

# Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 (with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities) Grant Opportunity Guidelines

<b>Opening date:</b>	<b>20 March 2023</b>
<b>Closing date and time:</b>	<b>17.00 AEST on 31 May 2023 (10 weeks after opening)</b>
<b>Commonwealth policy entity:</b>	<b>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts</b>
<b>Enquiries:</b>	<b>If you have any questions, please email us at <a href="mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au">regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au</a>.  Questions should be sent no later than two weeks before the closing date.</b>
<b>Date guidelines released:</b>	<b>20 March 2023</b>
<b>Type of grant opportunity:</b>	<b>Targeted competitive</b>

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# 1 Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities: processes

## The Program is designed to achieve Australian Government objectives

This Grant Opportunity brings together the Regional Connectivity Program, and the Mobile Black Spot Program in two streams, which contributes to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' (the 'Department's') Outcome: *Promote an innovative and competitive communications sector, through policy development, advice and program delivery, so all Australians can realise the full potential of digital technologies and communications services.* The Department works with stakeholders to plan and design the Grant Opportunity according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines \(CGRGs\)](#).



## The Grant Opportunity opens

We publish the grant Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#).



## Register with Department and pre-application documentation (Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Organisations wishing to apply for funding under the Program for Mobile Black Spot Solutions must contact the Department to register as potential applicants within four weeks following release of these Guidelines in order to obtain access to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions specific application documentation. At this time, applicants must submit their coverage maps as outlined in section 7.2. 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.



## Submit initial proposal period for Mobile Black Spot Solutions (Mobile Black Spot Solutions applications only)

Applicants have six weeks from the release of the Guidelines to develop and submit initial proposals for locations where they are interested in partnering with another Mobile Network Operator (**MNO**) on a site.



## You complete and submit a grant application

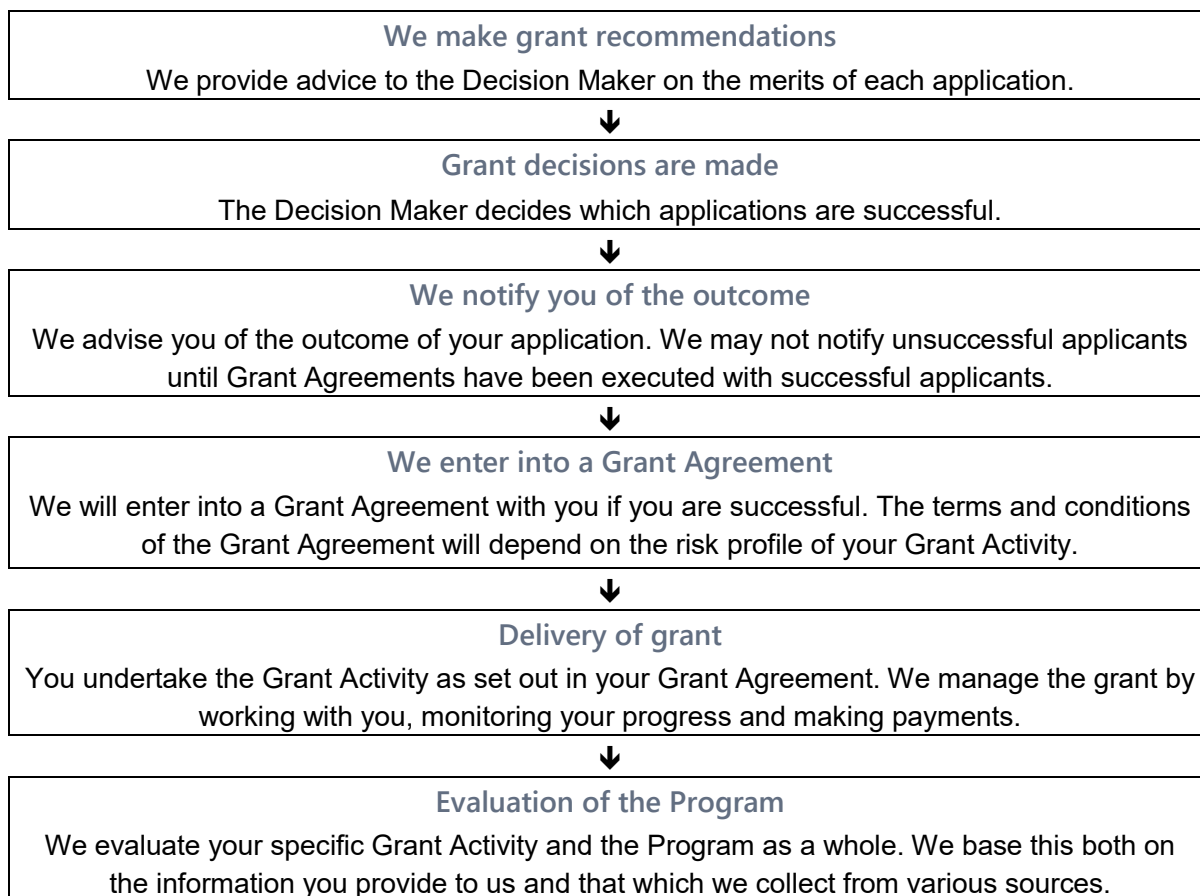
You complete the application form and address all of the Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria to be considered for a grant.



## We assess all grant applications

We assess the applications against Eligibility Criteria and notify you if you are not eligible. We assess your eligible application against the Assessment Criteria, including an overall consideration of Value for Money, and compare it to other applications.





## 2 About the Program

These Grant Opportunity Guidelines ('Guidelines') contain information about Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program - with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities ('the Program') and the Program's Grant Opportunity and set out:

- the purpose of the Program/Grant Opportunity;
- the Eligibility Criteria 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; and
- responsibilities and expectations in relation to the Grant Opportunity.

**You must read these Guidelines before filling out an application.**

We have defined key terms used in these Guidelines in the [Glossary at section 15](#).

### 2.1 Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile coverage and protecting communities against natural disaster. This opportunity is part of the *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* (Better Connectivity Plan) which is providing more than \$1.1 billion to rural and regional communities. Through the October 2022 Budget, the Government provided \$656 million for the Better Connectivity Plan to improve mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience in rural and regional Australia, including:

- \$400 million to expand regional mobile coverage and improve the resilience of communication systems;

- \$200 million for two further rounds of the *Regional Connectivity Program* to improve connectivity in regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- \$30 million over three years to accelerate Australia's agricultural sector through the *On Farm Connectivity Program*;
- \$20 million for an independent audit of mobile coverage to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities; and
- a further \$6 million over three years to extend the Regional Tech Hub to support better consumer awareness and better information regarding digital services:

This \$1.1 billion also includes the \$480 million already delivered by the Government to support NBN Co to upgrade the NBN Fixed Wireless network, with associated benefits to NBN satellite services.

The Government's new funding commitment for the Program builds on previous investment of \$230 million (GST exclusive) in Rounds 1 and 2 of the Program, which is generating a total investment of around \$413 million (GST exclusive) in 223 telecommunications projects in regional, rural and remote Australia. Further information on previous Program rounds is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rcp).

Indicative funding of around \$30 million of the Government's \$200 million commitment towards further rounds of the Regional Connectivity Program will be set aside to improve telecommunications access in First Nations communities. This funding will assist progress towards Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to ensure First Nations people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.

The Better Connectivity Plan will deliver funding for expanded regional mobile coverage through additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program. This includes the \$50 million for the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities available through this current Program Round.

The Better Connectivity Plan mobile coverage commitment will build on the outcomes delivered under the first six rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, including funding for over 1,200 new mobile base stations across regional and remote Australia. Further information on previous rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program is available on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbsp](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/mbsp).

## 2.2 About Round 3

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- A \$100 million (GST exclusive) **Regional Connectivity** (Round 3) stream for place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions that deliver new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services. It will enable bespoke telecommunications projects to be specifically tailored to the particular economic and/or social requirements of a region; and
- A \$50 million (GST exclusive) Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream (allocated from the expanding regional mobile coverage component of the Better Connectivity Plan) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that deliver **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and remote Australia.

For Mobile Black Spot Solutions, applicants and **Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application development period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including Proposed Solutions that use active sharing technologies and/or mobile roaming.

Both streams will include dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities (see Section 3.1).

- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new or upgraded broadband services and/or upgraded mobile services must apply under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** funding stream.
- Applicants seeking funding for infrastructure targeting new mobile coverage must apply under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Further information about the types of Proposed Solutions that can be funded under each stream is provided at section 5.1.

Your application may include a combination of **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** or propose only **Regional Connectivity Solutions** or only **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

The objectives of Round 3 of the Program are to:

- use a place-based approach to target telecommunications infrastructure investment that will respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and First Nations communities;
- expand mobile coverage in regional, rural, and First Nations communities; and
- assist progress towards Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative.

The intended outcomes of this Round of the Program are to:

- Provide **place-based Regional Connectivity Solutions** to regional digital connectivity issues through a range of new or improved broadband services and/or improved mobile services;
- Provide **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** to expand mobile coverage and competition across regional and rural Australia; and
- Complement the National Broadband Network, including the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see below), and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

The Program Round's Grant Opportunity will support Funded Projects that deliver new telecommunications infrastructure or the upgrade of existing telecommunications infrastructure to provide:

- economic and social benefits in regional, rural and First Nations areas; and/or
- **New Handheld Coverage** to regional, rural and First Nations areas.

For **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, the Round 3 Grant Opportunity will focus on areas:

- of high economic and/or social value;
- outside the NBN fixed-line footprint; and
- where better connectivity and increased data have a clear benefit to a local region.

The Australian Government has recently provided \$480 million (GST exclusive) towards upgrading the NBN Fixed Wireless network. Consumers in the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint will benefit from access to increased download speeds of up to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps). Fixed wireless coverage will also be expanded to cover a further 120,000 currently satellite-only premises.

A Proposed Solution to deliver fixed wireless broadband in the NBN Fixed Wireless coverage areas will only be eligible under the Program if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and that the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade (see Section 5.2 below).



The opening and closing dates and any other relevant information will be published on the [Regional Connectivity Program](#)<sup>1</sup> webpage and [GrantConnect](#)<sup>2</sup>. If there is any discrepancy between these two publications, GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

The Grant Opportunity will be administered according to the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#) (CGRGs)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Services and deliverables

The services to be delivered, as a result of the Proposed Solution, must be a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications solutions in the relevant area.

For broadband access technologies, a like-for-like technology where there is an existing broadband service would only meet this requirement if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in:

- Service Quality: eg. latency, packet loss, contention ratio
- Coverage: eg. area, people, percentage of residential and/or business properties that will be covered by the Proposed Service
- Reliability: eg. service availability, service restoration times, backup and redundancy; and/or
- Speed: eg. latency, upload and download speeds.

These service improvements may include, but are not limited to, upgrades to address seasonal congestion, backhaul capacity upgrades to improve quality of service or additional mobile base stations in areas where there is existing but patchy coverage.

For services delivering **New Handheld Coverage**, the service 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 **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- deliver at least 4G, and preferably also 5G, 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) at a 90 per cent confidence level for the cell area, as per the following table.

Table 1: RSRP Coverage Modelling Requirements

Coverage category	Channel bandwidth	Threshold (dBm)
Handheld	5	>-100
Handheld	10	>-103
Handheld	15	>-105
Handheld	20	>-106

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/internet/regional-connectivity-program>

<sup>2</sup> [www.grants.gov.au/](http://www.grants.gov.au/)

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

### 2.2.2 Local community priority

During the application period, **applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with state, territory and local governments and local communities regarding the Proposed Solutions.** (especially in relation to projects for First Nations communities). These consultations should involve the identification of priority areas to be covered by the Proposed Solution. Priority areas may include specific roads, health or education facilities, communities with significant First Nations populations, industrial areas, community sites, high-value production areas, or areas with a demonstrable need for improved public safety (for example, where people are unable to call 000 because of limited coverage or lack of infrastructure).

To give effect to the place-based objective of the Program, **applicants should provide evidence that their Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution is a priority for the local community** (*This is not required for **Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, although any information provided will be considered in the value for money stage*).

A local priority project could be identified through a regional digital plan or similar strategy by local government or letters of support accompanying the grant application. This could be demonstrated by evidence of support from groups such as: state and territory governments; local government; Regional Development Australia committees; industry, business, and community groups; not-for-profits (registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and First Nations community organisations.

State, territory and local governments may own infrastructure in areas that could potentially be used for Proposed Solutions. These governments may have specific requirements in relation to the use of their infrastructure that will need to be identified in the applications put forward by applicants for relevant Proposed Solutions.

### 2.2.3 Operational period

All Funded **Regional Connectivity Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of seven (7) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should provide retail services for a minimum period of ten (10) years after all Asset(s) has (have) become operational.

### 2.2.4 Application and selection process

Applicants may apply individually or jointly (as part of a consortium). Joint applications must be underpinned by commercially binding arrangements or a clear intention to enter into such arrangements, should the application be successful. Grants to joint applicants may be granted on the condition that the parties enter into a binding agreement, approved by the Department, prior to finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

Grant recipients will be selected through a competitive, merit-based Selection Process against Eligibility Criteria and Assessment Criteria as set out in these Guidelines and a final value for money consideration. In applying for grants, applicants will outline their specific Proposed Solution, and demonstrate support from the local community. The most overt form of support will be financial co-contributions (such as contributions from state, territory or local governments or other third parties). **The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria and also demonstrate its claims against the assessment criteria.**

An applicant seeking dedicated First Nations funding will need to demonstrate that its Proposed Solution will benefit a First Nations community. For the purposes of the Program, applicants may use the following definition of a First Nations community as a guide for areas that the Government

is looking to target with dedicated First Nations funding: *a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents) by First Nations peoples, with housing or infrastructure (power, water, sewerage) that is managed on a community basis. First Nations communities have populations of (but not limited to) 50 or more First Nations people*<sup>4</sup>.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the local First Nations community and provide evidence of support for the Proposed Solution from that community (for example, through letters of support from First Nations community leaders). Applicants should also demonstrate how their Proposed Solution will help the Government meet Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (outlined at section 2.1 above).

For communities not eligible for dedicated First Nations funding, applicants can still apply for the general funding through the Program.

## 3 Grant amount and project period

### 3.1 Grants available

This Round of the Program has up to \$150 million (GST exclusive) of funding available, including:

- \$100 million for **Regional Connectivity (Round 3) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$15 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that improve telecommunications infrastructure in First Nations communities; and
- \$50 million for **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) Solutions**, including indicative funding of \$7.5 million (GST exclusive) for solutions that provide new mobile coverage in First Nations communities.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to extend the funding available for eligible Proposed Solutions to fund further meritorious projects.

The Project Period for Funded Projects will run from July 2023 to 30 June 2026. Grantees will also be required to provide retail services from the Funded Project for the Operational Period as identified in section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines.

In terms of the grant amount:

- There is no minimum grant amount
- There is no maximum grant amount, but total Round 3 grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

All eligible Regional Connectivity Solutions applications under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream will be grouped into three categories for both the overall Program merit list and the First Nations communities merit list, according to the amount of Program funding requested, to ensure that smaller Proposed Solutions are given due consideration during the assessment process. There is no minimum or maximum number of Proposed Solutions that the Government is seeking to fund in any category. The categories are:

- Category 1: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of less than \$300,000 (GST exclusive)
- Category 2: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of \$300,000 to \$2 million (GST exclusive)

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<sup>4</sup> This definition is based on ABS Release — 2901.0 — Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016 – Discrete Community.

- Category 3: Regional Connectivity Solutions seeking Program funding of greater than \$2 million (GST exclusive).

All eligible **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) stream will be grouped into a **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** merit list and a First Nations communities merit list.

### 3.1.1 Financial co-contribution

To increase the reach of the Program, **applicants are encouraged to seek financial co-contributions (cash) towards each Proposed Solution from state, territory or local governments, local communities and/or other third parties.**

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 third parties.

For Funded Projects 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.

For Funded Projects that include co-contributions from other parties, the Grantee will bear any costs, and cover the other parties' funding if the other parties' funding is not secured following execution of the Grant Agreement between the Grantee and the Commonwealth.

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.

## 3.2 Project period

Grantees must complete all of your Funded Projects by 30 June 2026. Grantees will be required to maintain the services for an Operational Period of:

- seven (7) years for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**; and
- ten (10) years for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If you consider that additional time is required to complete your Funded Project, please advise the Department in your application including providing justification for the additional time.

## 4 Eligibility criteria

We cannot consider your application if you do not satisfy all the Eligibility Criteria.

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

For applicants applying for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)

And must be one of the following entity types, a:

- licensed telecommunications carrier under the *Telecommunications Act 1997*; or
- owner or intended owner of the Proposed Solution infrastructure who holds or intends to hold a Nominated Carrier Declaration (NCD) under the *Telecommunications Act 1997* in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded; or

For a joint (consortia) application:

- At least one organisation<sup>5</sup> must be a licensed telecommunications carrier or infrastructure owner who holds/intends to hold an NCD in relation to the infrastructure to be built or improved/upgraded. The licensed carrier or infrastructure owner (in the case an NCD applies) must be the entity that enters into a Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth. However, such an application may be led by any of the following entity types:
  - Licensed carriers or infrastructure owners (in the case an NCD applies);
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local governments, local governing bodies, and regional development bodies;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community-controlled organisations.

For applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, you must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN); and
- be one of the following entity types:
  - a national **Mobile Network Operator (MNO)**; or
  - a **Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)**.
- 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); and
  - Holds an apparatus or a spectrum licence (or both) for the supply of public mobile telecommunications services under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* (Cth).
- 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 **National MNOs** to provide public mobile telecommunications services.
- **MNIP** applications must be accompanied by written evidence of intent from at least one **National MNO**, that offers national mobile coverage, to enter into a commercially binding commitment to use the infrastructure to deliver mobile services as described at section 2.2.3 for the Operational Period of the Proposed Solution. Funding may be awarded to eligible **MNIPs** on the condition that the **MNIP** and relevant **National MNO/s** enter into a binding commercial commitment prior to the finalisation of the Grant Agreement.

## 4.2 Multi-MNO and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions and Regional Connectivity Solutions to deliver mobile service from a National MNO

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, applicants and **MNOs**/other interested parties are encouraged to work together during the application period to develop **Multi-MNO solutions**, including active sharing solutions. Applicants are solely responsible for forming relationships and discussions with any relevant third parties.

If a **Regional Connectivity Solution** delivers new mobile coverage outcomes (e.g. a new mobile base station that delivers new mobile coverage to an area rather than an upgrade to an existing base station) to an area (i.e. it is not solely a mobile broadband or capacity upgrade to the **MNO** existing coverage in the area), and the applicant is a **National MNO**, then the solution is required to meet the **Multi-MNO** and co-locations requirements set out in this section.

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<sup>5</sup> The Australian Government recognises that some organisations may seek to form consortia in order to apply for a grant. Consortia are eligible to apply and the relevant conditions applicable to consortia are at [6](#) 'Joint (consortia) Applications'.

If you put forward a proposal for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** that offers services from more than one **MNO**, you may include in the proposal the eligible expenditure, found at section 5.3, for all of the **MNOs** that will offer services from the Proposed Solution. 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 participating parties will be made to the lead applicant only.

In addition to any arrangements negotiated with an **MNO** confirmed at the time of the application to provide services through the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution**, each Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** must offer:

- to **MNOs**, the option of offering services from the Proposed Solution using active sharing on commercial terms, if the Proposed Solution is an active sharing solution; and
- co-location to **MNOs**, or the applicant must provide evidence 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).

**MNOs** who are not included in the Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as submitted in your application will be responsible for meeting their own expenses for active sharing and / or co-locating at the site.

The detailed requirements for the **MNO** to offer the option of co-location to other **MNOs** not participating in the lead proposal are set out in **Attachment A**. Other **MNOs** will be provided with an opportunity to express interest in co-location before the detailed design phase. The **MNO** will not be required to design or build the site to allow for co-location if no such expressions of interest are received.

## 5 What the grant money can be used for

### 5.1 Eligible grant activities

This Round of the Program comprises two funding streams:

- the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** funding stream; and
- the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** funding stream.

Proposed Regional Connectivity Solutions under the **Regional Connectivity (Round 3)** stream are limited to broadband connectivity solutions **and/or** mobile capacity improvement solutions in Eligible Areas.

Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solutions under the **Mobile Black Spot (Round 7)** stream are limited to mobile infrastructure in Eligible Areas that extends the coverage of one or more **National MNO's** mobile network to an area without **Existing Handheld Coverage**.

To be eligible your Proposed Solution must:

- provide access to mobile or broadband services in Eligible Areas as set out in Section 5.2; and
- not have started construction or be part of the participating telecommunications provider's forward build network or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027;
- for all macro cell mobile solutions (under both **streams**), include a back-up power supply which provides back up power for a minimum of 12 hours and, where technically feasible, for other Proposed Solutions, in the event of the loss of external power to the site; and
- show evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for the relevant Operational Period at section 2.2.3.

In addition, your Proposed **Regional Connectivity Solutions** must:

- provide place-based telecommunications solutions to regional digital connectivity issues;
- deliver new infrastructure or the upgrade or improvement of existing infrastructure; and
- not overbuild a like-for-like service unless you can demonstrate a clear need for improvement and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability or speed.

Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must:

- provide New Mobile Coverage to a location in regional, rural or remote Australia.

Your Proposed **Mobile Black Spot Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Regional Connectivity Solution** in your application. Similarly, your **Regional Connectivity Solution(s)** must not be dependent on a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** in your application.

## 5.2 Eligible Areas

Your application can include Proposed Solutions at different locations, as long as they are all in Eligible Areas. Each Proposed Solution will be individually assessed according to the Assessment Criteria. Part or all of the Asset may be located in an Ineligible Area provided it supports services in Eligible Areas. Eligible Areas are all parts of Australia that do not fall within one or more of these Ineligible Areas.

Ineligible Areas are:

- Urban Centres and Localities geographical units classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 'Major Urban', i.e. with a population of 100,000 or more<sup>6</sup>. The Department will provide map overlays showing Ineligible Areas on request.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, Ineligible Areas also include:

- Areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with a Fixed-Line service. Information on NBN Co's rollout is available at [www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map](http://www.nbnco.com.au/residential/learn/rollout-map).

For areas that NBN Co predominantly services or proposes to service with Fixed Wireless technologies, Proposed Solutions that deliver mobile voice and data, Fixed-Line broadband or backhaul upgrade solutions will be eligible for funding. Fixed Wireless broadband Proposed Solutions will only be eligible within the NBN Fixed Wireless footprint if the applicant can demonstrate a clear need for improvement in the targeted location and the Proposed Solution would deliver a demonstrable and substantive improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed compared to the NBN Fixed Wireless upgrade.

The existing indicative NBN Fixed Wireless footprint is available on the National Map at [nationalmap.gov.au](http://nationalmap.gov.au). While it is expected that the expansion of coverage following NBN Co's Fixed Wireless upgrade will be substantial, applicants should assume this will extend the existing coverage area by up to 15km. Applicants should note that updated coverage maps of the expanded NBN upgrade footprint may not be available during the Round 3 application or assessment period. The Commonwealth reserves the right to delay the assessment and/or funding

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<sup>6</sup> Based on ABS Release — 1270.0.55.004 — Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 4 — Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2016.

of a Proposed Solution until it is known whether the Proposed Solution area will be within the upgraded NBN Fixed Wireless footprint or within an area where NBN announces FTTP upgrades.

### 5.3 Eligible expenditure

You can only spend the grant on eligible expenditure you have incurred on a Funded Project as defined in your Grant Agreement.

Grant funding will be available for the capital costs of building or installing Funded Projects. This may include site acquisition and planning approval costs. Grantees will be responsible for any actual capital costs which exceed estimated costs.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in a Remote or a Very Remote area (based on the ABS remoteness structure)<sup>7</sup>, or a Mobile Black Spot Solution seeking First Nations funding, applicants may seek funding up to 75% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot 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 Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** in other locations, you may seek funding for up to 50% of the combined estimated Asset Capital Costs of building or installing Funded **Mobile Black Spot 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 Project.

Note: The installation expenditure can also include the reasonable incremental one-off costs associated with configuring participating MNOs' networks to connect to a Mobile Black Spot Solution if the Proposed Solution utilises active sharing and/or mobile roaming, provided that such costs have not already been subsidised by another funding program of the Commonwealth or States/Territories.

Not all expenditure on your Funded Projects may be eligible for grant funding. The program delegate makes the final decision on what is eligible expenditure and may give additional guidance on eligible expenditure if required.

You must incur the expenditure on your Funded Project between the start date and completion date for your Grant Agreement for the expenditure to be eligible.

#### 5.3.1 Eligible backhaul costs

For both **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** and **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, funding may be sought for the capitalised cost of Backhaul over the Operational Period of Funded Solutions, regardless of Backhaul technology. For remote locations where existing fibre or microwave Backhaul (or a combination of both) is not available or readily accessible, satellite Backhaul technology may be utilised to deliver the Funded Project. If satellite Backhaul technology is put forward for a Proposed Solution, the applicant should clearly define the level of service or connectivity to be provided.

In addition to upfront capital costs related to the installation and deployment of Backhaul (such as special linkage charges), 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 relating to leased optical fibre, microwave, or satellite Backhaul over the minimum Operational Period of a

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<sup>7</sup> 1270.0.55.005 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure, July 2016



Proposed Solution may be included in the estimated asset capital cost of building the Proposed Solution. These capitalised operational costs for Backhaul must be clearly identified separately in the application.

## 5.4 What the grant money cannot be used for

To ensure that applicants do not seek Program funding for Proposed Solutions in areas where they have already planned to invest commercially, all applicants must certify that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

In addition, for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**:

- Operating and maintenance expenditure for Funded Solutions is ineligible for grant funding.

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.

The Department may audit a Grantee's compliance with requirements.

# 6 Assessment criteria

## 6.1 Assessment Criteria for Regional Connectivity Solutions

Applications for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** will need to address each of the following criteria:

1. Merit Criterion one (economic benefits) (15 points)
2. Merit Criterion two (social benefits) (15 points)
3. Merit Criterion three (capacity, capability and resources to deliver the Proposed Solution) (10 points)
4. Merit Criterion four (financial co-contribution) (10 points).

The obligation is on the applicant to demonstrate how the Proposed Solution meets each Merit Criterion. Applicants should provide a response to each Merit Criterion, as well as evidence of support to reinforce the claims made in its responses. We will assess eligible applications against each Merit Criterion using the weighting indicated to develop an overall score. Each application will also undergo an overall Value for Money assessment to determine whether the Proposed Solution represents Value for Money to the Commonwealth.

The application form asks questions that relate to the Merit Criteria below. You should provide sufficient evidence to support your answers, including evidence of community support for any proposed economic and/or social benefits offered by your Proposed Solution (see section 6.1.1 and section 6.1.2 for more information) in response to the Merit Criteria. In addition, you should provide evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in connectivity levels over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area (as outlined at section 2.2.1). The extent of this improvement will impact the assessment of the Proposed Solution's ability to deliver the economic and/or social benefits.

We encourage you to seek the support of the local government and/or state or territory government in preparing your application. For example, they may be able to assist you in identifying the

expected outcomes of the Proposed Solution, particularly the economic and social benefits that would be available to the local community, if the Proposed Solution is funded.

## **6.1.1 Merit Criterion 1 – Economic Benefit**

### **6.1.1.1 Economic benefits of your project for the region (15 points)**

**Economic benefits** for a region may cover increases in employment opportunities or economic activity, improvements in productivity, wider access to markets or fairer and more equitable economic outcomes. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to economic benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these economic benefits include:

- a. increasing the number or value of jobs, creating new businesses or efficiencies in the production of goods and services in the region beyond the construction phase (this includes direct and indirect opportunities created through the Proposed Solution);
- b. providing opportunities for growth in existing sectors, e.g. tourism, agriculture, manufacturing;
- c. facilitating greater competition in telecommunication retail services;
- d. whether the Proposed Solution provides an innovative approach to improve productivity, efficiency or addresses an identified problem; and/or
- e. evidence of the community/local intent to employ the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - i. State and territory governments;
  - ii. Local government and regional development authorities;
  - iii. Industry, business, and community groups;
  - iv. Not-for-profits; or
  - v. First Nations community-controlled organisations.

## **6.1.2 Merit Criterion 2 – Social Benefit**

### **6.1.2.1 Social benefits of your project for the region (15 points)**

**Social benefits** for a region may cover improving access to health and education services, improving public safety and improving regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. In addressing this criterion, applicants should articulate the level of improvement in telecommunications that will be delivered by the Proposed Solution and demonstrate how this will lead to social benefits for the targeted region or community.

Examples of how your Proposed Solution could demonstrate these social benefits include:

- a. facilitating provision of more efficient and effective health or education services, including improved access to health or education resources in the home;
- b. improving public safety and network resilience in a defined area. This may include the ability to call 000 from more locations, providing alternative technologies with which to do so, or improving the effectiveness, resilience or safety of Public Safety Premises;
- c. improving retail competition, regional amenity, community connections and inclusion. This may include improving affordability, providing services that help to attract and retain a workforce or enhancing cultural heritage; and/or
- d. addressing disadvantage within the community including First Nations communities. This may include addressing low digital inclusion, providing affordable services to places with entrenched disadvantage (including benefits such as community free wifi or discounted pricing models), or providing people who are excluded with improved opportunities to access support services.

Applicants applying for First Nations funding should highlight how the Proposed Solution will address Target 17 of the Closing the Gap initiative (as outlined in section 2.1 above), or any other targets under the Closing the Gap initiative.

### 6.1.3 Merit Criterion 3 – Project Delivery

#### 6.1.3.1 Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project (10 points)

You should demonstrate your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution within the specified cost and timeframe, including through identifying:

- a. Your track record and your capacity to deliver the Proposed Solution, including
  - a. examples of delivering similar projects and solutions;
  - b. your resources and access to personnel and/or partners with the right skills and experience;
  - c. your ability to deliver in the context of your organisation's broader program of work (including any pipeline of works through Commonwealth and state or territory government programs such as MBSP and previous Program rounds); and
  - d. your access, or future access to, any necessary infrastructure, power or backhaul.
- b. The maturity of the Proposed Solution, including outlining
  - a. the key technical components of the solution, and a comprehensive project cost budget and breakdown;
  - b. a robust project delivery plan and schedule;
  - c. approvals that will be required and any steps taken to progress these; and
  - d. evidence of contingency planning that mitigates the risk of delays in getting the necessary approvals to commence work, particularly for greenfield and remote projects.

In addition, you should outline how you will maintain the infrastructure and the benefits provided by the Proposed Solution during the Operational Period, including managing expected increased data demands over the course of the Operational Period.

### 6.1.4 Merit Criterion 4 – Financial Co-contributions

#### 6.1.4.1 Total investment the grant funding will leverage (10 points)

You should demonstrate this through identifying the total investment the grant will leverage. A higher level of contribution from non-Commonwealth sources, comparative to the cost of the Proposed Solution, will help drive a higher score in the assessment process for this criterion.

While financial contributions from other Commonwealth sources will be considered as part of the Value for Money assessment, those contributions will not count towards the score for this Merit Criterion.

## 6.2 Assessment Criteria for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

All **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** that offer coverage outcomes from three **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions that only offer service from two **MNOs**, all other things being equal. All Proposed Solutions that offer services from two **MNOs** will be ranked higher on the draft merit list than Proposed Solutions with a single **MNO**, **all other things being equal**.

Proposed Solutions within these **MNO** groupings (i.e. three **MNOs**, two **MNOs** and single **MNO**) will be ranked using 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 an **MNIP**, the relevant **MNO(s)**) but overlaps with another **MNO's** network.

Proposed Solutions with a lower cost per square kilometre will rank higher than Proposed Solutions with a high cost per square kilometre.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)}}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

**Mobile Black Spot Solutions** located in Remote and Very Remote areas<sup>8</sup>, or seeking First Nations funding, will also be assessed against the **New Coverage Assessment Formula**, however, only 50 per cent of the cost to the Commonwealth will be used in the calculation for these solutions, as it is recognised that there is a higher cost to delivering mobile services in these areas.

The **New Coverage Assessment Formula** for Remote and Very Remote Proposed Solutions is:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to the Commonwealth (\$)} \times 0.50}{\text{New Handheld Coverage (km}^2\text{) + (Overlapping Coverage (km}^2\text{) / 2)}}$$

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), 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 Proposed Solutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to the higher costs that may be incurred for these Proposed 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.

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3 - Significant Urban Areas, Urban Centres and Localities, Section of State, July 2021

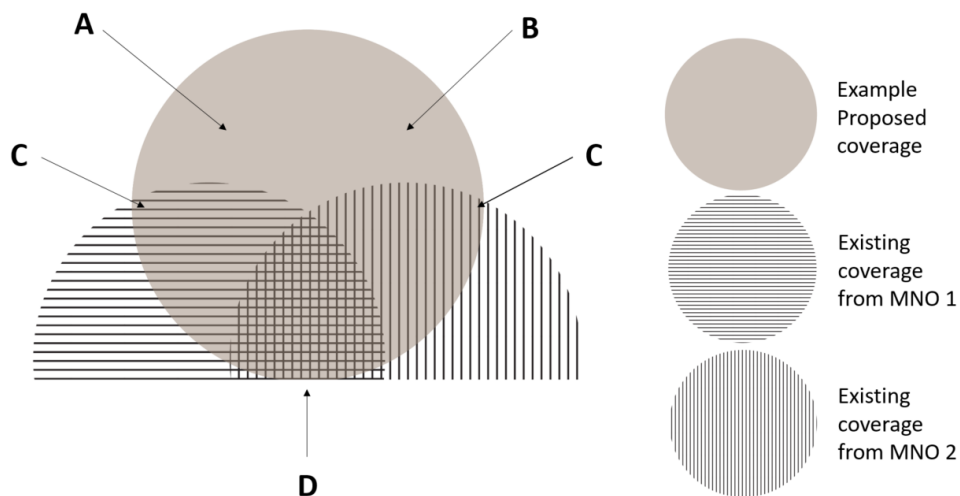
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement of a single **MNO**, overlapping coverage with the **MNO**'s own existing network is not eligible for assessment.
- For each Proposed Solution with confirmed involvement (e.g. active sharing) of two or more **MNOs**, overlapping coverage that is 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.

**New Handheld Coverage** and Overlapping Coverage will be measured by comparing the 4G handheld coverage provided by the Proposed 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 2.2.1.

Table 2: Example assessment of New Handheld Coverage and Overlapping Coverage

<p>A Proposed Solution has confirmed participation of two MNOs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 1, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.</li> <li>▪ B. The Proposed Solution provides 30km<sup>2</sup> of New Handheld Coverage from MNO 2, that doesn't overlap with an existing network.</li> <li>▪ C. The Proposed Solution provides 20km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage, but is new for at least one of the participating MNOs.</li> <li>▪ D. The Proposed Solution provides 10km<sup>2</sup> of coverage that overlaps with Existing Handheld Coverage in the networks of both participating MNOs (not eligible for assessment).</li> </ul> <p>The assessed coverage for this Proposed Solution is A+B+(C/2)  Equalling: 30km<sup>2</sup> + 30km<sup>2</sup> + (20km<sup>2</sup> / 2) = 70km<sup>2</sup></p>
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A graphical representation of this example is below:



## 7 How to apply

Before applying, you must read and understand these Guidelines.

All application documents may be found on [GrantConnect](#). Any alterations and addenda<sup>9</sup> will be published on GrantConnect and by registering on the GrantConnect website, you will be automatically notified on any changes. GrantConnect is the authoritative source for grants information.

If you need further guidance around the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online, contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au).

To apply you must:

- complete the Grant Opportunity application form;
- provide all information requested;
- demonstrate that you meet all Eligibility Criteria;
- provide responses to the Assessment Criteria;
- include all necessary attachments; and
- submit your application/s before the due date.

Table 3: Expected timing for this grant opportunity

Activity	Timeframe
Guidelines released and applications open	20 March 2023
Applicant registration and pre-application documentation for applicants applying for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)
Submit initial proposal period for <b>Mobile Black Spot Solutions</b>	Registration and pre-application documentation due by 1 May 2023 (6 weeks after opening)
Applications close	5pm AEST 31 May 2023
Announcement on Successful Applications	To be advised
Commencement date of Grant Activity	On Execution of Grant Agreement
End date of Grant Activity	30 June, 2026
End date of Asset Operational Period	As defined at section 2.2.3 of these Guidelines

### 7.1 Applicant registration (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Potential applicants who intend to propose **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** must register their interest with the Department and sign and provide a Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to being granted access to the confidential Program documentation.

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<sup>9</sup> Alterations and addenda include but are not limited to: corrections to currently published documents; changes to closing times for applications; Questions and Answers (Q&A) documents; and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents.

## 7.2 Pre-application lodgement (Mobile Black Spot Solutions only)

Upon registering as a potential applicant, **MNOs** who intend to submit applications for funding, or are partnering with potential applicants, for a **Mobile Black Spot Solution** 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.

**Existing Handheld Coverage** information required above must be submitted to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), 1 May 2023. The Department may, at its absolute discretion, accept mobile coverage information submitted by **MNOs** after this date.

The **Existing Handheld Coverage** information required in accordance with this section 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 2.2.1; 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.

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).

Pre-application information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.3 Submit initial proposals for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Applicants applying for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions** should lodge any initial proposal locations where they are interested in partnering with another **MNO** on a site under the Program to the Department by no later than 5pm (Canberra time), 1 May 2023.

The registered applicants should provide this information using the “Initial Proposals” template provided in the Application Pack.

The Department will collate the lists of initial proposal locations and provide a consolidated list to all registered applicants. The consolidated list will include the following information for each initial proposal:

- an unique identifier;
- the location;
- type of base stations being considered (small cell / macro); and
- the applicant's contact details.

The Department will also distribute a contact list of all pre-registered applicants to facilitate discussions regardless of whether a pre-registered applicant has identified potential partnering locations.

Applicants and other interested parties have until closing of the application period to discuss and plan co-development and co-funding opportunities at these sites prior to finalising applications.

The list of locations will be treated as Confidential Information by the registered applicants.

Initial proposal information can be submitted by any of the methods outlined at section 7.4.

## 7.4 Completing and lodging an application

Your application must provide:

- An outline of the key technical components of the Proposed Solution, including any required supporting infrastructure and services, (including appropriate diagrams) and detail how the overall 'system' will deliver the proposed services to the stated quality.
- The location of the Proposed Solution and all Assets.
- Mapping data, where applicable, outlining the predictive coverage for the Proposed Solution.
- The total estimated capital cost of construction (GST inclusive).
- The amount of co-contribution (GST inclusive) being provided by the applicant.
- The amount of Commonwealth co-contribution sought under the Proposed Solution (GST Inclusive).
- The amount of any co-contributions (GST Inclusive) to be received from all third parties, including but not limited to state, territory or local governments, local communities, or any combination of these, and any specific requirements or conditions tied to the co-contributions.
- Evidence of any co-contributions to be received from all third parties. For example, a letter of support from a suitably senior official from the relevant third party, which outlines the amount of co-contributions to be received and any conditions attached to the co-contributions. The department may ask for additional evidence of co-contributions if it considers the evidence you provide is unsatisfactory.
- Evidence of the extent to which the Proposed Solution meets the Assessment Criteria.
- Evidence that your Proposed Solution provides a demonstrable improvement in service quality, coverage, reliability and/or speed over existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area.
- Whether the Proposed Solution is dependent on the construction of one or more of the applicants' other Proposed Solutions, including explaining the specific dependencies.

You must agree that the predictive coverage mapping data can be used by the Department to prepare promotional material for the Program or for policy development and advice as needed.

Applicants must indicate their ability to comply with the applicable sample Grant Agreement(s) for the relevant stream(s) (to be made available on GrantConnect shortly after Program opening) at the time of submitting their applications. There will be separate sample Grant Agreements for Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions. Where the terms of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) are not accepted in full, applicants are required to submit a revision-marked version of the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) reflecting their proposed drafting, their position, and their reasons for requesting the change.

Applicants who have previously agreed a funding agreement with the Commonwealth under Round 2 of the Regional Connectivity Program (for Regional Connectivity Solutions) or the Mobile Black Spot Program (for Mobile Black Spot Solutions) and wish to use that Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the applicable stream) must request to do so at the time of submitting their application. However, applicants must still indicate their ability to comply with the relevant sample Grant Agreement(s) as mentioned above. The Commonwealth may, at its sole discretion, agree to use the Previous Funding Agreement as a basis for this round's Grant Agreement (for the relevant stream). The Commonwealth will indicate any updates to be made to the Previous Funding Agreement for the purposes of this round. The updates will be drawn from the applicable sample Grant Agreement for the relevant stream.

As outlined in [section 5.4](#) of these Guidelines, applicants must warrant that none of the Proposed Solutions for which Grant Opportunity funds are being sought were at any time part of their forward



build network expansion or upgrade plans from the period commencing from the date the Grant Opportunity opens until 30 June 2027.

You are responsible for ensuring that your application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information is a serious offence under the [Criminal Code Act 1995 \(Cth\)](#). We will investigate any false or misleading information and may exclude your application from further consideration.

If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact us immediately at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for Regional Connectivity Solutions and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for Mobile Black Spot Solutions. We may, at our sole discretion, accept additional information from you or a request to correct the error. However, we are under no obligation to accept any additional information or agree to a request from you to correct your application after the closing time.

If we identify an error in your application, you may be contacted to correct or explain the error. However, we can refuse to accept any additional information from you that would change your application after the closing time.

You should keep a copy of your application and any supporting documents.

All applications lodged will be acknowledged by the Department by email. Applicants lodging an application who do not receive acknowledgement of their application should contact the Department. Applications that are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. If you need further guidance about the application process or if you are unable to submit an application online contact us at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

Applications can be lodged by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. Application files lodged by email must not exceed a combined size of 10 megabytes per email. Applications may also be lodged using GovTEAMS, the Australian Government's secure online document sharing and project management system. Potential applicants can be provided with information about lodging applications using GovTEAMS upon request to the Department. Potential applicants may also request to use alternative online secure document sharing systems by agreement with the Department.

You should advise the Department if you intend to lodge your application using GovTEAMS, or if you need to use an alternative electronic lodgement platform. You should do this **at least two weeks before the closing date** via email to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. If you wish to change the electronic lodgement platform after notifying the Department, you should advise the Department of the change and the reasons why. The Department may, at its discretion, accept changes to the lodgement method.

All electronic files, regardless of transmission method, should be provided in an appropriate Microsoft compatible format (Microsoft Office 2007 or later or PDF files preferred): Geo-spatial information such as maps should be provided in either Mapinfo TAB or MID/MIF; ESRI Shape; GML; or KML format.

The Department may also accept applications via hard copy and/or physical electronic media, in addition to electronic applications.

Where physical electronic media is to be provided, such as a USB stick, the media must be PC-formatted. Applicants should include an index of all electronic documents on the physical electronic media.

Applications provided in hard copy and physical electronic media formats should be delivered via registered post or by hand prior to the closing date.

Applications via post are to be addressed and delivered to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Applications via hand delivery are to be addressed and delivered by the closing date to:

Director, Regional Connectivity Program  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
2 Phillip Law Street  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

## 7.5 Attachments to application

The following details must also be provided as attachments to your application:

- a comprehensive budget for the Proposed Solution including itemised costs of all the key items such as material, equipment and software licenses (linked to a Bill of Material), costs of key labour, contractor activities and tasks, and other overhead costs such as project management, administration, transport, travel & accommodation
- evidence of a Funding Strategy, e.g. financial statements, loan agreements, cash flow documents
- accountant declaration that you are able to fund your share of the cost of the Proposed Solution (sample template provided on GrantConnect)
- evidence of commitment to financial co-contributions as detailed in [section 6.1.4](#) of these Guidelines
- certification of the application by a duly authorised representative of your organisation, for example a senior executive, director, or company secretary
- evidence to demonstrate your ability to successfully construct and operate the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of ability to deliver a retail service on the Asset for the Operational Period
- evidence of a commitment from at least one retail service provider to use the infrastructure to deliver telecommunications services for at least the Operational Period
- for **Regional Connectivity Solutions**, evidence of the local need for the Proposed Solution, which may include evidence or support from:
  - State and territory governments;
  - Local government and regional development authorities;
  - Industry, business, and community groups;
  - Not-for-profits; or
  - First Nations community controlled organisations
- other evidence, as necessary to support your claims against the Assessment Criteria.
- Predictive coverage mapping data for each Proposed Solution.

Supporting documentation to the application form can be attached in line with the instructions provided within the form.

## 7.6 Joint (consortia) applications

We recognise that some organisations may want to join together as a group to deliver a Proposed Solution.

In these circumstances, you must appoint a 'lead organisation'. Only the lead organisation can submit the application form, but the lead organisation will not necessarily be the entity entering into any agreement with the Commonwealth (refer to [section 4.1](#) of these Guidelines). The application must identify all other members of the group (partner organisations) and their role in the Proposed Solution and include a letter of support from each of the partners organisations.

Each letter of support should include:

- details of the partner organisation;
- an overview of how the partner organisation will work with the lead organisation, including financial co-contributor and any other partner organisations in the group to successfully complete the Proposed Solution;
- an outline of the relevant experience and/or expertise the partner organisation will bring to the group;
- the roles/responsibilities of the partner organisation and the resources they will contribute (if any); and
- details of a nominated management level contact officer.

You must have a formal arrangement in place with all partner organisations prior to execution of the Grant Agreement.

## 7.7 Closing date for funding applications

The closing date for submitting an application for funding under this Grant Opportunity is 5pm (Canberra Time) on 31 May 2023.

## 7.8 Timing of Grant Opportunity processes

You must submit an application between the published opening and closing dates. The Department reserves the right to, in exceptional circumstances, accept a late application to the assessment process at its discretion. Without limiting the Department's discretion, exceptional circumstances may include natural disasters or unforeseen technical issues with application forms or lodgement systems. Any decision by the Department on whether or not to accept a late application to the assessment process shall be final.

If you believe there are circumstances which will affect the timely submission of your application, you must contact us before the application closing date to negotiate an alternative submission due date.

## 7.9 Questions during application process

All requests for clarification or determination of the meaning of provisions in these Guidelines should be referred to the Department by email at [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**. The Department's written decision on the matter is final.

We will acknowledge and address emailed questions as soon as practicable. Answers to questions will be posted on GrantConnect as Frequently Asked Questions.

## 8 The grant Selection Process

### 8.1 Assessment of grant applications

We will consider eligible applications through a targeted competitive grant process.

The assessment process for the program will be as follows:

1. initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria
2. detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria
3. Value for Money assessment and consideration of whether the Proposed Solution supports a Government priority as outlined in [section 8.2](#)
4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.

As part of the Value for Money assessment we will group all eligible Proposed Solutions by funding stream and for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** into the funding categories described in [section 3.1](#) to ensure we compare Proposed Solutions of similar size against each other.

There is no separate application process or Eligibility Criteria to receive dedicated funding for Proposed Solutions in First Nations communities. We will consider eligible First Nations applications, as defined in [section 2.2.4](#) of these Guidelines, under a separate merit list. Eligible First Nations solutions that are not successful in gaining dedicated First Nations funding through the First Nations merit list will be considered under the relevant merit list for each funding stream.

We may seek advice regarding your Proposed Solution from state or territory government agencies, other Australian Government agencies, independent experts and other external parties. This advice may be taken into consideration when assessing the Proposed Solution.

Where the level of information provided in an application is not sufficient for the assessors to make a recommendation they may, but are not obliged to, seek more information from the applicant so long as it does not change the substance of the application. If the assessment process identifies unintentional errors in your application, we may contact you to correct or clarify the errors, but you cannot make any material alteration or addition. It is therefore recommended that you thoroughly address the criteria in your application.

An evaluation committee may seek additional information about your application. They may do this from within the Commonwealth, even if the sources are not nominated by you as referees. The evaluation committee may also consider information about you or your application that is available through the normal course of business.

### 8.2 Value for Money and government priorities

Following assessment against the Eligibility and Assessment Criteria, an assessment will also be undertaken to consider which of the Proposed Solutions represent the best Value for Money to the Commonwealth and whether they support a government priority. This is to ensure the grant will add value by achieving Program benefits that would not occur without the grant. This assessment will have regard to the overall Program and Grant Opportunity objectives.

Factors that may be considered in the Value for Money assessment include, but are not limited to the:

- cost to the Commonwealth of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which the Proposed Solution would contribute to the Program objectives, including addressing an identified local priority or government priority
- for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, degree to which the Proposed Solution delivers **Multi-MNO** outcomes

- extent to which the Proposed Solution will build on investments (aimed at delivering social and economic benefits) already made or planned for the Proposed Solution location
- extent of existing or planned commercial activity/investment that will impact on telecommunications services and the level of connectivity in the Proposed Solution location
- extent to which the Proposed Solution presents a demonstrable improvement over the existing telecommunications services in the Proposed Solution area
- extent to which Proposed Solutions provide overlapping coverage in a given area, and the appropriateness of each Proposed Solution to local needs
- extent to which the Proposed Solution leverages additional partnerships and in-kind contributions
- extent to which the Proposed Solution supports broader Commonwealth objectives or priorities, including through written support or financial co-contributions from other Commonwealth Departments or agencies
- ability to meet the needs of end users over the Operational Period
- forecast benefits of the Proposed Solution
- extent to which there is an appropriate spread of Proposed Solution types and Eligible Areas.

Based on the overarching Value for Money assessment, the Department reserves the right to recommend funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that were lower ranked against the Assessment Criteria than other eligible Proposed Solutions. This could include lower ranked Proposed Solutions from First Nations communities in recognition of the dedicated funding available for First Nations communities. The Department also reserves the right to recommend not funding one or more Proposed Solutions, that are highly ranked against the Assessment Criteria, based on the Value for Money assessment.

The Department may, at its absolute discretion, recommend increasing the level of Commonwealth funding for one or more **Mobile Black Spot Solution** above the maximum percentage per **Mobile Black Spot Solution** as outlined in section 5.3, should it be considered of higher Value for Money.

### **8.3 Who will assess applications?**

The evaluation committee will assess each application on its merits and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which Proposed Solutions should be awarded a grant (if any).

We may ask external advisors to inform the assessment process. Any advisor who is not a Commonwealth Official will be required to perform their duties in accordance with the CGRGs.

The evaluation committee recommends to the Decision Maker which applications to approve for a grant.

### **8.4 Who will approve grants?**

The Minister for Communications (the Decision Maker) decides which grants to approve, taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation committee and the availability of grant funds for the purposes of the Grant Opportunity.

The Minister's decision is final in all matters, including the:

- approval of applications for funding;
- amount of grant funding awarded; and
- terms and conditions of funding.

There is no appeal mechanism for decisions 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 13.1](#).

## 9 Notification of application outcomes

We will advise you of the outcome of your application in writing. If you are successful, we will advise you of any specific conditions attached to the grant.

### 9.1 Feedback on your application

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a grant, you may ask for feedback within 28 days of being advised of the outcome. We will give written feedback within one month of your request.

## 10 Successful grant applications

### 10.1 The Grant Agreement

Each Grantee will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement (or Agreements if successful in both streams) with the Commonwealth. Each Grant Agreement will set out the Grantee's obligations in respect of the roll-out and service terms for each Funded Project. Where the Grantee is successful in obtaining funding for both Regional Connectivity Solutions and Mobile Black Spot Solutions, the Regional Connectivity Solutions will be covered by a separate Grant Agreement to the Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

A sample Grant Agreement for Regional Connectivity Solutions and a separate sample Grant Agreement for Mobile Black Spot Solutions will be available shortly after the opening of the application round.

Applicants requesting any changes to the applicable sample Grant Agreement should provide full details of the proposed changes in their application, for consideration by the Department (see section 7.4 of these Guidelines). An applicant who was a previous funding recipient under either stream of the Program may, at the time of making their application, request to use a previously agreed funding agreement for that stream, with appropriate updates specified by the Commonwealth, as the basis for their Round 3 Agreement (an Updated Previous Funding Agreement). For RCP Round 2 funding recipients that are successful under Round 3 when seeking funding for a Regional Connectivity Solution, they may request to use their executed Round 2 Grant Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement. The decision to use an Updated Previous Funding Agreement as the basis for the Round 3 Grant Agreement is at the ultimate discretion of the Commonwealth.

We must execute a Grant Agreement with the applicant before we can make any payments. We are not responsible for any of the applicant's expenditure until a Grant Agreement is executed. Applicant's should not start any activities relating to a Funded Project until a Grant Agreement is executed. Each successful applicant must enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth prior to the Government's announcement of successful locations and Grantees.

The Commonwealth expects Grant Agreement terms to be reached with a successful Grantee within 60 Business days of the proposed Grantee being advised in writing that the Commonwealth is prepared to financially support the Proposed Solutions/s. If terms have not been agreed within 60 Business days, and without limiting any other rights or discretions, the Commonwealth reserves to the right not to proceed with a Grant Agreement for the Proposed Solution.

### 10.2 Specific legislation, policies and industry standards

Whilst applicants are required to be compliant with all laws and regulations, they may be requested to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation, policies or industry standards. For example,

applicants may be requested to demonstrate compliance with health, safety or security related legislation, policies or industry standards that are in any way applicable to the Funded Project.

### 10.2.1 Australian Industry Participation (AIP) Plan

Grant applicants should note that for funding of \$20 million or more, subject to advice from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, the Australian Industry Participation National Framework principles, including an AIP plan requirement, may apply to the grant agreement(s). More information on AIP plan requirements can be found at <https://industry.gov.au/aip>.

### 10.2.2 WHS Accreditation Scheme

Building work undertaken as part of the Funded Project/s funded under this agreement may be covered by the Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme (WHS Accreditation Scheme). The WHS Accreditation Scheme is established under the Federal Safety Commissioner Act 2022 and specified in the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) (Accreditation Scheme) Rules 2019*.

The WHS Accreditation Scheme applies to building work that is indirectly funded by the Commonwealth or a corporate Commonwealth entity if it is carried out under a contract with a value of \$4 million or more (GST inclusive) and the contribution made to the funding of the project that includes the building work by the Commonwealth or corporate Commonwealth entity is at least:

- \$6,000,000 (GST inclusive) and represents at least 50% of the total funding; or
- \$10,000,000 (GST inclusive).

A successful applicant who is the builder must comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation and successful applicants who will be engaging builders to undertake the building work must require builders to comply with all conditions of Scheme accreditation.

## 10.3 How we pay the grant

The Grant Agreement will state:

- the maximum grant amount to be paid;
- the proportion of eligible expenditure covered by the grant;
- any financial contributions provided by you or a third party;
- any in-kind contributions you will make; and
- any other requirements.

We will not exceed the maximum grant amount under any circumstances. If applicants incur extra costs, they must meet them themselves.

We may make an initial payment on execution of the Grant Agreement. We will make subsequent payments as applicants achieve Asset completion demonstrated by a satisfactory report, based on applicants actual eligible expenditure. These payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the Funded Project.

For **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**, an upfront operational expense payment will be made once the Operational Period has commenced.

## 10.4 Maintaining project benefits

In the Grant Agreement, an applicant will be required to commit to operate its Funded Project infrastructure and deliver Funded Project benefits over the Operational Period. Applicants may be required to report on the ongoing benefits delivered by the Funded Project.

## 10.5 Grants payments and GST

Payments will be made as set out in the Grant Agreement.

## 10.6 Amendment to these Guidelines

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.

Any alterations and addenda<sup>10</sup> to the Program 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.

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.

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 set out details of the changes, and all existing applicants will be notified of arrangements impacting existing applications.

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 by the Commonwealth and the Grantee.

## 11 Announcement of grants

If successful, applicants grants will be listed on the GrantConnect website 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 Keeping us informed

Applicants should let us know if anything is likely to affect the Funded Project or organisation.

We need to know of any key changes to the applicant's organisation or its business activities which may affect its ability to complete the Funded Project, carry on business and pay debts due.

Applicants must also inform us of any changes to:

- name;
- addresses;
- nominated contact details; and
- bank account details.

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



If applicants become aware of a breach of terms and conditions under the Grant Agreement, they must contact us immediately.

Applicants must notify us of events relating to the grant and provide an opportunity for the Minister or their representative to attend.

## **12.2 Reporting**

Applicants must submit reports in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will expect applicants to report on such matters as:

- progress against agreed activity and outcomes;
- contributions of participants directly related to the Funded Project including scheduled co-contributions (if any); and
- expenditure of the grant.

The amount of detail you provide in your reports should be relative to the Funded Project size, complexity and grant amount.

We will monitor progress by assessing reports applicants submit and may conduct site visits or request records to confirm details of reports if necessary. Occasionally we may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement.

## **12.3 Asset completion report**

For each completed Asset, applicants must submit an asset completion report as specified in the Grant Agreement. Assets will be defined in each applicant's Grant Agreement with the Commonwealth.

## **12.4 Grant agreement variations**

We recognise that unexpected events may affect your progress. In these circumstances, you can request a variation to your grant agreement. Applicants can request a variation by providing written notice to the Department setting out the reasons for the variation and proposing steps that could be taken to better achieve the purpose or address the risks of the Funded Project.

You should not assume that a variation request will be successful. We will consider your request based on provisions in the Grant Agreement and the likely impact on achieving outcomes.

## **12.5 Financial declaration or audited financial acquittal report**

We will ask applicants to provide a declaration that the grant money was spent in accordance with the Grant Agreement and to report on any underspends of the grant money. We may need to re-examine claims, seek further information or request an independent audit of claims and payments.

## **12.6 Independent audit report**

The Department may request an independently audited financial report for Funded Projects at the applicants expense. The financial audit report will verify that applicants spent the grant in accordance with the Grant Agreement. We will assess the report and may re-examine applicants claims or conduct site visits if necessary.

## 12.7 Compliance visits

The Department (including entities acting on our behalf) may visit applicants during the development and construction of the Funded Project, or at the completion of the Funded Project to review compliance with the Grant Agreement. We may also inspect the records applicants are required to keep under the Grant Agreement. For large or complex Funded Projects, we may visit applicants after they finish the Funded Project. We will provide applicants with reasonable notice of any compliance visit.

## 12.8 Evaluation

We will evaluate the Grant Opportunity to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from applications and reports for this purpose. We may also interview applicants, or ask for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted applicants and to evaluate how effective the Program was in achieving its outcomes. Grantees may be required to participate in Program reviews and evaluations.

We may contact applicants up to one year after the Asset Completion Dates for each Funded Project for more information to assist with this evaluation.

## 12.9 Acknowledgement

The Program logo should be used on all materials related to grants under the Program. Whenever the logo is used, the publication must also acknowledge the Commonwealth as follows:

‘Regional Connectivity Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Regional Connectivity Solutions and ‘Mobile Black Spot Program – an Australian Government initiative’ for Mobile Black Spot Solutions.

If applicants make a public statement about a Funded Project under the Program, we require them to acknowledge the grant by using the following:

‘This project received grant funding from the Australian Government.’

# 13 Probity

The Australian Government will make sure that the Grant Opportunity process is fair, conducted according to these Guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct, and is consistent with the CGRGs.

External advisors may also be asked to inform the assessment and evaluation process. All external advisors must comply with the CGRGs.

## 13.1 Enquiries and feedback

The Department’s [Client Service Charter](#) applies to complaints about this Grant Opportunity. All complaints about a grant process must be provided in writing.

Any questions applicants have about grant decisions for this Grant Opportunity should be sent to [regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au](mailto:regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au) for **Regional Connectivity Solutions** and [MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:MBSP@infrastructure.gov.au) for **Mobile Black Spot Solutions**.

If applicants do not agree with the way the Department has handled its complaint, they 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)

## 13.2 Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the Grant Opportunity or Program. There may be a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, if Department staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or applicant or any of the applicant's personnel has a:

- Professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the application Selection Process, such as an Australian Government officer or external advisor;
- Relationship with or interest in an organisation that 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 Grant Opportunity.

Applicants will be asked to declare, as part of your application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interests or that, to the best of your knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If applicants later identify an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest, they must inform the Department in writing immediately.

Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Australian [Public Service Code of Conduct \(Section 13\(7\)\)](#) of the [Public Service Act 1999](#). Committee members and other officials including the Decision Maker must also declare any conflicts of interest.

## 13.3 Privacy

We treat applicant's personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#). This includes letting applicants know:

- what personal information we collect;
- why we collect your personal information; and
- who we give your personal information to.

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 and grant recipients 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.

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*.

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

### **13.4 Confidential Information**

The Department will treat the applicant's commercially sensitive information provided in the applicant's application as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information (applicant Confidential Information).

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 or the Auditor-General;
- shared by the Commonwealth within the Commonwealth's entity (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 obligation.

The applicant will treat any information provided by the Department as confidential information provided that information is designated as confidential information. (Commonwealth Confidential Information).

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.

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, subject to agreement on confidentiality with applicants.

### **13.5 Intellectual property rights**

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 (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 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, the Program.

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.

### 13.6 Freedom of information

All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#) (FOI Act).

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 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.

All Freedom of Information requests must be referred to the Freedom of Information Coordinator in writing.

By mail: Freedom of Information Coordinator  
 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications  
 and the Arts  
 GPO Box 594  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: <mailto:FOI@infrastructure.gov.au>

## 14 Consultation

These Guidelines are informed by the submissions received as part of consultation on the draft Guidelines.

## 15 Glossary

Term	Definition
4G	Fourth generation mobile telecommunications service.
5G	Fifth generation mobile telecommunications service.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Active sharing	Arrangements where MNOs share the active layer of mobile network infrastructure to deliver services to a location, including through Radio Access Network Sharing, and/or mobile roaming.
AEST	Australian Eastern Standard Time
AC	Alternating Current
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
Asset	“The component of Proposed Solution to be constructed or upgraded at (or in connection to) a site”.
Date of Asset Completion	The date on which the Grantee has delivered the contracted service for a particular Asset.

Term	Definition
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.
<a href="#">Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines or CGRGs</a>	Guidelines issued by the Finance Minister under section 105C of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> , which establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration.
Commonwealth Official	A Commonwealth representative who is working or consulting on the Program.
Decision Maker	As set out in <a href="#">section 8.4</a> , the Minister for Communications.
DC	Direct Current
DTCS FAD	Domestic Transmission Capacity Service Final Access Determination
Eligible Area	As described in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Eligibility Criteria	The mandatory criteria set out in <a href="#">section 4</a> which applicants must meet in order for their application for the Grant Opportunity to be considered.
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; or</li> <li>• that will be provided by any applicant base station funded under a State or Territory program.</li> </ul>
Fixed-line	A type of internet connection that uses a physical line (including but not limited to fibre, Hybrid Fibre-Coaxial and copper) to provide services to a premises.
Fixed Wireless	A type of internet connection that uses fixed transmission towers or base stations to provide wireless services to a premises via antennas.
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTTP	Fibre to the Premises
Funded Project	A telecommunications infrastructure project found suitable during the assessment process and selected for funding under this Round of the Program.

Term	Definition
Funding Strategy	A written plan that outlines the financial capacity of the applicant to deliver a Proposed Solution through the Program.
Grant Activity	All the projects that the Grantee is required to undertake as set out in the Grant Agreement.
Grant Agreement	A document with contractual effect that sets out the relationship between the Grantee and the Commonwealth, and specifies the details of 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 Program Grant Opportunity as described in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Grantee	An applicant who has been selected to receive a grant under the Grant Opportunity.
Guidelines	These Grant Opportunity Guidelines for Round 3 of the Regional Connectivity Program – with Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) opportunities.
GST	Goods and Service Tax
Ineligible Areas	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 5.2</a> .
Intellectual Property	Includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. all copyright (including rights in relation to phonograms and broadcasts);</li> <li>2. all rights in relation to inventions, plant varieties, trademarks (including service marks), designs, circuit layouts; and</li> <li>3. all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.</li> </ol>
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.
Assessment Criteria	The specified principles or standards set out in <a href="#">section 6</a> , against which applications will be judged. The Assessment Criteria will be used to assess the merits of proposals and to determine application rankings.
Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve and extend mobile coverage in regional, rural and remote Australia.
Mobile Network Infrastructure Provider (MNIP)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.
Mobile Network Operator (MNO)	Has the meaning given in section 4.1.

Term	Definition
National MNO	An MNO who operates a mobile network that provides mobile coverage to at least 80% of the Australian population.
National Broadband Network (NBN)	The national wholesale-only, open access telecommunications network that is being built by, or in conjunction with, NBN Co (including any existing network incorporated into the NBN).
New Handheld Coverage	Coverage from a Proposed Solution that will be able to be obtained with a handheld mobile device in areas that do not receive Existing Handheld Coverage, in accordance with the meaning given in section 2.2.1.
NCD	Nominated Carrier Declaration
Operational Period	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2.2.3</a> .
Operational Costs (OPEX)	Costs for additional goods or services that are purchased for the ongoing operation of an asset.
Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP)	An Australian Government initiative to improve mobile coverage and capacity in peri-urban fringe areas at risk of bushfire and natural disaster.
Program	Has the meaning given in <a href="#">section 2</a> .
Proposed Solution	Infrastructure for which an applicant has sought funding under the Program.
Proposed Mobile Black Spot Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Mobile Black Spot (Round 7) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Proposed Regional Connectivity Solution	A Proposed Solution put forward under the Regional Connectivity (Round 3) funding stream as set out in <a href="#">section 2.2</a> .
Public Safety Premises	Places including emergency services facilities (i.e. including ambulance and Rural Fire Service (RFS) depots, hospitals, police facilities, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and related facilities (which may include airstrips).
Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP)	The 4G received signal power in a long-term evolution (LTE) network measured in decibels per milliwatt (dBm).
RRU	Remote Radio Unit
Selection Process	The method used to select Grantees, which will include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an initial assessment against Eligibility Criteria;</li> <li>2. a detailed assessment against Assessment Criteria;</li> <li>3. a Value for Money assessment and consideration of other government priorities; and</li> <li>4. comparison of similarly weighted applications for consideration of funding.</li> </ol>
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.



Term	Definition
Value for Money	<p>Refers to achieving ‘value with relevant money’ which is 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 in accordance with the CGRGs.</p> <p>When administering a grant opportunity, a Commonwealth 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>a. the quality of the project proposal and activities;</li> <li>b. fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to Government objectives;</li> <li>c. that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the applicant’s and the Government’s objectives being achieved; and</li> <li>d. the applicant’s relevant experience and performance history.</li> </ul>
We/us	The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts/or Commonwealth Officials administering the Program.
WHS	Work Health and Safety

# Attachment A

## A1. Co-location and co-build for Mobile Black Spot Solutions

Subject to 4.2 above, 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 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 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 Mobile Black Spot 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.

Once an applicant is selected to build a Proposed Solution it must, if other parties express interest, give any other MNO(s) not already participating in the Funded Project the opportunity to co-locate and to participate in the detailed design phase for that Funded Project using the process set out in this paragraph.

- The incremental cost for a Funded Project to support an additional MNO will be provided to the other participating MNOs to allow for greater transparency in co-location negotiations.
- For Funded Project 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 Project. 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 Project, 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 Project including (but not limited to) provision of Backhaul.

For the purpose of providing the incremental cost of supporting an additional MNO, a Funded Project 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 4: 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)	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)

Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3
(d), Weight 32kg); or equivalent load		
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 requirement 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.
- For macrocell solutions, the Grantee must ensure 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.

MNOs interested in co-locating on a Funded Project (i.e. the MNO expresses an interest in co-locating on Funded Project after funding has been awarded) will be required to express interest prior to the start of the detailed design stage for that Funded Project. All parties will be required to negotiate in good faith with each other in relation to the Funded Project 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 Project must, at least, equal the incremental cost incurred by reason of provisioning co-location for that Funded Project.

In accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined at section A3, 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.

Following the process set out above, 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.

## **A2. Backhaul access and pricing for Mobile Black Spot Solutions**

Where a Grantee selected to build a Funded Project reaches an agreement under section A.1 for an MNO not already participating in the Funded Project (the Co-locating MNO) to co-locate on the Funded Project, and subject to the microwave backhaul requirements below, the Grantee must offer Backhaul to the Co-locating MNO if the Grantee is in a position to do so.

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 Project to the Grantee's network.

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>11</sup>, including a DTCS pricing calculator that may assist interested parties to calculate the regulated price for Backhaul.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project 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.

Where a Grantee chooses to provide Backhaul to a Funded Project 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 Project; and
- the Co-locating MNO is permitted to install, operate and maintain its own microwave Backhaul equipment on the Funded Project.

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 A.2.

### **A3. Dispute resolution for Mobile Black Spot Solutions**

Disputes between parties in relation to co-location and Backhaul for a Funded Project will be referred for determination to an independent third party expert, at the parties' own shared cost.

The Grantee and Co-locating MNO will be bound by the determination made by the independent third party expert.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report](http://www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/communications/transmission-services-facilities-access/domestic-transmission-capacity-service-final-access-determination-inquiry-2019-2020/final-report)