

Communities and Justice



Connect IRL Phase 2

Grant Program Guidelines

October 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

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We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

Connect IRL Phase 2

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Contents

1	Key dates and information	4
2	Overview of Connect IRL Phase 2 Grant Program	5
2.1	Program purpose	5
2.2	Program objectives	5
2.3	Program Outcomes	6
2.4	Target groups	6
2.5	Eligibility Criteria.....	7
2.6	Other Mandatory Criteria	7
2.7	Ineligible applicants	7
2.8	Eligible projects.....	7
2.9	Funding amounts	8
2.10	Grant funds expenditure	8
2.11	Grant fund exclusions.....	8
2.12	Subcontracting arrangements	9
2.13	Assessment Criteria	9
2.14	National Redress Scheme	10
2.15	Insurance	10
3	Application process	10
4	Assessment Process.....	11
	Decision Maker.....	11
5	Successful grant applications.....	11
5.1	Grant Funding Agreement.....	11
5.2	Authorised signatories	12
5.3	Variations.....	12
5.4	Bank details.....	12
5.5	Unspent project funds.....	12
5.6	Publication of grant information.....	12
6	Performance, Monitoring and Reporting	12
7	Additional information.....	13
7.1	Complaint handling	13
7.2	Feedback	13
7.3	Access to information.....	13
7.4	Acknowledgement of NSW Government support.....	13
7.5	Ethical conduct	14
7.6	Disclaimer.....	14
7.7	Accessibility	14
7.8	Support.....	14

1 Key dates and information

Grant Round Applications Open	9 October 2026 at 9am
Grant Round Applications Close	6 November 2026 at 4pm
Assessment of submitted applications	November 2026
Notification of application outcomes	January 2027
Project delivery and evaluation timeframe	February 2027 to August 2028
Mid-term reports	Six monthly
Final Completion Report	September 2028
Decision-maker	Executive Director, Office for Youth
NSW Government Agency	Office for Youth, DCJ
Type of grant opportunity	Open, competitive
Grant Program Allocation	\$3,025,000 (excluding GST)
Grant project funding	\$50,000 up to \$150,000 (excluding GST)
Grant program enquiries	GrantDesignandSupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au

2 Overview of Connect IRL Phase 2 Grant Program

Administered by DCJ, the Office for Youth's Connect In-Real-Life (IRL) Phase 2 Grant Program builds on the foundation of the original Connect IRL program by continuing to create opportunities for young people aged 8 – 24 years to connect in meaningful ways.

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.

The Connect IRL Grants Program is co-funded by the Office for Youth and the Premier's Department.

2.1 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 projects will be placed-based and will be designed and delivered with reference to the **"Guiding Principles for Youth Grants"**.

The program supports the delivery of safe, inclusive and youth-centred initiatives that enable young people to build positive relationships, strengthen their sense of belonging, actively participate in their communities, and contribute to decisions that affect their lives. Through these opportunities, young people can also develop the skills, confidence and capabilities needed to support their wellbeing and successful transition 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**.

The Office for Youth will work closely with successful grantees to deliver their planned project activities to ensure the delivery of programs have a partnership approach with young people. This includes working with young people at all stages of project development.

2.2 Program objectives

The grant aims to support children and young people aged 8-24 from **identified priority youth cohorts**. This has been influenced through the recent **Space to Speak** consultation.

- 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.

2.3 Program Outcomes

The intended program outcomes are:

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.

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.

2.4 Target groups

The Program supports a diverse range of projects for young people primarily aged 8–24 years who may face different needs and challenges in connecting to their community, to their peers and receiving support.

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.

2.5 Eligibility Criteria

All applicants are required to meet the following eligibility criteria to be eligible to apply for the grant program you must be:

- Not for profit companies limited by guarantee, registered with the ACNC and/or with DGR status.
 - NSW associations or non-distributing co-operatives registered with NSW Fair Trading.
 - Local Aboriginal Land Councils.
 - Not-for-profit Indigenous corporations registered with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations.
 - NSW local councils operating under the Local Government Act 1993.
 - Not-for-profit entities incorporated under an Act of Parliament.
 - Incorporated Association registered outside of NSW but with an Australian Registered Body Number (ARBN).
-

2.6 Other Mandatory Criteria

The following are mandatory program requirements. Applicants must:

- 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 operating in NSW, and all proposed activities or events must be delivered in NSW for young people living in NSW. LGAs or Unincorporated Areas on border locations within NSW may be eligible to conduct projects and activities in their neighbouring state if declared during the application process.
 - Delivery of all projects must be completed by 31 August 2028.
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2.7 Ineligible applicants

Ineligible applicants include:

- 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.
-

2.8 Eligible projects

Eligible projects and activities must align to the program objectives and achieve the intended outcomes of the program. Innovative approaches co-designed with young people are encouraged.

Examples of eligible projects include:

- Life skills courses (e.g. Cooking programs, financial literacy, resume workshops)
- Independent living programs
- Driver licensing support
- Youth hubs fit out and programs
- Volunteering programs
- Mentoring programs
- Social clubs, Gaming clubs, Creative clubs: establishment or upgrading
- Entrepreneurship programs
- Peer leadership activities and programs
- Community events focussed on youth participation
- Healthy-relationship courses
- Recovery responses (resilience, wellbeing, community impact).

When preparing your application, be specific about how many activities you are proposing, the duration of the activities, and anticipated number of young people who expect to benefit.

For example, “we will arrange a Life skills course once a month for 18 months. We plan on having 30 different young people in each of the 18 sessions.”

2.9 Funding amounts

A total of \$3,025,000 (exclusive of GST) is available under the Connect IRL Phase 2 program, jointly funded by the Office for Youth and the NSW Premier’s Department.

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

2.10 Grant funds expenditure

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.

Evidence to support purchase of furniture or fittings that support the delivery of the project is required.

For any fit out evidence of ownership of the premises will be required.

2.11 Grant fund exclusions

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.

2.12 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](#).

2.13 Assessment Criteria

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

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

Applicants should demonstrate:

- A clear understanding of the needs and barriers facing the target youth cohort(s) which is informed by local needs, youth consultation, community engagement, research and relevant data.
- How the project will contribute to improved wellbeing and provide opportunities to support priority young people to become more connected, supported and engaged in their communities.

2. Strengthened offline connections for young people that promote social connection and community participation

Applicants should demonstrate:

- How the project will create safe, welcoming and inclusive opportunities for young people to connect in person with peers, mentors and their community.
- How the project will support young people to participate in community activities (e.g. volunteering, leadership opportunities, cultural activities, recreation, education, employment pathways or civic engagement).
- How the project responds to locally identified needs and barriers to participation.
- How activities will be accessible and inclusive for the priority youth cohort(s) targeted.

3. Youth-Centred Design, Inclusion and Community Impact

Applicants should demonstrate:

- How young people will be engaged in shaping, influencing and participating in project design, delivery, leadership or decision-making.

- Approaches to ensure they are culturally safe, inclusive and respectful.
- Meaningful youth participation across the project lifecycle.

4. Project Delivery, Organisational Capability and Risk Management

Applicants should demonstrate:

- Experience delivering similar programs, services or activities for young people.
- Understanding of trauma-informed, strengths-based, culturally responsive and/or lived-experience approaches where relevant.
- Appropriate staffing, volunteer and mentor management arrangements, relevant partnerships and stakeholder relationships.
- Governance, safeguarding and child-safe practices.
- Experience managing public funding and reporting requirements, including a realistic project plan, timeline and implementation approach.
- Identification and management of key project risks and appropriate monitoring, evaluation and outcomes measurement processes.

5. Value for Money

Applicants should demonstrate:

- A clear and reasonable budget that aligns with proposed activities and efficient use of available resources.
- Costs that are proportionate to the expected outcomes and number of participants reached.

2.14 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.

2.15 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 must provide a copy of all relevant insurance policies and certificates in the application form.

3 Application process

Before you start your application please read these Guidelines.

Applications close on **6 November 2026 at 4:00 pm**.

- Late submissions will not be accepted.

- Applications for this grant are submitted and managed using the *SmartyGrants* portal.
- Applications will be assessed based on the eligibility and assessment criteria outlined in this guide.
- Evidence that is required to be submitted with the application includes your Public Liability insurance Certificate of Currency and a copy of your bank account statement showing BSB and Account number.
- 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.
- All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application in January 2027.
- Submission of an application does not guarantee funding.

NB. Please ensure that your contact details in SmartyGrants are kept up to date.

4 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 Executive 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.

Decision Maker

The Delegated Department Officer is the final decision-maker for funding. Decision announcement will be posted on the [NSW Grant Funding Finder](#).

5 Successful grant applications

5.1 Grant Funding Agreement

Successful applicants are required to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement with Office for Youth, DCJ.

The Grant Funding Agreement must be signed by the two authorised persons nominated in your application.

The application, Grant Funding Agreement and acquittal for the grant will be managed using the SmartyGrants management system and Adobe Acrobat Sign.

Once we receive the signed Grant Funding Agreement DCJ will countersign the agreement and return it by email. Payments will then be processed and paid into your nominated bank account.

NB. The grant offer may be withdrawn if the grant funding agreement is not signed within 14 days of receipt.

5.2 Authorised signatories

- Agreements can only be signed by authorised officers of your organisation. This may be a member of the executive/committee as deemed under the Articles of Association or Constitution for a not-for-profit organisation, or the General Manager or delegated officer if you are a council.
- Authorised signatories' details (name, unique email address, phone number and position) are included in the application form. To enable the Adobe Acrobat Sign function to work correctly the email addresses must be unique to the individual signatory no shared inbox addresses will be accepted
- It is the applicants' responsibility to ensure nominated authorised signatories will be available to sign the grant funding agreement within the required timeframe.

5.3 Variations

Any variations to the Grant Funding Agreement, including scope, location or time frames outlined in the application form and Grant Program Guidelines must be formally requested and approved in writing. Failure to do so may result in the withdrawal of the grant offer.

Project variations may be accepted where the requested change aligns with the Program Guidelines and the original intent of the approved project. Grant variations may be declined.

To discuss a variation, please contact GrantDesignandSupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au.

5.4 Bank details

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

5.5 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 if more than \$250, unless otherwise specified in the grant funding agreement.

5.6 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 payment of the grant funding agreement (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.

6 Performance, Monitoring and Reporting

- 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 will include additional support from office for youth to facilitate the delivery of programs and successful outcomes.

- Six-monthly written project reports are required to be submitted via your smarty grants portal and phone catchups may also be conducted.
- Applicants will also be required to provide any other information reasonably requested by DCJ.
- 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.
- 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 DCJ still and moving images consent form. It is a requirement that all financial records related to grant expenditure and acquittal be retained by the organisation for seven years.

7 Additional information

7.1 Complaint handling

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

7.2 Feedback

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.

7.3 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.

<https://www.ipc.nsw.gov.au/resources/government-information-public-access-act-2009-gipa-act>

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.

7.4 Acknowledgement of NSW Government support

Grantees must acknowledge the support of the NSW Government in accordance with the Grant Funding Agreement. Grantees will be provided with the appropriate NSW Government logo for advertising material inclusion.

Grantees must acknowledge funding through the following approved wording: “The NSW Government proudly supports this community-led partnership with funding provided under Connect IRL Phase 2 Grants Program.”

7.5 Ethical conduct

Conflict of interest management

Conflicts of Interest between DCJ and applicants will be managed in accordance with the DCJ's code of conduct, and declarations are made and recorded by all persons involved in performing functions related to the assessment process.

Confidentiality

DCJ 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 DCJ website.
- The NSW Grants finder website.
- The Office for Youth social media
- DCJ social media.

7.6 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 because of information contained herein.

7.7 Accessibility

Grant Design and Support 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.

7.8 Support

Grant Design and Support, GrantDesignandSupport@dcj.nsw.gov.au 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.

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