



Workforce Connect Fund

Frequently asked questions

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What is the Workforce Connect Fund?

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

The Workforce Connect Fund is a key action under the [Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-32](#)'s first three-year Action Plan.

Why is this Fund important?

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

The impacts of COVID-19 have also changed the way that employees wish to engage with work, the drivers for attraction and retention and how 'meaningful work' is defined.

More people are now weighing up financial and lifestyle factors when making employment decisions. Workplace culture and values are also having a greater impact on whether employees choose a particular workplace and whether to remain there. Employers are needing to re-think the ways they attract and retain staff.

What funding is available?

There are two components under the Workforce Connect Fund:

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

When can I apply for funding?

The second funding round opened to Expressions of Interest on 29 January 2024 and will close on 11 March 2024.

The application process will be in two parts.

Expression of Interest

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

Applicant organisations must submit an Expression of Interest during the specified dates in order to be eligible to progress to the full application stage.

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

Full application

Applicant organisations that submit an Expression of Interest may be invited to complete a full application.

This is where the full assessment criteria and evidence requirements must be satisfied.

Further information on the application process can be found in the Workforce Connect Fund Guidelines for Funding.

Who are the Industry Workforce Advisors?

A network of Industry-based Workforce Advisors have been established under the [Queensland Government's Good people. Good jobs. Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032](#).

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

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

[Find your Industry Workforce Advisor here.](#)

Who can apply to deliver a large-scale project?

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

It is a mandatory requirement that applicant organisations must partner with other organisations (peak bodies, community-based organisations, HR/recruitment specialists and other relevant stakeholders) to ensure successful delivery of projects.

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

Applicant organisations must be registered for GST.

Why can only industry and community peak organisations apply?

Workforce planning at the sector level is critical and must be underpinned by industry leadership, as it is industry who is responsible for job creation, employing people and shaping the future state of the workforce.

Similarly, communities play a vital role in this landscape by supporting employers to tap into workers they have not traditionally accessed, as well as support Queenslanders to work in jobs they never thought available to them.

Why are partnerships mandatory?

Strong partnerships between industry and community is the key to improving workforce outcomes for employers, employees, and jobseekers.

Only through partnerships can systemic issues be addressed and long-lasting change embedded in workforces.

What is a large-scale project?

Projects that aim to address industry specific attraction, retention and participation issues and have the capability to roll out outcomes sector-wide (across Queensland) and effect systemic change within an industry's workforce.

What level of funding is available per project?

The level of funding depends on the nature of the project and is capped at up to \$1 million.

How long will a project be funded for?

Funding is available for a maximum 24-month term for the delivery of large-scale projects.

What does systemic change look like?

Collaboration and partnership with a diverse range of stakeholders at both the local and industry level with all parties providing input into the necessary adjustments or transformations required to embed lasting change.

Systemic change could be seen as:

- implementing transformational changes to workplaces to shift mindsets or stigmas within an industry;
- implementing a shift such as skilling up or training non-traditional cohorts to work within a specific industry and or
- driving structural changes to recruitment, and employee retention, including through changes to supporting infrastructure or systems to change the way an industry operates
- and/or

- supporting more Queenslanders, particularly women, to access the workforce through fostering flexible work practices to widen the pool of available workers.

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

What outcomes are expected?

At the completion of a project, a measurable increase in retention rates is expected to be reported across the funded organisation's member and non-member base in addition to the following standard Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) being met:

- A minimum of 10% employers supported a non-member employees (including small businesses within the industry).
- For the target number of employers assisted: at least 95% of that target must be achieved.
- For the target number of employees being assisted: at least 95% of that target must be achieved.
- For the target number of jobseekers assisted: at least 95% of that target must be achieved; and o those jobseekers assisted, a minimum of 55% are successfully employed at completion of the project.
- Other project KPIs may be established based on approved project specifications.

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

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

What are some examples of eligible activities?

Projects must:

- have a strong focus on connections and community engagement
- explore and trial new solutions with partner organisations to address industry specific issues with the aim of creating long-term, sustainable workforce outcomes
- be able to be rolled out sector-wide and effect systemic change within the specified industry.

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

Project examples could include:

- implementation of sector-wide human resources support
- design and development of new information technology platforms or systems
- development of new programs and approaches that support specific cohorts and promote social cohesion within the industry.
- development of innovative pre-employment programs
- development of innovative, new mentoring or coaching strategies that trial new approaches to the professional development and retention of employees.
- other innovative concepts designed primarily to address current and future workforce attraction, retention, and participation issues.

What can program funds be used for?

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

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

What can't program funds be used for?

Funding cannot be used for:

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

What are the expected outcomes of large-scale projects?

Large-scale projects will have the following standard KPIs:

- At the completion of the project, a measurable increase in retention and/or participation rates (depending on the project's target assist) is expected to be reported across the funded organisation's employer network.
- Where funded organisations have a member base, a minimum of 10% of employers supported are non-member employers (including small businesses) within the industry.
- Employment outcomes - of jobseekers assisted, a minimum of 55% are successfully employed at completion of the project.
- Other project KPIs may be established based on approved project specifications.

What is the application process?

Expression of Interest

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

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

Full application

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

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

Applications for the Workforce Connect Fund must be submitted via the DESBT SmartyGrants portal.

Applicants must:

- Create an account or log in via the DESBT SmartyGrants portal
- Select the Workforce Connect Fund application form
- Read and accept the terms of use
- Complete the application form uploading any required supporting materials and using relevant templates supplied on this page.
- Check your application for completeness and read and accept declaration terms.
- Submit your application before the funding round close date.

How will Expressions of Interest be assessed?

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

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

If deemed eligible to progress, DESBT will invite eligible applicants to complete a full application for assessment. However, please note, an invitation to progress to full application stage is not an indication of funding approval.

How will full applications be assessed?

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

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

Applicants should note that:

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

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

How will I be notified of funding decisions?

Applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application once the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training has completed all assessment and approval processes.