

# Workforce Connect Fund – Large-scale Projects

## 2023-24 Funding Guidelines

### Introduction

New challenges require new approaches, and we are ready to deliver.

The *Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032* (the Strategy) is the first whole-of-government workforce strategy produced by the Queensland Government. It delivers on the outcomes of the Queensland Workforce Summit, held in March 2022.

The Strategy delivers innovative and practical solutions to ensure Queensland has a ready workforce to support growth, strengthen our communities and keep Queensland at the forefront of new economic opportunities such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Workforce Connect Fund, a key initiative under the Strategy, is a \$25 million investment over two years up to 2023-24 that aims to increase investment in industry and community-led projects that address attraction, retention and participation issues with the workforce.

There are two components under this initiative:

- funding is available to industry bodies and community peak organisations to deliver large-scale, sector-wide, projects that aim to address systemic attraction, retention, and participation issues within specific industries; and
- funding is available to provide identified human resources (HR) support and advice to eligible small businesses).

These guidelines have been developed for the large-scale project component only. For information on the HR Support Grants for Small Business can be found at: <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/employment/workforce-connect-fund>.

The Workforce Connect Fund is administered by the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT).

### Overview and objectives

The Workforce Connect Fund will fund large scale projects delivered by industry bodies and community peak organisations that aim to address systemic attraction, retention, and participation issues within specific industries. The Fund aims to drive systemic, industry-wide

change in relation to these issues to enhance workforce outcomes for employers, employees, and jobseekers.

Industry bodies and community peak organisations will connect and partner with other organisations, employers, and key stakeholders, to deliver innovative and flexible solutions to address workforce needs. This is to ensure that employers are attracting employees that have the right skills and experience for industry specific careers and are proactively implementing industry-wide strategies and mechanisms to support retention and enhance diversity and workplace appeal.

Projects must have the capability to be rolled out sector-wide and effect systemic change within the industry.

### Why is this Fund important?

The Queensland Workforce Strategy is focussed on delivering innovative and practical solutions and driving systemic change to strengthen Queensland's current and future workforce. Partnerships and collaboration between a broad range of stakeholder groups are central to successfully delivering these outcomes.

The impacts of COVID-19 have also changed the way that employees wish to engage with work, the drivers for attraction and retention and how 'meaningful work' is defined. More people are now weighing up financial and lifestyle factors when making employment decisions. Workplace culture and values are also having a greater impact on whether employees choose a particular workplace and whether to remain there. Employers are needing to re-think the ways they attract and retain staff.

### Where will the Fund be delivered?

The Workforce Connect Fund will be available throughout Queensland with priority given to industries that identify new, innovative, and flexible solutions to addressing workforce attraction, retention, and participation issues.

### Who can apply for funding?

Industry-led organisations and peak body associations (including community peaks) in Queensland are eligible to apply for funding for large-scale projects.

Applicant organisations **must** partner with other organisations, such as peak bodies, community-based organisations, HR/recruitment specialists and other



relevant stakeholders to ensure successful delivery of projects.

Applicant organisations must be able to demonstrate their peak body status to the department's satisfaction.

Applicant organisations must be registered for GST.

## Who will the funds support?

For large-scale projects, the Workforce Connect Fund will fund peak body associations (including community peaks) to connect, develop and implement, new and innovative strategies, services and/or mechanisms that support the attraction and retention of employees now and into the future.

Peak body associations that operate on a membership basis will be expected to provide services/support to industry more broadly and not limit the available support to their members. Support must be able to reach smaller businesses within the industry.

Peak body associations must also have a focus on increasing workforce participation and/or diversity within the industry **and** support jobseekers into employment.

## What does systemic change look like?

To effect systemic change, consideration needs to be given to adjustments or transformations of embedded workforce policies and/or practices, including, but not limited to, the adjustment of mindsets or social 'norms'.

To be effective and long-lasting, this involves collaboration and partnership with a diverse range of stakeholders at both the local and industry level.

Working towards achieving systemic change could look like:

- implementing transformational changes to workplaces to shift mindsets or stigmas within an industry; and/or
- implementing a shift such as skilling up or training non-traditional cohorts to work within a specific industry; and/or
- driving structural changes to recruitment, and employee retention, including through changes to supporting infrastructure or systems to change the way an industry operates; and/or
- supporting more Queenslanders, particularly women, to access the workforce through fostering flexible work practices to widen the pool of available workers.

It may be that one or all of the above is required to be considered when addressing and embedding large scale, systemic change within a particular industry.

## What can be funded?

The Workforce Connect Fund will fund large scale projects that aim to address systemic attraction, retention, and participation issues within specific industries. Projects must have the capability to be rolled out sector-wide and effect systemic change.

Projects must have a strong focus on connections and community engagement and must examine, explore, and trial new solutions with partner organisations to address industry specific issues with the aim of creating long-term, sustainable workforce outcomes.

Projects should address attraction, retention **and** participation within an industry or specific cohorts (i.e., participation rates or retention of specific cohorts or labour mobility)..

Eligible project activities could include (but are not limited to):

- Design and development of new information technology platforms or systems that enhance or address issues relating to workforce participation.
- Implementation of sector-wide human resources support and advice on topics such as health and wellbeing, flexible work arrangements, workforce utilisation, workplace inclusion and accessibility, cultural transformation, or specialised recruitment strategies or practices, and targets.
- Development of new programs and approaches that support specific cohorts and promote social cohesion within the industry.
- Development of innovative pre-employment programs, industry inductions, simulated work environments, work experience programs, or standardised industry specific entry requirement materials for new cohorts of jobseekers for the industry.
- Development of innovative, new mentoring or coaching strategies that trial new approaches to the professional development and retention of employees.

**Other innovative concepts that have the primary objective of addressing current and future workforce attraction, retention, and participation issues.**

## What outcomes are expected?

The Workforce Connect Fund, through the funding of large-scale projects, aims to promote systemic change which requires a commitment from funded organisations to connect and collaborate with other organisations to drive project deliverables sector-wide. This includes to both member and non-member bases and small businesses within the industry.

At the completion of a project, a measurable increase in retention rates is expected to be reported across the

funded organisation's member and non-member base in addition to the following standard Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) being met:

- A minimum of 10% of employers supported are non-member employers (including small businesses) within the industry. **Note: this must not be viewed as a membership or recruitment drive by funded organisations.**

Funded organisations will understand the intent of the Fund in driving systemic, industry-wide change is far reaching, and extends beyond any membership base.

- For the target number of employers assisted: at least 95% of that target must be achieved.
- For the target number of employees being assisted: at least 95% of that target must be achieved.
- For the target number of jobseekers assisted: at least 95% of that target must be achieved; and of those jobseekers assisted, a minimum of 55% are successfully employed at completion of the project.
- Other project KPIs may be established based on approved project specifications.

Progress against KPIs is to be reported to DESBT each month. Applicants will need to demonstrate how they plan to record and report measures against the KPIs.

As part of the application process organisations will self-nominate targets. These targets should:

- Be meaningful - stakeholders assisted during the project should get real value from interacting with the project.
- Be achievable - the assessment process will consider if projects have set unrealistic targets.
- Be inclusive – be able to demonstrate target numbers of jobseekers, employees and employers assisted in both regional and South East Queensland.
- Relevant to the level of funding requested - there is an expectation that organisations that apply for \$1 million in funding will have significantly higher targets than an organisation that applies for less.

## Linkages to Industry Workforce Advisors and other services

Under Queensland's Workforce Strategy, a network of Industry-based Workforce Advisors has been established to work directly with employers to help them address workforce challenges and diversify their workforces.

Industry Workforce Advisors will support employers to address gaps in workforces and connect to potential sources of labour supply, as well as connect employers with other DESBT programs and services such as Mentoring for Growth, Small Business Wellness Coaches and Financial Counsellors, Back to Work and VET

Investment programs to help strengthen pathways to employment.

Industry Workforce Advisors are a key connection for funded organisations under the Workforce Connect Fund and smaller, non-member employers. In addition to connecting with other relevant organisations to deliver projects, funded organisations **must** connect with Industry Workforce Advisors when rolling out project deliverables to ensure the reach is beyond its member bases.

## What is the application process?

There will be one funding round held each year, for two years up to 2023-24, under a transparent contestable application process.

### Expression of Interest

An Expression of Interest period will open in the first instance whereby applicant organisations will be able to submit their large-scale **project proposals** to the department, along with **evidence to confirm their eligibility** as a peak body organisation and provide their response to the **capacity to manage** criterion.

Applicant organisations **must** submit an Expression of Interest during the specified dates as outlined on the department's Workforce Connect Fund webpage in order to be eligible to progress to full application stage.

### Full application

Applicant organisations that submit an Expression of Interest may be invited to complete a full application whereby the full assessment criteria and evidence requirements must be satisfied.

Not all Expressions of Interest may progress to full application. Applicant organisations that do not progress beyond the Expression of Interest stage will be notified accordingly.

### Disclaimer

The department's Expression of Interest, application, selection process, and assessment criteria, may be varied or discontinued by DESBT as required at any time and for any reason, in its sole discretion.

Without limitation, DESBT may, in its sole discretion:

- apply such criteria and weightings as DESBT sees fit
- for Expressions of Interest and applications considered ambiguous, erroneous or incomplete, refuse to consider or request further information from the applicant, as DESBT sees fit
- not accept any application.

DESBT may also decide to accept, suspend, or not proceed with, or carry out itself, all or any part of the project proposals included in an application.

Peak bodies and associations must apply online during the open funding round period. Incomplete Expressions of

Interest or full applications, and those received outside of the published opening and closing dates, will be ineligible for consideration.

## How will Expressions of Interest be assessed?

DESBT will assess an applicant organisation's eligibility against the 'capacity to manage' criteria outlined in these Guidelines, as well as consider how each project proposal aligns to the purpose and intent of the Workforce Connect Fund.

Departmental priorities and budget may be taken into consideration when assessing project proposals.

If deemed eligible to progress, DESBT will invite eligible applicants to complete a full application for assessment.

**Note:** an invitation to progress to full application stage is not an indication of funding approval.

## How will full applications be assessed?

Full applications will be assessed against the remainder of the assessment criteria outlined in these Guidelines by DESBT, and an Assessment Panel established by DESBT that may include representatives from both within and outside of the department.

The role of the Assessment Panel will be to discuss, prioritise and recommend applications for funding to DESBT.

Applicants should note that:

- the order of the list of assessment criteria is not to be taken as an order of precedence or an indication of weighting which will be given to any particular criteria; and
- the list of assessment criteria is not necessarily exhaustive and DESBT may also have regard to such other criteria as it considers appropriate in its sole discretion.

Following the completion of full application assessment, DESBT will notify each applicant of its decision in relation to the application.

## What level of funding is available?

The funding available under the Workforce Connect Fund for large-scale projects is for a maximum 24-month term.

The level of funding is dependent on the type of project and services delivered, capped at up to \$1 million per project. Funded organisations must not receive funding or be eligible under other DESBT funded programs to deliver the same project. However, employers who employ jobseekers engaged in the Workforce Connect Fund may

be eligible to apply for the Employer Incentive Payment under the Back to Work program.

## What can program funds be used for?

Project funds can only be expended on costs directly associated with the delivery of the project including:

- wages and on-costs for a project team and other delivery staff
- costs associated with partnership arrangements
- administration costs
- materials and equipment
- specialist workshops and monitoring costs
- costs associated with the facilitation of work experience or work placement
- training costs for the delivery of accredited or non-accredited training
- overheads and operating costs

## Ineligible costs

Funding **cannot** be used for:

- any recurring cost for the organisation, for instance, ongoing staff costs; established positions within the organisation; normal operating costs (i.e., utility and telecommunications charges, building lease costs) and core functions of the organisation.
- the purchase of assets/capital equipment, or significant assets (buildings or vehicles).
- retrospective payments for expenses already incurred prior to grant funding approval or for work already undertaken.
- costs for consultants/contractors or other suppliers of services that are associated entities with the applicant.
- costs associated with attendance at domestic and international trade show/s, including interstate and overseas travel.
- any other costs deemed ineligible by DESBT.

## What are the funding conditions?

Successful applicants must enter into a formal Services Agreement with DESBT, which will include standard and non-standard key performance indicators.

A first payment will be made once the Services Agreement has been executed, and no sooner than 30 days prior to the start of the project. Subsequent payments are made upon satisfactory compliance with all reporting requirements and the acquittal of expenditure of the previous payment. Monthly reports will be required throughout the life of the project.

All projects must be fully acquitted after completion and any unexpended or surplus funds returned to DESBT.

## Additional funding for existing projects

The Expression of Interest and full application process is for **new projects only**. If an existing organisation, currently funded to deliver a large-scale project under the Workforce Connect Fund, wishes to continue or expand the scope of their existing project, this must be done by negotiation with DESBT and through a formal variation process within the parameters of an existing Services Agreement.

Funded organisations are encouraged to contact the department via email at [wcf@desbt.qld.gov.au](mailto:wcf@desbt.qld.gov.au) to discuss any proposed variation to their existing project.

Approval is at the discretion of DESBT and will not be an automatic process or guaranteed but based on a targeted continuous improvement strategy.

The department will take into account a range of factors when making a decision to vary a Services Agreement including but not limited to:

- budget availability
- adherence to reporting requirements
- performance against **all** specified Key Performance Indicators
- ongoing alignment to the intent and objectives of the Workforce Connect Fund.

Any Expressions of Interest received through a funding round process for an existing project/organisation will be **deemed ineligible** and advised of the above process.

## Appeals process

Organisations may request a review of a decision made by DESBT in relation to the provision of funding under the Workforce Connect Fund.

The appeals process has been established to help identify any problems in the application process, ensuring these processes continue to improve, and to assist with future applications.

Appeals must be lodged in writing within 21 days of being notified of a funding decision to:

Appeals Officer  
Program Delivery  
Department of Employment, Small Business and Training  
PO Box 15483  
CITY EAST QLD 4002

Organisations will be notified in writing of the appeal outcome within 21 business days from receipt of the appeal.

## Privacy collection notice

Applicants are required to read and agree to terms of USE of the Fund, including the terms of collection of their personal information. If you have any questions regarding how DESBT will use your information, please contact DESBT at [corporate.legal@desbt.qld.gov.au](mailto:corporate.legal@desbt.qld.gov.au)

## More information

For more information on the Workforce Connect Fund please contact 1300 369 935 or email at: [WCF@desbt.qld.gov.au](mailto:WCF@desbt.qld.gov.au).

Assessment criteria	How will this be assessed – including but not limited to:
<b>Capacity to manage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial viability of the lead organisation.</li> <li>Lead organisation’s structure, governance, risk management and reporting framework.</li> <li>Relevant experience, and current and past performance, in managing government funds and delivering services sector-wide.</li> <li>Project team’s experience and appropriateness in delivering similar projects.</li> </ul> <p><b>Mandatory requirement for lead organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>must be a peak body; registered for GST; and be able to provide audited income and expenditure statement for the past two years.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Addressing and responding to industry need</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear articulation of how the project will address identified gaps and workforce shortages.</li> <li>Demonstrated industry benefit, including being of a systemic nature with lasting benefits beyond the term of the project.</li> <li>No duplication of other programs or services, which includes clear articulation on how the project differs from normal business activities.</li> <li>Capacity to meet employment shortages and labour market needs in areas of attraction, retention, capability, flexibility and participation and evidence of regional priorities considered.</li> </ul>
<b>Connections and Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of partnerships with community, specialist service providers and/or relevant stakeholders.</li> <li>Demonstrated understanding of specific cohorts targeted and the level of assistance needed to address identified barriers.</li> <li>If targeting specific cohorts, for example Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, recent migrants and refugees, or people with disability, this may need to include demonstrated co-design or significant input from people being targeted to ensure it is fit for purpose. This includes building in appropriate consultation and engagement timeframes.</li> <li>Clear rationale for linking particular cohorts to specific job types and industries where there is evidence of skills shortages or labour needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Linkages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrated connections with Industry Workforce Advisors and organisations that can link smaller, non-member employers within the project deliverables.</li> <li>Engagement methods for learning exchange and mobilising knowledge</li> <li>Demonstrated commitment to driving systemic, industry-wide change extending beyond an industry membership base without intention of recruitment or commercial benefit. This includes reaching small businesses within the industry.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes and evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrated strategies to ensure success of the project.</li> <li>Identified measures of success and processes for robust data collection, analysis and reporting of the collected data, including regional and South East Queensland breakdowns</li> <li>Clear evidence that the proposed project design and delivery approach will deliver tangible and successful outcomes.</li> <li>Identified economic and social impacts of the project.</li> <li>Demonstrated commitment to roll-out implementation of project and sharing best practice sector-wide.</li> <li>Identified outcomes and/or strategies are adjustable and scalable over time.</li> </ul>
<b>Cost/value for money</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence that demonstrates the project is the most suitable option/solution.</li> <li>Ability to deliver proposed outcomes within prescribed timeframe.</li> <li>Identified innovative ways in reducing the costs of project implementation.</li> <li>Level of complementary funding and assistance accessed from other sources.</li> </ul>