

Connecting Communities Regional Program

Regional Digital Fund Guidelines

1. Context

1.1 Connecting Communities Regional Program

The \$45 million *Connecting Regional Communities Program* aims to improve digital technology and infrastructure across regional Victoria.

The suite of activities falls into six project streams:

- **\$11m** for co-funding the Commonwealth Mobile Black Spot Program, focused on flood and fire prone areas (Victorian Mobile Project 3, VMP3)
- **\$7m** for regional enhanced broadband projects in Morwell, North Geelong and Horsham (Enhanced Broadband)
- **\$7m** for free public Wi-Fi in Shepparton and Geelong (Wi-Fi)
- **\$12m** for projects to support the adaption of internet enabled on farm technologies in Victoria's North West, the Macalister Irrigation District, the Murray-Goulburn and the Serpentine region (Digital Agriculture)
- **\$7m** for a state-wide Digital Economy Plan initiative to drive innovation and increase the competitiveness of regional industries (Digital Economy Initiatives, DEI)
- **\$1m** to improve regional services through access to government communications infrastructure (Telecommunications Infrastructure Leverage, TIL)

The Regional Digital Fund is funded from the DEI project stream.

As part of the *Connecting Regional Communities Program* the government has committed to the development of Digital Plans for each Regional Partnership (see <https://economicdevelopment.vic.gov.au/connecting-victoria/connecting-regional-communities-program>.)

The digital plans will detail current and future digital supply and demand conditions and identify gaps in digital capability, affordability and access in each Regional Partnership area.

The Digital Plans will also identify priority digital projects and areas of need determined by each Regional Partnership.

2. Description and objectives of fund

2.1 Regional Digital Fund

The Regional Digital Fund aims to implement projects and address needs identified in Regional Partnerships' Digital Plans.

It is a flexible grant program that will allow the government to support a broad range of small-scale digital projects with an emphasis on, but not limited to, non-infrastructure projects and digital capability building.

The RDF will accept applications at any time.

2.2 Activities that will generally not be funded

The following activities would generally not be considered:

- requests for retrospective funding, where projects have commenced (i.e. equipment purchased, contracts entered, or construction has begun) or have been completed prior to receiving funding approval
- projects requiring ongoing funding from the Victorian Government
- ongoing operating costs or salary subsidies except where a salary subsidy provides administrative and project management support for groups of local government authorities and project partners
- private sector projects undertaken resulting from a Victorian Government contract
- projects where funding is normally provided by other state, commonwealth and/or local government sources
- any costs to meet regulatory requirements
- the purchase of land

2.3 Who can apply

All projects must be in, or for the benefit of, regional and rural councils in Victoria

Applications will be considered from:

- private sector businesses and agencies
- business and industry groups including:
 - chambers of commerce and business associations
 - industry peak bodies
 - business and industry clusters and networks.
- local government authorities
- not-for-profit organisations, including community groups that
 - are an incorporated body, cooperative or association
 - have an Australian Business Number (ABN) or can provide written advice from the Australian Tax Office that no withholding tax is required from the grant payment
- higher and other education institutions
- regional organisations e.g. regional strategic planning alliances
- Individuals are not eligible to apply.

2.4 Funding details

The Regional Digital Fund (RDF) will provide grants up to \$390,000. This may include up to \$200,000 for capital items.

The cap on capital funding is to allow funding for a well-defined and necessary capital component of projects, and to enable funding of small-scale infrastructure projects that are supported by their Regional Partnership.

Funding will be available for salaries where there is a demonstrated need.

Applicants are expected to make a financial contribution or source third-party funding commensurate with project scale and applicant(s) and project participant's resources. Financial contributions are not required for small scale projects, seeking less than \$50,000.

Third party funding sources might include commonwealth/ local government and community, private sector and regional organisations.

In-kind contributions can be included as part of the total project costs in calculating the level of grant assistance.

2.5 Definition of rural and regional Victoria

Rural and regional Victoria is defined as the 48 local government areas including six alpine resort areas set out in Schedule 2 of the *Regional Development Victoria Act 2002* and available at www.rdv.vic.gov.au.

The ten regional city local government areas are Ballarat, Greater Bendigo, Greater Geelong, Greater Shepperton, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga.

The remaining 38 local government areas including six alpine resort areas are referred to as the rural local government areas.

3. Application and assessment process

The process for applying for funding under the program is outlined below:

- contact your local RDV office to discuss your project
- DJPR will undertake an initial assessment against program eligibility and assessment criteria and provide you with feedback
- after considering feedback, you may decide to apply for program funding
- submit the application to the RDF program team in DJPR
- your application will be assessed by the RDF Assessment panel against the assessment criteria
- The RDF Assessment panel will make recommendations to the CRCP Program Governance Board (PGB)
- Once the PGB has endorsed the recommendations, RDF will make a recommendation to the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade
- the Ministers will consider the advice and determine whether to approve the application for funding
- you will receive a letter confirming the outcome of your application.

Applicants will be provided with an application form in which to clearly and succinctly describe the project, expected outcomes and benefits as well as resource requirements.

Assessment

The primary aim of the RDF is to support digital development projects in regional and rural communities throughout Victoria that meet a need identified in a Regional Partnership Digital Plan.

In preparing the application, applicants will be asked to demonstrate the following:

- how will it address a defined digital need such as:
 - digital capability
 - digital affordability
 - digital access.
- how will it support economic and social development and allow regional business to be competitive and innovative through the uptake of digital technologies?

Mandatory Criteria

Endorsement of the Application

- Applications must have the written endorsement of the Chair of the Regional Partnership and be signed by the parties involved in the proposed project.

Provision of information

- Project applicants must have a clear plan on how they will share information about the project, how it was implemented and the outcomes. This will assist the Victorian Government replicate successful projects.

Scored criteria - Project Planning

The assessment criteria will be based around the 'What, Why, How and Who' of the project required in a project plan as follows:

What is the project seeking to achieve?

- outline the objectives and proposed outcomes particularly demonstrating how the funding will accelerate the uptake of digital technologies in regional Victoria and is consistent with the Regional Partnership Digital Plan.
- address any existing digital needs, gaps or problem
- outline a way to sustain project benefits once funding ceases.

Why is this project needed / of benefit to the community?

- quantify the scale and nature of the challenge the project is seeking to address
- demonstrate that the project is strongly supported at a community and/or business level and is consistent Regional partnership Digital Plans
- is consistent with, complimentary to and or leverages Connecting Regional Communities Program initiatives, and other relevant government policies
- is identified by or consistent with the Regional Partnership Digital Plans

How will this project be delivered; project management, budget, timelines, resources?

- has a clear scope and realistic time-frames
- well planned or part of a planning process for a larger-scale project
- is time limited and has a well-developed approach to sustainability
- is viable and represents value for money.

Who will deliver the project and who else will be involved or benefit?

- Demonstrates/outlines how the project will collaborate with a range of partners and access the necessary resources required to undertake the project.

Projects will also be assessed for value for money and risks, including alignment and consistency with relevant government policies.

Applicants must demonstrate the project is consistent with existing government policy where there is a clear relationship.

4. Conditions of funding

4.1 Funding agreements

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement with DJPR detailing all funding obligations and conditions. The standard terms and conditions on which the funding is offered are available from the RDV website at www.rdv.vic.gov.au or by contacting RDV on **13 22 15**.

The funding agreement is a legally enforceable document that clearly defines the obligations of both parties. The funding agreement aims to protect the Victorian Government's interests and to ensure the efficient and effective use of public money. It also ensures there is appropriate recognition of Victorian Government support on project related publications, media releases and promotional material.

Funding agreements must be signed by the organisation's Chief Executive Officer (or equivalent) and will:

- describe the purpose for which the funding must be used
- set out any requirements or conditions that must be met prior to the payment of a grant instalment
- outline agreed milestones and project outcomes that must be achieved before payment of a grant instalment.

Once the funding agreement has been executed, the applicant will be required to actively manage and deliver the project and provide progress reports to DJPR.

Successful applicants must enter into a funding agreement and commence the project within one year from the date of offer of the funding. If a project does not commence within this timeframe, the grant will be reviewed by DJPR.

4.2 Evaluation and reporting

Applicants must submit a completion, evaluation and sustainability report assessing the success of the project in meeting its stated objectives. Subsequent evaluation reports may be required for up to three years following the completion of the funded project.

Successful applicants will generally be required to submit progress and completion reporting, assess progress of the project against milestones, outputs and outcomes, and provide evidence of project completion. This will be dependent on the scope of initiative and funding milestones.

Successful applicants may be required to contribute information on project outcomes, including longer-term impacts beyond project completion, for use in program evaluation reviews and/or DJPR marketing materials. It is the responsibility of successful applicants to put in place adequate data collection arrangements to capture the appropriate data in relation to outputs and outcomes. These arrangements will assist DJPR to undertake robust evaluation of the RDF.

4.3 Competitive neutrality

All successful applications from a government body, including local government authorities and government agencies will be required to comply with the Competitive Neutrality Policy Victoria in respect of any commercial goods or services as a result of the grant.

4.4 Privacy

Any personal information about you or a third party in your application will be collected by RDV, a statutory body within the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) for the purpose of grant administration.

This information may be provided to other Victorian Government agencies for the purposes of assessing your application. If you intend to include personal information about third parties in your application, please ensure they are aware of the contents of this privacy statement.

Any personal information about you or a third party in your correspondence will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the *Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)* and other applicable laws. DEDJTR is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information.

The Department's privacy policy is available from:

Privacy Officer
Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

GPO Box 2392
Melbourne, VIC, 3001
Tel: (+ 61 3) 9665 9535
Email: privacy@ecodev.vic.gov.au

4.5 Acknowledgement

Successful applicants need to acknowledge the Victorian Government's support through the provision of a grant from the RDF. Promotional guidelines form part of the funding agreement and include the requirement that all activities acknowledge Victorian Government support through logo presentation on any activity-related publications, media releases and promotional material. A Victorian Government endorsed sign must also be placed at the site of infrastructure activities.

Successful applicants must liaise with DJPR to coordinate any events or announcements related to the activity. Successful applicants may be required to contribute information on activity outcomes for use in communications materials.

5. Contact details of regional offices:

Applicants requiring further information should contact your local RDV office or email: rdv@rdv.vic.gov.au

Ballarat

111 Armstrong Street Nth. Ballarat 3350
Tel: (+61 3) 5327 2800
Fax: (+61 3) 5327 2830
Email: information.ballarat@rdv.vic.gov.au

Bendigo

Level 1, 56-60 King Street, Bendigo 3550
Tel: (+61 3) 4433 8000
Fax: (+61 3) 4433 8099
Email: information.bendigo@rdv.vic.gov.au

Geelong

Level 2, Harrison Place, 237 Ryrie Street, Geelong 3220
Tel: (+61 3) 5215 6000
Fax: (+61 3) 5215 6099
Email: information.geelong@rdv.vic.gov.au

Horsham

Wimmera Business Centre
 62 Darlot Street, Horsham 3400
Tel: (+61 3) 5381 2762
Fax: (+61 3) 5381 2514
Email: information.horsham@rdv.vic.gov.au

Mildura

131 Langtree Avenue, Mildura VIC 3500
Tel: (+61 3) 5051 2000
Fax: (+61 3) 5051 2020
Email: information.mildura@rdv.vic.gov.au

Shepparton

79a Wyndham Street, Shepparton 3630
Tel: (+61 3) 5895 4100
Fax: (+61 3) 5822 2554
Email: information.shepparton@rdv.vic.gov.au

Swan Hill

324 Campbell Street, Swan Hill 3585
Tel: (+61 3) 5036 4823
Email: information.swanhill@rdv.vic.gov.au

Traralgon

33 Breed Street, Traralgon 3844
Tel: (+61 3) 5116 7300
Fax: (+61 3) 5175 0324
Email: information.traralgon@rdv.vic.gov.au

Wangaratta

Wangaratta Government Centre
 1st Floor, 62 Ovens Street, Wangaratta 3677
Tel: (+61 3) 5722 7101
Fax: (+61 3) 5722 7109
Email: information.wangaratta@rdv.vic.gov.au

Warrnambool

Old Police Station
 South West TAFE
 9 Gilles Street, Warrnambool 3280
Tel: (+61 3) 5561 4135
Fax: (+61 3) 5561 3851
Email: information.warrnambool@rdv.vic.gov.au

Wodonga

111-113 Hume Street, Wodonga 3690
Tel: (+61 2) 6059 0200
Fax: (+61 2) 6059 0250
Email: information.wodonga@rdv.vic.gov.au

