Department of Communities and Justice

Office for YOUTH

# Connect IRL Phase 2

## Frequently Asked Questions ‘FAQs’

October 2026

The 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.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

Published by Department of Communities and Justice

dcj.nsw.gov.au

Updated: October 2026.

## Copyright and disclaimer

© State of New South Wales through Department of Communities and Justice. Information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing, July 2027, and is subject to change. For more information, please visit dcj.nsw.gov.au/copyright.

# Connect In-Real-Life (IRL) Phase 2 Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

## Introduction

These FAQs are for the Connect In-Real-Life (IRL) Phase 2 Grant Program and are intended to accompany the Grant Program Guidelines. Questions and answers below are grouped in topics in the same order as they appear in the Guidelines.

## Overview of the Grant Program

**Q: What is the Connect In-Real-Life (IRL) Phase 2 Grant Program?**

The program was developed following the Commonwealth's Online Safety Amendment (social media Minimum Age) Bill 2024, which delays the age of access for those under 16 and aims to protect children from online harms.

There were concerns that these restrictions may unintentionally reduce access to support networks for vulnerable young people. The NSW Social Media Summit (2024) highlighted the need to balance online engagement with opportunities for face-to-face interaction, noting links between high social media use and increased loneliness.

Phase 1 provided funding for eligible non-for-profits to support young people, through offline connection, mentoring, safe spaces, and prosocial activities Phase 2 has expanded eligibility to local government councils to broaden the range of providers eligible to manage projects to support young people throughout NSW.

**Q: What is the Program purpose?**

The purpose of the Connect IRL Phase 2 program is to support the delivery of practical initiatives that strengthen young people's social connection, participation, wellbeing, skills development and pathways to adulthood.

The program focusses on addressing barriers to community connection and participation for priority youth cohorts and supporting opportunities for young people to engage with their communities to foster a stronger sense of belonging, inclusion and to develop the skills, confidence and capabilities necessary to support successful transitions to adulthood through practical experiences, trusted relationships and meaningful participation.

**Q: What are the objectives of the Program?**

- Access safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces to connect with others and participate in community life and build meaningful relationships and social connections that foster a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion.
- Receive enhanced and targeted mentoring including trauma-informed and lived experience approaches, and to enable mentors to more effectively support them to form meaningful connections in real life environments.
- Respond to emerging and locally identified needs through initiatives that strengthen community engagement and create opportunities for input in decisions that affect them.
- Develop skills, confidence and capabilities needed to navigate transitions, pursue education and employment opportunities and actively contribute to their communities through civic, leadership or through structured mentoring programs that promote healthy relationships, empathy, mutual respect, and active civic participation.
- Strengthen offline connections by delivering inclusive, pro-social activities and safe discussion spaces that support mental health, physical health, practical skill development and healthy relationships that foster mutual understanding, reduce isolation, and build peer

networks — with a focus on those from marginalised, diverse, or geographically isolated communities.

### Q: What are the desired Program Outcomes?

1. Young people from identified priority youth cohorts are more connected, confident, resilient, and engaged in their communities.
2. Young people experience improved wellbeing, stronger support networks, and greater opportunities for positive development, social cohesion and healthy relationships.
3. Communities are better equipped to support young people through inclusive, responsive, and youth-centred approaches.
4. Stronger relationships are established between young people, mentors, community organisations, and local stakeholders.
5. Increased participation of young people in community life. This may be through leadership, education, employment, and civic activities.

### Q: Who are the Priority Cohorts for this Program?

Applicants must design their projects to specifically service **at least one** of the priority cohorts listed below.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- Young people with a disability
- Rural and regional young people
- Young people experiencing poverty
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people
- LGBTIQA+ young people
- Young women and girls
- Young people with adverse childhood experiences (including youth justice, out of home care, homelessness, caring responsibilities).
- Successful projects will focus on delivering improved outcomes for priority cohorts and this may include working directly with other cohorts - for example projects which focus on supporting healthy relationships and better understanding of consent may include work with young men and boys to support making safer communities for young women and girls.

### Q: Should young people be involved in the grant process?

Projects proposed under the Connect IRL Grants Phase 2 Program must involve young people at every stage of the project delivery. These are outlined in the Guiding Principles for Youth Grants with an engagement framework and include working with young people to:

- Identify the need
- Plan and design the project
- Deliver the project with young people
- Final review with young people and recognition of their contribution.

# Applying for a grant

### Q: Do I have to use SmartyGrants to apply?

Yes, applications for this program must be submitted via the SmartyGrants platform.
When you commence an application, you will receive an email from SmartyGrants with your application ID number and a link to go back to your application. You are not required to complete your application in one sitting and can save and return later to complete and submit.

### Q: Can I review the application form before starting my application?

Yes, we strongly encourage you to thoroughly read the application form before commencing to fill it out. When you log on to SmartyGrants and view the application you can also choose to download it as a PDF or you can also preview the form online. Please note that PDF copies of application forms do not show which questions are conditional, so you may see questions that do or do not apply to your organisation.

### Q: How do I know I have successfully submitted my application?

When your application is successfully submitted you will receive an automated email from SmartyGrants that includes an application ID number. Please keep this reference number and use it in any communications regarding the grant. If you log back into SmartyGrants and click 'My Submissions' you will see all your submitted and unsubmitted applications. Submitted applications are identified by a green tick.

### Q: I have submitted my application how do I get back in to change something?

Carefully check your application prior to submitting. If you realise that you have made an error after submitting your application or need to amend something, if it is prior to the closing time we can reopen the application for you. Please email grantdesignandsupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au for assistance.

### Q: Can I provide letters of support or references to support my application?

You have the option to provide supporting information demonstrating your experience delivering similar projects, although this is not mandatory

### Q: Is there support available to help me apply or answer questions?

Applicants with any queries regarding the application process can contact the Grant Design and Support at grantdesignandsupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au. Remember to quote your application ID number. Please refer to the SmartyGrants Help Guide for Applicants or you can also contact SmartyGrants directly if you are having technical difficulties with the application form or your SmartyGrants account/password, for contact details visit their help page.

### Q. Should we include GST in our application?

Your funding request should exclude any GST that you will be charged by contractors or suppliers as part of the cost/delivery. If your application is successful and your organisation's ABN is registered for GST, you will be paid GST on top of the approved grant amount. If your organisation ABN is not registered for GST or you do not have an ABN, you will only be paid the approved grant amount.

### Q: Who should be added as Authorised Signatories?

Two people that your organisation's governing document state may enter into legal contracts on behalf of the organisation. Generally, this is members of the executive/committee or company secretaries and directors. Or individuals with this power delegated to them, such as a CEO, General Manager of a council, Finance Director.

### Q: Who needs to sign off on our application?

The Applicant Declaration must be made by an appropriately authorised person who has the delegation to make a legal declaration on behalf of the organisation.

### Q: Can we submit more than one application?

Organisations can submit more than one application, however any successful organisations will only be awarded one grant.

### Q: Can I apply for funding for an existing program?

As outlined in the Guidelines, funding cannot be used for an existing project, business-as-usual activities, or to supplement, increase or continue ongoing service delivery.

Applicants seeking to build on previous initiatives should submit a new project proposal, detailing the modifications and outlining new or additional activities. All applications will be assessed against the published eligibility and assessment criteria of the Connect IRL Phase 2 Grant Guidelines.

### Q: Is it too late to apply?

Applications close on **6 November 2026 at 4:00 pm**. Late submissions will not be accepted.

---

## Eligibility and Assessment criteria

### Q: What are the eligibility criteria?

All applicants are required to meet the following eligibility criteria

- Have public liability insurance of at least $10 million.
- Address the NSW National Redress Scheme sanctions.
- Not have outstanding acquittals with the Department of Communities and Justice.
- The organisation must be a not-for-profit eligible legal entity operating in NSW or a local government organisation, and all proposed activities or events must be delivered in NSW for young people living in NSW.
- Delivery of all projects must be completed by 31 August 2028.
- Be able to enter into a grant funding agreement with Department of Communities and Justice
- Have an Australian bank account in the name of your organisation.

### Q. What is the difference between an ACCO and other organisations that serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

An ACCO delivers services that build the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people, and is:

- incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit
- controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people;
- connected to the community or communities in which they deliver the services; and
- governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body.

### Q: Who are ineligibility applicants?

- Individuals or sole traders.
- Federal and State Government agencies and bodies.
- NSW educational facilities (public schools, private schools, TAFE).
- For-profit organisations, including Aboriginal organisations.
- Unincorporated organisations or groups.

### Q: How much can I apply for?

Eligible organisations may apply for a grant between $50,000 up to $150,000 (excluding GST).

### Q: What are the assessment criteria?

All eligible applications will be assessed against their capability and capacity to deliver on the following criteria.

1. Alignment with priority youth cohort(s) and community need

2. Strengthened offline connections for young people that promote social connection and community participation
3. Youth-Centred Design, Inclusion and Community Impact
4. Project Delivery, Organisational Capability and Risk Management
5. Value for Money

# What grant funds can be used for

**Q: What can we use the grant funds for?**

Funds can only be used for expenses and activities directly associated to the grant. Your application must provide a detailed budget that clearly outlines your proposed expenditure in relation to the funding amount requested.

**Q: What are we not allowed to spend grant funding on?**

Grant funding cannot be used for the following expenses or activities:

- Any activity of a commercial nature that is for profit
- Existing debt or budget deficits
- Capital works, including building work that require planning approvals including building work
- Any fit out that does not directly relate to the delivery of a youth hub, e.g. office or kitchenette fit out. Please note premises that are **not owned** by the organisation are also excluded.
- Permanent staff salaries/wages for existing roles which service BAU and existing projects (costs for temporary tutors/instructors/project officers for your project or activity can be included)
- Business as usual costs or seeking funding to supplement, increase, or continue ongoing service delivery that is the core business of the organisation
- An organisation's general operating expenses including rent or administration cost
- Reimbursement of expenses already incurred
- Seeking funding for an existing project
- Fundraising activities
- Donations or commissions to third parties
- Cash prizes or gifts
- Projects or activities that encourage gambling such as bingo, or the consumption of alcohol and smoking products. As well as the purchase of alcohol and smoking or vaping products.

**Q: What is subcontracting?**

For the purposes of these grants, "subcontracting" refers to an arrangement between your organisation and one or more other organisations/individuals (referred to as "subcontractors") to assist your organisation to provide services funded through your grant.
In some cases, all the service delivery may be undertaken by the subcontractor. A subcontracting arrangement requires the eligible organisation to enter into an agreement with the subcontractor to conduct the work, but the applicant (lead) organisation will retain the contractual obligations to DCJ under the Grant Funding Agreement for delivery and accountability.

**Q: Is subcontracting the same as auspicing?**

Yes, please note the term "subcontracting" is used for the purposes of this grant program.

# Assessment process

**Q: What is the assessment process?**

The Connect IRL Phase 2 applications will be assessed as follows:

1. The eligibility team will determine if the organisation and application is eligible
2. The assessment team will conduct thorough assessments of eligible applications based on the objectives and assessment criteria detailed above.
3. The recommendation panel will review all assessments and make recommendations to the decision-maker, the Director Office for Youth. The Director Office for Youth is the Delegated Department Officer and the final decision-maker for funding for the Connect IRL Phase 2 program.
4. The decision-maker will consider the recommendations and make the final decision.

# After applications close

**Q: When will I know if my application was successful?**

You will be notified via email in January 2027. Applicants must ensure all contact details in SmartyGrants remain up to date.

**Q: If I'm successful, what happens then?**

You will be required to enter into a DCJ Grant Funding Agreement. This agreement will be sent by email using Adobe Acrobat Sign to the authorised signatories nominated in the grant application. Each signatory in turn will receive an email and be required to carefully read the terms and conditions of the Grant Funding Agreement, then electronically sign the agreement. Please note the Adobe Sign emails cannot be forwarded to another email address and must be signed within the specified timeframe or they will expire.

**Q: When will we receive the funds?**

Payment will be made directly into your nominated bank account within 14 days of the execution of the Grant Funding Agreement.

**Q: What if my authorised signatories change?**

Please contact grantdesignandsupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au immediately if these details change.

**Q: Where can I get more information about authorised signatories?**

For further details on authorised signatories and delegation. Visit https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/service-providers/working-with-us/how-we-work-with-you/authorised-signatories.html

**Q: What happens if situations change, and we wish to change the details of our program after we receive funding?**

Any major variations to the approved purposes outlined in your original application form on SmartyGrants must be formally requested and approved in writing before any related work takes place, as your application form will form part of your legally binding Grant Funding Agreement with DCJ. Failure to do so may result in you being required to return the grant monies in full. To discuss a variation, please contact the Grants team by email grantdesignandsupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au.

**Q: What reporting will be required?**

Successful applicants will need to submit six-monthly project reports and a final completion report (as outlined in the Funding Agreement). Submission is required via SmartyGrants. Virtual or in-person catchups may also be conducted by Office for Youth.

**Q: Will we get support during the delivery of my project?**

Office for Youth will engage and support the successful recipients over the life of the project to ensure delivery of the programs have a partnership approach with young people. This may include additional support from office for youth to facilitate the delivery of programs and successful outcomes.

**Q: What acquittals requirements?**

All projects must be completed by 31 August 2028. You are required to submit a Final Completion Report in SmartyGrants no later than 29 September 2028. DCJ will assign your final acquittal form prior the required date that you will need to complete in the SmartyGrants portal.

**Q: Why should I keep my contact details up to date?**

It is the responsibility of the grant recipient to keep DCJ up to date with any change in contact information. DCJ is not responsible for any consequences should your grant offer be withdrawn due to out-of-date contact details in SmartyGrants.

**Q: Why was my application not successful?**

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, DCJ is unable to provide individual feedback on each unsuccessful application.

## Communities and Justice

**6 Parramatta Square**
**10 Darcy Street**
**Parramatta NSW 2150**

**Locked Bag 5000**
**Parramatta NSW 2124**

Office hours:
**Monday to Friday**
**9.00am — 5.00pm**

E: grantdesignandsupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au

NSW GOVERNMENT