



Outreach Funding Guidance

1. Purpose of this document

This document provides guidance to higher education providers on the use of Outreach funding in 2026. It aims to support providers by promoting best practices to meet the key policy objectives, legislative requirements and reporting obligations.

2. Background

In response to the Australian Universities Accord (Accord), the Australian Government has set an ambitious target of 80 per cent of working age Australians having tertiary qualifications by 2050. Achieving this requires more people from underrepresented backgrounds to attend and graduate university. Strong, targeted outreach will be critical to reaching this target.

Prior to 2026, funding for outreach activities was provided through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), which was also used to support students from underrepresented backgrounds through the entire higher education lifecycle, including access, participation and completion of their studies.

To deliver on the Accord and reach the targets, the Government will introduce a fresh approach to equity funding from 2026. This new model will replace the current HEPPP arrangements with two distinct programs.

- A new **Outreach Funding Program** has been established, which will provide \$44 million in 2026 to deliver targeted outreach initiatives which aim to increase the number of underrepresented people aspiring to attend and access higher education.
- This will be complemented by **Needs-Based Funding (NBF)** that will ensure universities have the resources they need to support underrepresented students once they have enrolled in study through to completion.

Note: This document relates to Outreach Funding Program only.

3. Objectives

The objective of the Outreach Funding Program is to increase the number of people from underrepresented backgrounds accessing higher education. This will be achieved through the delivery of high-quality, tailored outreach activities which build aspiration in target cohorts to enrol in and attend higher education.

4. Legislation

The Outreach Funding Program is administered as a Grant under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)*. Further conditions regarding use of grant funding are set out in the [*Higher Education Support \(Other Grants\) Amendment \(Outreach Funding Program\) Guidelines 2025*](#).

Providers must ensure that any expenditure of Outreach funding aligns with requirements set out in the legislative instrument.

5. Funding

5.1 Calculation of funding amounts

In 2026, all available funding will be allocated to Table A providers for the delivery of quality outreach activities. Each providers allocation will be calculated based on their share of all enrolled equity students using the most recent Higher Education Data Collections (HEDC) student data (2024), as per the following formula:

$$A \left(0.45 \left(\frac{B}{C} \right) + 0.45 \left(\frac{D}{E} \right) + 0.1 \left(\frac{F}{G} \right) \right)$$

Note: This is consistent with the previous funding allocation process under HEPPP.

5.2 Payment of funding

Funding will be paid to providers in monthly instalments throughout 2026.

5.3 Underspends

Providers should seek to expend all allocated funding in 2026, with limited opportunity to rollover any remaining funding into 2027. Any request to rollover remaining funding should be provided in writing supported by evidence and reasons for a decision to be made at the discretion of the Department.

6. Use of funding

6.1 Target Cohorts

Funding must only be used to deliver outreach activities which target the following cohorts:

- **First Nations student:** a person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies themselves as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live or have previously lived as per HESA.
- **Student from low-SES backgrounds:** whose permanent home address prior to commencing study by Statistical Area 1, is in the lowest quartile of the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Education and Occupation.
- **Student attending regional or remote campus:** a person studying internally and/or multimodally at a campus in an area defined as regional, remote, very remote, or in any area of the Northern Territory that is classified as neither remote nor very remote, according to the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure; or a person studying externally at a higher education provider with their main campus in a regional area as defined above.

Providers should take reasonable steps to confirm that participants are part of the target cohort or activities are appropriately targeted at the target cohorts. How this is verified is up to each provider. They can use their existing processes, data checks, or university systems to make sure reporting is accurate and the risk of errors are reduced.

For 2026, outreach activities targeting students with a disability should be funded from the Disability Support Program, unless the student also meets the target cohort criteria.

6.2 Defining Outreach

For this program, **Outreach activities** are defined as activities which build aspiration *for higher education*, for example by:

- Reducing and or removing barriers to accessing higher education (i.e. through the provision of financial assistance).
- Informing participants about the benefits of higher education.
- Informing participants about the potential pathways to higher education and/or available supports that may be accessible to them (including careers advice).
- Supporting participants to navigate the higher education system, including the application process.
- Providing support to prepare for higher education studies through academic tutoring or guidance (but specifically excluding delivery of pathway/preparation courses, which are funded through Fee-Free Uni Ready (FFUR)).

Outreach activities are distinctly separate from student recruitment activities, which seek to attract potential students *to a particular institution* and cannot be delivered using Outreach Funding.

6.3 Principles for use of funding

To support providers in using Outreach funding effectively to meet policy objectives, the following principles have been developed. Providers should ensure alignment with the principles when planning and designing their program of outreach activities.

Principle 1: Reaching the right people

The purpose of Outreach Funding is to increase the number of people from underrepresented backgrounds accessing higher education, in line with the government's target of 80 per cent of working aged Australians having tertiary qualifications by 2050. To support this objective, outreach activities should primarily target people who are not already actively planning to engage in university-level study, with a focus on showcasing the potential benefits of further study and breaking down barriers to access. Outreach programs aim to support First Nations students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students attending regional or remote campuses to ensure equitable access and success in higher education.

Principle 2: A focus on building and supporting aspiration

Outreach activities must focus on building and supporting aspiration for further study, rather than attracting students to a particular institution. Outreach is distinctly different to recruitment, and this should be reflected in the design of outreach programs.

As an example, providers should consider whether there is a need for materials produced for outreach activities to include specific institutional branding, or whether provider agnostic approaches may be more appropriate.

Principle 3: Targeting all cohorts

Providers should consider how resources can be leveraged to deliver a range of activities which target all three identified cohorts, including First Nations people, people from low SES backgrounds and people in regional and remote locations. Consideration should be given to the unique barriers faced by each cohort and designing activities which appropriately respond to these barriers.

Principle 4: Targeting all life stages

Providers should deliver activities which target people at different life stages, including school leavers, mature-age students, mid-career changers, etc. Consideration should be given to activities can respond to the different barriers faced by students in these different life stages.

Principle 5: Reaching all Australians

Providers should consider the proposed reach of outreach activities to ensure all Australians, regardless of where they live, have opportunities to access tailored support. This should include consideration of how providers can work collaboratively across geographic areas and avoid over or under servicing particular areas. Providers should include consideration of the coverage to regional and remote areas across the country, regardless of whether a provider has a physical presence there.

Principle 6: Addressing barriers

Providers should design activities which respond to the different types of barriers faced by people from underrepresented backgrounds. These may include:

- Societal barriers – the perceived lack of value of higher education to individuals and communities, lack of available role models, perceived ‘elitism’ of universities, age barriers.
- Financial barriers – the perceived cost of studying (both direct and indirect) versus directly entering the labour market.
- Information barriers – application and entry requirements, unclear work or career goals, lack of understanding regarding available supports.
- Geographic barriers – availability of study options locally, cost of moving to study, impacts of leaving family/support systems.

Principle 7: Collaboration

Providers should seek to engage in partnerships to co-design and deliver outreach activities, avoid duplicating efforts, and ensure student needs are being met. This may include collaboration between higher education providers, vocational education and training (VET) providers, community organisations, industry and other stakeholders.

Principle 8: Informed design

Activities should be based on best-practice and evidence of ‘what works’, for example through previous experience and learnings or available research.

Providers should share information regarding effective approaches or lessons learned in the delivery of outreach activities (for example, through communities of practice, formal data sharing arrangements or published evaluations).

Note: The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success provide a Resource Library with relevant research, projects and analysis to inform equity policy and practice.

Principle 9: Continuous improvement

Providers must have in place clear arrangements in place to evaluate funded outreach activities to ensure they are fit for purpose, achieving intended outcomes and to identify improvements. This should include consideration of data collection requirements in the planning stages for new activities.

Providers should use the Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework (SEHEEF) to support design and evaluation of outreach activities.

Principle 10: A focus on a joined-up tertiary sector

Providers should consider a whole-of-tertiary sector approach when planning their outreach activities, providing students with a range of tertiary pathway options to meet varying needs and interest, and provide clear pathways.

This may include developing close partnerships with VET providers to develop and deliver cohesive outreach programs.

6.4 Ineligible activities

Outreach Funding must not be used to deliver the following activities:

- General marketing and recruitment activities designed to encourage participants to attend a specific university.
- Support services which are targeted to students already enrolled in higher education (for example academic tutoring, scholarships, etc.). NBF is available to support these activities.
- Delivery of FFUR courses.
- Activities which target people who are not part of a defined target cohort (refer section 6.1).

Note: It is understood that some activities targeted to specific equity cohorts may also incidentally benefit other participants.

7. Reporting and acquittal

In 2026, the Outreach Funding Program and the NBF (equity component) reporting processes will be amalgamated to reduce reporting for providers, noting the similar purposes of the two funding streams.

Providers in receipt of Outreach funding will be required to provide a Financial Acquittal Report and Performance Report by 27 March 2027. The department will provide relevant templates combining the Outreach Funding Program and the NBF (equity component) with clear instructions for completion.

A summary of the finalised reports may be published on the department's website to provide transparency of funded programs and encourage information sharing across the sector.

7.1 Financial Acquittal

The purpose of the financial report is to demonstrate that Outreach funding has been used according to the HESA and Other Grant Guidelines, and to support future allocation of resources. Key information to be contained in the acquittal is listed below:

- A detailed grant/income and expenditure statement.
- The name of each funded activity and total funding expended on each activity (including a breakdown of Outreach Funding vs. funding from other sources).
- Certification by an authorised person (Vice Chancellor or an approved delegate).

7.2 Performance Reporting

The performance report will focus on the outcomes of funded activities, and their alignment with the overarching policy objectives. Key information to be contained in the report includes (but is not limited to):

- A detailed description of each funded activity
- The target cohort/s for each activity
- The aim of each activity and how success will be measured
- Outcomes of each funded activity, including whether objectives were met
- The number of participants engaged in each activity
- How the provider's program of activities responds to the Principles outlined at section 6.
- Key lessons learned/improvements implemented to support continuous improvement.
- Any other relevant information as determined by the department.

*Note: Providers **must** have in place mechanisms to review the effectiveness of each funded activity.*

8. Contact

If you require further information regarding Outreach Funding, please contact equityprograms@education.gov.au .