

Schools Upgrade Fund

ROUND 2 – GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST GUIDELINES
OCTOBER 2023

At a glance

Applications open:	31 October 2023
Applications close:	11:59 pm AEDT, Thursday 29 February 2024
Eligibility:	Government schools
Funding:	Minimum \$250,000 per project
Projects:	Larger scale capital infrastructure projects and associated costs
Guidelines:	Version 3 (11 October 2023)
Contact:	SchoolsUpgradeFund@education.gov.au

Definitions

The definitions below are for the purposes of these Guidelines.

The Act: Refers to the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act)

Approved authority: Each school has an approved authority, which is the body approved by the Minister for Education under the Act. For a government school, the approved authority is the relevant state or territory government.

The department: Australian Government Department of Education

The Fund: Round 2 of the Schools Upgrade Fund

Goods and Services Tax (GST): The GST is a broad-based tax of 10 per cent on the supply of most goods and services sold or consumed in Australia.

School: Refers to a primary school, a secondary school or a combined school that is conducted by or on behalf of the government of a state or territory

Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA): Refers to a scale which allows for fair and reasonable comparisons among schools. ICSEA was created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), and provides an independent and transparent indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students at a school.

Minister for Education: Refers to the Australian Government Minister for Education

The Regulation: Refers to the *Australian Education Regulation 2023*

Purpose of the Guidelines

1. These Guidelines set out the policy and processes for the administration and delivery of the Round 2 of the Schools Upgrade Fund (the Fund).
2. Schools should read this document carefully before completing and submitting an expression of interest for funding.
3. These Guidelines and the application process do not create any legally enforceable undertakings (contractual or otherwise) between the Commonwealth of Australia and any applicant.

About the Fund

4. The Commonwealth will provide \$215.8 million to support capital infrastructure upgrade projects in government schools across Australia under Round 2 of the Schools Upgrade Fund. It will enable investment in large-scale capital projects such as new facilities, major refurbishments and upgrades to government schools.
5. The fund is not administered as Commonwealth grants and will not be managed through Grant Connect. Further information about the process for applying under this round can be found online at <https://www.education.gov.au/schools-upgrade-fund>.
6. Round 2 of the Schools Upgrade Fund will be delivered in partnership with state and territory education departments. The department is responsible for the overall administration of the Fund, with projects endorsed by the Australian Government Minister for Education based on advice from by state and territory ministers for education.
7. Individual schools will apply for funding and deliver projects, together with their state or territory government, as applicable. However, it is the state or territory government as the approved authority for the school, as defined under the Act and the Regulation, which has responsibility for the school and accountability for the use of any funding paid.

Funding available

8. A total of \$215.8 million will be allocated to state and territory governments for projects at schools whose applications are endorsed by the Minister for Education.
9. In addition to funding provided through the Schools Upgrade Fund, the total cost of the project may include funding contributions from the school or the relevant state or territory.
10. States and territories are required to nominate the total cost required to deliver each of the proposed projects.
11. Where applicable, the total cost should include any project management and contingency costs, or similar costs, that will be funded by the Schools Upgrade Fund. States and territories may use up to 1 per cent of their funding allocation to meet administration costs.
12. Acknowledging the cost for some projects may change prior to completion, states and territories may reallocate Round 2 funding across their suite of projects as required, including allocating underspends to new projects.

13. The Commonwealth will not provide any funding additional to the \$215.8 million available under the Fund.
14. All funding amounts are exclusive of GST.

Eligible schools

15. Round 2 of the Fund is open to all government schools that attracted Commonwealth recurrent funding through an approved authority for 2023 under the Act.
16. To be eligible for funding, the school must anticipate continuing to operate in 2024 (for example, a school would be ineligible if it is closing at the end of 2023 or will have no enrolled students in 2024).
17. The school must have at least one enrolled student at the time of submitting an application.
18. Government schools that received funding through Round 1 of the Schools Upgrade Fund – the Targeted Round or the Open Round – are eligible to apply for funding under Round 2 of the Fund.

Eligible project activities

19. The relevant state or territory department of education for the school must support the application. Schools must engage with their approved authority (their state/territory local department of education) to ensure they have their support.
20. Large-scale capital projects such as new facilities, major refurbishments and upgrades are in scope. Eligible projects include (but are not limited to):
 - building or upgrading facilities essential to support student learning and/or wellbeing, other subject-specific facilities (such as art facilities, music rooms, technical and applied studies facilities, sporting facilities etc.) or other critical school infrastructure
 - upgrading playground and outdoor learning facilities
 - for schools with a high proportion of ageing demountable buildings, replacing these with permanent structures or modern modular teaching spaces.

21. Funding is not available for:
- projects with a Commonwealth funding requirement of less than \$250,000 (GST exclusive)
 - projects that have commenced prior to the school receiving notification of approval from the department. Project commencement includes making financial commitments (for example, purchase orders placed or invoices received) for work involved in the project. Preliminary work undertaken by a school to prepare its applications (for example, research, scoping, obtaining costs or quotes) does not constitute project commencement
 - projects where the majority of use will be by overseas students or any other students who would not attract funding under the Act
 - projects that are principally for pre-primary education, being children below the prescribed state or territory school starting age
 - a facility that is not in a formal school setting (for example, an Early Learning Centre attached to a school)
 - expenses relating to security to obtain, or comply with, any form of loan, credit, payment or other interest
 - expenses relating to the preparation of, or in the course of, any litigation.

How to apply

22. Applications open on Tuesday 31 October 2023 and close at 11:59 pm AEDT on Thursday 29 February 2024.
23. Schools must submit an application to the department by 11:59pm AEDT on Thursday 29 February 2024. Schools must engage with their department of education during the EOI process to collaborate, identify priorities, and gain their support for the proposed project, including identification of the estimated costs of the project. Schools may only submit one (1) application for a Round 2 project for which a minimum of \$250,000 (Goods and Services Tax (GST) exclusive) of funding under the Schools Upgrade Fund will be applied.
24. Where a school is composed of multiple campuses, the school may only submit a single application to deliver a project that may be across multiple campuses.
25. All applications for Round 2 funding should be made via the online application form. The form can be accessed on the department's website at <https://www.education.gov.au/schools-upgrade-fund>.
26. Applications must be submitted by the School Principal, Deputy/Assistant Principal, Business Manager or equivalent. The person submitting the application form will also be the contact for all related queries.
27. Where schools have previously applied to their approved authorities (their state/territory local department of education) for the same or similar project via another program, schools may refer to this project in their application.

28. Schools that are unable to apply via the online application form should contact the department at Schoolsupgradefund@education.gov.au to discuss alternative options to submit an application form.
29. If an application form is submitted in error, or with any inaccurate information that a school would like to rectify, the school should contact the department at Schoolsupgradefund@education.gov.au.
30. If a school experiences any technical errors in submitting an application form or requires assistance, it should send a screen shot of the error and a description of the problem to the department at Schoolsupgradefund@education.gov.au.

Application assessment and prioritisation of projects

31. Once the application period closes, the department will undertake eligibility and completeness checks of the applications and ensure:
 - the school attracted recurrent funding under the Act in 2023 and is expected to continue to operate in 2024
 - the school has at least one enrolled student at the time of submitting the application
 - projects are eligible funding activities
 - the relevant state or territory department of education for the school has endorsed the project
 - the application confirms that funding for the project will be committed to be spent by 31 December 2024 or as otherwise agreed with the department.
32. Following the initial check, the department will provide all applications received to the relevant state or territory department of education for consideration.
33. The relevant state and territory department of education will consider all eligible expressions of interest received from their schools and assess applications on the basis of need.
34. Based on these assessments, state and territory ministers for education will identify projects for funding in their jurisdiction.
35. Projects will be prioritised with reference to key indicators of disadvantage, including:

- projects that support schools with a low Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) value relative to the jurisdictional median
 - eligible projects for schools that have a high proportion of students experiencing educational disadvantage and that have not received significant capital funding in the past two years (that is, projects valued at \$250,000 or more in 2022 or 2023)
 - projects that support schools that cater to disadvantaged students, such as:
 - special schools
 - special assistance schools or
 - majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools.
36. States and territories will make funding decisions using the information from the expression of interest process, local capital investment priorities, and any other information available.
37. Identification of projects to be funded will depend on, among other things:
- the number of eligible applications received
 - the amount of available funding in each jurisdiction
 - characteristics of school disadvantage and
 - the relative demonstrated need for funding for the proposed priority project.
38. States and territories will be the decision-makers on identifying successful projects however the Commonwealth reserves the right to not endorse a project proposed by a state or territory, and to request an alternative project.
39. State and territory departments of education will notify schools of the outcome of all project applications. State and territory departments of education will also provide advice to schools regarding commencement of approved projects.

Managing funding

Payment of funds

40. Funds will be paid by the Commonwealth to state and territory governments in accordance with the terms agreed under the relevant schedule to the *Federation Funding Agreement – Education and Skills* (the Schedule). State and territory governments may use up to one per cent of the total funding for the administration of the Fund and will ensure all other funds are used on approved projects.
41. The Commonwealth Government will not own any assets funded through the Fund. Ownership will remain with the relevant state or territory government.

Funding conditions

42. In order for state and territory governments to comply with their obligations under the Schedule, they must, among other things:

- a) spend the funding only on the approved project(s) and its associated costs (with the exception of up to 1 per cent of total funds which may be used for administration of the Fund)
- b) spend, or commit to spend funds received, including any interest earned, on approved projects by 31 December 2024, unless otherwise agreed with the department
- c) ensure that the project is completed to a satisfactory standard, and within a reasonable time
- d) ensure that the project complies with any relevant statutes, regulations, by-laws and requirements of any Commonwealth, state, territory or local authority
- e) keep full and accurate records in a form that will permit comprehensive information to be provided to the Commonwealth if required
- f) meet the Commonwealth recognition requirements for the Fund (see 'Recognition Requirements' section).

Varying and cancelling projects

- 43. In exceptional circumstances, a school may seek a variation to their approved project scope or timeframe or to cancel the project. In this instance, schools should contact their relevant department of education.
- 44. Schools may not seek additional funds through the Schools Upgrade Fund, including where implementation costs increase above the originally approved amount.
- 45. If a project for which funds have been paid is subsequently cancelled, and it is not reasonably possible to apply the funds to another project, the funds allocated to the cancelled project will be offset from future payments to the approved authority.

Administration and reporting

- 46. Schools or their approved authorities are required to provide an annual report to their relevant state or territory department of education detailing a brief progress update on the project status and include all income and expenditure in respect of the project.
- 47. The financial acquittal of funds paid will be completed by the relevant state or territory department of education. Where applicable, acquittal documentation will clearly indicate how cost savings realised for a project(s) have been applied to the jurisdiction's other Round 2 Schools Upgrade Fund projects.
- 48. Further information on the requirements will be provided in the written directions sent to schools by their state or territory authority at the time of project approval.
- 49. The department will undertake an evaluation of the Fund following the submission of all final acquittal reports.

Public announcement of funding

- 50. The Minister for Education or other Australian Government Members of Parliament may make public announcements about the Fund at any time and inform schools about the Fund.

51. Schools that receive Round 2 funding may be published on the department's Schools Upgrade Fund webpage.

Recognition requirements

52. Schools must meet the following Australian Government recognition requirements for the Fund, including:
- all publicity materials and announcements in relation to projects supported under the Schools Upgrade Fund acknowledge the Australian Government's contribution
 - relevant school communities are advised directly about assistance received from the Commonwealth by such means as school newsletters
 - for all facilities that receive support under the Fund, an official opening ceremony is arranged within six months of the physical completion of the project, unless otherwise agreed by the Commonwealth
 - the Commonwealth Minister for Education, or the Minister's representative, is invited to officially open all facilities supported under the Fund
 - the department, via the SchoolOpenings@education.gov.au inbox, is provided three proposed dates for school recognition ceremonies at least three months in advance of the proposed opening date of the facility
 - Commonwealth funding is acknowledged on plaques provided for facilities supported under the Fund, as follows:
 - installing on all completed projects building plaques that acknowledge Commonwealth funding, unless otherwise agreed by the department
 - where a facility is opened by a Commonwealth representative, the name of the person opening the facility should be included on the plaque
 - wording on plaques acknowledging Commonwealth funding should be of similar size and style to wording acknowledging other funding sources
 - including the Australian Government crest on all plaques
 - obtaining the department's prior approval of all plaque wording.

Records and information provision

53. Schools, or their approved authorities, must keep records relating to all income and expenditure of funds received in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and generally acceptable accounting practices. These records must be kept for at least seven years.
54. Schools, or their approved authorities, must keep adequate records to ensure financial accountability obligations are met.

55. Schools or their approved authorities must retain documentation to support claims made through the application process and the implementation of projects and could be called upon as part of a verification process to provide such documentation.

Conflicts of interest

56. A conflict of interest can be real (or actual), apparent (or perceived) or potential.
57. A conflict of interest could arise if an individual's personal interests' conflict with the proper use and management of Commonwealth funding provided through the Fund.
58. Schools and their approved authorities must ensure that they appropriately manage any conflicts of interest should they arise in relation to an approved project.
59. If a conflict of interest is not able to be appropriately resolved by the school (or its approved authority), it must contact the department in writing immediately.

Compliance with laws

60. Schools and their approved authorities must comply with any relevant statutes, regulations, by-laws and requirements of any Commonwealth, state, territory or local authority. These include, where applicable, relevant anti-discrimination laws and the:
- Building Code 2016
 - Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)
 - *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth)
 - applicable Australian Standards
 - applicable planning and approval requirements for capital infrastructure.

Privacy and freedom of information

61. The department is subject to the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) and the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth), and any information schools submit to the department will be subject to both of these pieces of legislation. Please also note that any documents a school submits to the department may be subject to freedom of information application.