

NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government – Round Five – Addressing racism and discrimination

Guidelines

March 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

NSW Premier's Department acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this grant guideline.

NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government – Round Five – Addressing racism and discrimination

Published by Connected Communities, Delivery – Social & Community

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/connected-communities>

First published: March 2026

Copyright and disclaimer

© State of New South Wales through NSW Premier's Department 2026. Information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing, February 2026, and is subject to change. For more information, please visit <https://www.specialcommission.nsw.gov.au/copyright/>.

Grant Program Details	
Opening date and time	9.00am 12 March 2026
Closing date and time	11.59pm, 22 April 2026
Application outcome date	25/05/2026
Project delivery timeframe (for successful applications)	Projects can be delivered from 3 to 12 months commencing in July 2026
Evaluation timeframe (for successful applications)	No later than September 2027
Decision-maker	Deputy Secretary – Delivery & Engagement Group – Premier’s Department
NSW Government Agency	NSW Premier’s Department
Type of grant opportunity	Open, competitive
Grant value (total available funding for the grant and the available individual grant amounts, excluding GST)	A total of \$800,000 is available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants may apply for individual funding amounts of \$10,000 - \$100,000 (excluding GST)
Enquiries	Connected Communities, Premier’s Department connectedcommunities@premiersdepartment.nsw.gov.au

Contents

1	Overview of grant program	1
1.1	Purpose of the grant	1
1.2	Program objectives and outcomes	3
1.3	Grant value	1
2	Selection criteria	2
2.1	Eligibility criteria	2
2.2	Eligible use of funds	2
2.2.1	Project Activities	2
2.2.2	What will not be funded	2
2.3	Assessment criteria	3
2.4	Project Budget	3
2.5	Application form must be completed and submitted on time	4
3	Application process	5
3.1	How to apply	5
4	Assessment process	6
4.1	Assessment of grant applications	6
4.2	Notification of application outcome	6
4.2.1	Feedback on applications	6
4.3	Publication of grants information	6
5	Successful grant applications	6
5.1	Grant agreement	7
5.2	Grant payment	7
5.3	Unspent funds	8
5.4	Indicative reporting and acquittal requirements	8
5.5	Evaluation	8
6	Additional information and resources	1
6.1	Disclaimer	1
6.2	Complaint handling	1
6.3	Access to information	1
6.4	Ethical Conduct	2
6.4.1	Conflict of interest management	2
6.4.2	Confidentiality	2

1 Overview of grant program

Local governments know and understand their communities, helping to deliver economic, environmental, and social outcomes that impact social cohesion. They are well placed to design and implement initiatives that build stronger, more resilient, and more cohesive communities.

For these reasons, the NSW Government announced the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government program in 2022.

Since then, the NSW Government has facilitated four rounds of grants, providing funding to a range of local governments across the state. The Premier's Department (**the Department**) is now pleased to announce a fifth round of funding, designed to enhance local governments' capacity to address racism and discrimination that exists within and between communities.

Applicable local governments will facilitate informed, inclusive and reflective dialogues to identify and understand the scope and impact of racism and discrimination internally and in their communities. These valuable insights may assist to inform the development the grantee's tailored NSW Local Government Anti-Racism Strategies (utilising the Anti-Racism Strategy Template) or Local Government Social Cohesion Strategies, reflecting the unique community and organisational needs.

It is our intention that successful applicants may build stronger, more resilient, and cohesive communities in the face of racism and discrimination through these grants.

1.1 Purpose of the grant

The overarching purpose of this grants program is to build stronger, more resilient, and cohesive communities to reduce racism and intersectional experiences of discrimination.

It is our vision that, by supporting local governments through the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government:

- Connection and belonging within local communities will be strengthened
- Connection and belonging between local communities will be strengthened
- Connection and trust between local communities and institutions will be strengthened
- Local government will have enhanced capability to design, implement and evaluate social cohesion initiatives.

Responding to racism and discrimination

- In this round, the Department is seeking applications for funding which seek to uplift local government capacity to address racism and intersectional experiences of discrimination and inform the development of the grantee's tailored Anti-Racism Strategy (or related strategies)
- Local governments are well-positioned to engage with communities and promote safety, respect and inclusion at the local level, strengthening broader social cohesion. In this mutually beneficial stream, local government will gain valuable insights from the community, and the community will be enabled and empowered to contribute to decision-making processes that help inform how their local government area addresses racism and discrimination. Local government may wish to utilise the grants funding to hold roundtable conversations or run workshops to better understand the racism and discrimination issues specific to their locality.
- Racism and intersectional experiences of discrimination can also occur at the organisational level within local government. Local governments will have the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of their staff and critically assess cultural safety within the workplace and

system. For example, local government may wish to utilise the grants funding to understand staff concerns and address racism and discrimination through training.

Background

- In February 2025, Waverley, Liverpool City and Inner West Council invited local government councils to attend a jointly hosted roundtable on social cohesion. This roundtable was an opportunity for local Mayors and leaders to listen, share, and stand united in their commitment to building stronger and more resilient communities. Twenty-two local governments signed a call-to-action, seeking support to strengthen social cohesion through anti-racism strategies, education, legislative reform, and safety measures to protect communities from racism and discrimination.
- In response to the call-to-action, the Department held a Co-Design Workshop in May 2025 to design a strategy template to respond to racism and discrimination.
- This workshop attracted over fifty NSW local government representatives, who shared insights about the issue of racism and discrimination in their communities and within their organisations. Representatives also identified the growing gap in capabilities and resourcing across all councils in NSW to effectively engage communities and discuss racism and discrimination in a meaningful format.
- The associated [Co-Design Workshop Report](#) reflects six Local Government-identified enablers:
 - **sustainable funding and cross-government coordination**, ensuring local councils are resourced and empowered to lead anti-racism work at the grassroots.
 - **embedding racial equity into core governance and business**, including council planning frameworks, recruitment, risk and engagement
 - **culturally safe leadership and workforce**, through ongoing training, open dialogue, performance accountability and values-led leadership
 - **partnerships and regional collaboration**, including with schools, neighbouring councils and community leaders, especially those outside traditional power structures
 - **robust data and evidence**, to track outcomes, guide decisions and create measurable change
 - **meaningful, inclusive community engagement**, built on trust, reflection and trauma-informed approaches.

The Anti-Racism Strategy Guideline and Template

- Insights from funded activities may inform locally appropriate Anti-Racism or related strategies, supporting councils to strengthen prevention and response efforts.
- Councils may choose to draw on the NSW Local Government Anti-Racism Strategy Template, developed by the Department, as a resource to guide this work.
- **This grant round accompanies the release of the NSW Local Government Anti-Racism Strategy [Guideline](#) and [Template](#) and supports its consideration and use by local government.**

Helpful resources

- Applicants are strongly encouraged to be familiar with the [Co-Design Workshop Report](#) and the NSW Local Government Anti-Racism Strategy [Guideline](#) and [Template](#). The Template is designed to support uniquely placed Local Governments in building and strengthening Anti-Racism Strategies to their local context.

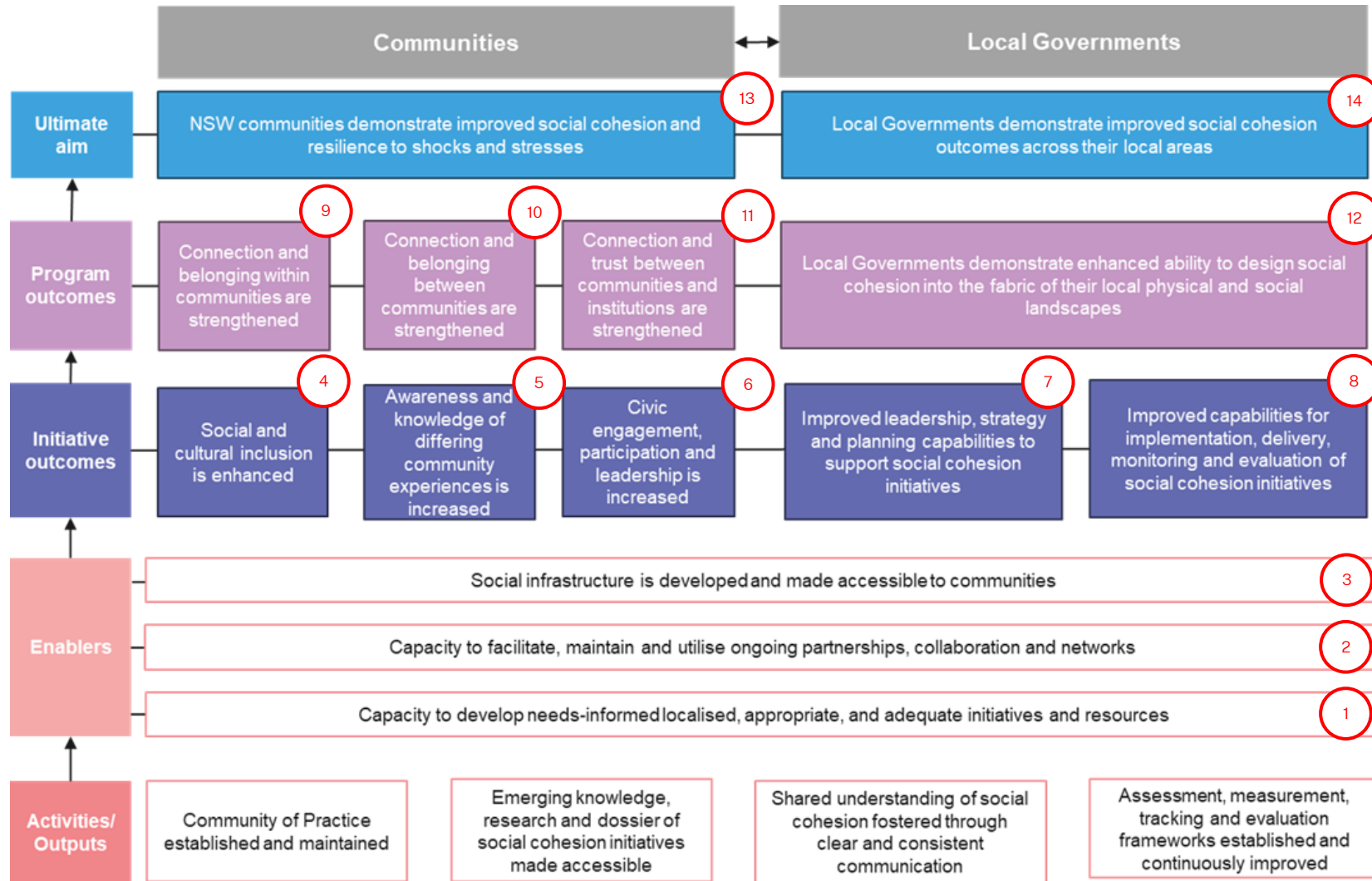
1.2 Program objectives and outcomes

The objective of the grants program is to fund Local Governments to develop initiatives that will help strengthen social cohesion in local communities. Initiatives must seek to uplift council capacity in engaging and collaborating with their communities as well as aligning with the **NSW Local Government Social Cohesion Program Logic** (please refer to the following page for the full program logic) by strengthening connections within communities, between communities or between communities and institutions.

Initiatives do not need to meet all outcomes (these are indicated by the points marked with a number and a red circle) listed on the program logic on the next page but must identify and address at least one of the following program outcomes:

- Connection and belonging within communities are strengthened **(9)**
- Connection and belonging between communities are strengthened **(10)**
- Connection and trust between communities and institutions are strengthened **(11)**

NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government Program Logic - Applicants should use numbered outcomes listed in the program logic (in red) to identify which outcome(s) their proposed project aligns with.



1.3 Grant value

A total of \$800,000 (excl. GST) is available for this grant round. This pool will be distributed to successful applicants in the 2025-26 financial year and not exceed the total funding pool.

The Department will award funding for projects between \$10,000 and \$100,000 (excluding GST). Projects will commence in July 2026.

The available funding will be awarded to successful applicants through an open, competitive merit-based process where applications for funding will be assessed against set criteria.

Only one application per NSW Local Government will be considered.

2 Selection criteria

2.1 Eligibility criteria

To be eligible:

- Applicants must be a NSW Local Government (operating under the Local Government Act 1993). (Applicants who applied for funding in previous rounds regardless of success are welcome to apply.)
- The application must not be for an existing project or funded from council or other sources.
- The application should seek funding for a project that seek to uplift local government capacity and/or to engage meaningfully with their communities to address racism and intersectional experiences of discrimination.
- The application must clearly describe the social cohesion challenge/s in the community related to racism and intersectional experiences of discrimination. The application must address how this project may seek to respond to these challenges.
- The application must align with the **NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government Program Logic** and links to one or more of the program outcomes (see section 1.2).

2.2 Eligible use of funds

2.2.1 Project Activities

All funded activities must contribute to the achievement of the program's aims as set out in the program logic (see sections 1.1 and 1.2).

Initiatives uplift local government capacity and/or engage their communities to address racism and discrimination as well as align with the Local Government Social Cohesion Program Logic by strengthening connections within communities, between communities or between communities and institutions.

The requested funds contribute towards the cost of delivering a range of activities, including but not limited to:

- The purchase of equipment (including software) if it is integral to the activity this must be factored into the budget as well as the specific usage of this equipment for the project.
- Devolved funding programs for service organisations.
- Applicants may allocate funds requested to staff-related costs. These costs must be directly related to the proposed project.
- Activities can be a one-off or time-limited activity, or series of events with specific goals and conditions. The project will have defined responsibilities for all contractors and external personnel, a proposed budget, an iterative project plan, and a specific start date and end date.

2.2.2 What will not be funded

Funding is not available for:

- Projects and/or activities that are not related to strengthening social cohesion or to address racism and intersectional experiences of discrimination internally or in their local communities.

- Ongoing or recurrent funding for programs.
- Supplementing, increasing, or continuing ongoing service delivery that is the core business of the Local Government.
- Political party activities.
- Capital expenses, including but not limited to building works (including maintenance) and equipment purchase, unless explicitly related to the project.
- Celebration of specific national or independence days, with the exception of key Australian days including ANZAC Day, Australia Day, and NAIDOC week. Celebrations must focus on building equity across all cultural and ethnic groups.
- Religious festivals, rituals, events or promotions, except multi-faith events which involve people from multiple religions and do not isolate one religious group.
- Reimbursement of expenses incurred prior to the commencement of the funding agreement.
- Covering existing debts or budget deficits of the Local Government.
- Purchase of alcohol, tobacco products, gaming services, entertainment streaming.
- Commercial or fundraising activities.
- Cash prizes or gifts, including gift vouchers (this does not include disbursements for public participation).

The Department may seek confirmation or clarification regarding a project's activities and funds sought as part of this program during the assessment phase.

2.3 Assessment criteria

All eligible applications will be assessed against the following assessment criteria (assessment weightings have also been provided):

- Application clearly outlines local social cohesion challenges related to racism and intersectional experiences of discrimination and detail how this application will address these. **(20%)**
- Applicants must respond to one or more anticipated outcomes of: connectedness within communities (9), connectedness between communities (10), or connectedness between communities and institutions (11) from the program logic. Additional outcomes from the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government Program Logic will also be considered. **(20%)**
- Application includes a project plan that outlines activities and tasks, milestones, how they may work with local services/businesses to deliver tasks, and associated risks with implementing the proposed initiative. **(20%)**
- Application demonstrates value for money with reference to a budget, applicants can also consider social, environmental and cultural value and opportunities. **(20%)**
- Application demonstrates commitment to program evaluation, including the provision of a program logic. **(10%)**
- Application considers how learnings and techniques taken from the project can be utilised throughout Local Government processes, noting that funding is a one-off grant and will not be extended. **(10%)**

Application fields will correspond to each of stream assessment criteria.

2.4 Project Budget

The final approved budget will only fund eligible expenditure and is subject to funding availability. In some cases, partial funding may be awarded or only some expenditure items will be supported for funding. Applicants must use the supplied budget tool in the application form.

The project budget will be assessed on the following criteria:

- reasonability of the proposed cost.
- amount and proportion of expenditure going towards staff related costs (noting that ongoing or recurrent operational and/or administration costs will not be funded).
- any relevant quotes and/or advice associated with the project.

2.5 Application form must be completed and submitted on time

Applications that are not submitted online through the approved application portal before the closing date (11.59pm on 22 April 2026 (AET)) with all required aspects of the application form completed will not be considered.

3 Application process

3.1 How to apply

Applications will open on **12 March 2026**

Submissions will close at **11:59pm (AET) on 22 April 2026**. The closing date and time is a strict deadline. No extensions to the deadline will be permitted.

Phase	Date	Activity
Grant Round Opens	9.00am, 12 March 2026 (AEDT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applications for Round 5 open on SmartyGrants.
Grant Round Closes	11.59pm, 22 April 2026 (AET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applications for Round 5 close.
Panel Assessment	23 April – 6 May 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment panel reviews applications. Panel makes recommendations for funding. Final funding recommendations approved by the Deputy Secretary – Delivery & Engagement Group
Funding	By June 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All applicants notified of outcome. Successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement with the Department.
Completion	Within 13 months funding having been received (or otherwise by agreement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funded projects to be completed. Submission of final report.

The Department uses an online grant management platform for all grant submissions, accessible through a portal on the Grants page on the nsw.gov.au website and via this link:

<https://dpcnswpfr.smartygrants.com.au/socialcohesionround5>

Through the portal, applicants are required to log in to access the online application form. If the applicant Local Government has previously used the portal to apply for a grant, then they will already be registered and can use existing usernames and log in details, and do not need to set up a new registration/account.

All required attachments must be uploaded through the online application form. All required fields marked with an Asterix (*) are mandatory and must be completed. If you do not complete the mandatory fields, you will not be able to submit your application. Please do not upload documents that have not been requested.

The Department will not accept applications unless they are submitted online through the portal. Incomplete and/or non-compliant applications will not be progressed for assessment after the grant round has closed.

All grant queries must be submitted in writing, via email to connectedcommunities@premiersdepartment.nsw.gov.au

4 Assessment process

4.1 Assessment of grant applications

A five-person assessment panel convened by the Department will include at least one member from the Department and up to four staff from other NSW Government agencies.

These members (clerk grade 7/8 and above) will have expertise on social cohesion initiatives, community engagement or anti-racism policy.

Panel members will be screened for actual, potential or reasonably perceived conflicts of interest before participating in the assessment of applications. Any identified conflicts will be reported to the Director, Connected Communities, Premier's Department for appropriate risk management in accordance with the Department's systems for risk management and conflict of interest management. In event of the Director, Connected Communities, Premier's Department identified conflict of interest, this matter will be escalated to the Executive Director, Delivery, Social & Community Delivery.

All applications for grants are reviewed to ensure compliance with eligibility criteria and required documentation. Eligible applications are then progressed to the assessment phase.

The panel will make recommendations for grant funding to the decision-maker (Deputy Secretary, Delivery & Engagement Group, Premier's Department) who will approve successful applications. Not all grant applications will be successful.

4.2 Notification of application outcome

All applicants will be notified of in writing of application outcomes by June 2026 unless otherwise communicated.

4.2.1 Feedback on applications

The NSW Government will notify Local Governments of unsuccessful applications in writing additional information and feedback can be received upon request.

4.3 Publication of grants information

The Grants Administration Guide requires that certain information is published in relation to grants awarded no later than 45 calendar days after the grant agreement takes effect (see section 6.5 of the Guide and Appendix A to the Guide). This information is also open access information under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW) (**GIPA Act**), which must be made publicly available unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.

In accordance with these requirements, relevant information about the grants awarded will be made available on the NSW Government Grants and Funding Finder as soon as possible after the grant funding is approved or declined.

All records in relation to this decision will be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* (NSW).

5 Successful grant applications

Each grant recipient will be required to:

- collaborate with the Department in project planning and its associated developments.
- collaborate with the department when issuing publicly facing materials
- contribute to program evaluation, including working with Department staff to develop a program evaluation.
- provide the Department with relevant multimedia of the project. This may include video, photos etc.
- deliver their designed project by a date agreed with the Department.
- acquit funds by a date agreed with the Department.
- participate in forums and materials the Department may produce to share updates, insights, and learnings.

If funding is awarded, the Department's Program Terms and Conditions (see 5.1) will apply to the grant funding agreement.

Applicants will be required to:

- review the Terms and Conditions and declare in their application that they have read and understood them,
- acknowledge that an agreement based on the Terms and Conditions will apply to the grant,
- if awarded a grant, agree to comply with the Terms and Conditions in acquitting the grant.

Local Governments who are successful and receive funding must deliver their projects on time and on budget. Extensions will only be granted when a compelling case is presented as to why the funded project could not be completed within the agreed timeframe.

5.1 Grant agreement

The NSW Government requires consistent and accurate reporting of funding expenditure to ensure accountability. The provision of progress and completion reports is a condition of funding.

Throughout the process and at completion, grant recipients will be required to attend check-in meetings and provide the Department:

- data against a range of program measures*.
- an acquittal letter, signed by the relevant Local Government officer with appropriate delegation, detailing expenditure.
- a completion report responding to previously stated program measures.

*All documents and details will be provided to successful applicants prior to project commencement.

Applicants are required to acknowledge the financial support provided by the NSW Government.

All grant-funded events and activities must be covered by Insurance.

Funded Local Governments are required to provide a valid Certificate of Currency for Public Liability Insurance with a minimum cover of \$20 million in the name of the applicant before funding can be released.

The funded Local Government is responsible for ensuring that it has appropriate insurance coverage in place for the project, equipment or activities, and its day-to-day operations. Funded Local Governments that employ staff must comply with relevant industrial relations and workplace health and safety requirements.

5.2 Grant payment

All Local Governments awarded funding will enter into funding agreements which include a 'grant deliverables' reporting component and acquittal requirements.

Grant funds will be released after the execution of a funding agreement with the successful applicant and receipt of an invoice from the funded Local Government.

Funds will be released in a one-off payment via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) at the beginning of the contract, and all funds must be expended within 12 months of funding having been received, unless otherwise agreed to by the Department.

5.3 Unspent funds

Grant recipients are required to return unspent funds, or funds not spent in accordance with the funding agreement, to the Department, unless otherwise renegotiated and agreed to by both parties.

5.4 Indicative reporting and acquittal requirements

Monitoring will be carried out via formal and informal check-in meetings. A mid-point and final report and acquittal will be produced by grant recipients. Grant recipients may also be asked to formally present their delivered projects to NSW government stakeholders as learning.

Grant recipients will keep the Premier's Department informed in writing if circumstances change, via connectedcommunities@premiersdepartment.nsw.gov.au.

5.5 Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the Program will be undertaken in-line with best practice to determine the effectiveness of the Program including with reference to TPG22-22 Policy and Guidelines: Evaluation. Grant recipient projects will be evaluated based on the program logic stated on page 4 of the guidelines.

6 Additional information and resources

6.1 Disclaimer

The Premier's Department accepts no responsibility for funded projects, irrespective of the funding provided by the agency to support the project, and irrespective of its listing on the Department's website or other publications.

6.2 Complaint handling

Any concerns about the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government Grants should be submitted in writing to <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/premiers-department/contact-us>.

The Department is committed to responding to external complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively. Concerns and complaints procedures for the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government Program is set out in the Department's External Complaints Handling Policy available at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2023-12/External-Complaints-Handling-Policy-2023.pdf>. This policy sets out the steps for managing an external complaint received by the Department regarding the grant Program.

If you are a person with a disability or experience difficulties in providing your complaint in writing, you can make a verbal complaint by contacting 02 9228 5555. The Department may require a verbal complaint to be made in writing in circumstances where the matter is complex or contentious.

6.3 Access to information

Applicants should be aware that information submitted in applications and all related correspondence, attachments and other documents may be made publicly available under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW) (GIPA Act)* or an order for papers under Standing Order 52.

The GIPA Act provides for the proactive release of government information by agencies and gives members of the public an enforceable right to access government information held by an agency (which includes Ministerial offices). Access to government information is only to be restricted if there is an overriding public interest against disclosure.

Before information is released in response to an application under the GIPA Act, there will be an assessment of the public interest considerations in favour of and against disclosure of that information and there may be consultation requirements that apply.

Information may also be made publicly available as a result of an order for papers made by the NSW Legislative Council under Standing Order 52. Standing Order 52 provides that the House may order documents to be tabled by the Government in the House.

Applicants should be aware that information included in their application may be shared with persons from other government agencies, third party subject matter experts and other professional advisers to facilitate the assessment process.

If an application is successful, information about the project and the applicant may be shared in media releases, NSW Government websites and social media accounts. This information may include the name of the applicant and their Local Government, a description of the funded project, the project's expected community benefits, and the funding amount.

6.4 Ethical Conduct

6.4.1 Conflict of interest management

Panel members will be screened for actual, potential or reasonably perceived conflicts of interest before participating in the assessment of applications. Any identified conflicts will be reported to the Director, Connected Communities for appropriate risk management in accordance with the Department's systems for risk management and management of conflicts of interest. In event of additional conflict of interest, the matter will be escalated to the Executive Director, Social & Community.

6.4.2 Confidentiality

Successful applicants will be required to keep the outcome of the application process confidential until the Government makes a public announcement.

Premier's Department

52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW, 2000

GPO Box 5241
Sydney NSW, 2001

E: connectedcommunities@premiersdepartment.nsw.gov.au

W: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/connected-communities>