



Australian Government  
Department of Education

# Suburban University Study Hubs

Program Guidelines



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# 1. Purpose

The Suburban University Study Hubs Program Guidelines (Program Guidelines) provide information to assist potential applicants develop an application, including:

- program objectives and background
- eligibility criteria
- how applications will be assessed
- responsibilities and expectations of selected operators.

Applicants should read these Program Guidelines **before** applying.

Relevant information about the Suburban University Study Hubs Program is available on the Department of Education's (the department) website at <https://www.education.gov.au/suburban-university-study-hubs>.

## 2. About the program

The Australian Government committed to an Australian Universities Accord (the Accord), a 12-month Review of Australia's higher education system (the Review) led by an expert panel to drive lasting and transformational reform in the higher education sector.

The final Accord Report recommended a tertiary attainment target of at least 80 per cent of the working population by 2050.

To meet this need, there must be a significant increase in participation and success in both higher education and Vocational Education and Training (VET). In higher education this means more students from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, including First Nations students, students with disability, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and those in regional, remote and outer suburban areas.

Priority Action 1 of the Accord Interim Report recommended:

*Extend visible, local access to tertiary education by creating further Regional University Centres (Regional University Study Hubs) and establish a similar concept for suburban/metropolitan locations.*

In 2023, in response to the Interim Report, the Australian Government announced \$66.9 million to establish approximately 20 new Regional University Study Hubs and expand the concept to metropolitan areas by establishing up to 14 Suburban University Study Hubs.

The Suburban University Study Hubs Program offers an innovative solution to improving access and boosting success in higher education for those living in outer metropolitan areas of Australia where people may face increased barriers to access to tertiary study.



Hubs will be established in areas that will benefit most from their presence, with emphasis placed on supporting underrepresented students from suburban areas with low tertiary education participation who face increased barriers to accessing tertiary study.

Hubs are community-driven spaces that offer tailored support to their local community. They do not operate as education providers and do not deliver formal education through this program.

The primary functions of a Suburban University Study Hub are to:

- respond to the education support needs of the community they serve
- facilitate open, safe access to tertiary education across Australia
- provide wrap-around supports to students to scaffold success
- increase aspiration for tertiary study by facilitating outreach activities, including local schools
- support students to succeed in tertiary study and beyond by creating links with local tertiary education providers and industry.

Supports and services include, but are not limited to:

- Infrastructure: study spaces, break out areas, video conferencing, computer facilities, internet access
- Administrative and academic skills support services: developing writing and research skills, managing administrative processes
- Student support services: general wellbeing support, study advice, help accessing student services, supporting students with paid placements and Work Integrated Learning, careers advice.

Each Suburban University Study Hub should reflect the community it serves and will be selected with consideration to:

- geographic location, including proximity to public transport and other community services
- the population size, demographic and needs of the local community
- the location of higher education and VET providers
- ability to support open access to all tertiary students.

## 2.1. Legislative context

The Suburban University Study Hubs is a program under Part 2-3 of the [Higher Education Support Act 2003](#) (HESA). Eligibility and some conditions for the Program are set out in Part 9A of the [Higher Education Support \(Other Grants\) Guidelines 2022](#) (Other Grants Guidelines). These Program Guidelines should be read in conjunction with Part 2-3 of HESA and Part 9A of the Other Grants Guidelines. Applicants will be responsible for complying with all relevant legislative requirements.

## 2.2. Program objectives

The Suburban University Study Hubs Program aims to support students from suburban areas with low tertiary education participation who face increased barriers to accessing tertiary study. Hubs will do this by:

- supporting any student studying at any Australian publicly funded tertiary education provider



- providing dedicated wrap-around support services and study facilities to improve access and outcomes
- building readiness and aspiration for tertiary level study
- complementing, rather than duplicating or replacing, existing and planned university investments and activities in metropolitan and peri-urban areas
- encouraging linkages between providers, employers, industry and local community to support improved outcomes for students, including Work Integrated Learning.

## 3. Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for funding under the Program, an applicant must meet the requirements set out in Part 9A, section 66B of the Other Grants Guidelines at the time of application. Applicants are required to address the five eligibility requirements set out below.

### 3.1. Geographic location

Suburban University Study Hubs (including all sites for multi-site Hubs) must be established in a location classified as:

- ‘Major Cities of Australia’ as per the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Australian Statistical Geographic Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Areas* classification<sup>1</sup>
- OR
- ‘Greater Darwin’ or ‘Greater Hobart’ under the ABS ASGS *Greater Capital City Statistical Areas* classification<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.2. Socio-economic status

Hubs will only be established in a location that will serve one or more locations classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as Quintiles 1 (Q1) and 2 (Q2) in Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2), according to the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD)<sup>3</sup> which is one of the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). Where two applications are assessed to be of equivalent quality, priority will be given to the applicant that serves one or more locations in a SA2 in the bottom 20 per cent (Q1) according to the SEIFA IRSAD index.

Applicants can view whether their proposed hub is in an eligible area on the [Suburban University Study Hubs – 2024 Targeted Round](#) webpage.

### 3.3. New hubs only

To ensure Suburban University Study Hubs are established in areas with the highest need, funding is only available for new Hubs.

<sup>1</sup> [Remoteness Areas | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Greater Capital City Statistical Areas | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), Australia, 2016 \(abs.gov.au\)](#)



Existing facilities providing similar or equivalent services are ineligible to apply, including those receiving funding from the Australian Government through the Regional University Study Hubs program or from a State or Territory Government to deliver an equivalent service.

A similar or equivalent service will include:

- some, or all, of the facilities described as infrastructure; **and**
- some, or all, of the services listed in administrative and academic skills support and/or student support services.

Facilities or Services	
Infrastructure	study spaces, break out areas, video conferencing, computer facilities, internet access
Administrative and academic skills support services	developing writing and research skills, managing administrative processes
Student support services	General wellbeing support, study advice, help accessing student services, supporting students with paid placements and Work Integrated Learning, careers advice

### 3.4. Body corporate

Applicant organisations must be, or be able to become, a body corporate to be eligible for funding under this Program.

If an application is successful, approval of a grant is contingent on the applicant organisation successfully incorporating. Applicants will be required to provide evidence of eligibility/capability to become a body corporate at least seven days prior to the Conditions of Grant being issued.

Table A and Table B providers listed in the [Higher Education Support Act \(2003\)](#) are also eligible under this program.

### 3.5. ‘Fit and proper person’

The ‘fit and proper person’ requirement focuses on the organisation’s business and financial affairs and on its compliance with relevant regulatory schemes.

Before allocating funding under the Program, the Minister must be satisfied that the recipient organisation responsible for the management of each Hub, and each person who makes or participates in making decisions that affect the whole or a substantial part of the Hub’s affairs, is a ‘fit and proper person’, in accordance with Part 9A, section 66B of the Other Grants Guidelines. In making this decision, the Minister and/or their Delegate will consider matters similar to those described in paragraph 6.2 of the [Higher Education Support \(Fit and Proper Person\) Instrument 2019](#).

The individual completing the ‘fit and proper person’ requirement must be the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chair of the Board, Director or other equivalent executive authorised to do so on behalf of the Suburban University Study Hub.



## 4. Application and Assessment Process

### 4.1. Application overview

An [Application Guide](#) is available to assist applicants in preparing their Suburban University Study Hubs application. The Application Guide provides additional information on the application questions, considerations and word limits.

Completed documents **must** be submitted via the [application portal](#). You will receive an automated confirmation email once your application has been received.

### 4.2. Application assessment and approval

The department will establish an Assessment Panel to assess applications for Suburban University Study Hubs. The Panel will consider whether applications meet the eligibility criteria and assess them against the following assessment considerations:

- community need: considering factors such as distance to existing campuses, higher and tertiary education participation and attainment rates and support for underrepresented and disadvantaged students.
- community involvement: including community representation on governance models to ensure a genuine place-based approach to supporting local students. As well as partnerships with tertiary education providers and local business and industry.
- readiness to operate a Hub: including leadership and governance structures, staffing requirements for effective hub management.
- an appropriate and sustainable budget, which considers value for money and provides for in-kind support, co-contributions and/or alternate funding sources.
- geographic spread that considers current Regional University Study Hubs and proposed Suburban University Study Hubs. This is particularly relevant for Hobart and Darwin, which are eligible for both programs.

Where two applications are assessed to be of equal quality, priority will be given to the applicant located in a Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) in the bottom 20% (quintile 1) according to the SEIFA IRSAD index.

The Assessment Panel may seek clarification regarding specific questions on applicant responses.

The department will provide recommendations to the Minister for Education for his consideration.

## 5. Funding available

The Australian Government will provide \$32.5 million (2023–24 to 2026–27) to establish up to 14 Suburban University Study Hubs, including funding for:

- Fit out costs (minor capital works)



- Ongoing operational costs, including, but not limited to staffing, rent, IT support, utilities, marketing, insurance and building maintenance.

Conditions of Grant will be established with successful applicants detailing the conditions associated with the use of grant funds (see ‘**6. Managing funding**’).

## 5.1. Estimated operating costs

Funding costs for operating a Suburban University Study Hub are expected to vary based on local contextual factors, service offerings and contributions from other sources (including in-kind contributions). Noting proposed hubs must be new and not be in receipt of any government funding for a similar service (state or federal) prior to the application (see **3.3 Existing hubs are ineligible**).

Final funding amounts will be determined by the Program Delegate. Applicants should be aware even if their application is successful, the funding amounts they propose in their application may not be the final amount of the grant made by the Program Delegate.

## 5.2. GST

GST may be applicable and if so, will be additional to grant funding paid under this Program unless the body corporate is a Government Related Entity (GRE)<sup>4</sup>. When making payments to Suburban University Study Hubs, the department will pay GST as an additional amount to the grant funds, and Hubs will need to ensure they account for GST when reconciling their finances for tax purposes.

# 6. Managing funding

## 6.1. Use of grant funds

Conditions will be imposed on the use of funds. Some of these conditions are set out in Part 9A of the Other Grants Guidelines, and others will be detailed in Conditions of Grant for each Suburban University Study Hub. Grant funds must only be used for the purpose and activities outlined in the Other Grants Guidelines and Conditions of Grant. Grant funding for this Program must not be used to purchase property or land.

It will be a condition of grant that operators are ‘provider agnostic’ and provide open access to any tertiary student studying at any institution.

## 6.2. Payment of grant funds

Funds will be paid in instalments, set out in any conditions imposed on grant funding by the Program Delegate under subsection 41-25(2) of HESA (Conditions of Grant). Each recipient will be required to meet defined milestones (such as delivery of progress reporting) before payment of each instalment is made.

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<sup>4</sup> GST and payments between Government Related Entities: [www.ato.gov.au/Business/Government-entities/In-detail/GST-and-payments-between-government-related-entities/](http://www.ato.gov.au/Business/Government-entities/In-detail/GST-and-payments-between-government-related-entities/)

## 7. Administration and reporting

### 7.1. Reporting requirements

Funding is subject to ongoing reporting requirements. Successful applicants will be consulted, and an agreed milestone reporting, and payment schedule will be detailed within the Conditions of Grant.

Reporting will include the submission of an Operational Plan that provides a detailed overview of how the Suburban University Study Hub will achieve its goals through its day-to-day management, and if required, a Capital Works Plan. Ongoing progress reporting including student data and financial reports will also be required as part of the Conditions of Grant.

### 7.2. Requirement to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988*

Suburban University Study Hubs are required to comply with the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) described in Division 2, Part III of the [Privacy Act 1988](#) (the Act). This requirement applies regardless of whether a Suburban University Study Hub would normally be considered a relevant organisation under the Act. The APPs impose obligations on organisations with respect to the way that they handle and deal with personal information and give individuals the right to access that information in certain ways.

### 7.3. Contact information

You may also contact the department at [suburbanhubs@education.gov.au](mailto:suburbanhubs@education.gov.au).

