

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The hands are interacting with the screen, and the background is blurred with warm, bokeh-style lights.

# Independent Grants Program Guidelines

**2026 Round**

## Key dates

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Expressions of Interest OPEN	6 February 2026
Expressions of Interest CLOSE	2 March 2026
<i>(Please note any time differences for your region, as the system will automatically close at <b>5pm AEDT</b>.)</i>	5pm AEDT (Sydney)
Applicants notified	3 April 2026
Full Applications OPEN  (Invited applicants only)	10 April 2026
Full Applications CLOSE  <i>(Please note any time differences for your region, as the system will automatically close at <b>5pm AEST</b>.)</i>	8 May 2026  5pm AEST (Sydney)
Applicants notified	1 July 2026
Projects can begin	1 July 2026
Projects must be complete	30 June 2027

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# Contact us

Email: [grants@accan.org.au](mailto:grants@accan.org.au)

Phone: (02) 9288 4000

Web: [www.accan.org.au/grants](http://www.accan.org.au/grants)

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

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## About ACCAN

[The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network \(ACCAN\)](#) is the peak national consumer advocacy organisation for communications.

Our vision is for trusted, accessible, inclusive, affordable and available communications and digital services for all Australians.

ACCAN is committed to achieving the following four key strategic goals:

- National leadership in consumer communications advocacy and awareness.
- National leadership in policy and research.
- Collaboration and coalition building.
- Organisational capacity and resilience.

## About the program

ACCAN's Independent 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 vision.

### Scope

The Program funds projects that address **communications consumer** issues in Australia.

Applicants need to demonstrate that their project:

- Improves **communications services** for consumers in Australia.
- Aligns with [ACCAN's Strategic Plan](#).

Take a look at [past projects](#) for a sense of what can be funded under the Program.

### *What's not in scope*

We do not fund projects targeting outcomes outside of the communications sector. E.g. If you are seeking to improve health or educational outcomes, your project is likely out of scope. It is not enough to be *using* communications services in your work – you must show that the impact you are seeking is on the communications services themselves.

Contact us before applying to check your idea is in scope.

# Eligibility

Any entity with an ABN (Australian Business Number) is able to apply.

Your project must:

- Address **communications consumer** issues in Australia.
- Be consumer-focused research, education or representation.
- Be consistent with ACCAN's [Strategic Plan](#).
- Begin after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026 and finish before 30 June 2027.

Applicants must:

- Provide a valid ABN in the Applicant's name.
- Declare that should they be funded, they will provide evidence of Public Liability Insurance with coverage of at least \$5 million.
- Have successfully acquitted any previous funding under the Program.
- Commit to meeting ACCAN reporting requirements including delivery of a project report, summary report and/or project presentation.

Ineligible items:

- Indirect costs, overheads, university or other administration levies.
- Operational or ongoing costs not directly attributable to the project.
- Activities primarily related to commercial product or service development.
- Activities of a partisan (party) political nature.
- Activities that have already been completed (i.e., retroactive funding for work already undertaken).
- Travel costs (unless directly necessary for the project).

# Assessment

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

Applications are assessed by an [Independent Panel](#) of external specialists, whose recommendations for funding must then be approved by the [ACCAN Board](#). [Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#) are in place to ensure the process is fair and equitable.

Strong applications:

- Are **framed** in terms of the specific **priority themes** identified by the ACCAN policy team for 2026.
- Best satisfy the Assessment Criteria, which are weighted to reflect the priorities of the Program.
- Investigate emerging and/or **high-priority consumer issues**.

- 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.
- Have outputs which are produced in accessible formats and are demonstrably able to be used on an **ongoing basis**.
- Include cross-sector **collaboration**, especially with consumers and/or their representatives, as appropriate.
- Have strong justification for budgeted items.

# Criteria

Assessment Criteria	Examples of considerations made by the Panel	Weighting
<b>Benefit to consumers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the project seek to fill a knowledge or skills gap and is the project an effective response to that gap?</li> <li>• Does the project advance research on a policy issue of national significance?</li> <li>• How many consumers will benefit from the research project?</li> <li>• What will the impact/s of the benefit be and how will they be measured?</li> </ul>	20%
<b>Addresses high priority consumer issue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the project align with the objectives of the <a href="#">ACCAN's Strategic Plan</a>?</li> <li>• How does the project address one or more of the <b>Priority Themes</b>?</li> </ul>	40%
<b>Technical strength of the project</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the project objectives, outputs, plan and timeline well considered?</li> <li>• Does the project team have the appropriate skills and capacity to carry out the project?</li> <li>• If a research project, is the chosen methodology valid and appropriate?</li> <li>• Does the application demonstrate knowledge of previous and current work/research on the theme, including that by ACCAN and regulatory bodies?</li> <li>• Have ethical issues regarding researching and working with people and partners been considered and addressed?</li> </ul>	20%
<b>Value for money</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the project budget appropriate for the proposed project activities, outputs and outcomes?</li> <li>• Would the project be able to proceed without this funding?</li> <li>• If in-kind contributions are noted, are they well considered?</li> </ul>	20%

# Priority Themes

ACCAN has identified two priority themes for the 2026 Grant Round. Applicants may choose to address either of these priority themes.

## **Uplifting the consumer experience**

The first priority for 2026 is research into the communications consumer experience. ACCAN research shows that many consumers do not trust their provider to act in their best interests or to deliver value for money. This theme would examine where and why the consumer experience breaks down, including the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and migrant communities. It would also explore why many consumers rarely change mobile and internet plans, the barriers to switching providers, and what would make switching easier. The research would focus on what consumers say about how the communications market is working for them, and what changes would improve outcomes.

## **Affordable communications for all consumers**

ACCAN research shows that almost half of consumers have low trust in internet providers to keep costs low. Consumers on low incomes regularly cut back on essential household expenses to afford access to communications. The second priority theme for 2026 examines the experiences of communications consumers having trouble affording communications services. Research projects might include consumer choice in selecting mobile and home internet plans and what tools would better allow consumers to choose communications services that suit their needs. Projects might also include studies of policy interventions to ensure that the most vulnerable consumers are able to maintain access to communications. Research could diagnose barriers to economic and social participation for vulnerable groups through communications affordability and suggest ways to reduce the problem.

## About the 2026 round

### *Funding available*

Applicants can **apply for up to \$40,000 per project**.

Approximately \$80,000 is available for distribution.

Applications requesting smaller amounts are welcome.

It is at the Panel's discretion whether all available funds are allocated in any given Round, and whether funding is spread across several smaller projects, or fewer larger projects. Some applications may be offered partial funding. Any residual funding is rolled over and added to the following Round's funds.

### *Project duration*

The maximum duration for a project is 1 year.

- Projects can begin after **1 July 2026**
- Projects must be completed and acquitted by **30 June 2027**.

All projects need to demonstrate they are appropriate in length to the activity proposed and may span any period within the above timeframe.

Short projects, for example, of 6 months or less, are welcomed.

## How to apply

### Speak to us about your project idea

Our data shows that eligibility rates are greatly improved for those applicants who seek ACCAN's 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 provide advice on its relevance for the Program.

Our Contact Details are on the front page of these Guidelines.

### Submit an Expression of Interest (EOI)

- a. Your EOI must be submitted online at: <https://ACCAN.smartygrants.com.au/2026>
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. You will receive a confirmation email immediately after submitting.
- e. Please ensure you submit your EOI well ahead of the closing time, and note any time differences for your location.
- f. Please note that previous Rounds have attracted between 60-80 EOIs, with approximately 15-20 of these invited through to the *Full Application* stage.

### Submit a Full Application

- 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.
- b. Your application will need to include a full project plan and budget.  
\*University applicants: please note that ACCAN does not normally fund teaching buyout/teaching relief. If you do wish to include teaching buyout in your budget, please ensure it is strongly justified.

## After Applying

Your application/s 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 invited to contact ACCAN 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.

It will be filled 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 for you to evaluate the project and document all financial details.