will be considered in determining the relevance of the claims in line with the grant requirements.

(Note that an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander officer within the ACT Government must also meet this criterion to make an informed and culturally appropriate determination).

Organisation eligibility requirements

Organisations can apply if they:

- Are a non-government, legally incorporated entity, or support by an incorporated auspicing organisation
- Are a registered not-for-profit or a charitable organisation
- Are an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) – OR - if they are not an ACCO, can demonstrate how their project/activity is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-led
- Demonstrate that the program, project, or activity will be of benefit to ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- Demonstrate a strong connection the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community
- Have no overdue acquittal obligations for any previous Health and Community Services Directorate grant. **All overdue acquittals must be completed prior to applying**
- Have not received funding from another source to deliver or provide the same or similar project/program
- Have an appropriate insurance cover held by the organisation implementing a funded project. This may include Public Liability of no less than \$10 million, Personal Accident, Volunteer Cover and or Directors Professional Indemnity. Evidence of insurance may be required as a condition of the grant.

Unincorporated community groups may be eligible to apply through an auspicing entity. For more information refer to 'Auspicing arrangements' section.

Partnerships and consortiums

Projects that involve more than one group or organisation may apply as a partnership or consortium. In such instances the following is required:

- List the roles and responsibilities of each group or organisation
- Clarify who will take the lead, lodge the application, and submit the final acquittal
- Identify the financial contribution each is making to the project.

Auspecting arrangements

If you are a community group or organisation that is not legally incorporated (unincorporated) then you may ask an incorporated association to auspice an application on your behalf.

An auspecting body is an organisation that accepts the legal responsibility including financial accountability for a project. If your organisation is not a legal entity, you will need to arrange for an organisation that has legal status to act as an auspecting body.

The auspecting organisation must provide a letter of support with the application stating they will:

- Be the applicant for this grant funding and if successful contract directly with the Health and Community Services Directorate for the receipt of grant funding, and comply with all grant funding contractual obligations, including the provision of financial acquittal documentation.
- Be the entity that will accept the grant funding for the project and administer the funding in accordance with the Grant Guidelines and Letter of Offer.
- Disburse grant funding to the auspected party in accordance with the Grant Guidelines and Letter of Offer. This includes providing the whole grant amount to the auspected party in a reasonable timeframe.

Funding cannot be used for

The following will not be funded:

- Projects that do not contribute to or meet the priority areas of this program
- Projects that are not delivered primarily within the ACT or do not benefit the ACT community
- General administration and operational costs such as salaries, communication and IT, stationery, rent, leasing, or utilities
- Costs of projects or activities that have already taken place, or item already purchased.
- Operational insurance costs specific to the project.
- Debt repayments of any kind, including personal loans, or HECS-HELP debt.

- Projects or activities already funded by the ACT Government or Australian Government or are better suited to other available funding opportunities or incentives.
- Travel or accommodation costs not specifically associated with the project.
- Prizes or gifts
- Private events such as parties, and private celebrations
- Activities that contain content that may offend or bring into disrepute the applicant organisation, the Health and Community Services Directorate and/or the ACT Government
- Activities that do not comply with public safety requirements or meet relevant Australian Government legislative requirements
- Projects or activities which are deemed to be inappropriate or offensive.

5 Funding categories

The 2025-26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program has 3 specific funding categories.

Cultural, Leadership and Lifelong Learning, and Social Participation Grants.

The total funding available under the Cultural, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grants is \$166,700.

If the full amount of \$166,700 is not expended on Cultural, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grants, it may be allocated to applications under the Social Participation grants.

As there are no goods or services being exchanged, and the grant is intended as a contribution towards your identified project, activity or initiative, GST is not applicable to grant payments.

Cultural Grants – <https://dhcs.smartygrants.com.au/2526ACG>

Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grants – <https://dhcs.smartygrants.com.au/2526ALG>

Eligible applicants may apply once under each category.

Funding availability for each of the specific funding categories is outlined here:

Cultural Grants

The maximum grant an individual can apply for is \$5,000.

The maximum grant an organisation can apply for is \$10,000.

Projects, activities or initiatives in this category can be aimed at any of the following:

Community Awareness

These are activities or projects within the ACT that promote wider community awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Collaboration and Connection

These are activities, programs, or projects within the ACT and/or for the benefit of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that promote social and cultural connection.

Cultural Milestones

These are activities, programs or projects that mark significant cultural milestones or celebrations within the ACT such as but not limited to – National Sorry Day, Mabo Day, or NAIDOC Week.

Cultural practices

These are activities that seek to maintain and/or restore cultural practices, such as performances activities, programs, or projects within the ACT, or benefitting the ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.

Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grants

The maximum grant that an individual can apply for is \$5,000.

The maximum grant an organisation can apply for is \$10,000.

Individuals applying in this category can apply to fund IT equipment to support adult learning up to a threshold of \$1,000. Applications for IT equipment will not be considered if the applicant has received IT funding in the grant rounds in the previous 2 years (2024 & 2025). Applications from organisations for IT equipment will not be supported.

You will need evidence of your grant activity to complete the application form. This can take the form of:

- Excerpt or screenshot from a website showing current pricing
- Letter or email from the organisation offering the activity confirming costs
- Invoice or quote from the provider
- Flyer or brochure with pricing details

Projects, activities or initiatives in this category can be aimed at any of the following:

Leadership

This includes learning activities that encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals or Community Organisations to enhance their leadership skills and abilities to lead, engage, and influence on behalf of their communities and/or organisations. This also may include learning activities that support and/or strengthen the governance of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisation. Examples may include attendance at educational programs, seminars, conferences, professional and personal development opportunities, cultural leadership programs, mentoring, coaching, board readiness training, youth leadership activities, community advocacy workshops, Elder and inter-generational learning opportunities.

Lifelong Learning

This includes activities that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, at all stages of their life, to engage in learning activities that support the development of their knowledge, skills, expertise, capabilities, personal growth, confidence, and/or self-efficacy. This may include creative and cultural skills development, digital literacy and technology training, healing and wellbeing programs, learning languages, financial and legal literacy, and business skills.

6 Assessment of applications

When your application is received it will be checked against these grant guidelines to ensure eligibility for funding.

Assessment process

Following the eligibility check, a Grant Assessment Team will assess all eligible applications. The Grant Assessment Team will be made up of a chairperson and 2 other assessors. Grant Assessment Team members will be appointed based on their knowledge of the issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Grant Assessment Team members will use the information provided in your application to assess the applications submitted against the grant's selection criteria. If you have been successful in other recent grant rounds, the assessors may also take this into consideration during their assessment considering the high number of applications received to ensure fairness across all applicants.

All decisions on whether to award a grant, or on the amount of any grant, are at the sole discretion of the Health and Community Services Directorate.

Assessment criteria for applications

Cultural, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grants

All eligible applications for the Cultural, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grants will be competitively assessed and prioritised by the Grant Assessment Team against the following criteria:

- **Capacity:** The proposal demonstrates that the individual or organisation has the capacity to manage the funding and deliver or complete the initiative, project, or activity.

For Individuals applying, you may want to describe any skills, knowledge, experience, or connections that will help you to share your culture with the community. For Organisations, you may want to describe if you have dedicated staff with the skills, experience, and time to manage the activity, any existing connections with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and plans for continued engagement with the community to delivery culturally- appropriate services.

- **Outcomes:** The proposal demonstrates a clear outcome for the initiative, project, or activity.

You may want to describe the benefits that this initiative, project, or activity will have on your life, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and how that contributes to the Agreement Core Focus Area of Cultural Integrity.

- **Need:** The proposal demonstrates the current need in the community for this initiative, project, or activity.

You may like to describe why you need this grant. Also consider what would happen if you didn't receive a grant now, or in the future. Also, what are the expected long-term benefits of this activity on your life, the lives of your family or those you provide services to and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community.

- **Budget:** The proposal has a realistic budget which demonstrates value for money.

Your budget should be broken down to show what the grant funding will be spent on and supported by things like quotes, links to websites etc to demonstrate the costs.

A budget is an estimate of income and expenditure required to complete your chosen activity. You will need to provide a budget with your application. This needs to show the funding breakdown for different items.

In some cases, due to the high demand for grants only partial funding can be offered. Therefore, you will need to consider if you can proceed with your project if only part-funding is available.

If you have applied for another grant for this same project, please ensure this is explained in your application.

Late applications will not be accepted.

Notification of outcome

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their applications in writing via email.

The Health and Community Services Directorate expects to notify applicants of the outcome of their applications in May 2026. Please ensure that this timeframe is taken into consideration when planning your projects. Between the grant round closing, and receiving your outcome letters, applicants may not hear anything from the CSD Grants team.

Unfortunately, not all applications can be funded as there are usually more applications received than funds available. This does not necessarily mean that the application is not worthy. It is more likely that other applications were ranked higher in the assessment process.

If you would like feedback on your application, please see the 'Application Feedback' section.

7 Accepting a grant

Grant Agreement

Successful applicants will be required to enter into an Agreement. This will be via a Letter of Offer with the Health and Community Service Directorate for which grant funding will be provided. The Letter of Offer will include:

- How to accept an offer
- Detail on the grant amount to be funded
- Detail the purpose or activity for which the grant is given
- The term of your funded activity for which the grant amount must be fully expended
- How to acquit your grant funds when the project has been completed.

The ACT Government does not carry any responsibility for the activity undertaken by grant recipients.

Funds must be spent only on items and activities listed in your application. The Letter of Offer may have conditions of what the funding can and cannot be spent on.

Changes to project

A grant is funded based on the details of your application only. If something changes due to unexpected circumstances, you must first obtain written approval from the Health and Community Services Directorate. Your request to change the activity will be reviewed by the Delegate and you will be advised in writing if the request is approved or declined. Failure to seek approval to change the purpose can result in non-conformance and may result in you having to return the full grant amount that was paid by the Health and Community Services Directorate.

Acknowledging support

Grant Recipients must ensure the assistance provided by the ACT Government is appropriately acknowledged in any promotional or other materials. The ACT Government's Branding Guidelines and "Supported By" logo are accessible at:

<https://www.act.gov.au/act-government/communications/design-and-brand-guidelines>

Grant and project promotion

The names, project descriptions and funding amounts of all successful applicants will be posted on the ACT Government Grants website following completion of the grants process. By accepting a grant, you agree to this and to the ACT Government Media team contacting you to discuss publishing a story on how the grant was used.

If you do not want your name published, or to be contacted by the ACT Government Media Team, please let the CSD Grants Team know when you accept your grant.

8 Acquittal and reporting requirements

All successful applicants must expend the funds within the timeframes nominated in the Letter of Offer.

An acquittal is a signed declaration, submitted at the end of the activity, stating that funding was used for the agreed purpose. This includes providing copies of receipts as proof of expenditure.

Acquittal process

The acquittal of the grant must be submitted through SmartyGrants at:

<http://dhcs.SmartyGrants.com.au/applicant>

Instructions will be provided to successful applicants in their Letter of Offer. You will need to log in using the same identification details you used to submit the application. Please keep this in a safe place.

The funds must be expended in accordance with the activity/project outlined in the grant application and in the Letter of Offer. All receipts must be kept and submitted with the acquittal.

As part of your acquittal, you will be asked to briefly outline who was supported by your program and highlight any key successes or outcomes.

Unspent funds

Any unspent funds from your grant must be returned to Health and Community Services Directorate. Please email the CSD Grants team at HCSGrants@act.gov.au to advise of any unspent funds.

Please note: *To be eligible for funding in any future Health and Community Services Directorate grants rounds, applicants must meet all acquittal requirements.*

9 Application submission

Online Application Form

Now that you have read the Grant Guidelines, this section explains how to submit your application on SmartyGrants. All applications must be submitted via the online application form at:

Cultural Grants – link to application form (<https://dhcs.smartygrants.com.au/2526ACG>)

Leadership and Lifelong Learning Grants – link to application form (<https://dhcs.smartygrants.com.au/2526ALG>)

All applications must be submitted online. Hardcopy or email applications will not be accepted.

If you require assistance to complete your application please contact the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs team via email to OATSIA.Grants@act.gov.au

Start early – the process of preparing a grant application depends on how well you have planned the activity for which you are applying. You can start this process long before you start and submit an application.

If you have never prepared a proposal or written a grant application, we suggest you take some time to understand the process and reach out for assistance if you need it. You will find lots of tips on the SmartyGrants website –

<http://help.smartygrants.com.au/display/help/Help+Guide+for+Applicants>

Start gathering your support materials. These might be quotes, or website details. You can never have enough evidence to support an application, so long as it is relevant to the activity to be funded.

Create login

You will need to create a login to begin your application, and you may begin anywhere in the application form. Please make sure you save as you go.

Navigating form

On the right-hand side of every screen, there is a box which links directly to every page of the application. Click on any page to jump directly to that page. You can also click 'next page' or 'previous page' on the top or bottom of each page to move forward or backward through the application.

Saving draft

You can press 'save' at any point and log out. When you log back in, your draft application will be saved, and you can start where you left off.

Submitting application

The submit button is on the final page. You will not be able to submit your application until all the questions are completed. Once your application has been submitted, you cannot make further changes to it.

Supporting documentation

All applicants must provide supporting documentation at the time of submission.

If your application does not include all the required documentation, it may be deemed ineligible.

SmartyGrants provides an online help guide for applicants. This guide will explain the essential steps you need to take to complete and submit your form. The help guide is accessible at:

<http://help.smartygrants.com.au/display/help/Help+Guide+for+Applicants>

Correct contact details

Please make sure that the contact details listed in your application form are correct. The Health and Community Services Directorate will use this information for all correspondence relating to your application.

Completing application as a group/team

Several people can work on an application using the same login details provided that only 1 person is working on the application at any given time. Please ensure you save as you go.

Save application

It is recommended that you keep a copy of your application for your records as well as your application ID number (e.g., 2526ACGxx or 2526ALGxx). You can print a copy of your completed online application or save it as a PDF.

10 Application feedback

Providing feedback

Applicants are encouraged to complete the feedback questions at the end of the application form. This feedback assists to improve grant programs, processes, and service delivery. You can also email feedback to the CSD Grants team at HCSDDGrants@act.gov.au.

Requesting feedback

The Health and Community Services Directorate supports your right to ask questions about the grant application process. If your application has not been successful, email the CSD Grants team at HCSDDGrants@act.gov.au, quoting your application ID number and outlining your specific concerns. The Health and Community Services Directorate will provide a response as soon as possible.

This information also assists to improve grant programs, processes, and service delivery.