



**Australian Government**

**Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts**

# **Mobile Black Spot Program Improving Mobile Coverage Round Stage 2—Grant Opportunity Guidelines**

31 July 2024

<b>Opening date:</b>	<b>31 July 2024</b>
<b>Closing date and time:</b>	<b>17.00 AEST on 25 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
<b>Commonwealth policy entity:</b>	<b>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts</b>
<b>Enquiries:</b>	If you have any questions, contact <a href="mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au">MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au</a> Questions should be sent no later than 11 September 2024
<b>Date guidelines released:</b>	<b>31 July 2024</b>
<b>Type of grant opportunity:</b>	<b>Targeted competitive</b>



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# 1. Improving Mobile Coverage Round Stage 2: processes

## The Program is designed to achieve Australian Government objectives

This grant opportunity is part of the Mobile Black Spot Program, which contributes to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' Outcome 5. The department works with stakeholders to plan and design the grant program according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines \(CGRGs\)](#).



## The grant opportunity opens – Release of Guidelines and call for applications

Timing: Guidelines released on 31 July 2024

We publish the grant guidelines on [GrantConnect](#). At the same time, we issue a call for applications from eligible applicants for funding under the Program. For applicant eligibility, see section 4.1.



## Applicant registration and pre-application documentation

Timing: Registration due by 28 August 2024 (*4 weeks after opening*)

Organisations wishing to apply for funding under the Program must contact the department to register as potential applicants within four weeks following release of these Guidelines in order to obtain access to the application documentation. At this time, applicants must submit their coverage maps as outlined in section 7.3.1.

The application documentation outlines the requirements on potential applicants prior to submitting an application for funding.

Organisations can register their interest with the department by emailing [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) and providing the following information:

- (a) Organisation name;
- (b) Contact name;
- (c) Contact phone number; and
- (d) Contact email address.



## Submitting final applications

Timing: Applications due by 25 September 2024 (*8 weeks after opening*)

*Proposals for individual base stations or clusters can be submitted at any time during this period i.e. it is not necessary to submit an applicant's entire application as a single package.*

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to discuss and plan co-development and co-funding opportunities prior to finalising applications. This could include discussions with states, local government or other industry entities. It is expected that potential applicants may engage in discussions on possible multi-Mobile Network Operator (MNO) solutions in areas of mutual interest.<sup>1</sup>

At final application stage, each applicant must complete all required documentation, as set out in section 7.4.

This includes the Application Pack, including the Assessment Tool and Application Form, for each Proposed Solution for which it is seeking funding, specifying in each case the information set out in section 7.4.2.

The completed Assessment Tool must include data on the level of New Handheld Coverage that each Proposed Solution will achieve. Mapping data must indicate the area to be covered by New Handheld Coverage, calculated using the required service standards set out at section 4.2.

Applications for Proposed Solutions through which more than one MNO will provide mobile coverage and connectivity must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from any of those MNOs that is not an applicant for the purposes of the application, including confirmation of how they intend to provide services through the Proposed Solution (e.g. Radio Access Network (RAN) sharing, co-location).

<sup>1</sup> Applicants are encouraged to engage with the *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)* if they consider that any competition issues might arise under the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (Cth)* from a multi-MNO solution.



**Assessment of final applications**

Timing: September 2024 to November 2024 (6 weeks)

The department will assess all eligible applications received by the closing date and time (see section 7.5) to determine which Proposed Solutions are to be recommended for Program funding using the Assessment Criteria in section 6 and the processes outlined in section 8.

An expert engineering firm in the mobile telecommunications industry, as appointed by the department, may test coverage claims at the department's discretion.



**We make grant recommendations**

We provide a Merit List of the Proposed Solutions recommended for funding through the assessment process to the Decision Maker (see sections 8.6 and 8.7).



**Grant decisions are made**

The Decision Maker decides which applications are successful.



**We notify you of the outcome**

We advise you of the outcome of your application. We may not notify unsuccessful applicants until Grant Agreements have been executed with successful applicants.



**We enter into a Grant Agreement**

We will enter into a Grant Agreement with you if successful. The type of Grant Agreement is based on the nature of the grant and will be proportional to the risks involved.



**Sharing negotiations**

Grantees will notify MNOs that have not already confirmed their intention to provide services through Funded Solutions (whether through active sharing, co-location or otherwise) of the opportunity to offer services from those Funded Solutions (via active sharing if offered, or co-location), and to participate in the detailed design phase using the process set out in sections 4.2.11 to 4.2.15.



**Delivery of grant**

You undertake the grant activity as set out in your Grant Agreement. We manage the grant by working with you, monitoring your progress and making payments.



**Date of Rollout Completion**

Timing: 30 June 2027

Grantees will be expected to complete the rollout of all Funded Solutions by 30 June 2027 (Date of Rollout Completion). The agreed Date of Rollout Completion will be set out in the Grant Agreement.

## 1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. These Grant Opportunity Guidelines (Guidelines) contain information for the Improving Mobile Coverage Round Stage 2 (the Round) of the Mobile Black Spot Program (the Program). This document sets out:

- the purpose of the grant program
- the eligibility and assessment criteria
- how grant applications are considered and selected
- how grantees are notified and receive grant payments
- how grantees will be monitored and evaluated
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the opportunity

1.1.2. You must read these guidelines before filling out an application.

## 2. About the grant program

### 2.1. About the Program

2.1.1. The objectives of the Program are to extend and improve mobile phone coverage and competition across Australia, by co-funding new or upgraded telecommunications infrastructure.

2.1.2. The intended outcomes of the Program are to provide mobile telecommunications users in eligible areas for each round with:

- access to new handheld mobile coverage
- greater choice of mobile network.

2.1.3. Over the previous rounds of the Program, up to 1,400 base stations have been awarded funding:<sup>2</sup>

- Round 1: 499 base stations, announced in June 2015.
- Round 2: 266 base stations, announced in December 2016.
- Round 3: 102 base stations, announced March 2018.
- Round 4: 180 base stations, announced March 2019.
- Round 5: 182 base stations, announced April 2020.
- Round 5A: 68 base stations, announced July 2021.
- Round 6: 41 base stations, announced 19 October 2023.
- Round 7: 62 base stations, announced 11 December 2023.

2.1.4. The department is responsible for administering the Program on behalf of the Australian Government.

2.1.5. We administer the program according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines \(CGRGs\)](#)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> A small number of sites have not been able to be built and have been removed from the Program.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines.pdf>

## 2.2. About the Improving Mobile Coverage Round Stage 2 grant opportunity

- 2.2.1. The Improving Mobile Coverage Round was announced as part of the [2022-23 Federal Budget](#)<sup>4</sup> in October 2022.
- 2.2.2. The first stage of IMCR was run between 2 February 2023 and 13 April 2023, with an approach to market seeking solutions to address identified mobile coverage and quality of service issues at 54 Target Locations<sup>5</sup> across Australia, including several major road transport corridors.
- 2.2.3. On 19 October 2023, following a competitive assessment process undertaken by the department, the Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, announced funding for 41 new base stations that will provide coverage to 42 of the Target Locations.
- 2.2.4. Twelve (12) Target Locations did not receive a solution through this process. Of these locations, four (4) are expected to receive coverage improvements from projects previously funded under the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) and Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP), or through commercial solutions. Six (6) of the Target Locations will not be progressed further through the IMCR as there is a low chance of success at this time.
- 2.2.5. It was decided to retest the market for solutions at Majors Creek and Mangrove Mountain where there is a reasonable prospect that a value with relevant money solution may exist.
- 2.2.6. Under this round of IMCR Stage 2, the department is seeking solutions to address the identified mobile coverage and quality of service issues at the Target Locations of Majors Creek and Mangrove Mountain.
- 2.2.7. As part of Stage 1 of the IMCR process, the department undertook a detailed analysis of the Target Locations. The Majors Creek and Mangrove Mountain solutions were categorised as **New Coverage Solutions**, which are defined as “solutions that deliver New Handheld Coverage at Target Locations with limited existing coverage”.
- 2.2.8. Further details on the Majors Creek and Mangrove Mountain Target Locations are provided at [Appendix A](#).
- 2.2.9. These Stage 2 Grant Opportunity Guidelines have been updated from the first stage of the IMCR to remove irrelevant material (e.g. reference to other solution categories), remove the requirement for a solution at Majors Creek to be a small cell (allowing applicants to propose an appropriate solution to achieve the intended outcome) and contemporise some text based on more recent program rounds (such as Round 7 and the Peri-Urban Mobile Program Round 2).

## 3. Grant amount and grant period

### 3.1. Grants available

- 3.1.1. The Australian Government has committed a total of \$44 million (GST Inclusive) over four years for the grant opportunity, with funding available from 2023-24 to 2026-27.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/about-us/corporate-reporting/budgets/budget-2022-23/portfolio-budget-statements-2022-23>

<sup>5</sup> 57 locations were announced as election commitments by the Government. Three locations are receiving Australian Government funding under other programs to improve mobile coverage and reception.



- 3.1.2. Following the awarding of Stage 1, \$3.047 million (GST Inclusive) in funding remains available for solutions at Majors Creek and Mangrove Mountain over 2024-25 to 2026-27.
- 3.1.3. Under this Stage 2, a nominal funding cap (the Cap) is available for a solution at each location of \$1.024 million (GST inclusive). This is consistent with the average cost of a solution deployed at a Target Location under Stage 1 of IMCR.
- 3.1.4. As a first principle, the department will recommend funding at least one Proposed Solution for Majors Creek and Mangrove Mountain where there is a Proposed Solution that offers Value with Relevant Money and is within the Cap for the given base station type(s).
- 3.1.5. Subject to the availability of funds, the Government reserves the right to fund multiple solutions at a given Target Location where it considers these address the mobile coverage or quality of service issues for that Target Location and represent Value with Relevant Money.
- 3.1.6. The department may, at its absolute discretion and subject to the availability of funding, also recommend increasing the level of Commonwealth funding for one or more Proposed Solutions above the Cap should it be considered Value with Relevant Money (see section 8.4).

## **3.2. Applicant co-contribution**

- 3.2.1. All Grantees will be expected to make a financial (cash) co-contribution to the capital costs of building or installing each Funded Solution, as well as ongoing operational expenses over the service period specified at section 3.5.2.
- 3.2.2. Financial co-contributions made by other MNOs that are confirmed to provide mobile coverage through a Proposed Solution at the time of application, but are not an applicant for the purposes of the application, will be considered in the same manner as other third-party co-contributions, as specified in section 3.3.

## **3.3. Third Party funding co-contributions**

- 3.3.1. To increase the reach of the Program, applicants are encouraged (but not required) to seek financial (cash) and in-kind co-contributions from State, Territory or local governments, local communities and/or other third parties. Interested third parties are also encouraged to contact applicants directly in relation to potential co-contributions.
- 3.3.2. During the application period, applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with State, Territory and local governments and local communities regarding the locations for which they intend to build Proposed Solutions. These consultations should include any specific areas identified within the location that would be considered desirable to be covered by the Proposed Solution.
- 3.3.3. Where applicants can confirm the level of co-contributions that State, Territory or local governments or other third-parties propose to make, applicants should include this in their application in respect of the relevant Proposed Solution.
- 3.3.4. On request, the department will provide State, Territory and local government contact details to organisations that have registered as eligible applicants for funding under the Program. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and negotiating contributions with any relevant third parties, and for testing and/or verifying any advice received from these parties.
- 3.3.5. For Funded Solutions that include a co-contribution from a State or Territory government, the department expects that Grantees will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth and a separate agreement with the respective State or Territory government.

- 3.3.6. State, Territory and local governments may own infrastructure in locations that could potentially be used for Funded Solutions. These governments may have specific requirements that will need to be reflected in the applications put forward by applicants for each Proposed Solution.
- 3.3.7. For Proposed Solutions that include co-contributions from third parties, a copy of the terms of the third parties' commitment to the applicant is to be attached to the application for funding.
- 3.3.8. In the event that a Funded Solution includes a co-contribution from a third party, the Commonwealth will not be liable for any costs that may arise in relation to that co-contribution. For example, if the third party's funding is not secured following execution of the Grant Agreement between the Commonwealth and the Grantee, the Grantee will cover the third party's funding.

### **3.4. In-kind co-contributions**

- 3.4.1. A third party may wish to provide an incentive for applicants to include a location in their funding applications. Third party incentives may include in-kind co-contributions towards the construction of a Proposed Solution such as the co-contributions outlined in section 3.4.2.
- 3.4.2. In-kind co-contributions could include:
- assistance with identifying and consulting with the local community on a suitable site;
  - securing the necessary planning and site approvals;
  - lease arrangements;
  - civil works required for access to the site;
  - assistance with coordinating power to the site; or
  - facilitating access to existing infrastructure.
- 3.4.3. Third party in-kind co-contributions are the responsibility of the applicant, and can be reflected in a reduction in the amount of funding the applicant seeks for a Proposed Solution.
- 3.4.4. Applicants are responsible for forming relationships and negotiating contributions with any relevant parties, and for testing and/or verifying any advice received from these parties.

### **3.5. Grant period**

- 3.5.1. All Funded Solutions must be completed by the date specified in the respective Grant Agreement. Consistent with section 3.1., funding for the IMCR Stage 2 Grant Opportunity is available from 2024–25 to 2026–27.
- 3.5.2. Funded Solutions must remain operational, and provide the required services outlined in section 4.2 to the target coverage areas on a commercial basis, for at least 10 years following the date on which the Grantee confirms that the required services are able to be provided from each Funded Solution in accordance with the Grant Agreement.

## 4. Eligibility criteria

### 4.1. Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

4.1.1. To be eligible to apply for funding under the Program you must meet the below criteria (see section 8.1 for details on the eligibility assessment process):

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)
- be registered for the purposes of the Goods and Services Tax (GST)

and be one of the following entity types:

- a **Mobile Network Operator** (MNO); or
- a **Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider** (MNIP)

4.1.2. For the purposes of the Program, **MNO** means a company that:

- Supplies a public mobile telecommunications service within the meaning of the [Telecommunications Act 1997 \(Cth\)](#)<sup>6</sup>; and
- Holds an apparatus or a spectrum licence (or both) for the supply of public mobile telecommunications services under the [Radiocommunications Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#)<sup>7</sup>.

4.1.3. For the purposes of the Program, **MNIP** means a company, other than an MNO, that provides communications infrastructure in Australia or overseas, including the installation and operation of infrastructure to be used by one or more MNOs to provide public mobile telecommunications services.

4.1.4. MNIP applications must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from at least one MNO to enter into a commercially binding commitment to use the infrastructure to deliver mobile services as described at section 4.2 for the Operational Period of the Proposed Solution. Funding may be awarded to eligible MNIPs on the condition that the MNIP and relevant MNO(s) enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

4.1.5. MNOs and MNIPs may also apply jointly for funding through the Program. Joint applications must be underpinned by commercially binding arrangements or the clear intention to enter into such arrangements should the application be successful. A grant may only be awarded to eligible joint applicants on the condition that the MNIP and relevant MNO enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement. The Commonwealth will only enter into a Grant Agreement with one of the joint applicants, being the Lead Applicant.

### 4.2. Minimum requirements

4.2.1. Unless indicated otherwise in these Guidelines, this section 4.2 sets out the minimum requirements that Grantees will need to comply with if their application is successful. These requirements will be included as schedules to the Grant Agreements, and form part of the assessment of applications as set out in section 8.3. Under section 8.3, Proposed Solutions that do not meet the minimum requirements may be excluded from further consideration, at the department's absolute discretion.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A05145>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A04465>

## Services required

- 4.2.2. Proposed Solutions must deliver New Handheld Coverage to the Target Locations of Majors Creek and Mangrove Mountain as outlined in [Appendix A](#).

It is not necessary for all individual base stations included in a Cluster Solution to provide New Handheld Coverage if all of the base stations are necessary to meet the objectives of the solution. The Cluster Solution will be assessed as a whole as per section 6.

- 4.2.3. The Government's expectation is that Proposed Solutions will enable consumers to perform a range of functions using mobile devices, such as making and receiving phone calls, sending emails and text messages, browsing the internet, accessing online services, downloading files, using mobile apps, and accessing emergency communications services. To meet this expectation all Proposed Solutions must:
- deliver 4G, and preferably also 5G, mobile broadband data services and a voice service; and
  - provide coverage modelling based on a New Handheld Coverage level with a Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP) of **-85dBm** at a 90 per cent confidence level for the cell area.

## Back-up Power

- 4.2.4. All Macrocell base stations in Funded Solutions must have an auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power for a minimum of 12 hours in the event of the loss of external power to the site.
- 4.2.5. Other base stations (e.g. Small Cells) in Funded Solutions must have an auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power for a minimum of 12 hours in the event of the loss of external power to the site, unless (to the satisfaction of the department) it is not feasible to do so. Applicants should provide sufficient justification for Funded Solutions where it is not feasible to provide a minimum of 12 hours back-up power supply.

## Multi-provider outcomes and co-build

- 4.2.6. Applicants and MNOs/other interested parties are encouraged to work together to develop multi-MNO solutions, including (but not limited to) active sharing or co-location. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and discussions with any relevant third parties.
- 4.2.7. If you put forward a Proposal Solution that offers services from one or more MNOs, you may include the eligible expenditure (see section 5.3) for all of the MNOs offering services from the Proposed Solution in the proposal. However, the department will only enter into an agreement with you as the lead applicant if the Proposed Solution is successful. All payments, including any components for the other parties, will be made to the lead applicant only.
- 4.2.8. In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an MNO confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed Solution, each Proposed Solution must offer the option of co-location to other MNOs, or the applicant must provide evidence (as per section 4.2.11) that the Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO for technical or other reasons (for example because the applicant does not own or control the site). If active sharing is provided at the Proposed Solution, the applicant is encouraged to offer access to other MNOs on commercial terms.

- 4.2.9. If a Proposed Solution is unable to support an additional MNO other than those already participating or is not capable of supporting co-location, applicants must provide a detailed explanation of why it is not technically feasible to reconfigure the Proposed Solution to support an additional MNO at incremental cost to the Co-locating MNO, or why it is not otherwise possible to offer co-location at the site. The department’s technical advisor may review any technical advice from the applicant. If the department’s view is that co-location is technically possible, then the applicant must be prepared to offer the option of co-location at incremental cost to an MNO seeking to co-locate on the Proposed Solution, or the department may remove the Proposed Solution from the assessment process.
- 4.2.10. Once an applicant is selected to build a Proposed Solution and if other parties express interest, it must give any other MNO(s) not already participating in the solution the opportunity to co-locate and to participate in the detailed design phase for that Funded Solution using the process set out in this section 4.2.11, noting section 4.2.10.
- MNOs who are not included in the Proposed Solution as submitted in your application will be responsible for meeting their own expenses for active sharing or co-locating at the site. The incremental cost for a Funded Solution to support an additional MNO will be provided to the other participating MNOs to allow for greater transparency in co-location negotiations.
  - For Funded Solutions where other MNOs are interested in co-locating, the costs can be shared more broadly and efficiencies achieved if the interested MNOs can participate in the design and build phases, which should ensure that their reasonable specifications are accommodated in the design and construction of the Funded Solution. This opportunity relates to all the requirements necessary for co-location to efficiently occur, including (but not limited to) the height and robustness of the Funded Solution, as well as site space for housing equipment and providing access to power and Backhaul.
  - The Government is supportive of Grantees offering other MNOs the opportunity to co-invest in Funded Solutions including (but not limited to) provision of Backhaul.
- 4.2.11. For the purpose of providing the incremental cost of supporting an additional MNO, a Funded Solution must meet the following minimum specifications to be considered capable of supporting two or three MNOs:
- The structure is based on one of the following configurations:

**Table 1: Minimum specification configurations for co-location of multiple MNOs**

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
3 x 1 panel antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2533mm (h) x 353mm (w) x 209mm (d), Weight 32kg); or equivalent load	3 x 6 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2680mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 146mm (d), Weight: 39.5kg)	3 x 10 port antenna on a standalone headframe (Dimensions: 2688mm (h) x 349mm (w) x 166mm (d), Weight 36.5kg)
3 x Tower Mounted Amplifiers (Dimensions: (457mm (h) x 275mm (w) x 208mm (d), Weight 25kg); or equivalent load	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 150mm (d), Weight 20kg)	6 x RRUs (Dimensions: 400mm (h) x 300mm (w) x 100mm (d), Weight 13.5kg)
6 x feeders + 300mm cable gantry for monopole structure type sites	6 x combiners (Dimensions: 330mm (h) x 200mm (w) x 130mm (d), Weight 3.2kg)	2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load
2 x 600mm fixed link dishes; or equivalent load	2 x 600mm transmission dishes; or equivalent load	
	Other DC Cables and Junction Boxes	

- There is sufficient mains AC power provision to support the requirements of additional MNO equipment. This section does not apply to solar powered sites, however, solar powered sites must have sufficient space for the additional MNO(s) to install additional solar panels.
  - There is a communications hut of sufficient size (or space available on the site for further huts) to accommodate additional MNO equipment.
  - There is sufficient space is available to allow any participating MNOs to install auxiliary back-up power supply which provides back-up power in the event of the loss of external power to the site up to the Program’s minimum 12 hours standard. Justification should be provided for Funded Solutions (e.g. Small Cells) where it is not feasible to provide a minimum of 12 hours back-up power supply.
- 4.2.12. MNOs interested in co-locating on a Funded Solution (i.e. the MNO expresses an interest in co-locating on Funded Solutions after funding has been awarded) will be required to express interest prior to the start of the detailed design stage for that Funded Solution. All parties will be required to negotiate in good faith with each other in relation to the Funded Solution access and price terms, and enter into commercial arrangements. The capital contribution to be made by the co-locating parties in respect of a Funded Solution must, at least, equal the incremental cost incurred by reason of provisioning co-location for that Funded Solution.
- 4.2.13. In accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined at sections 4.2.22 and 4.2.23, any disagreements regarding co-location matters will be determined by an independent third party, to be appointed at the MNOs’/MNIPs’ shared cost, and in accordance with the dispute resolution process.
- 4.2.14. Following the process set out in sections 4.2.7 to 4.2.13, if it is ascertained that there is no interest in co-location from another MNO, the Grantee will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location.

### **Backhaul access and pricing**

- 4.2.15. Where a Grantee selected to build a Funded Solution reaches an agreement under sections 4.2.7 to 4.2.13 for an MNO not already participating in the Funded Solution (the Co-locating MNO) to co-locate on the Funded Solution, and subject to section 4.2.20, the Grantee must offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee is in a position to do so (see section 4.2.17).
- 4.2.16. The Grantee will be taken to be in a position to offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee owns or controls an optical fibre or microwave link which connects the Funded Solution to the Grantee’s network.
- 4.2.17. The price at which the Grantee offers Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO must be more favourable than the regulated prices set under the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination (DTCS FAD), for example, by offering a defined rent-free period or other discounting mechanism.
- The ACCC has released the DTCS FAD 2020<sup>8</sup>, including a DTCS pricing calculator that may assist interested parties to calculate the regulated price for Backhaul.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.accc.gov.au/public-registers/telecommunications-registers/s152bcw-access-determinations-register/final-access-determination-no-2-of-2020-for-the-domestic-transmission-capacity-service-dtcs](http://www.accc.gov.au/public-registers/telecommunications-registers/s152bcw-access-determinations-register/final-access-determination-no-2-of-2020-for-the-domestic-transmission-capacity-service-dtcs)

- 4.2.18. Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Solution using an optical fibre connection, it must ensure that it provides sufficient Backhaul capacity, transmission and interfacing equipment to meet the Backhaul requirements of any Co-locating MNO on the Funded Solution.
- 4.2.19. Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Solution using a microwave connection, the Grantee must provide Backhaul services to a Co-locating MNO over that microwave connection, unless:
- the Funded Solution is designed and built to allow the Co-locating MNO to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Solution; and
  - the Co-locating MNO is permitted to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Solution.
- 4.2.20. The terms and pricing of Backhaul services provided by a Grantee to a Co-locating MNO must be negotiated commercially between the Grantee and Co-locating MNO in accordance with the principles set out in sections 4.2.16 to 4.2.20.

### Dispute resolution

- 4.2.21. Disputes between parties in relation to active sharing, co-location and Backhaul for a Funded Solution will be referred for determination to an independent third-party expert, at the parties' own shared cost.
- 4.2.22. The Grantee and Co-locating MNO will be bound by the determination made by the independent third-party expert.

## 5. What the grant money can be used for

### 5.1. Eligible grant activities

- 5.1.1. To be eligible for funding under the Program, each Proposed Solution must provide New Handheld Coverage (at or above the relevant minimum requirements at section 4.2.3) to a Target Location as set out at Appendix A.
- 5.1.2. Applicants may propose any infrastructure solution or combination of solutions (**Cluster Solution**) that addresses the identified mobile coverage or quality of service issues at a Target Location, so long as it delivers the relevant minimum standards specified at section 4.2.

### 5.2. Eligible locations

- 5.2.1. Under IMCR Stage 2 eligible locations are the Target Locations as detailed at [Appendix A](#).
- 5.2.2. Subject to network requirements, Proposed Solutions may be located in an area adjacent to a Target Location providing they deliver the relevant minimum requirements (see section 4.2) to the Target Location.

### 5.3. Eligible expenditure

- 5.3.1. Commonwealth funding under the Program will be available for the:
- estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded Solutions; and
  - the capitalised net present value (using a discount rate equivalent to the 10-year Treasury Bond Rate applied at the date of the application) of Operational Costs over



the minimum Operational Period of a Funded Solution up to the available funding Cap for each base station type.

- 5.3.2. Asset Capital Costs and Operational Costs must be clearly identified separately in the application, and will be considered as part of both the assessment against the Assessment Criteria (section 6) and Value with Relevant Money assessment (section 8.4).
- 5.3.3. Grantees will be responsible for any actual Asset Capital Costs and/or Operational Costs that exceed estimated costs.

## 5.4. What the grant money cannot be used for

- 5.4.1. Applicants must not seek Commonwealth funding for Proposed Solutions where they have already planned to invest commercially. All applicants must certify through the provision of a statutory declaration that any Proposed Solutions for which Commonwealth funds are being sought were not, at any time, part of their 2024-25 to 2028-29 forward-build plans.
- 5.4.2. The department may audit a Grantee's compliance with section 5.4.1.
- 5.4.3. Proposed Solutions must be infrastructure projects and cannot consist of Consumer Level Products or Equipment.

## 6. The assessment criteria

### 6.1. Assessment Criteria

- 6.1.1. All Proposed Solutions in this Stage 2 will be assessed against the **New Coverage Assessment Formula** to derive the cost to the Commonwealth per weighted square kilometre of New Handheld Coverage, and coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a MNIP, the relevant MNO(s)) but overlaps with another MNO's network. All other factors being equal, solutions with a lower cost per square kilometre will rank higher than solutions with a high cost per square kilometre.
- 6.1.2. The New Coverage Assessment Formula is:

$$\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)}$$

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$$\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}$$

- 6.1.3. The New Coverage Assessment Formula is based on the following components:
- a. **Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)** refers to the Commonwealth portion of the estimated Total Cost for the Proposed Solution (see section 5.3.1), including capitalised Operational Costs.
  - b. **New Handheld Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>)** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld mobile coverage where there is no Existing Handheld Coverage.
    - Where a Proposed Solution provides New Handheld Coverage from more than one participating MNO, each participating MNO's New Handheld Coverage will be counted cumulatively, regardless of whether the New Handheld Coverage areas overlap.



- This is in recognition of the benefits of multi-MNO solutions, and to ensure that these solutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to the higher costs that may be incurred for these solutions.
- c. **Overlapping Coverage (km<sup>2</sup>) / 2** refers to the size (in square kilometres) of the mobile coverage footprint area which will receive handheld coverage that is new for the applicant (or, if the applicant is a MNIP, the relevant MNO(s)) but overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage from another MNO, divided by a weighting factor of 2.
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement of a single MNO, overlapping coverage with the MNO's own existing network is not eligible for assessment.
  - For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement (e.g. active sharing) of two or more MNOs, overlapping coverage that is new for at least one participating MNO is eligible for assessment, but counted only once. Coverage located in an area within the existing network of all participating MNOs will not be eligible for assessment.

6.1.4. New Handheld Coverage and Overlapping Coverage will be measured by comparing the 4G handheld coverage provided by the solution against existing 4G handheld coverage (including as-yet unbuilt base stations funded under other Commonwealth and/or state government programs), as per the MNOs' submitted coverage maps at the handheld coverage levels set out in section 4.2.3.

## 7. How to apply

### 7.1. Timing of grant opportunity processes

7.1.1. The Program will be implemented in eight key stages. A summary of each stage and indicative timing is provided below.

**Table 2: Expected timing for this Grant Opportunity**

Stage	Activity	Timing
1	Release of Guidelines and call for applications	31 JULY 2024
2	Applicant registration and pre-application documentation	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 5pm AEST 28 AUGUST 2024 (4 weeks after opening)
3	Submitting final applications	Final applications due by 5pm AEST 25 SEPTEMBER 2024 (8 weeks after opening)
4	Assessment of applications	SEPTEMBER 2024 – NOVEMBER 2024 (6 weeks)
5	Announcement of successful applications	NOVEMBER 2024
6	Negotiation of Grant Agreements	From NOVEMBER 2024
7	Date of Rollout Completion	30 JUNE 2027

## 7.2. Applicant registration

- 7.2.1. Before applying, you must read and understand these guidelines, the sample application form and the sample grant agreement. These documents may be found at [GrantConnect](#)<sup>9</sup>. Any alterations and addenda<sup>10</sup> will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on this website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.
- 7.2.2. Potential applicants must register their interest with the department and sign and provide a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to being granted access to the Program documentation.

## 7.3. Pre-application lodgement

- 7.3.1. Upon registering as a potential applicant, MNOs who intend to submit applications for funding, or are partnering with potential applicants, under this Program must first submit their existing handheld 4G coverage information, incorporating the coverage from base stations funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program, the Peri-Urban Mobile Program and the Regional Connectivity Program and any base station funded under a State or Territory program, regardless of the stage of construction.
- 7.3.2. Existing handheld coverage information required at section 7.3.1 must be submitted to the department as set out in the expected timing at Table 2 (see section 7.1). The department may, at its absolute discretion, accept mobile coverage information submitted by MNOs after this date.
- 7.3.3. The existing handheld coverage information required in accordance with section 7.3.1 must be supplied as two separate layers as follows:
- Handheld Coverage Maps: being a layer modelled to the Handheld Coverage levels as set out in section 4.2.3; and
  - Existing Public Coverage Maps: being a layer representing the predictive handheld coverage modelling standards which underpin the publicly available coverage maps on the MNO's website.
- 7.3.4. For avoidance of doubt, the Existing Public Coverage Maps are requested for information purposes only. Assessment will only consider the New Handheld Coverage Maps (i.e. a “like-for-like” comparison).
- 7.3.5. Pre-application information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.4. Completing and lodging an application

- 7.4.1. Applications for funding must be lodged using the Application Pack provided following registration.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.grants.gov.au/>

<sup>10</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents, changes to close times for applications, Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents

- 7.4.2. To seek funding for Proposed Solutions, applicants must complete the Assessment Tool from the Application Pack to provide information for each Proposed Solution for which they are seeking funding, specifying in each case:
- the Target Location;
  - the proposed site location(s) (address and coordinates);
  - the total estimated all-up Asset Capital Cost of construction and the Operational Costs (GST inclusive), including, if required, Backhaul and power;
  - the amount of co-contribution (GST inclusive) being provided by the applicant;
  - the amount of Commonwealth co-contribution sought under the Program – noting section 3.1;
  - the amount (if any) of co-contributions (GST inclusive) to be received from third parties such as State, Territory or local governments, local communities, MNOs (other than an applicant) confirmed to provide services through the Proposed Solution, or any combination of these, and any specific requirements or conditions tied to the co-contributions (for information purposes);
  - the extent to which the Proposed Solution meets the Assessment Criteria in section 6;
  - whether the Proposed Solution is dependent on the construction of one or more of the applicant’s other Proposed Solutions, and explaining the specific dependencies (for example between individual base stations included in the same Cluster Solution);
  - predictive coverage mapping data for each Proposed Solution modelled to the New/ Handheld Coverage specified at section 4.2.3, and mapping data modelled to the level of coverage the applicant will publicly claim;
  - written support (where necessary); and
  - the number of MNOs confirmed to provide services through the Proposed Solution, and, if more than one, confirmation of the way in which multiple MNOs will provide services (e.g. RAN sharing, co-location).

Note: The applicant must agree that any predictive coverage mapping data supplied in the application can be used by the department to prepare promotional material for the Program.

- 7.4.3. In addition, applicants must warrant that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Commonwealth funds have been sought were at any time part of their forward-build network expansion or upgrade plans as set out at section 5.4.1.
- 7.4.4. Applicants must indicate their compliance with the draft Grant Agreement (to be provided to registered applicants) at the time of submitting their applications. Where the terms of the draft Grant Agreement are not accepted in full, applicants are required to submit a revised version of the draft Grant Agreement marked to reflect their proposed drafting, their position and their reasons for requesting the change.
- 7.4.5. Where an applicant has previously agreed a grant agreement with the Commonwealth under the Mobile Black Spot Program or another similar grant program that is administered by the department (for example, the Peri-Urban Mobile Program) (Previous Grant Agreement) the applicant may request the Commonwealth consider using the Previous Grant Agreement as the basis for the Grant Agreement under this grant program. When making a request, the applicant must provide reasons addressing why utilising a Previous Grant Agreement would

be appropriate. Requests of this nature must be received no later than 11 September 2024, being two weeks before close of applications.

- 7.4.6. The department may, at its sole and absolute discretion, decide to agree to use the Previous Grant Agreement as the basis for the Grant Agreement. However, the department is under no obligation to agree to any request made by an applicant to utilise a Previous Grant Agreement. Any decision by the department will be final.
- 7.4.7. Subject to section 7.4.5, the applicant may identify any terms in the Previous Grant Agreement the applicant does not fully accept or which in its opinion require adaptation for this Program. In this case, the applicant is required at the time of application to submit a revised version of the Previous Grant Agreement marked to reflect its proposed drafting, its position and its reasons for requesting the change.
- 7.4.8. Where the Commonwealth has agreed to use a Previous Grant Agreement as the basis for the Grant Agreement under this Program, prior to commencement of negotiations, the department will provide the applicant with details of the clauses from the Previous Grant Agreement that the department considers will need to be amended to reflect the requirements of this Program. These requirements will be drawn from the sample Grant Agreement provided in the Application Pack.
- Note: No contractual obligations arise for either party until a Grant Agreement satisfactory to the Commonwealth is negotiated and signed by the Commonwealth.
- 7.4.9. Details for contacting the department to seek clarification or assistance with any aspects of completing an application are at section 7.8.
- 7.4.10. Applications can be lodged using GovTEAMS, the Australian Government’s secure online document sharing and project management system. Potential applicants will be provided with information about lodging applications using GovTEAMS upon registering their interest for the Program (see section 7.2.2).
- Note: Potential applicants may request to use alternative online secure document sharing systems by agreement with the department. Requests can be made by email to [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au); and should be received no later than two weeks prior to the closing of the application period.
- 7.4.11. All electronic files, regardless of transmission method, should be provided in an appropriate Microsoft compatible format. Geo-spatial information such as maps should be provided in either ESRI Shape; MapInfo TAB or MID/MIF; GML; or KML format.
- 7.4.12. The department strongly prefers electronic applications. However, the department may also accept applications via hard copy and/or physical electronic media if there is a reason why electronic submission is not feasible. Applicants wishing to make applications through physical means should contact the department by email to [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) no later than four weeks prior to the closing of the application period.
- 7.4.13. The department will acknowledge receipt of all applications by email to the applicant’s nominated contact officer.

## 7.5. Closing date for funding applications

- 7.5.1. The closing date for submitting an application for funding under the Program is as set out in the expected timing at Table 2 (see section 7.1).

## 7.6. Late applications

7.6.1. Any decision by the department on whether or not to accept a late application to the assessment process is wholly within the department’s absolute discretion and shall be final.

## 7.7. Further information about the application

7.7.1. At any time during the initial registration, pre-application, application, or assessment processes, the department may:

- contact applicants to check information that may be ambiguous, incorrect or unclear;
- seek either additional information or seek clarification of certain information to assist its assessment of applications; and/or
- seek expert advice to verify claims made.

## 7.8. Questions during the application process

7.8.1. All requests for clarification or determination of the meaning of provisions in these Guidelines should be referred to the department by email at [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au). The department’s written decision on any matter is final.

7.8.2. Answers to questions may be posted on GrantConnect on a non-attributable basis.

## 7.9. Errors identified in applications

7.9.1. If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact the department immediately at [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au).

7.9.2. The department may, at its sole discretion, accept additional information from the applicant or a request to correct the error. However, the department is under no obligation to accept any additional information or a request from the applicant to correct any applications after the Closing Date in as set out in the expected timing at Table 2 (see section 7.1).

7.9.3. The department may, at its sole discretion, refuse to accept any additional information from the applicant that would substantively change the nature of an application or Proposed Solution after the Closing Date as set out in the expected timing at Table 2 (see section 7.1).

# 8. The grant selection process

## 8.1. Assessment of grant applications

8.1.1. Following the closing date for applications, the department will undertake an initial check to ensure each application is complete, that all necessary supporting documentation has been submitted as part of the application, and that it meets the Eligibility Criteria contained in section 4.

## 8.2. Risk assessment

8.2.1. The department will conduct an overall risk assessment in relation to the suitability of the applicants (and applications) for funding under the Program. The risk assessment will inform the Value with Relevant Money assessment (see section 8.4) and may consider a range of factors, including but not limited to: background checks, financial viability assessments, consideration of past performance by applicants under similar programs, where relevant, and general implementation risks.

### 8.3. Assessment against the assessment criteria

- 8.3.1. Following confirmation that the applications are complete and the applicants meet the Eligibility Criteria in section 4.1, the Assessment Criteria in section 6 will be used to undertake the initial assessment of applications received for the Program. This step will include an assessment of whether the relevant minimum requirements set out in section 4.2 have been satisfied. Proposed Solutions that do not meet the minimum requirements may, at the department's absolute discretion, be excluded from further consideration.
- 8.3.2. The department will review each Proposed Solution against the Assessment Criteria, and will rank each Proposed Solution accordingly. Applicants must provide evidence to back up claims made in their applications, including mapping data on coverage claims in a format required by the department (see section 7.4.11).
- 8.3.3. Following this review process, the department will prepare a separate Draft Merit List for each Target Location containing the eligible Proposed Solutions for that location ranked in accordance with the Assessment Criteria in section 6.

### 8.4. Value with Relevant Money

- 8.4.1. Following the creation of the Draft Merit Lists for each Target Location, the department will undertake a Value with Relevant Money assessment for each Proposed Solution to finalise the Merit Lists. Recommendations for funding will use the processes, requirements and Assessment Criteria set out in these Guidelines.
- 8.4.2. Based on the overarching Value with Relevant Money assessment, the department reserves the right to recommend funding one or more Proposed Solutions which were lower ranked against the Assessment Criteria than other Proposed Solutions within a Draft Merit List.
- 8.4.3. Based on the overarching Value with Relevant Money assessment, the department also reserves the right to recommend not funding one or more Proposed Solutions which were higher ranked against the Assessment Criteria than other Proposed Solutions within a Draft Merit List.
- 8.4.4. Key factors considered in the overarching Value with Relevant Money assessment include, but are not limited to, the:
- degree to which mobile services are improved at the Target Location;
  - extent to which competitive multi-MNO services are provided at the Target Location;
  - amount of New Handheld Coverage and coverage that is new for a participating MNO but overlaps with another MNO's network (km<sup>2</sup>);
  - length of major rail and/or road transport routes, not limited to those included in the Program as Target Locations, that will receive New Handheld Coverage, or coverage that is new for a participating MNO but overlaps with another MNO's network, from the Proposed Solution.
  - number of premises that will benefit from New Handheld Coverage, including coverage that is new for a participating MNO but overlaps with another MNO's network, from the Proposed Solution;
  - degree to which the Proposed Solution is supported by third-parties (as demonstrated by third-party co-contributions and/or written evidence of support); and the
  - cost to the Commonwealth of the Proposed Solution.

- 8.4.5. Any other Value with Relevant Money considerations taken into account by the Assessment Committee during its assessment of applications will be documented and form part of the advice to the Decision Maker.

## 8.5. Merit List

- 8.5.1. Following the assessment of the applications, the department will prepare a combined list (Merit List) of Proposed Solutions that the department considers meets the Assessment Criteria in section 6, will provide Value with Relevant Money to the Commonwealth in accordance with section 8.4, and which it recommends for funding.
- 8.5.2. The department will provide the Merit List to the Decision Maker and provide the Decision Maker with details of the assessment of each Proposed Solution against the Assessment Criteria, including the overall Value with Relevant Money of each Proposed Solution, and each Proposed Solution's ability to assist in achieving the intended outcomes of the Program as set out in section 2.1 and the objectives of the grant opportunity as described in section 2.2.

## 8.6. Who will assess applications?

- 8.6.1. An Assessment Committee will assess and evaluate each application on its merit and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which grant proposals should be awarded a grant. The Assessment Committee will be made up of members of the department, and members may also be drawn from other Commonwealth agencies.
- 8.6.2. An expert technical advisor in the mobile telecommunications industry, as appointed by the department, may validate applicant coverage and/or quality of service claims at the department's discretion. Other external advisors may also be asked to inform the assessment process. Any advisor who is not an APS employee will be required to perform their duties in accordance with the CGRGs.
- 8.6.3. The Assessment Committee may seek information about the applicant or their application. They may do this from within the Commonwealth, even if the sources are not nominated by the applicant as referees. The Assessment Committee may also consider information about the applicant or their application that is available through publicly available information or the normal course of business.
- 8.6.4. If the selection process identifies unintentional errors in an application, the applicant may be contacted to correct or explain the information.

## 8.7. Who will approve grants?

- 8.7.1. The Decision Maker for the Program is the Minister for Communications. The Decision Maker will review the recommendations set out in the Merit List and the availability of grant funds for the Grant Opportunity, and may do one or more of the following:
- approve the recommendations;
  - seek further information from the department or relevant experts or both; and
  - subject to section 13, make any amendments the Decision Maker deems necessary.
- 8.7.2. The department will prepare the list of Funded Solutions (Decision Maker's List) based on the requirements and advice from the Decision Maker.
- 8.7.3. The Decision Maker will have the final decision on all applications for funding, the amount of grant funding to be awarded, and the terms and conditions of grant funding.



- 8.7.4. There is no appeal mechanism for a decision to approve or not approve a grant. An applicant who is dissatisfied with the outcome may contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman as set out in section 13.2.

## 9. Notification of application outcomes

### 9.1. Application outcomes

- 9.1.1. The applicant will be advised of the outcomes of their application in writing, following a decision by the Decision Maker. If an applicant is successful, they will also be advised about any specific conditions attached to the grant.

### 9.2. Feedback on your application

- 9.2.1. An applicant may ask for feedback from the department within 14 days of being advised of the outcome. The department will give the applicant written and/or verbal feedback within one month of feedback being requested.

### 9.3. Further grant opportunities

- 9.3.1. If there are not enough suitable applications to meet the program's objectives (i.e. no proposals are put forward for a given Target Location or the received proposals do not offer Value with Relevant Money), the department may, at its discretion, engage directly with applicants to identify alternative options for meeting the program's objectives, including (but not limited to) administering additional grants on a targeted, non-competitive basis.

## 10. Successful grant applications

### 10.1. The grant agreement

- 10.1.1. A sample Grant Agreement will be provided to registered applicants.
- 10.1.2. Each Grant Agreement will set out the Grantee's obligations in respect of the Funded Solutions, including the rollout, co-location and service terms.

### 10.2. Termination, variation or amendment

- 10.2.1. The Government reserves the right to terminate or vary the Program (including via variation of these Guidelines) at its discretion, at any time, for any reason, including without limitation, in the light of changes to Government policy.
- 10.2.2. If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment prior to the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the department, potential applicants will be advised of the revised or new Guidelines in a timely manner, including any resultant extension that may be applied to the application period. Any amendments and resultant extensions will be published on GrantConnect.
- 10.2.3. If the Government determines that these Guidelines require amendment following the date for which funding applications are due to be submitted to the department (for example, if the applications received do not achieve the Program objectives), the revised or new Guidelines will clearly identify the extent, if any, to which the amended criteria will be applied to existing applications, and/or whether applicants will have the opportunity to re-submit an application based upon the revised criteria, and/or whether any new applicants will be considered. In this



event, existing applicants will be notified in writing and via GrantConnect and the revised Guidelines will be published on GrantConnect.

- 10.2.4. An organisation submitting an application acknowledges that neither these Guidelines, nor any application, give rise to a binding agreement or any other binding legal arrangement or legal relationship between the applicant and the Commonwealth. There is no binding agreement on any party until a Grant Agreement is executed between the Commonwealth and the Grantee.
- 10.2.5. The Commonwealth may recover grant funds if there is a breach of the Grant Agreement.

## 11. Announcement of grants

- 11.1.1. If successful, the applicant's grant will be listed on the GrantConnect website within 21 calendar days after the date of effect as required by section 5.3 of the CGRGs.

## 12. How we monitor your grant activity

### 12.1. The Grantee's responsibilities

- 12.1.1. Grantees must meet the terms and conditions set out in the Grant Agreement.
- 12.1.2. Grantees will need to establish Baseline Data for measuring project and Program progress. This Baseline Data will be provided by the applicant in their application (refer to sections 7.3 and 7.4.2), which will subsequently form the basis of project progress reports.
- 12.1.3. Grantees will be required to maintain a publicly available online database for the construction phase of the Program, as specified in the Grant Agreement, which will include information regarding the status and progress of Funded Solutions.
- 12.1.4. Grantees will be required to provide and maintain a stakeholder engagement plan for the rollout of the Program, including relevant details for each Funded Solution. The plan should cover:
- communication activities with relevant stakeholders including the local community, local councils and state and federal members of parliament; and
  - communication of updates to the community regarding any changes to the rollout of the Funded Solution (e.g. timing, location, expected coverage outcomes).
- 12.1.5. The Grantee must also inform the department of any changes to their name, addresses, nominated contact details, or bank account details.
- 12.1.6. The Grantee must notify the department of any key changes to their organisation or its business activities, particularly if these affect the Grantee's ability to complete their grant, carry on business and pay debts due.

### 12.2. The department's responsibilities

- 12.2.1. The department will:
- meet the terms and conditions set out in the Grant Agreement;
  - provide timely administration of the grant; and
  - evaluate the Grantee's performance.

- 12.2.2. The department will monitor the progress of the Grantee’s project by assessing reports the Grantee submits and may conduct site visits to confirm details of the reports if necessary. Occasionally, the department may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments.

### 12.3. Grant payments and GST

- 12.3.1. Payments will be made as set out in the Grant Agreement. If the applicant is registered for the GST, where applicable, the department will add GST to the grant payment.
- 12.3.2. Grants are assessable income for taxation purposes, unless exempted by a taxation law. The department recommends that Grantees seek independent professional advice on their taxation obligations or seek assistance from the Australian Taxation Office. The department does not provide advice on an applicant’s particular taxation circumstances.

### 12.4. Evaluation

- 12.4.1. The Program will be evaluated by the department against key performance indicators (KPIs) as agreed with each Grantee. The department will use the KPIs to monitor, measure and report on progress, outputs, outcomes and benefits of the Program.
- 12.4.2. We may evaluate the Grant Opportunity to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from your application and reports for this purpose. We may also interview Grantees, or ask for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted you and to evaluate how effective the Program was in achieving its outcomes.
- 12.4.3. Grantees will be required to participate in Program reviews and evaluations. We may contact Grantees up to one year after the rollout completion date for more information to assist with this evaluation.

## 13. Probity

### 13.1. Accountability and probity

- 13.1.1. The department is committed to ensuring that the process for selecting and approving Funded Solutions under the Program is fair, conducted in accordance with these Guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct, and is consistent with the CGRGs.
- 13.1.2. The department, as a non-corporate Commonwealth entity under the [Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 \(Cth\)](#)<sup>11</sup> (the PGPA Act), in relation to its investment in the Program, must comply with:
- the various duties set out in section 15 of the PGPA Act including promoting the proper use and management of public resources for which the department is responsible; promoting the achievement of the purposes of the department; and promoting the financial sustainability of the department;
  - section 16 of the PGPA Act which requires the department to establish and maintain appropriate systems of risk oversight and management and an appropriate system of internal controls; and

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2013A00123>

- the CGRGs, which establish the overarching Commonwealth grant policy framework and articulate the expectations for the department (including but not limited to a range of probity and reporting requirements).

## 13.2. Enquiries and feedback

- 13.2.1. The department's [Client Service Charter](#)<sup>12</sup> applies to complaints about this grant opportunity. All complaints about a grant process must be provided in writing.
- 13.2.2. Any questions you have about grant decisions for this grant opportunity should be sent to [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au).
- 13.2.3. If you do not agree with the way the department has handled your complaint, you may complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will not usually look into a complaint unless the matter has first been raised directly with the department.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on:

Phone (Toll free): 1300 362 072  
 Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)  
 Website: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

## 13.3. Conflicts of interest

- 13.3.1. Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the Grant Opportunity. There may be an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest if the department's staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or the eligible applicant or any of the eligible applicant's personnel has a:
- professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the Selection Process, such as an Australian Government officer;
  - relationship with or interest in, an organisation, which is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently; or
  - relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain because the organisation receives a grant under the Program.
- 13.3.2. Applicants will be asked to declare, as part of their application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interest or that, to the best of the applicant's knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.
- 13.3.3. If an applicant later identifies an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest, it must inform the department in writing immediately.
- 13.3.4. Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled in accordance with the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct (Section 13(7)) of the [Public Service Act 1999 \(Cth\)](#)<sup>13</sup> and applicable Australian Government policy and legal requirements. Assessment Committee members and other officials including the Decision Maker must also declare any conflicts of interest in accordance with the probity requirements of the Program.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/about/charter.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A00538>

## 13.4. Costs

- 13.4.1. The department will not, in any circumstances, meet any costs or expenses incurred by an applicant in connection with their application. Applicants must bear their own costs and expenses associated with the application and assessment process, and the preparation, negotiation and execution of the Grant Agreement and of other documentation.

## 13.5. Background checks

- 13.5.1. The department may undertake checks on organisations submitting an application for the Program (including the applicant’s personnel). It may also undertake consultations with other relevant third parties regarding any application. The department may also conduct checks to obtain any relevant information not disclosed in an application.
- 13.5.2. As part of these checks, the department reserves the right to use information from:
- the department’s databases;
  - other Government agencies, such as the Australian Taxation Office and Australian Securities and Investments Commission;
  - State or Territory agencies;
  - law enforcement agencies;
  - credit reference agencies;
  - courts or tribunals;
  - other public sources of information; and
  - any other appropriate organisation or person.

## 13.6. Confidentiality

- 13.6.1. The department will treat the applicant’s commercially sensitive information provided in their application as Confidential Information provided that the information is designated as Confidential Information (Applicant Confidential Information).
- 13.6.2. The department’s confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Applicant Confidential Information is:
- authorised or required by law to be disclosed;
  - disclosed by the department to its advisers, officers, employees, or other agencies’ officers or employees, for the purpose of evaluating the applicant’s application and during any Grant Agreement negotiations;
  - disclosed by the department in response to a request by a house or a committee of the Parliament of Australia, or a house or a committee of the Parliament of a state or territory;
  - disclosed by the department to its responsible Minister and his or her advisors or the Auditor-General and the APS employees assisting the Auditor-General;
  - shared by the Commonwealth within the Commonwealth (for example, another Commonwealth agency), where this serves the Commonwealth’s legitimate interests;
  - disclosed to the department’s officers to enable the effective management or auditing of the Program; or
  - in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the department’s confidentiality obligations.
- 13.6.3. The applicant will treat any information provided by the department as Confidential Information provided that the information is designated as Confidential Information. (Commonwealth Confidential Information).

- 13.6.4. The applicant’s confidentiality obligation does not apply to the extent any Commonwealth Confidential Information is:
- authorised or required by law to be disclosed; or
  - in the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the applicant’s confidentiality obligation.
- 13.6.5. The department may share with State or Territory governments (on a confidential basis) any or all information contained in applications which it considers relevant to the respective jurisdiction based on the location of the Proposed Solution(s), including costings for Proposed Solutions that are not successful in receiving funding through the Program.

## 13.7. Intellectual Property rights

- 13.7.1. By submitting an application under the Program, to the extent the applicant’s application contains:
- its Intellectual Property; or
  - a third party’s Intellectual Property,
- the applicant grants by the making of its application, (or will procure for) the Commonwealth a permanent, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide, non-exclusive licence (including a right of sublicense) to use, reproduce, adapt, and communicate the applicant’s (or third party’s) Intellectual Property contained in its application under the Program provided the use, reproduction, adaptation, or communication is in connection with any assessment processes under, or the evaluation of, or promotion of the Program.
- 13.7.2. Any licence granted to the Commonwealth in relation to Intellectual Property rights does not include a right to exploit the Intellectual Property for commercial purposes.

## 13.8. Privacy

- 13.8.1. We treat personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) (Cth) (the Privacy Act) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#) (the APPs). This includes letting applicants know:
- what personal information we collect;
  - why we collect your personal information; and
  - who we give your information to.
- 13.8.2. Applicants’ personal information can only be disclosed to someone else for the primary purpose for which it was collected, unless an exemption applies under the *Privacy Act 1988*. The Australian Government may use and disclose information about grant applicants under this Grant Opportunity. This includes disclosing grant information on GrantConnect as required for reporting purposes and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.
- 13.8.3. We may share the information you give us with other Commonwealth entities for purposes including government administration, research, or service delivery, according to Australian laws. As part of your application, you declare your ability to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the Australian Privacy Principles and impose the same privacy obligations on officers, employees, agents and subcontractors that you engage to assist with the eligible Grant Activity, in respect of personal information you collect, use, store, or disclose in connection with the Grant Activity. Accordingly, you must not do anything which if done by the department would breach an [Australian Privacy Principle](#) as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988*.

- 13.8.4. For further information about our privacy obligations (including in relation how to access or correct personal information or make a complaint) and our contact details for privacy matters, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

## 13.9. Exclusion of liabilities

- 13.9.1. To the greatest extent possible in law, the department is not liable to applicants on the basis of a process contract (express or implied), promissory estoppel, equitable, restitutionary, contractual or quasi-contractual grounds or any other legal or equitable principle or theory, in relation to the Selection Process, including without limitation, when the department or the Decision Maker:

- varies or terminates all or any part of the Selection Process or any negotiations;
- decides not to fund any or all of the activities sought through the Selection Process;
- varies the Selection Process; or
- exercises or fails to exercise any of its other rights under, or in relation to, these Guidelines.

## 13.10. Disclaimer

- 13.10.1. The Commonwealth, the department and its officers, employees, agents and advisors:

- are not, and will not be, responsible or liable for the accuracy or completeness of any information in or provided in connection with these Guidelines and associated forms;
- make no express or implied representation or warranty that any statement as to future matters will prove correct;
- disclaim any and all liability arising from any information provided to the applicants, including, without limitation, errors in, or omissions contained in, that information;
- except so far as liability under any statute cannot be excluded, accept no responsibility arising in any way from errors or omissions contained in any information in these Guidelines and associated forms; and
- accept no liability for any loss or damage suffered by any person as a result of that person, or any other person, placing reliance on the contents of these Guidelines and associated forms, or any other information provided by the department.

## 13.11. Fraud prevention

- 13.11.1. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that their application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information is a serious offence under the [Criminal Code Act 1995 \(Cth\)](#)<sup>14</sup> and the department will investigate any false or misleading information and may exclude your application from further consideration.

## 13.12. Freedom of Information

- 13.12.1. All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982 \(Cth\)](#)<sup>15</sup> (FOI Act).
- 13.12.2. The purpose of the FOI Act is to give members of the public rights of access to information held by the Australian Government and its entities. Under the FOI Act, members of the public can seek access to documents held by the Australian Government. This right of access is

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A04868>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A02562>

limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary to protect essential public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

- 13.12.3. All Freedom of Information requests must be referred to the department’s Freedom of Information Coordinator in writing at [foi@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:foi@infrastructure.gov.au).

## 14. Consultation

- 14.1.1. In November 2022, the department released the draft Guidelines for the first stage of the IMCR seeking stakeholder feedback on the proposed design of the Program. This feedback was considered in preparing the Guidelines for the first stage. The Guidelines have been updated as described at section 2.2.

## 15. Glossary

Term	Definition
4G	Fourth generation mobile telecommunications service.
5G	Fifth generation mobile telecommunications service.
Application Pack	Has the meaning given in section 7.4.1.
Assessment Criteria	The specified principles or standards in section 6 against which applications will be assessed. These criteria are also used to assess the merits of proposals and, in the case of a competitive Grant Opportunity, to determine application rankings.
Assessment Form	Appendix B to the Application Pack.
Assessment Tool	Has the meaning given in section 7.4.2.
Asset Capital Costs (CAPEX)	The costs to purchase and build physical assets under the Program.
Australian Business Number (ABN)	A unique 11 digit number that identifies a business to the government and community
Backhaul	A link between the core or backbone of a network and sub-networks, transporting data from a series of disparate locations to a more centralised location.
Baseline Data	The applicant’s existing coverage and the amount of new coverage which each Funded Solution would provide will be used as the mobile coverage baseline data for section 12.1.2.
Cluster Solution	A Proposed Solution comprising two or more (to a maximum of fifteen) base stations that the applicant is putting forward as a single proposal due to economic and/or network design benefits.
Co-locating MNO	Has the meaning given in section 4.2.
Commonwealth entity	See subsections 10(1) and (2) of the PGPA Act.
<a href="#">Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines (CGRGs)</a>	Rules that establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration. Under this overarching framework, non-corporate Commonwealth entities undertake grants administration based on the mandatory requirements and key principles of grants administration.
Confidential Information	Applicant Confidential Information and Commonwealth Confidential Information as defined in section 13.6.1 and section 13.6.3.



Term	Definition
Consumer Level Products or Equipment	Non-infrastructure telecommunication products purchased for the consumption by a limited number of users.
Date of Rollout Completion	Has the meaning given in stage 8 of section 7.1.
Decision Maker	The Minister for Communications.
Decision Maker's List	Has the meaning given in section 8.7.2.
Department	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
Draft Merit List	The ranked list of Proposed Solutions for a Target Location following the assessment process, but before Value with Relevant Money considerations.
Eligibility Criteria	The mandatory criteria which must be met to qualify for a grant. Assessment Criteria may apply in addition to Eligibility Criteria.
Eligible Location	Has the meaning given in section 5.2.
Existing Handheld Coverage	Coverage able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device within the applicant's mobile network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that is currently available;</li> <li>• that will be provided by any base station that will be delivered by the applicant under a round of the Mobile Black Spot Program, Peri-Urban Mobile Program or other Commonwealth grant program; and/or</li> <li>• that will be provided by any applicant base station funded under a State or Territory program.</li> </ul>
FOI	Freedom of Information
Funded Solution	Solution selected for funding under the Program.
Grant	For the purposes of the CGRGs, a 'grant' is an arrangement for the provision of financial assistance by the Commonwealth or on behalf of the Commonwealth: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>under which relevant money<sup>16</sup> or other <a href="#">Consolidated Revenue Fund</a> (CRF) money<sup>17</sup> is to be paid to a Grantee other than the Commonwealth; and</li> </ol> <p>which is intended to help address one or more of the Australian Government's policy outcomes while assisting the Grantee achieve its objectives.</p>
Grant Activity/Activities	Refers to the project/tasks/services that the Grantee is required to undertake
Grant Agreement	The agreement which sets out the relationship between the Commonwealth and the Grantee, and specifies the details of the grant and responsibilities in relation to the grant.
<a href="#">GrantConnect</a>	The Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CGRGs.
Grant Opportunity	The specific grant round or process where a Commonwealth grant is made available to potential applicants. Grant Opportunities may be open or targeted, and will reflect the relevant grant Selection Process.

<sup>16</sup> Relevant money is defined in the PGPA Act. See section 8, Dictionary.

<sup>17</sup> Other CRF money is defined in the PGPA Act. See section 105, Rules in relation to other CRF money.



Term	Definition
Grant Program	A 'program' carries its natural meaning and is intended to cover a potentially wide range of related activities aimed at achieving government policy outcomes. A Grant Program is a group of one or more Grant Opportunities under a single [entity] Portfolio Budget Statement Program.
Grantee	The individual/organisation which has been selected to receive a grant and has executed a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth.
GST	Goods and Services Tax
Intellectual Property	Includes: (a) all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts); (b) all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and (c) all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.
Lead Applicant	The responsible entity for application, funding and reporting purposes.
Macrocell	The widest range of cell sizes used in a mobile phone network served by a mobile base station, often used in rural areas and along highways. Macrocells generally provide larger coverage than small cell base stations or microcells, with a typical power output of tens of watts.
Merit List	The list of Proposed Solutions that the department will recommend to the Decision Maker when the assessment process and Value with Relevant Money consideration is completed (refer to section 8.5).
Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.3.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.2.
New Coverage Assessment Formula	Has the meaning given in section 6.1.2.
New Coverage Solution	Has the meaning given in section 2.2.7.
New Handheld Coverage	Coverage from a New Coverage Solution that will be able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device in areas that do not receive Existing Handheld Coverage at the signal levels specified in section 4.2.3.
Operational Costs (OPEX)	Costs for additional goods or services that are purchased for the ongoing operation of an asset.
Operational Period	The length of time that an asset is required to provide services for which it was funded under the Program.
Previous Grant Agreement	Has the meaning given in section 7.4.5.
Target Location	A location listed at <a href="#">Appendix A</a> .
Program	The Mobile Black Spot Program - Improving Mobile Coverage Round – Stage 2
Proposed Solution	Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.

Term	Definition
Quality of Service	In mobile telecommunications, the description or measurement of the overall performance of a service, particularly the performance seen by the users of the network.
Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP)	The 4G or 5G received signal power in a long-term evolution (LTE) or 5G New Radio (NR) network measured in decibels per milliwatt (dBm).
Selection Process	The method used to select potential grantees. This process may involve comparative assessment of applications or the assessment of applications against the Eligibility Criteria and/or the Assessment Criteria.
Small Cell	A 'small cell' in a mobile phone network, with a typical range less than two kilometres. Often used to add network capacity in areas of dense population or very remote locations, utilising power control to limit coverage area. These are also known as microcells.
Value with Relevant Money	<p>'Value with relevant money', as used in these Guidelines, refers to a judgement based on the grant proposal representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public resources and determined from a variety of considerations. When administering a grant opportunity, an official should consider the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each proposal including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the quality of the project proposal and activities;</li> <li>▪ fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to government objectives;</li> <li>▪ that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the grantee and government's outcomes being achieved; and</li> <li>▪ the potential grantee's relevant experience and performance history.</li> </ul> <p>As further set out in section 8.4.</p>

## Appendix A. – Target Locations and Issue Descriptions

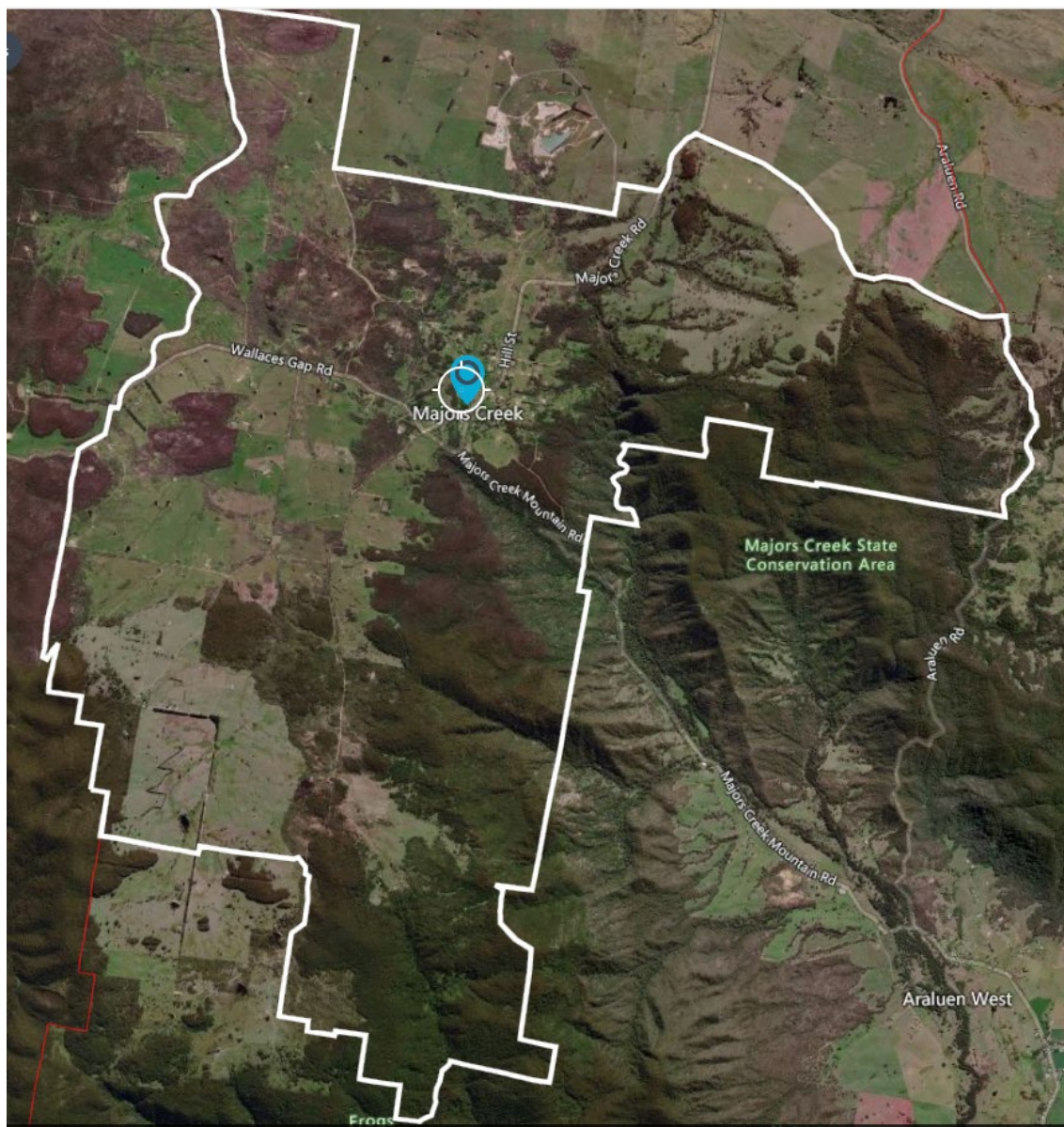
This appendix lists the two Target Locations eligible for funding under Stage 2 of the IMCR and a description each Target Location.

Please refer to sections 2.2.6, 5 and 6 of the Guidelines for information on the eligibility and assessment requirements.

Issue descriptions included in the first stage of the IMCR were informed by a desktop analysis of existing mobile network connectivity by the department and feedback received during public consultation on the draft Guidelines. Please note that this additional information is intended as a **guide only** and may not be reflective of actual coverage outcomes at a Target Location.

## Target Location: Majors Creek, NSW

The Majors Creek suburb boundary is provided below to assist applicants develop solutions for the Target Location.

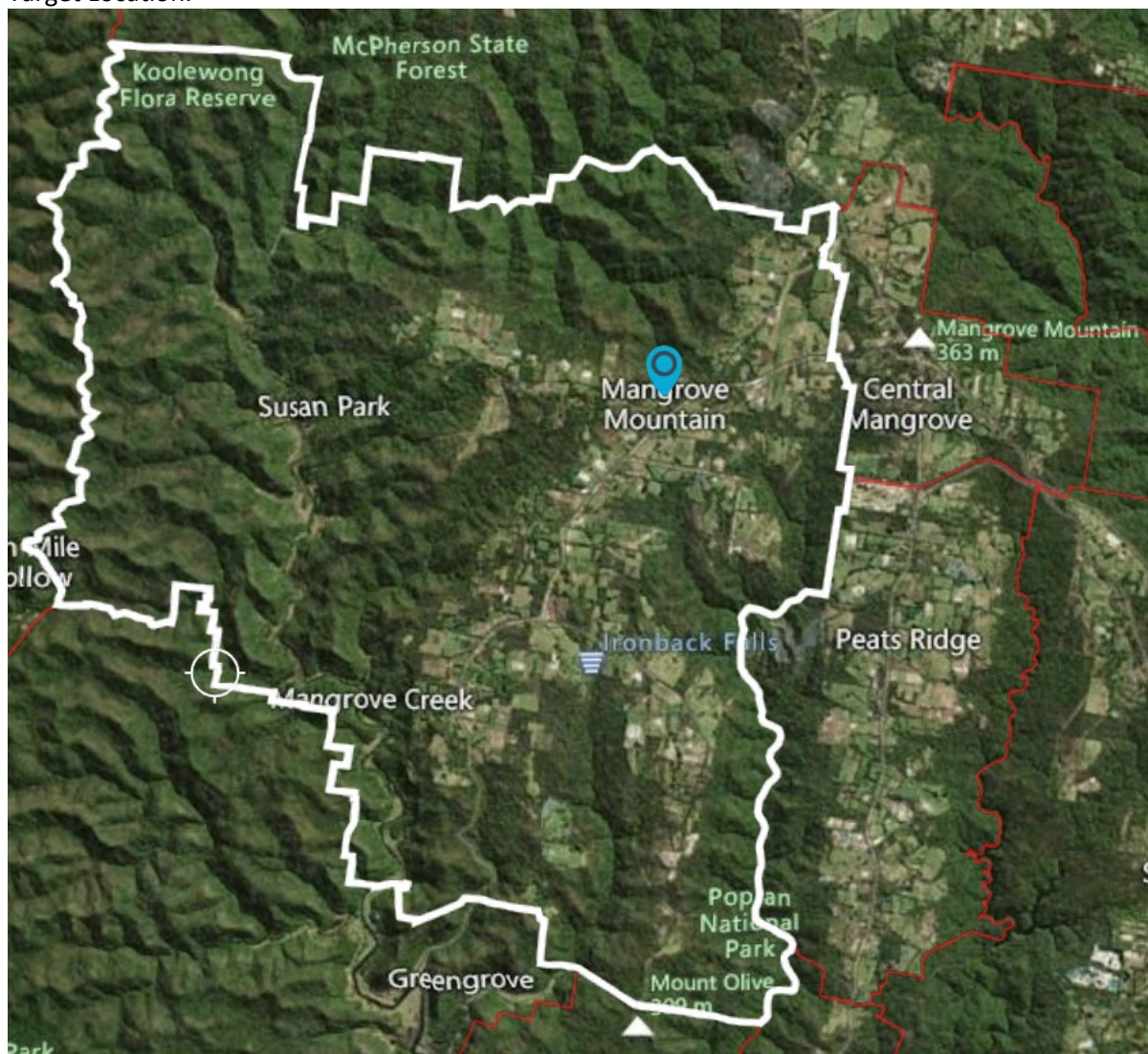


**Issue description:** Consistent with the IMCR Stage 1 Guidelines Attachment A, the coverage issues appear to relate to areas of poor or no mobile coverage in Majors Creek. A new mobile coverage solution is required for Majors Creek.



## Target Location: Mangrove Mountain, NSW

The Mangrove Mountain suburb boundary is provided below to assist applicants develop solutions for the Target Location.



**Issue description:** Consistent with the IMCR Stage 1 Guidelines Attachment A, the coverage issues appear to relate to areas of poor or no mobile coverage. A new mobile coverage solution is required for Mangrove Mountain.

Based on desktop analysis<sup>18</sup>, poor handheld coverage was identified at Upper Mangrove, spanning the area around Waratah Rd, Mangrove Creek (south and south west of Mangrove Mountain) and Central Mangrove. Poor handheld coverage was also identified at Mangrove Mountain in the sector west of George Downes Drive.

<sup>18</sup> The desktop analysis used publicly available mobile coverage data, targeted highway survey data and other information, such as recent correspondence received about mobile issues at any of the Target Locations. Appendix A of the Stage 1 Guidelines, included additional information was available about specific coverage and / or quality of service issues at a location (e.g. provided in the original announcement, via feedback from the public consultation process) to assist applicants develop proposed solutions.