



Needs-based Funding and Outreach Program: further questions and answers

Questions from provider information session on 23 March 2026

Outreach Funding

How are the 2026 Outreach Program (Outreach) allocations calculated?

For 2026 Outreach funding is allocated to Table A providers based on their share of enrolled equity students using the most recent verified data provided to the department (2024). Equity cohorts include low socioeconomic status (low SES), students from regional and remote areas, and First Nations students.

Consistent with the approach under the former Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), each provider's allocation is calculated according to the providers proportional share of enrolled equity cohort students. In 2026 \$44 million is allocated for Outreach and proportional shares are allocated from this amount.

Will Outreach funding allocations be ongoing beyond 2026?

The Outreach program is ongoing and indexed annually. Providers have been notified of their 2026 funding allocations and are expected to be notified of 2027 arrangements later in the year.

Outreach funding is calculated based on two-year-old data. Will this continue into future years?

Outreach funding allocations are calculated using the most recent verified data provided to the department. In 2026 the most recent verified data is 2024. This is expected to continue unless there are changes to the program settings in the future.

Are Outreach funding contributions cumulative for students in multiple categories?

Students may be included in one or more Outreach equity category for the purpose of calculating the overall Outreach funding allocation.

Do activities funded under Outreach need to exclude participants who cannot be verified as being a member of the equity cohorts?

In community-based settings it is not always possible to verify every participant's eligibility at the point of engagement. As such, it is expected that some participants who are not part of the equity cohorts may access services and programs that are delivered under Outreach.

Providers are expected to take reasonable steps to ensure that their activities are designed to build higher education aspirations among the equity cohorts, however these programs are not required to exclude other participants.

Can Outreach funding be used to fund research activities?

Evaluation, monitoring and evidence building that is directly linked to NBF and Outreach program delivery, or improvement may be eligible as long as the activity is consistent with the requirements set out in the program guidelines. Standalone or academic research activities are not eligible under NBF or Outreach.

Do Outreach activities need to align to NBF?

Outreach activities do not need to directly align with NBF activities, noting these programs have differences in terms of the identified equity cohorts. However, some programs may align to offer continuity of supports throughout the student journey.

If you have questions about how your Outreach activities align with the guidelines, please contact the department at equityprograms@education.gov.au to discuss your specific circumstances.

Should access programs that include both pre-enrolment and post-enrolment activities be funded from Outreach or NBF?

The NBF and Outreach Programs support different stages of the student journey. Outreach funding supports pre-access activities, include aspiration-building, preparation, and supported transition up to enrolment. NBF applies once a student is enrolled in a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) and focuses on activities and services to support students to complete their studies.

Programs spanning both stages should align funding with the timing of the activity: pre-enrolment through Outreach, and post-enrolment components through NBF. Enrolment supports may be funded through either program depending on the nature of the supports provided.

Is application support eligible under Outreach?

The Guidelines distinguish between different types of support. High level informational application support (such as explaining application pathways, eligibility requirements, key timelines) is eligible.

Recognising that the application process can be difficult for some to navigate, NBF supports can be used to provide assistance during this phase, including helping individuals prepare, understand requirements,

and engage with the process more confidently. However, NBF should not be used to complete or submit applications for individuals directly or on their behalf.

Needs-based Funding

Can universities use Needs-based Funding (NBF) funding to cover existing HEPPP commitments?

It is likely that a number of programs previously funded under HEPPP will continue under NBF. However, NBF cannot be used to acquit or fund outstanding HEPPP related commitments and activities from prior years and HEPPP funding cannot be rolled over. NBF funding must clearly be attributed to programs delivered from 1 January 2026 onwards.

Can unspent NBF and Outreach funding be rolled over?

Underspend of NBF and Outreach may be carried forward and acquitted in subsequent financial years. For 2026, providers will be asked to identify and report any underspend and planned delivery of eligible activities in the subsequent year. Every effort should be made to expend funding each year to maximise the programs and supports that are available to eligible cohorts.

Further details are available in the NBF and Outreach Funding Reporting Handbook.

Can NBF be used for university wide programs if the provider is receiving contributions from other funding sources?

NBF may support university wide programs where activities are clearly targeted to the eligible cohorts and aligned with NBF objectives. Contributions from other funding sources are permitted, provided the NBF expenditure is clearly identifiable, not duplicated and appropriately reported.

2026 NBF is based on 2024 verified data provided to the department. Will future allocations be based on two-year old data?

2026 is a transition year for NBF. From 2027 and beyond, it is expected that the program will be fully demand driven facilitated by an acquittal process, subject to the passage of legislation. Further information on the administrative design will be provided later this year.

Can postcode data be used to verify equity status?

There is no mandatory verification method. Where Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1) matching is not possible, use of a postcode-based method may be used noting limitations with this method. Providers must document and be able to articulate their chosen approach recognising there may be differences between providers and programs allowing for flexibility.

How is equity funding allocated year to year when students move providers?

Equity funding is allocated using verified Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI) data from the most recent year (2024). Funding is based on where a student is enrolled and studying in that year. Equity status is not transferred across providers if it is not re-reported.

This approach ensures that funding aligns with current student cohorts and study locations and reflects provider reported data rather than historic or assumed equity status.

How is the regional component of NBF calculated?

The regional component of NBF is calculated annually using the most recent verified TCSI student data provided by universities to the department. For 2026 funding, this is calculated on 2024 verified data. Funding is based on students' actual study load (EFTSL) for continuing students, and headcount for commencing students (meaning a commencing student attracts the same funding as a full-time continuing student regardless of study load) and where their units were delivered at regional campuses during the year. Allocations reflect activity in that academic year only, which ensures funding aligns with actual regional delivery and participation.

Can universities receive the regional component of NBF if their main campus is not based in a remote area?

All universities are eligible to receive funding for NBF regional for students studying all or part of their studies in a face-to-face delivery mode at a regional campus, provided that campus meets the requirements set out in the program guidance. However, only those universities which are regionally headquartered will be eligible to receive funding for external or online students studying at regional campuses.

Are FEE-FREE Uni Ready (FFUR) courses eligible for NBF funding?

A provider will attract a per-student contribution under NBF for every CSP it enrolls in undergraduate courses for low SES students, and undergraduate and postgraduate sources for First Nations students.

Students enrolled in FFUR courses are not eligible for the equity components of NBF as these are non-award courses and are funded at a level that recognises the supports required for these students.

FFUR enrolments at eligible regional campuses may attract the regional component of NBF. This recognises the higher costs associated with delivery at regional locations and applies to FFUR enrolments at campuses that meet the minimum EFTSL threshold.

There may be incidental benefits for FFUR students where NBF activities, primarily designed to support the NBF identified cohorts, have university wide benefits.

Can NBF support First Nations postgraduate coursework students?

First Nations postgraduate coursework students who are enrolled in Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) will attract NBF. Postgraduate research students are generally not eligible for NBF targeted activities.

Can the NBF regional component fund direct student support (such as scholarships, grants, or bursaries)?

The regional component of NBF is provided in recognition of the higher cost of delivery in regional and remote areas. Providers may use the regional NBF component flexibly, as long as spending offsets higher regional costs and supports sustainable delivery in regional and remote areas.

Can providers give feedback on NBF or Outreach?

The department welcomes feedback via email at any time to equityprograms@education.gov.au. Providers will also be invited to further information sessions and consultation opportunities.