

INDEPENDENT GRANTS PROGRAM 2023 GUIDELINES



Independent Grants Program

v_25 Jan 2023

2023 Guidelines

Key Dates

Expressions of Interest OPEN	30 January 2023 - 24 February 2023 5pm AEDT (Sydney)
Applicants notified	29 March 2023
Full Applications OPEN (Invited applicants only)	30 March 2023 - 21 April 2023 5pm AEST (Sydney)
Applicants notified	30 June 2023
Funded projects can begin	1 July 2023

Contact the ACCAN Grants Team

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Contact us through the [National Relay Service](#)

Contents

ABOUT ACCAN	3
ABOUT THE GRANTS PROGRAM	3
Aim	3
Scope.....	3
Project Types.....	4
WHO CAN APPLY	5
Partnerships	5
Applying for follow-on work	5
Eligibility Criteria	6
ASSESSMENT	7
Accessibility of project outputs.....	7
Assessment Criteria	8
ABOUT THE 2023 ROUND	9
Key Dates	9
Available funding	9
Project duration	10
Streams	10
2023 Priority Themes (Research Stream applicants only)	10
HOW TO APPLY	11
After Applying	11
IF YOU ARE FUNDED.....	12
Funding Deed	12
Intellectual property	12
Records and reporting	12

ABOUT ACCAN

[The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network \(ACCAN\)](#) is Australia's peak body for communications consumers.

Our vision is for communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible and available for all.

Our work covers emerging consumer and technology issues and aims to inspire, inform and enable consumers to act in their own interests.

ABOUT THE GRANTS PROGRAM

The ACCAN Grants Program (the Program) is administered as part of our funding agreement with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (the Department), to fund projects that help achieve our aim.

Aim

The ACCAN Grants Program focuses on producing useful education, representation, and research outcomes for communications consumers.

We seek to help consumers navigate the communications market, and to establish a sound body of evidence for consumer representation and advocacy.

The Program is designed to:

- support ACCAN's ongoing [consumer education](#) objective;
- [represent and maintain diverse consumer interests](#) at the core of policy developments and industry initiatives; and
- support the provision of well researched, evidence-based input into [government and industry consultations](#).

Scope

The Program funds projects that address issues for **communications consumers** in Australia. Applicants need to demonstrate how their project improves **communications products or services** for Australians, and that it aligns with [ACCAN's Strategic Plan](#).

Projects may address the needs of large numbers of consumers, or significant needs of smaller numbers of consumers, or both.

Communications can relate to telecommunications, the internet, broadcasting, electronic media and new or emerging communications technologies.

A **communications consumer** includes individuals or small businesses.

Projects can examine consumer behaviours, attitudes or skills with communications products and services. Projects may seek to influence communications practices, policy or regulation.

Crucially, to be eligible under the Program, applications must demonstrate **communications outcomes**. If the main change you are seeking is outside of the communications sector (e.g., if you are seeking to improve health outcomes), then your project may be out of scope for an ACCAN grant. [Contact the Grants Team](#) if you are unsure.

Project Types

The Program funds consumer-focused **research, education or representation**. Projects may include one or more of these approaches in their work.

Research: research into the social, economic, environmental or technological effects, experiences and implications of communications for consumers. These projects need to demonstrate appropriate methodologies and document a particular communications consumer issue or experience. Outputs can include, for example, data sets, research reports and articles.

Projects which are predominantly research will be assessed under the *Research Stream*.

Education: These projects might include developing consumer education tools, conducting workshops or peer education initiatives to address systemic or emerging communications consumer issues. Education may be on topics such as billing issues, how to make a complaint about phone or internet services, consumer rights in relation to communications services, or digital literacy.

Projects aim to empower consumers and communities to act in their own interests in relation to communications issues.

Projects which are predominantly community education will be assessed under the *Education & Representation Stream*.

Representation: These projects undertake advocacy or representation of the interests of consumers in relation to communications issues. They might involve action such as developing specific submissions, participating in regulatory reviews or knowledge sharing to develop capacity to advocate on consumer issues. Projects that fall under this category can be directed, for example, towards regulatory bodies, industry or consumers themselves.

Projects which are predominantly representational will be assessed under the *Education & Representation Stream*.

WHO CAN APPLY

Any person or entity with an ABN is able to apply.

This may include community organisations, businesses, universities, research agencies, local councils or individuals. The majority of our applicants come from the community sector and universities.

Partnerships

We encourage applications from individuals or groups that have formed partnerships, especially projects partnering with the communications industry and/or community organisations promoting communications issues.

When multiple individuals or organisations are involved, one party is nominated as the applicant (the entity with which ACCAN will enter into contract), while the others are listed as partners.

The contribution of partners can include:

- cash or in-kind support
- input into the planning, design, execution or promotion of the project
- expertise or guidance, e.g., through participation on an advisory panel, or by supporting the development or dissemination of project outputs

If you are interested in forming a partnership but are unsure how to start, please [contact the ACCAN grants team](#). We may be able to suggest organisations with a similar interest and focus to you. It will remain the applicant's responsibility to build and maintain these partnerships, and to ensure any contractual obligations between partners are met.

Applying for follow-on work

If you have previously been awarded an ACCAN grant and wish to further build upon this project, you are able to apply for a second stage of funding.

This is NOT an extension of time for work contracted under the existing project. It is to allow those grantees who have demonstrated exceptional competency in delivering agreed outcomes, the chance to build upon and progress this work further.

Your application needs to demonstrate successful completion of milestones in your existing ACCAN-funded project, the ongoing support of any partners, and the outcomes your project has achieved for communications consumers.

Grantees applying for follow-on work use the same application and assessment process as other applicants.

Eligibility Criteria

Applications must meet **all** eligibility criteria. Applications that are late, incomplete, or ineligible will **not** be assessed.

Applications **must**:

- Be submitted prior to the advertised deadline
- Be for a project that seeks to explore **communications consumer** issues in Australia and be consistent with ACCAN's scope (see [ACCAN's Strategic Plan](#)).
- Be able to provide a valid ABN in the Applicant's name.
- Declare that should they be successful they will provide evidence of Public Liability Insurance with coverage up to \$5 million.
- Have successfully acquitted any previous funding under the ACCAN Grants Program.
- If applying under the *Education and Representation Stream*, be from a community sector applicant, or demonstrate a strong community sector partnership.
- If applying under the *Research Stream*, address one or more of the **2023 Priority Themes**.
- Be for a project that begins after 1st July 2023 and that is completed before 30th June 2025.
- Not request funding for any of the ineligible activities below:
 - Activities that contradict ACCAN's values.
 - Activities primarily related to commercial product or service development.
 - Activities of a partisan (party) political nature.
 - Projects that have already been completed (i.e., retroactive funding for work already undertaken).
 - Travel costs (unless directly necessary for the project).
 - Operational or ongoing activities normally funded through other arrangements.
 - University or other administration levies.
 - General operating costs not directly attributable to the project.

ASSESSMENT

The ACCAN Grants Program assessment process is competitive, merit-based, and guided by the Assessment Criteria (overleaf).

Eligible applications are assessed by an [Independent Panel](#) of external specialists, whose recommendations for funding must then be approved by the [ACCAN Board](#). The Independent Panel will endeavour to select a balance of projects that deliver the three desired outcomes of research, education and representation within the available funding. [Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#) are in place to ensure the process is fair and equitable.

Strong projects:

- are **framed** in terms of a specific **communications** consumer problem, and describe how the project addresses that problem
- best satisfy the [Assessment Criteria](#), which are weighted to reflect the priorities of the Program
- investigate emerging and **highly topical issues**
- demonstrate a high degree of **originality**
- focus on issues which affect a **large number** of consumers, or, have a **high impact** on groups of consumers for whom the market is not working
- can **continue independently** after ACCAN funding
- have outputs which are produced in accessible formats and are demonstrably able to be used on an **ongoing basis**
- include cross-sector **collaboration**.

Accessibility of project outputs

All resources produced under the Grants Program need to conform to basic accessibility principles. This means that:

- all documents, images and webpages are accessible to screen readers.
 - i. E.g., alt text on images; Heading Styles are consistent
- digital resources such as videos contain captions and audio description, or a transcript.

Ensure your application demonstrates your plan for this, or if some resources are intended to not be made accessible, your justification. ACCAN staff can provide guidance before you apply.

If you are funded, ACCAN will meet with you early in your project to confirm your plans for accessibility. We have accessibly-formatted templates that we can share with you for writing reports, or if you will be using a graphic designer or web developer without experience in accessibility, we can highlight the key design features they'll need to consider.

Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria	Examples of considerations made by the Panel	Weighting
Benefit to consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project seek to fill a knowledge or skills gap and is the project an effective response to that gap? Which groups of consumers will benefit from the project? How many consumers will benefit from the project? What will the impact/s of the benefit be and how will they be measured? When will consumers benefit from the project? Will the outputs be created in accessible formats? 	20%
Community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the motivation for the project? Have efforts been made to identify the key stakeholders in the issue? Does the project have concrete plans to consult and engage effectively with consumers, community groups, and/or research communities? Are there strengths or assets (tangible and intangible) within the communities involved that can be built upon to provide even greater benefit? 	20%
Addresses high priority consumer issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the project address ACCAN's Strategic Plan? For <i>Research Stream</i> applications: to what extent does the project address one or more of the 2023 Priority Themes (Research Stream applicants only) 	30%
Technical strength of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the project objectives, outputs, plan and timeline well considered and achievable? Is the project innovative and timely? Does the project team have the appropriate skills and capacity to carry out the project? If a research project, is the chosen methodology valid and appropriate? Does the application demonstrate knowledge of previous and current work/research on the theme, including that by ACCAN and regulatory bodies? Have ethical issues regarding researching and working with people and partners been considered and addressed? 	15%
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project budget appropriate for the proposed project activities, outputs and outcomes? Would the project be able to proceed without this funding? If in-kind contributions are noted, are they well considered? 	15%

ABOUT THE 2023 ROUND

Key Dates

Expressions of Interest OPEN	30 January 2023
Expressions of Interest CLOSE <i>(Please note any time differences for your region, as the system will automatically close at 5pm AEDT.)</i>	24 February 2023 5pm AEDT (Sydney)
Applicants notified	29 March 2023
Full Applications OPEN (Invited applicants only)	30 March 2023
Full Applications CLOSE <i>(Please note any time differences for your region, as the system will automatically close at 5pm AEST.)</i>	21 April 2023 5pm AEST (Sydney)
Applicants notified	30 June 2023
Funded projects can begin <i>(pending executed Deed)</i>	1 July 2023
Funded projects must be complete and acquitted	30 June 2025

Available funding

Applicants can **apply for up to \$100,000 per project**. Applications requesting smaller amounts are welcomed.

A total pool of approximately \$500,000 is available for distribution in the 2023 Round. It is at the Panel’s discretion whether all available funds are allocated in any given Round, whether projects from both Streams are funded, and whether funding is spread across several smaller projects, or fewer larger projects. Any residual funding is rolled over and added to the following Round’s funds.

Some applications may be offered partial funding.

Project duration

The maximum duration for a project is 2 years. Projects can begin after **1 July 2023**. Projects must be complete and acquitted by **30 June 2025**.

All projects need to demonstrate they are appropriate in length to the activity proposed and may span any period within the above timeframe. Projects of shorter duration, for example of 6 months or less, are welcomed.

Streams

Depending on the [type](#) of project you are proposing, your application will be assessed under one of two Streams:

1. **Education & Representation Stream**

Your project qualifies under this Stream if:

- a. the bulk of your work is consumer education and/or representation; and
- b. the lead applicant is from the community sector, or your application demonstrates strong and genuine community sector partnership; *and*
- c. your project uses, or supplements, existing ACCAN resources where relevant.

2. **Research Stream**

Your project qualifies under this Stream if:

- a. the bulk of your work is consumer-focused research; and
- b. it addresses one or more of the **2023 Priority Themes** (below)

2023 Priority Themes (Research Stream applicants only)

Research Stream applicants need to demonstrate how their research addresses one (or more) of the priority topics below. These priorities are selected by ACCAN after consultation with key stakeholders and may change each Round.

- Communications **privacy and security** e.g., cyber-security
- **Digital exclusion** e.g., policy issues; practical responses; economic cost.
- Communications **affordability** e.g., Obstacles to device and service upgrades; mis-selling; sales tactics; financial hardship.
- Solutions to communications issues for **remote** consumers
- **Other** topics which can demonstrate direct alignment with ACCAN's strategic plan.

HOW TO APPLY

1. Check your Eligibility and consider the [Assessment Criteria](#)
2. Contact the ACCAN Grants Team with your project idea
 - a. Our data shows that eligibility rates are greatly improved for those applicants who seek ACCAN input before submission. The application process is competitive, merit based, and assessed by an [Independent Panel](#), not by ACCAN, so the Grants team is available to discuss your project idea and ensure it is relevant to the Program.
 - b. The [ACCAN website](#) has lots of advice and resources to help you apply, including tips on writing a budget, eligibility, etc.
3. Apply online at: accan.smartygrants.com.au
 - a. The first stage of applications is an *Expression of Interest (EOI) stage*. The EOI is a shortened form and will ask for a brief project description, a summary of how you plan to complete the project and details of any outputs to be produced.
 - b. If you don't already have a SmartyGrants account, you will need to create one. You can save and edit your application as many times as you wish before submitting. The online forms comply with WCAG 2.0 Level AA accessibility standards.
 - c. A [Microsoft Word version](#) of the EOI form is available on our website, or by contacting the ACCAN grants team, to help draft applications or share the form amongst a team. Submission, however, can only be made online via SmartyGrants.
 - d. You will receive confirmation from the SmartyGrants system when your application is submitted.
4. Full Application stage
 - a. Shortlisted EOIs will be invited to submit a full application. This invitation may include questions or comments from the assessment Panel to be addressed. Please note, that previous Rounds have attracted between 60-80 EOIs, with approximately 15-20 of these invited through to *Full Application* stage.

After Applying

Your application will be kept confidential and will be accessed only by relevant ACCAN staff and members of the Independent Panel. The ACCAN Board will receive some information in their role as overseer of the assessment process.

ACCAN may seek further information from applicants at any stage in the assessment process.

Unsuccessful applicants will receive written feedback on their applications by email and are asked to contact ACCAN within two weeks from the date of notification if they would like to seek further feedback.

IF YOU ARE FUNDED

ACCAN takes a collaborative approach to project management and will provide regular communication and support throughout.

Funding Deed

If your project is selected to receive a grant you will need to have in place a signed funding agreement before commencing. This will set out ACCAN's requirements as well as your obligations in the delivery of the project.

ACCAN's Deed and Schedule are available to view on [our website](#).

It will be filled in according to the outputs, milestones, timelines etc. you indicated in your application. Payments are milestone-based, meaning you will be expected to show that you have delivered on an agreed milestone, prior to each payment being released.

Please review the Deed and Schedule to ensure you and/or your organisation are able to accept its conditions, should you be recommended for funding. Please note that because the ACCAN Grants Program is funded by the Federal Government, ACCAN is required to impose certain obligations on the Grant Recipient under its own Commonwealth Deed. Funding under the Independent Grants Program is dependent on acceptance of the terms of the Deed, in certain circumstances.

Intellectual property

All materials created during the project will remain the intellectual property of you or your organisation. By entering into a funding Deed with ACCAN you agree to:

- Grant ACCAN a permanent license to all materials created during the project, including the right to sub-license, which ACCAN is required to automatically grant to the Department
- Acknowledge ACCAN's support of the project in all public materials (and the Department in supporting ACCAN).

Projects selected for funding will be [listed on the ACCAN website](#).

Records and reporting

You will need to provide the following to ACCAN at a time specified in the funding agreement, or when requested:

- **Records** clearly accounting for funding provided. Records must be kept in such a way that they could be inspected and audited if required.
- A **Project Acquittal Report**: When your project has finished, a form will be provided in Smartygrants for you to evaluate the project and document all financial details.

ACCAN may also request:

- A Project Progress Report whereupon ACCAN will provide a form for you to complete approximately halfway through the project.