



Australian Government

Regional Growth Fund Frequently Asked Questions

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1: HOW TO APPLY

1.1: What is the Two Stage Process?

- A two stage process will allow applicants to submit an Initial Application for assessment without having to spend time and resources developing a Full Business Case and associated documents.
- The first stage is an Initial Application, allowing applicants to submit an application for an assessment against eligibility and Merit Criteria. This stage is competitive.
- Applicants who are successful under the Initial Application (Stage One) will be invited to submit a Full Business Case (Stage Two) to allow us to undertake a value with relevant money assessment.

1.2: What is the Department's schedule for the Initial Application process?

- Key dates for the Regional Growth Fund (RGF) are found at Section 3 of the Guidelines.
- Initial Applications will close at 5pm AEST on 27 April 2018.

1.3: What should I consider when preparing an Initial Application?

- Before you apply, you should read and understand the Program Guidelines, the Initial Application online form and the draft Grant Agreement.
- We cannot consider your Initial Application if you do not satisfy **all eligibility criteria**.
- Initial Applications will need to address each of the three Merit Criteria:
 - Create jobs
 - Drive economic growth
 - Build stronger regional communities
- In addition to completing the Initial Application form, applicants must attach all mandatory documentation specified in Section 8.3 of the Guidelines.

1.4: How do I submit an Initial Application?

- Initial Applications must be submitted via an Initial Application online form on the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities Grants Management System (GMS) Portal (<https://gms.infrastructure.gov.au/UI>).
- Applicants must be registered in the GMS Portal in order to view an Initial Application online form and submit their Initial Application. Many organisations are already registered in the GMS Portal. Unregistered organisations can register by following the links on the GMS Portal found on the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities website (<https://gms.infrastructure.gov.au/UI>).
- For further assistance in using the GMS Portal please contact the Regional Growth Fund Help Desk (1800 044 938) or via email at rgf@regional.gov.au.

1.5: What must be included in the Initial Application?

- Applicants must complete the Initial Application online form found on the portal and attach any mandatory documentation, as specified in Section 8.3 of the Guidelines.
- All applications will be assessed for eligibility and, if eligible, on their individual merits against the Merit Criteria.

1.6: How many Initial Applications can I submit?

- There is no limit to the number of applications an applicant can submit.
- All applications will be assessed for eligibility and, if eligible, on their individual merits against the Merit Criteria.

1.7: Can letters of support be provided via email?

- No, all supporting documentation must be submitted through the GMS Portal as part of your Initial Application.

1.8: Can I withdraw my Initial Application?

- Yes, a submitted Initial Application can be withdrawn at any time.
- Written advice of withdrawal must be provided to the Department at rgf@regional.gov.au, and must include the Initial Application ID and the reason(s) for withdrawal.
- If the Initial Application has not been submitted, it does not need to be withdrawn. The Applicant can either cancel the Initial Application in the GMS Portal, or simply not submit the Initial Application.

1.9: If I make a mistake in my Initial Application can I send the Department a replacement?

- To amend a submitted Initial Application, the Initial Application must be withdrawn, with amendments made and the Initial Application resubmitted before the closing date.
- Written advice of withdrawal must be provided to the Department at rgf@regional.gov.au, and must include the Initial Application ID and the reason(s) for withdrawal.

1.10: Can I provide extra information to the Department once the Initial Application Round has closed?

- No, once the Initial Application Period has closed, further information cannot be submitted.
- However, if your Initial Application is successful, you will be invited to provide a Full Business Case in relation to your project, for further assessment.
- The Department **may** contact you to clarify submitted information.
- The Department **will not** seek or accept additional information to support your Initial Application.

1.11: How can Regional Development Australia Committees (RDAs) assist me?

- Applicants are encouraged to seek the support of their Regional Development Australia Committee for their project when developing their Initial Application (www.rda.gov.au).
- Your RDA Committee can:
 - assist you to identify and develop a strong project proposal that will contribute to long term economic growth and is a priority within your region, and
 - work with you to prepare a competitive Initial Application, supporting documents and evidence.
- For contact information on your local RDA see <https://rda.gov.au/my-rda/>. Alternatively you can email the Department on rda@infrastructure.gov.au or call us on our RDA hotline 1800 505 938.

1.12: What happens if there are technical difficulties when I try to submit my Initial Application?

- Applicants should avoid submitting Initial Applications at the last minute, as high volumes of users can slow the system and may result in difficulties for you in completing your submission.
- If you experience technical difficulties when trying to submit your Initial Application, it is important that you seek assistance from the Department. Assistance must be sought via the Regional Growth Fund Help Desk (1800 044 938) or via email at rgf@regional.gov.au.
- The Regional Growth Fund Help Desk will be able to respond to queries relating to Initial Application lodgement.

1.13: My project plan consists of multiple documents but when submitting my application in the portal, I'm only able to submit a single attachment?

- When submitting attachments in your Initial Application form, mandatory document headings are available. Only one document can be submitted under each mandatory document heading. If one of your mandatory documents consists of multiple attachments there are ways around this:
 - Merged documents can be submitted as a single attachment.
 - The form allows for submission of multiple 'other' documents. If submitting under the other document heading please ensure the file name clearly identifies what is in the file.
- If you are still having difficulty uploading mandatory documents contact the Help Desk.

1.14: I am unable to log in to the GMS portal. How can I get a log in ID or password sent to me?

- If you know the log in details, but have forgotten your password, you can enter your log in ID in the appropriate field and select the 'forgotten my password' hyperlink. This will trigger an email with new password to the email address you have registered in the GMS.
- If your organisation is already registered in the GMS and you don't know the log in details, email the RGF Helpdesk at rgf@regional.gov.au providing your organisation name and ABN.
- The RGF Helpdesk will be able to advise you of registered GMS users within your organisation, and can create new users/user names and manually reset passwords if necessary.

1.15: How can I download the Initial Application form?

- The Initial Application is an online form, accessible to registered organisations via the Grants Management System (GMS) portal at <https://gms.infrastructure.gov.au/UI/Portal/PortalEntrance.aspx>.
- If your organisation is not yet registered, you can register by following the above link, selecting the 'RGF' button and clicking on 'Register here'.
- Screen shots of the online application form is available on the Department's website at <http://regional.gov.au/regional/programs/regional-growth-fund.aspx>.

1.16: Is there a maximum amount of funding available to applicants for the Regional Growth Fund (RGF)?

- The maximum amount of funding available for an individual grant is not capped under the RGF. However, grants must be for a minimum of \$10 million.
- The total funding available under the RGF is \$272.2 million.

2: ELIGIBILITY

2.1: Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

- The Program is open to state and territory governments, local governments, the private sector and not-for-profit organisations.
- For full eligibility criteria refer to section 7.2 of the Guidelines.

2.2: How are local government bodies defined?

- Local government bodies are defined as per the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*.

2.3: We are a branch of a not for profit organisation. Are we eligible to apply for RGF in our own right or should our head body submit one Initial Application on behalf of all of our branches?

- A branch of a not-for-profit organisation can apply for RGF funding in its own right if it meets the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 7 of the RGF Guidelines.

2.4: What type of projects are eligible for funding?

- Funding is only available for capital infrastructure projects.
- Projects must be for 'common-use' infrastructure or private use infrastructure that will deliver significant and sustainable benefits to the region by creating jobs and flow-on benefits to the economy.
- Total Australian Government Funding cannot exceed 50 per cent of the total project cash cost.
- You cannot include other Australian Government funding as part of your additional contributions for your project. However, you can identify it to demonstrate support for your project from that particular Government agency.
- Section 7 of the Guidelines provides guidance on what is eligible for funding.

2.5: What is Single Use Infrastructure?

- Single Use Infrastructure is infrastructure that is operated by a single legal entity for its own business purposes. Public utilities are generally considered single use infrastructure.

2.6: What is Common Use Infrastructure?

- Common Use Infrastructure is infrastructure operated by a single legal entity that can also be used by other legal entities to conduct their business activities.
- A Package of Works may include Single Use or Common Use Infrastructure, or be a combination of Common and Single Use Infrastructure. Examples of a Package of Works with a combination of Common and Single Use Infrastructure include:
 - Shared use trail (i.e. walking and mountain bike) that has an accompanying car park, visitor centre, accommodation and improved access roads, that together will attract visitors to stay for a longer period and provide a sustainable boost to the local economy.
 - A common use intermodal terminal and a series of bridge and culvert upgrades to improve the higher mass limit access to the intermodal terminal.

2.7: What can the grant money be used for?

- Refer to sections 7.6 and 7.7 of the guidelines for list of activities for which grant money can and cannot be used.

2.8: Can I use RGF grant funding for the provision of services and support activities?

- No, RGF funds cannot be used for the services and operational or maintenance activities.

2.9: What is meant by major transformational projects?

- The Regional Growth Fund has been designed to support projects with the capacity to transform regional communities, through new business and employment opportunities, promoting the long-term sustainability and economic viability of regional areas.
- Transformational Projects may provide these benefits through a range of mechanisms, including:
 - employment and skill development opportunities for young people
 - offering opportunities for indigenous employment and businesses
 - creating a wider range of jobs, stronger business communities, and making regional areas more attractive to professionals or businesses seeking to relocate or seek new business opportunities
 - improvements in connectivity to promote greater productivity, networking opportunities and ease of conducting business in regional areas
 - offering greater support for existing industries such as agriculture, tourism and manufacturing to allow these industries to continue to innovate and grow.

2.10: Can an application be made for multiple projects which together meet the funding threshold?

- Your project may include a number of strategically linked projects which together form a Package of Works that will deliver economic benefits to a region or regions.

2.11: Can a project be in multiple locations?

- Your project may include multiple site locations.
- Your project must be located in Australia
- If a project site is located in an excluded area, you must clearly demonstrate how ongoing economic benefits flow directly into an eligible area.
- Where there is mix of regional and remote site locations, you must nominate a project location based on where the majority of the benefit from your project will flow and substantiate your nominated location with evidence to be considered for the loading

2.12: Can an Initial Application be submitted for a project that has already commenced or is scheduled to commence?

- The Program will not fund projects where construction has begun or where construction contracts are in place at the time of submitting the Full Business Case.

- However, projects must be ready to **commence within 12 weeks** of executing the Grant Agreement.

2.13: How can I find out whether my project is located in an eligible area?

- The excluded areas for the purposes of the Program are the Urban Centre and Locality (UCL) cities over 1 million people for Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Statistical Geography Standard. For the city of Canberra, the excluded area is only the part of the Canberra-Queanbeyan Significant Urban Area that is located within the Australian Capital Territory.
- A mapping tool is available on <http://maps.infrastructure.gov.au> to assist you in determining the location of your project.

2.14: What is the definition of infrastructure?

- For the purposes of the RGF, infrastructure can be defined as projects which are capital in nature and could involve the construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade, or an extension to existing infrastructure. In its simplest form, it is bricks and mortar but it may not be limited to that. Examples of infrastructure include:
 - transport networks such as road, rail, ports, intermodal terminals, airports
 - road upgrades for higher mass limit vehicles
 - civil works for a new development
 - sewerage system
 - dams, water reservoirs, pipelines
 - gas pipelines
 - convention centres, community or performance centres, and
 - sports fields, clubs, grandstands.

2.15: What if I do not provide all the mandatory documents?

- Failure to provide mandatory documents will render an Initial Application ineligible.
- In addition to the mandatory documents, users may upload up to 20 documents in support of their Initial Application.
- Initial Applications with supporting information for claims against the Merit Criteria may rank higher than those without evidence-based supporting documents.

2.16: Do in-kind contributions count toward the total project cash costs?

- In-kind contributions are accepted but do not count towards the dollar for dollar matching cash co-contribution. There is no limit on the value of in-kind contributions.

- In-kind contributions can include land or equipment already owned and existing staff salaries.

2.17: Will Initial Applications be considered where additional contributions are not yet confirmed?

- Applications where an additional contribution is not yet confirmed will be considered
- Applicants must provide advice in their Initial Application as to when confirmation of additional contributions are expected.
- If an applicant is successful following the Initial Application Assessment, all additional contributions must be confirmed when submitting the Full Business Case.

2.18: In terms of additional contributions, what does 'cash' include?

- For the purpose of determining your cash contribution, cash includes money in hand, petty cash, bank account balance, customer cheques, and marketable securities. It may also include the un-utilised portion of an overdraft facility or line of credit.

2.19: When applicants are using existing staff or machinery to construct the project, how should this contribution be identified in the application?

- Where applicants already incur costs such as salaries and wages or machinery these can be included in the application as in-kind contributions to the total project cost.
- These costs cannot be used as part of the cash co-contribution and RGF funding cannot be used for these costs.

2.20: If an applicant engages additional staff to work specifically on the project can this be counted as part of the matching dollar for dollar cash co-funding contribution?

- Yes. The creation of new jobs aligns with the desired outcome of the Program.
- Outsourced and/or contracted labour can be counted as a cost of the project and can be included as part of the matching dollar for dollar contribution.

2.21: What is investment ready?

- If an Initial Application is successful and you are invited to submit a Full Business Case your project must be investment ready.
- Investment ready projects are those that have co-funding and all required regulatory and/or development approvals identified, and can demonstrate robust planning, in order to commence following execution of a grant agreement.
- If you submit an Initial Application and not all additional contributions are confirmed, these must be confirmed at time of Full Business Case submission.

2.22: What should be included in my Initial Application Project Management Plan?

- Your Project Management Plan should be commensurate with the stage of development of the project, and should include:
 - Project scope
 - Proposed Implementation methodology
 - Timeframes
 - Budget/Cost Estimates
 - Details of Regulatory Approvals
 - Procurement Plan
 - Risk Management Plan
 - Evaluation Plan
- Should you be invited to submit a Full Business Case, it is expected that your Project Management Plan would be updated.

2.23: I have applied for funding for my project from a separate Australian Government grants program, can I still apply under the Regional Growth Fund (RGF)?

- Yes. You can submit an Initial Application for funding under the Regional Growth Fund if you have applied for Australian Government funding from a separate funding stream.
- The maximum Australian Government contribution is 50 percent of all project costs. If you have applied for Australian Government funding from a separate funding stream you will need to identify this in your Initial Application including the funding status (i.e. sought or confirmed). If confirmed, you must supply evidence of confirmation.

2.24: Can I use funds received under the Northern Australian Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) as co-funding for an application under the Regional Growth Fund (RGF)?

- NAIF provides loans, which may be on concessional terms, rather than grants.
- For the purposes of the RGF, applicants can seek funding under both schemes and if successful under NAIF this funding would be considered an applicant contribution to the project rather than Australian Government funding and could be used to make up the 50 per cent co-funding required under the RGF.
- Applicants for the NAIF must meet the eligibility criteria and requirements of the NAIF Investment Mandate outlined on the NAIF website www.naif.gov.au.

2.25: My organisation is a University. The Guidelines state that public or private schools are not eligible to apply for a grant. Does this mean Universities are ineligible?

- Public or private primary and/or secondary schools are not eligible for funding under the RGF.
- Universities or tertiary education providers are eligible to apply under the RGF providing they are able to satisfy the eligibility criteria outlined in the Program Guidelines.

2.26: Are Australian Government Financial Assistance Grants provided to Local Government entities considered an Australian Government funding contribution to the project?

- For the purposes of the RGF, Financial Assistance Grants to local governments are not considered to be Australian Government funding. This funding should be identified in your application as a contribution from council.

2.27: Will an Initial Application with co-contributions from foreign investors be considered for funding?

- The eligibility criteria outlined in the Program Guidelines do not prevent co-contributions from foreign investment.
- However, any foreign investment co-funding must satisfy the requirements of the Australian Government's Foreign Investment Policy.
- For enquiries or information relating to Australia's Foreign Investment Policy, please visit the Foreign Investment Review Board webpage at www.firb.gov.au or contact the Executive Member, Foreign Investment Review Board, at the Australian Treasury by email, firbenquiries@treasury.gov.au or phone +61 2 6263 3795.

3: Merit Criteria

3.1: How can I demonstrate that my project contributes to Program outcomes?

- In your Initial Application you should submit independent, quantifiable evidence supporting claims against each of the three Merit Criteria.

3.2: If I am unable to address all the eligibility Criteria, can my project still be considered?

- No, only projects considered eligible, as per section 7 of the Program Guidelines will be considered for assessment against the Merit Criteria.

3.3: How do I calculate Full Time Equivalent (FTE) job estimates?

- A Full time Equivalent is based on an employee working 1800 hours over a 48 week period.
- Applicants should provide evidence supporting their FTE calculations in the Initial Application, including their methodology for calculating figures.

3.4: What is the Difference between a Direct and Indirect employee?

- Direct employees are those employed directly as a result of the project:
 - During construction this might include workers on site during construction such as building contractors, trades and labourers plus other workers who may be off-site but whose work contributes directly to the project outcomes, such as project managers, architects, designers and engineers.
 - For ongoing job figures direct employment includes newly employed ongoing workers following project completion.
- Indirect employees are jobs created for suppliers and distributors as a result of a project or business activity.

3.5: How should I go about calculating Indigenous and Youth employment estimates?

- For the purposes of the Program, youth employment is classified as employment for individuals between the ages of 16 and 24.
- Applicants may reference organisational policy or strategy targets for youth and/or indigenous employment, but will need to provide evidence supporting their FTE calculations.

4: ASSESSMENT

4.1: How will Initial Applications be assessed?

- Initial Applications will be assessed against the eligibility criteria (Section 7 of the Guidelines).
- All eligible Initial Applications will then be assessed against the Merit criteria (Section 8 of the Guidelines):
 1. Create jobs
 2. Drive economic growth
 3. Build stronger regional communities
- The Ministerial Panel will consider the recommendation and supporting information, and make decisions on projects to proceed to Full Business Case in consultation with the Investment, Infrastructure and Innovation Committee of Cabinet or Cabinet.

4.2: What is the Department's role in the assessment of Initial Applications?

- The Department will assess all Initial Applications for eligibility.
- The Department will consider all eligible Initial Applications against the Merit Criteria.
- The Department may request advice on applications from local, state and territory governments, other Australian Government agencies, independent experts and other external parties, on a range of matters, including but not limited to:
 - the history of the applicant in delivering projects
 - the viability of the project and applicant
 - the extent to which the project aligns with or delivers priorities in state and territory plans
 - confirmation of funding contributions
 - impact of the project on the region
- The Department may seek an Independent Viability Assessment from an appropriately qualified external consultant.
- The Department will make recommendations on projects to be funded to the Ministerial Panel.

4.3: Will the Department contact me with questions relating to my Initial Application?

- The Department **may** contact you to clarify information provided in your Initial Application.
- The Department **will not** seek or accept additional information during the assessment of your Initial Application.
- Successful applicants from the Initial Application Stage will be invited to submit a Full Business Case.

4.4: Are the criteria weighted?

- All eligible Initial Assessment will be scored out of 50.
- Criteria 1. Create jobs, and 2. Drive Economic Growth each account for 20 points of the final score
- Criteria 3 – Build Stronger Regional Communities accounts for 10 points of the final score.
- For eligible projects situated in remote locations, or which can be demonstrated to directly benefit a remote location, loading **may** be applied to your total merit assessment score.

4.5: Will my previous performance as a grant recipient be taken into account in the assessment process?

- No, previous Grant History will not be referred to during assessment of your Initial Application.
- However, the Department will check to see whether the project identified in your Initial Application has received or is approved to receive Australian Government Funding.

4.6: What is an Independent Viability Assessment?

- The Department will use the information provided by applicants to undertake a risk analysis of all eligible Initial Applications.
- Where a risk has been identified with the project and/or applicant organisation, and depending on the size and complexity of the project or amount of funding sought, an Independent Viability Assessment (IVA) may be undertaken. This will ensure the risks associated with the applicant and/or project is managed. There is no cost to the applicant for the IVA.
- The IVA will be undertaken by an appropriately qualified external consultant engaged by the Department and the findings of the IVA will be included in the assessment.

4.7: Do I have to get a letter of support from my RDA for my project to be funded?

- No. While a letter of support from RDA Committees would be well regarded, it is not a mandatory document. Letters of support generally demonstrate community support and affirm claims of economic benefit.

5: DECISIONS

5.1: Who makes the decision on which projects proceed to submit a Full Business Case?

- The Ministerial Panel will consider the advice of the Department and supporting information in deciding which applicants should submit a Full Business Case.
- The Ministerial Panel decision will be made in consultation with the Investment, Infrastructure and Innovation Committee of Cabinet or Cabinet.

5.2: When will I be advised about the outcome of my Initial Application?

- You will be advised of the outcomes of your Initial Application, following a decision by the Ministerial Panel.
- If you are successful, you will be invited to submit a Full Business Case.
- Applicants will have three months from the date of notification to submit a Full Business Case.

5.3: Is the outcome of the Initial Application process appealable?

- The Ministerial Panel's decision is final in all matters.
- There is no appeal mechanism for decisions on whether or not a project proceeds to Full Business Case.
- Unsuccessful applicants may request feedback from the Department within one month of being notified of the decision.

6: FURTHER INFORMATION

6.1: Who will provide advice during the Initial Application process?

- Questions can be sent to the rgf@regional.gov.au mailbox. Questions should be clear and concise.
- Answers will be provided in writing.
- Key questions will be added to this Frequently Asked Questions document which is available to all potential applicants.
- This ensures that consistent advice is provided to all applicants and does not advantage any single applicant.

6.2: Where do I get more information about the Program?

- All applicants should read the Program Guidelines and refer to this document in the first instance. This Frequently Asked Questions document may answer further queries.
- If you are still have unaddressed queries, please send your question to rgf@regional.gov.au.
- Enquiries can be made over the phone by calling 1800 044 938 throughout the Initial Application opening period.

6.3: What are the opening hours for the RGF helpdesk phone line?

- The phone line will be staffed between the Hours of 9.00am and 5.00pm AEST throughout the Initial Application opening period.

6.4: How many rounds will be run for applicants to the Regional Growth Fund (RGF)?

- There will be no further rounds under the Regional Growth Fund.
- To be considered for funding under the RGF, applicants will need to submit an Initial Application by the application close date.

- Should a project that is invited to Full Business Case not be successful at the end of the value with relevant money assessment, the Ministerial Panel may reconsider unsuccessful Initial Applications and invite a Full Business Case at a later stage.