

Disability Advocacy Futures Program: 2026 Grant Stream 2 – Thriving Kids

Grant Guidelines

October 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this document.

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Grant Guidelines

Disability Advocacy Futures Program 2026 Grant Stream 2 – Thriving Kids

The Disability Advocacy Futures Program: **2026 Grant Stream 2 - Thriving Kids Grant Guidelines** contain information to assist potential applicants to complete the application.

It includes an overview of the Thriving Kids grants, information about the application process, eligibility and assessment criteria, how the funds can and cannot be used, and reporting requirements.

It is recommended that these guidelines are read prior to completing your application for the grant.

1 Overview of DAFP 2026 Grant Stream 2 – Thriving Kids

In NSW, approximately 1.5 million people live with disability. Of those, approximately 13% are eligible for services and supports under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Disability Advocacy Futures Program (DAFP) commenced on 1 January 2022 to provide targeted funding to organisations to deliver individual, systemic, and representative advocacy to support all people with disability in NSW to access NSW Government funded and delivered services, regardless of whether or not they are NDIS participants.

The DAFP 2026 Grant Stream 2 - Thriving Kids grant round will focus on improving outcomes for children aged 0 to 8 years with developmental delay and/or autism, and their families, carers and kin. The grant round will support initiatives that promote early intervention, prevention and community-based supports, helping children to thrive in their families, communities and everyday environments.

The grant round aims to create stronger pathways for children and families to access the supports they need, when they need them, and to build more connected, responsive and sustainable community support systems across NSW.

As a result of the new Thriving Kids program a new cohort of people may need assistance to access and navigate NSW government and mainstream services in a safe and supported way.

The DAFP grants include targeted, one-off funding for organisations to deliver projects that:

- support parents, families and kin of children with disability in NSW to navigate services and access appropriate supports
 - strengthen the capacity of not-for-profit organisations to drive long-term social change for people and / or children with disability
 - enable policy advocacy organisations, led by or operating on behalf of people with disability, to collaborate with government on the development of effective disability policy.
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1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the **DAFP: 2026 Grant Stream 2 - Thriving Kids** is to fund initiatives to support significant pieces of work that further the advocacy, and information priorities of children 0-8 years with developmental delay and / or autism, with low to moderate support needs, and for their families, carers and kin in NSW.

Provision of information and advocacy support will ensure that families of children 0 to 8 years can access available Thriving Kids services being introduced across NSW.

This round acknowledges that families, carers and kin need information and reassurance that they will be adequately supported when seeking to access Thriving Kids services, and they will have sufficient information to plan and make informed choices. It may include developing community awareness of developmental literacy and other milestones and Aboriginal family awareness activities, multicultural community engagement and regional community outreach.

A list compiled by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice of the current priority areas and potential project topics is included below in section 1.7, however, this list contains examples and projects are not limited to these. Additional areas would be assessed on merit.

1.2 Objectives and outcomes

Grant applications must demonstrate how the proposed project will contribute to the development of the NSW disability advocacy sector and assist people with disability, including children aged 0-8 years with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs, and their families, carers and kin, to actively engage in their communities and access NSW Government and mainstream services by addressing at least one of the program objectives below.

There are four key objectives:

- increase the availability of advocacy supports to assist children aged 0-8 years with developmental delay and/or autism and their families, carers and kin, to access information, engage with services and supports, and participate in their communities in an informed and empowered way.
- further develop the NSW disability advocacy and service sector through quality improvement, collaboration and innovation, and initiatives that build the capacity of individuals, families, carers and kin to self-advocate.
- build stronger networks, partnerships and learning opportunities across the NSW disability advocacy sector, including initiatives that strengthen linkages between advocacy, early childhood, health, education and community services.
- support people and / or children with disability and their families, carers and kin to respond and adapt to key policy reforms at a state and national level by developing their self-advocacy capacity, access to information and broad advocacy supports.

1.3 Target group

The **DAFP: 2026 Grant Stream 2 - Thriving Kids** grant funding focuses on **organisations that support children 0-8 years with developmental delay and / or autism**, with low to moderate support needs, and for their families, carers and kin who need support to access NSW Government funded or provided services and support and their families, carers and kin in adapting and adopting disability reforms such as those identified in and highlighted in section 1.7 below.

1.4 Eligibility Criteria

All applicants are required to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- be able to enter into a grant funding agreement with Department of Communities and Justice
- have an Australian bank account
- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)
- have appropriate insurance; this must include but is not limited to a minimum of \$10 million Public Liability Insurance

- address the NSW National Redress Scheme sanctions (section 1.11)
- be an eligible legal entity with an established presence and location in NSW, including:
 - o Local Government organisations, including:
 - NSW local councils operating under the Local Government Act 1993 (LG Act)
 - Joint Organisations (s4000 of the LG Act)
 - County Councils (s383 of the LG Act)
 - Regional Organisations of Councils (which are voluntary groupings of councils).
 - o Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) – these Applicants will be required to provide documentation to support their ACCO status
 - o Incorporated organisation registered and approved as a not-for-profit body by NSW Fair Trading. Not-for-profit organisations will be considered eligible, if they are:
 - incorporated organisations that are registered and approved as not-for-profit bodies by NSW Fair Trading
 - not-for profit companies limited by guarantee, registered in NSW (must have ACNC registration and/or DGR status)
 - Indigenous Corporations (must be registered with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations)
 - NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils
 - religious organisations operating in NSW
 - NSW non-government organisations established under their own Act of Parliament.

1.5 Ineligible applicants

You are not eligible if you are:

- An individual
- Federal and State Government agencies and bodies
- NSW educational facility (public schools, private schools, TAFE)
- For-profit organisation, including Aboriginal businesses
- Unincorporated organisations or groups, unless subcontracted by an eligible organisation
- Organisations that has not met project requirements, including acquittal and reporting, for funding received from NSW Department of Communities and Justice in the previous two years.
- Organisations with Redress Obligations under the National Redress Scheme that have not joined the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse
- An organisation that has overdue acquittals with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- Without appropriate insurance; this must include but is not limited to a minimum of \$10 million Public Liability Insurance.

1.6 Assessment Criteria

Eligible organisations must meet the following assessment criteria to be considered for funding:

- 1) **Demonstrated understanding of and commitment to the provision of advocacy and information supports for children 0-8 years with developmental delay and / or autism, with low to moderate support needs, their families, carers and kin in NSW, and organisational experience that is relevant to the proposed project.**

Your response to this criterion must:

- demonstrate the history, commitment and experience of your organisation in delivering similar projects to that proposed or your capacity to deliver a new project:
 - o identify the resources, networks and community links that will support the successful implementation of the project
 - o identify the expected outcomes of the project and long-term sustainability and impacts of the project.

- 2) **Demonstrated ability to meet the grant objectives and outcomes.**

Your response to this criterion must:

- detail how your delivery of this Grant Program will:
 - o ensure quality, positive and sustainable outcomes for children 0-8 with developmental delay and / or autism, with low to moderate support needs and their supporters to actively engage in advocacy in their communities in a more informed and empowered way or,
 - o drive quality improvement, collaboration and innovation among advocacy organisations, and to build stronger networks and learning opportunities.
 - o explain how the Grant Program outcomes will be measured, specifically how quality outcomes will be met and monitored.

- 3) **Demonstrated value for money and capacity to deliver projects/activities for the target group(s).**

Your response to this criterion must:

- provide a detailed description of your business framework, model of service delivery and processes involved in providing the service
- explain and include examples of the activities and programs established to address the need of your target group
- outline your target group
- provide a proposed timeline of delivery of your project
- explain why your model of delivery requires the level of funding requested.

- 4) **Demonstrated experience working with the target group(s) and ability to collaborate and consult with relevant stakeholders.**

Your response to this criterion must:

- discuss your experience in delivering services to the target cohort or capacity and experience to carry out the work proposed.
- detail the existing stakeholders and any partnership relationships which will assist to deliver the proposed initiative

- detail community links and engagement with relevant stakeholders (including government and non-government organisations).

1.7 Prioritisation

The NSW Disability Inclusion Plan outlines the following as priority disability population groups:

- children with disability and their carers/families/kin
- Aboriginal people with disability
- people with disability from people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- people with disability identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or asexual (LGBTIQA+)
- people with disability in isolated locations and in rural, regional and remote areas.

The NSW Government is progressing a range of disability reforms in collaboration with the Commonwealth and as a response to Disability Royal Commission recommendations.

It has been identified that children 0-8 with developmental delay and / or autism, with low to moderate support needs, their family, carer or kin can be supported to access the benefit of these reforms through advocacy supports specifically targeted to their needs.

A range of focus areas has been identified and listed below. This is not an exhaustive list of potential areas for the **DAFP 2026 Grant Stream 2 - Thriving Kids** projects but is provided to guide applicants on the types of projects that this grant round is looking to progress.

Identified priority areas include:

Priority	Focus/Main Area	Examples but not limited to
First Nations Advocacy	Build disability advocacy capability and culturally safe pathways for Aboriginal children aged 0-8 years with developmental delay and/or autism who are eligible for the Thriving Kids Program, and their families, carers and kin, particularly in regional and remote NSW where access to advocacy and supports may be limited. This supports DRC Recommendation 6.23: Culturally Safe Disability Advocacy.	Capacity-building initiatives delivered through, or in partnership with, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Aboriginal Legal Services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. Activities may include strengthening disability advocacy awareness, developing culturally safe resources, improving information sharing and referral pathways, supporting access to Thriving Kids services, and establishing local networks that increase access to advocacy and early supports.
Self-Advocacy and supported decision making	Strengthen self-advocacy and supported decision-making by building the knowledge, skills and confidence of families, carers and kin to make informed decisions, understand the rights, and access supports that meet their child's needs.	Development and delivery of new or expanded self-advocacy initiatives that address unmet need and do not duplicate existing resources. Activities may include peer-led training, parent and carer education programs, supported decision-making tools, Easy Read resources, practical learning modules, and initiatives that build family capacity to

Priority	Focus/Main Area	Examples but not limited to
	This is a key safeguarding mechanism and a priority of the National Disability Advocacy Framework.	advocate for children aged 0-8 years with developmental delay and/or autism.
Improving safeguarding and access to supports through community connection and service navigation	Improve safeguarding outcomes for people with disability particularly children and their families, carers or kin in Thriving Kids programs in NSW by strengthening their ability to identify risks, understand their rights, access advocacy, and connect with appropriate supports and services.	Projects that strengthen the role of advocacy services in identifying, escalating and responding to safeguarding concerns. This may include improved referral pathways, stronger connections between advocacy, early childhood, health, education and community services, outreach activities for priority cohorts, and initiatives that support families to access Thriving Kids and other mainstream and specialist supports.
Cultural Inclusion	Increase the capacity of multicultural and culturally diverse communities to support eligible children aged 0-8 years with developmental delay and/or autism, and their families, carers and kin, to access advocacy, information and supports through the Thriving Kids program.	Projects providing information, advocacy and capacity building supports in community languages and through trusted community networks. Activities may include culturally appropriate resources, community outreach, improving access to Thriving Kids and related services, strengthening referral pathways, and supporting service responses that better meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

1.8 Funding amounts

The total funding amount for the **DAFP: 2026 Grant Stream 2 – Thriving Kids** is \$1,000,000.

- Applicants can apply for funding from \$30,000 to \$100,000 for projects that meet the assessment criteria.
- Project duration is up to 1 year. Grant funding paid in the 2026/27 financial year received must be expended within 12 months of receipt of funding.
- Eligible organisations may submit one application under each grant stream: Thriving Kids and/or Special Purposes and Projects & Sector Development (SPP&SD). Applications will be assessed on merit, and organisations may be successful in one or both grant streams.

Note: NSW Department of Communities and Justice may vary the distribution of grants depending on the number of funding applications submitted. The Department may also offer successful applicants a grant lower than the amount requested.

1.9 Grant funds expenditure

Funds can only be used for expenses and activities directly associated to the grant. Your application must clearly outline your proposed expenditure in relation to the funding amounts identified above and included in the budget you submit with your application.

1.10 Grant fund exclusions

Organisations must use the grant funds, including any interest earned, for the purposes of the grant. Items or activities that funding cannot be used for include:

- Any activity of a commercial nature that is for profit
 - Existing debt or budget deficits
 - Capital works, including building work
 - Permanent salaries/wages (costs for temporary tutors/instructors for your program or activity can be included)
 - Permanent equipment purchases, for example tables and computers
 - Business as usual costs or general operating expenses
 - Programs or activities that encourage gambling such as bingo, or the consumption of alcohol
 - Programs and activities coordinated by NSW Government Departments and Statutory Authorities
 - The same project twice. For example, two different organisations cannot apply for funds for the same program or activity
-

1.11 National Redress Scheme

The NSW Government will not award a Grant Funding Arrangement to a non-government organisation with Redress Obligation (or to any of its Related Entities) if that non-government organisation:

- has declined to join the Scheme, or
- at the expiry of six months after the time, it is notified to join the Scheme, has failed to do so.

Visit the [website](#) for further information about the [NSW National Redress Scheme](#) sanctions.

1.12 Insurance

Grant recipients must maintain current and adequate insurance appropriate to the activities/services funded under this grant to cover any liability of the grant recipient that might arise in connection with the performance of its obligations under a Grant Funding Agreement. This must include a minimum of \$10 million Public Liability Insurance.

Applicants will be asked to provide a copy of all relevant insurance policies and certificates in the application form.

If your organisation is not covered by the appropriate insurance, you will need to approach another organisation (such as your local council or an incorporated not-for-profit) to sponsor your application so that your project will be covered under their insurance.

2 Application process

One stage application process:

- All applications for grant funding are managed using the SmartyGrants portal and will be assessed based on eligibility and assessment criteria including priority target groups.
- One application form per project to be submitted by the applicant that will be assessed based on eligibility and assessment criteria.
- Only one application per organisation will be reviewed in either of the two Grant Streams. Organisations may make an application and be deemed successful on merit for either or both grant streams.
- Applications will open **13 October**; and close 4pm on **18 November 2026**.
- Applicants will be formally notified by January 2027 if their application has been successful or unsuccessful.
- A list of successful projects will be published on the [NSW Grant Funding Finder](#)

Note for all applicants:

- All applications for grant funding are managed using the SmartyGrants portal.
- Applicants must ensure that their contact details are up to date.
- Applicants must not have any outstanding acquittals for any other funding program with DCJ.

2.1 Subcontracting arrangements

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice will only provide a grant to a single organisation. Organisations can work together through one lead organisation using subcontracting arrangements between them.

For more information about subcontracting please refer to the [NSW Department of Communities and Justice subcontracting policy](#).

2.2 Assessment Process

One step assessment process:

Applications will be assessed against eligibility, prioritisation and assessment criteria.

One application form is to be submitted for both eligibility and merit assessment, as outlined below:

- Eligibility Team conducts all eligibility assessments
- Assessment Team conducts assessment of eligible applications
- Recommendation Panel reviews and makes recommendations to the delegated decision maker
- Delegated decision maker will consider the recommendations and make final decision.

2.3 Decision Making

The Department of Communities and Justice Executive Director, Early Intervention and Disability Inclusion, Strategy, Policy and Commissioning will be the decision-maker. and an announcement will be posted on the [NSW Grant Funding Finder](#)

The Deputy Secretary will consider the recommendations of the Recommendation Panel in this decision-making.

Applicants will be formally notified on whether their application has been successful.

It is an applicant's responsibility to ensure all contact details are up to date.

A list of successful applicants will be posted on the [NSW Grant Funding Finder](#) website.

3 Successful grant applications

3.1 Grant Funding Agreement

Successful applicants are required to:

- Enter into a Grant Funding Agreement with NSW Department of Communities and Justice within four weeks of the grant offer being made. The application, Grant Funding Agreement and acquittal for the grant will be managed using the SmartyGrants management system.
- Start and complete funded activities and events within the dates specified in the Grant Funding Agreement. Project variations may be accepted where the requested change aligns with the Program Guidelines and the original intent of the approved project.
- Seek approval from NSW Department of Communities and Justice for any proposed changes to a funded activity prior to the proposed changes being made via a variation submission in your SmartyGrants portal.
- Acknowledge the support of the NSW Government in accordance with the Grant Funding Agreement.
- Acknowledgement Guidelines: *"The NSW Government proudly supports this community-led partnership with funding provided under the **NSW Disability Advocacy Futures Program 2026**"*

3.2 Grant payment

The Payment will be made within 7 days of return of the fully executed Grant Funding Agreement.

3.3 Bank details

It is your responsibility as the applicant to provide correct banking details, including the authorised signature to verify your bank details in the application form. Funds transferred to an incorrect bank account may not be recoverable.

3.4 Unspent project funds

If a grant recipient's project is completed and there are unspent project funds remaining, these must be returned to NSW Department of Communities and Justice unless otherwise specified in the grant funding agreement if more than \$250.

Alternatively, the recipient may request a project extension to deliver the approved project.

3.5 Feedback and appeals process

If your application is not successful, it does not mean your application is without merit. Funding is limited and not all applications are successful. Due to the high-volume applications, we are unable to provide individual feedback on each unsuccessful application.

3.6 Publication of grant information

The NSW Grant Administration Guide requires that certain information is published in relation to grants awarded no later than 45 calendar days after the grant agreement takes effect (see section 6.5 of the Guide and Appendix A to the Guide). This information is also open access under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW) (GIPA Act), which must be made publicly available unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.

4 Performance, Monitoring and Reporting

Recipients will be required to:

- Complete a Final Report on project outcomes and Financial Acquittal within four weeks of project completion.
- Allow the NSW Department of Communities and Justice to inspect the records you are required to keep under the grant funding agreement.
- Submit six-monthly written project reports, and phone catchups may also be conducted. Under your Grant Funding Agreement, you will be required to respond to any reasonable request for information on your project status and progress.
- Complete progress reporting as requested by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.
- Agree that departmental staff may meet virtually or visit in person, during or at the completion of your grant activity, to review your progress. We will seek your permission to visit, in accordance with local protocols, and provide you with reasonable notice of any visit.

Any variations to the approved project scope, project location and completion time frames outlined in the original application form must be formally requested and approved in writing before any related work takes place.

To discuss a variation, please contact the DAFP team by email dafp@dcj.nsw.gov.au OR by email grantdesignandsupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au.

All projects must be completed by February 2028. You are required to submit a Final Report and Financial Acquittal in SmartyGrants no later than March 2028. The NSW Department of Communities and Justice will send you the final acquittal form prior the required date that you will need to complete in the SmartyGrants portal.

Please note that any photographs or videos containing images of participants and/or staff submitted in the Final Completion Report must be accompanied by a signed NSW Department of Communities and Justice still and moving images consent form.

It is a requirement that all financial records related to grant expenditure and acquittal be retained by the committee of the organisation for seven years. If the committee changes, these documents must be forwarded to the new incoming committee.

5 Additional information

5.1 Complaint handling

Any complaints should be sent in writing to grantdesignandsupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au

5.2 Access to information

Note that documents submitted as part of a grant application may be subject to an application under the GIPA Act or an order for papers under Standing Order 52.

The GIPA Act provides for the proactive release of government information by agencies and gives members of the public an enforceable right to access government information held by an agency (which includes Ministerial offices). Access to government information is only to be restricted if there is an overriding public interest against disclosure.

Before information is released in response to an application under the GIPA Act, there will be an assessment of the public interest considerations in favour of and against disclosure of that information, and there may be consultation requirements that apply.

The NSW Legislative Council has the power to order the production of State papers by the Executive Government. Standing Order 52 provides that the House may order documents to be tabled by the Government in the House. The Cabinet Office coordinates the preparation of the papers – that is, the return to order. The return to order may contain privileged and public documents. Privileged documents are available only to members of the Legislative Council.

5.3 Ethical conduct

Conflict of interest management

Conflicts of Interest between the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and applicants will be managed in accordance with the Departments code of conduct, and declarations are made and recorded by all persons involved in performing functions related to the assessment process.

Confidentiality

NSW Department of Communities and Justice staff who assist an applicant with an application will not be involved in assessment for that application.

Information relating to the successful applications, including the name of the applicant, description of the funded project and the funding amount, will be included in:

- Public media releases.
- An announcement on the NSW Department of Communities and Justice website.
- The NSW Grants finder website.
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice social media.

5.4 Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure that this publication is free from error and/or omission at the date of publication. The authors, publisher and any person involved in the preparation of this publication take no responsibility for loss occurring to any person acting or refraining from action as a result of information contained herein.

5.5 Accessibility

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice Grant Design and Support team can provide grant information and application forms in accessible formats on request. Formats include word documents, audio disk and large print. We also accept applications in accessible formats.

5.6 Support

Grant Design and Support can give you advice and information on the Grant Program Guidelines. While staff cannot help directly with your application, they can help clarify guidelines and point you in the direction of past funding precedents. The team does not assess applications. To maintain a fair and equitable process, staff are unable to edit or correct any applications.

6 Timeframes

Date	Event/Action
19 October	Grant applications open
24 November	Grant applications close
December	Assessment of grant applications
January 2027	Contact with successful applicants and project payment
February 2027	Grant program results published
March 2027	Projects commence
February 2028	Projects end
March 2028	Final Acquittal Reporting due to the NSW Department of Communities and Justice

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