Communities Innovation Fund:

Responses to Social Isolation and Loneliness for young people and victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence

Grant Guidelines
FY2025-26

DELIVERING FOR QUEENSLAND | Queensland Government

Contents

1. Overview

The Communities Innovation Fund is delivered as a competitive grants program to support flexible, person-centred, and place-based responses to social isolation and loneliness in Queensland communities. In 2025-26, these grants will support initiatives specifically designed to address the distinct challenges of social isolation and loneliness experienced by young people, including young people using or experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence, and victim-survivors of domestic, family and/or sexual violence (DFSV) of all ages.

An increasing number of young adults aged 12 to 25 are more at risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation and associated negative health outcomes. Young people experiencing isolation and loneliness are more likely to experience future mental health issues.

While loneliness in other demographics appears to be steady or reducing, in the youth cohort levels remain elevated. While young people may appear more connected than ever before, feelings of loneliness and experiences of social isolation are on the rise, as is the prevalence of young people using and/or experiencing DFSV.

Meanwhile, victim-survivors of DFSV of all ages are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness, and strong community connections are a powerful protective factor against the impacts of DFSV.

In 2025-26, both small and medium grants are available. These guidelines describe the requirements for proposals for small initiatives to the value of **$50,000** and larger initiatives to the value of **$200,000**. The total value of funding available for this grant round across both cohorts is $1,000,000. The breakdown between smaller and larger grants is at the discretion of the panel following assessment of meritorious applications.

Initiatives funded with grants of over $50,000 may run for up to two years to deliver their intended outcomes. The Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (DFSDSCS) is under no obligation to provide any ongoing funding or any future funding to any program.

The Communities Innovation Fund is a competitive program. Eligible organisations are encouraged to assess whether their initiative is appropriate for this grant and focus their efforts on the quality of their proposals and responding directly to assessment criteria. Even highly competitive applications may not be selected for funding.

2. Purpose of the grant

Eligible organisations are invited to submit proposals outlining their ideas for initiatives which align with the primary objective:

- to deliver innovative approaches to address social isolation and loneliness faced by young Queenslanders aged 12-25, young people 12-25 using or experiencing DFSV, and victim-survivors of DFSV of all ages.

Initiatives may also contribute to the fund's secondary objectives, which include:

- to increase community understanding of social isolation and loneliness including the causes, impacts, barriers and enablers to overcoming social isolation and loneliness
- to establish and maintain social and community connections and promote inclusion
- to support capacity building within organisations to respond to those experiencing social isolation and loneliness from within the relevant cohorts.

3. Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for this grant, your organisation, or auspicing organisation, must be incorporated and can be:

- a not-for-profit organisation

- a company limited by guarantee
- a cooperative
- an incorporated association
- a university or research organisation
- a Local Government
- an unincorporated community or user-led group or organisation that is auspiced by an eligible entity*
- a profit-for-purpose company.

If you are applying as a consortium, alliance or partnership, a lead entity must be identified, and the contract will be entered into with that organisation. You will be required to provide evidence of your partnership through a letter of support from participating partners.

If you are applying through an auspicing entity, a letter of support must be supplied from the entity.

Your organisation must also maintain public liability insurance for a sum of not less than $10 million.

You are not eligible to apply if you are:

- a state, territory or federal government agency or body
- an unincorporated group or organisation that is not auspiced by an eligible entity
- an individual that is not auspiced by an eligible entity
- an organisation that is not based in Queensland
- a fixed trust
- a political party.

To be eligible your initiative must:

- be available to people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, social isolation and loneliness within an identified cohort listed in the primary objective
- be delivered **in Queensland**
- not duplicate any currently funded services or initiatives in your proposed location, including services or initiatives funded through Queensland State Government agencies.

If your application does not meet the eligibility criteria, it will not be assessed.

4. Assessment criteria

The initial criteria is:

- The application demonstrates **strong community connections, partnerships or alliances** with (as relevant) local community groups, networks, organisations and service providers.

If your application meets the initial criteria, it will be considered in full against the following five assessment criteria:

1. The proposal demonstrates **excellence in innovation**, in responding to social isolation and loneliness. Proposals may be:
   o new and untried
   o new to the target cohort
   o new to the place or community where the proposal is to be implemented
2. The proposal clearly demonstrates **benefits to individuals at risk of, or experiencing, social isolation and/or loneliness** in preventing, responding to and mitigating the social, wellbeing, health and mental health impacts of social isolation and loneliness
   a. Including expected participants and the significance of the benefit.
3. The proposal meets a **community or cohort need that is not otherwise met** through more competitive proposals or alternate funding sources

4. The proposal demonstrates **sound planning**, with reference to financial feasibility, value for money and the capacity to deliver in the selected community

5. The proposal includes an **evaluation component**

Your application will be considered on its merits, based on how well it addresses the assessment criteria; and how it compares to other applications. You may be asked to submit further details or provide clarification during the assessment process.

In assessing your application, the panel may also take into consideration local need, existing service provision, and the geographical spread of applications to avoid duplication and/or concentration of service delivery in a single area.

Recommendations for funding are forwarded to the Director-General of DFSDSCS for consideration and approval.

Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of the assessment process.

Your proposal should describe how you plan to measure success in achieving outcomes, including how you will measure improved physical and mental health outcomes for your cohort before, during and after your initiative. If you're not sure how to do this, Ending Loneliness Together' s _Guide to Measuring Loneliness_ and _Guide to Evaluating Loneliness_ are a good place to start.

5. Target groups/service users:

The Communities Innovation Fund aims to target groups that are most at risk of social isolation and loneliness. In 2025-26 Communities Innovation Fund grants will be targeted towards initiatives that respond to social isolation and loneliness amongst **young people aged 12-25 generally, young people aged 12-25 using and/or experiencing DFSV, and victim-survivors of DFSV of all ages.**

6. Definitions

Social isolation and loneliness

There are no agreed, universal definitions of social isolation and loneliness. For the purposes of this grants program, we are adopting flexible definitions for social isolation and loneliness.

Social isolation can be understood as having little or no subjectively meaningful and beneficial roles, relationships or interaction with others and a low level of involvement in community life.

Loneliness is a subjective experience that results from a discrepancy between a person's desired and actual levels of human connection.

Innovation

Social isolation and loneliness are 'wicked' social problems and there is no 'one size fits all' approach to addressing them. We are therefore seeking proposals that present new, innovative approaches to combating social isolation and loneliness. Innovation is a key selection criterion of this fund. We are only willing to consider proposals for initiatives, programs or events that fulfil **at least one** of the below criteria:

- new and untried
- new to the target cohort
- new to the place or community where the proposal is to be implemented.

7. Examples

Initiatives that may be supported include but are not limited to:

- events that bring together people experiencing social isolation and loneliness and service providers to co-design, discuss and develop ongoing service models and approaches
- courses that bring people from within primary cohorts experiencing social isolation and loneliness together in a group environment for learning and social contact
- innovative professional development activities for frontline sector workers who support people experiencing social isolation and loneliness. The professional development activities must be directly relevant to combating social isolation and loneliness for the primary cohorts
- development of innovative connection methods that will encourage communication and reduce social isolation
- projects that create social connections by supporting the development of friendships, peer support networks and community groups
- targeted responses that respond to social isolation and loneliness that are delivered from community infrastructure including neighbourhood and community centres, libraries and community halls.

Projects that create social connections by supporting the development of long-term friendships, peer support networks and community groups;

8. Funding terms and timeframes

The Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (DFSDSCS) will enter into a service agreement with successful applicants of grants up to $50,000 concluding within the current financial year, with initiatives to be completed within 12 months from disbursement of the first funding payment.

For larger grants, DFSDSCS will enter into a service agreement with successful applicants in the current financial year, concluding no later than the end of the following financial year.

Final reports are due 3 months from the end of the service agreement (30 September in the calendar year of the service agreement end-date).

9. What the grant can be used for

Grants must be used for initiatives that address social isolation and loneliness and are inclusive of at least one group from the primary cohorts outlined above.

All proposals must embed cultural considerations into design, delivery and evaluation.

Eligible costs include wages, domestic travel, marketing costs, training, educational materials, project consumables, equipment or venue hire, office equipment or technology.

10. What the grant cannot be used for

Grants cannot be used for:

- Capital expenditure and equipment including renovations, building and maintenance
- Purchase of capital assets such as land
- Reimbursement of costs already incurred
- Unrelated professional development
- Personal gain
- Projects outside of Queensland
- Campaigns
- Purchasing vehicles
- Project management or consultancy fees
- Expenditure to develop submissions for the grants program

- Payment for individuals to participate in grants program initiatives (e.g. payment to participate in a survey)
- Payments for individual hardship support.

11. Making an application

Unless operating as an auspicing entity, each organisation may **only submit one proposal**. Your application must address the selection criteria, and include the following information:

1. A brief description of the initiative you are seeking funding for, including:
   a. Where the initiative will be delivered.
   b. For what cohort(s) the project is being delivered.
2. What existing connections, partnerships, networks or alliances you already have within the community that you will be utilising for this project.
3. Why the project is innovative, with explicit reference to one of the definitions of innovation in this guide.
4. How your project intends to address social isolation and loneliness, and evidence of the need for this project for your cohort(s).
5. A brief project plan which demonstrates your capacity to commence and deliver within the allowable timeframe above (including resources, capability and required relationships) **(maximum 5 pages)**, including:
   a. Timeframes and key milestones for establishment and delivery.
   b. Your approach to governance, stakeholder engagement and managing risk.
   c. Your transition plan to enable ongoing impacts from the initiative after the funding has ceased.
   d. How you will monitor and evaluate the impact of the project for individuals and the community.

Please note that the department cannot fund applications that are not eligible or do not meet the criteria.

12. Other requirements

All initiatives must:

- operate with low or no entry requirements to ensure services are accessible to all service users
- ensure processes are in place to refer service users to alternative services where appropriate
- monitor and supervise volunteers
- build strong relationships and engagement strategies with First Nations peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse organisations
- ensure activities are responsive to the needs of service users and are relevant to reducing vulnerability and disadvantage.
- Work closely with the department to support the monitoring, and evaluation of participant and program outcomes – this includes capturing data, participating in meetings at the request of the department and producing reporting on learnings and outcomes.

13. Successful applications

Applicants successful in obtaining funding will be required to:

- enter into a service agreement. (Please view the department's agreement templates at _social services agreements and contracts | Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety_, comply with the requirements and conditions within the Service Agreement, including reporting
- comply with the _Community Services Act 2007_.

We must execute a service agreement with you before we can make any payment.

Grant recipients will be bound to the grant agreement and contractual terms and conditions. Additional individual conditions may be specified at the time of approval. If necessary, a revised project plan may be negotiated.

14. How to apply

Applications will be managed online through SmartyGrants. Before applying, you must read and understand these Grant Program Guidelines.

To apply you must:

- Complete the online application form via SmartyGrants platform
- Provide all the information requested
- Address all eligibility criteria and assessment criteria
- Include all necessary attachments
- Submit your application by the closing date and time.

Late applications will not be accepted.

If you have any technical difficulties with logging in, progressing or submitting your application, please contact SmartyGrants on 03 9320 6888 or by email *service@smartygrants.com.au.*

15. Acknowledgement of funding

If your application is successful, you must ensure the Queensland Government is acknowledged in your annual report and any promotional materials, including on your website. Any acknowledgement in promotional material must use an acknowledgement wordmark which you must obtain from us.

16. Background of Communities Innovation Fund

Social isolation and loneliness have serious impacts on people's mental and physical health and wellbeing, as well as broader effects on communities, service systems and the economy. For many Queenslanders, the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health measures needed to contain its spread compounded pre-existing social isolation and loneliness.

In May 2021, in recognition of the widespread and significant impacts of social isolation and loneliness, the Queensland Parliament agreed to a motion that the Community Support and Services Committee (CSSC) commenced an Inquiry (the Inquiry) into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland. The Inquiry was wide reaching, charged with examining the nature, extent, causes, drivers, protective factors and benefits of addressing social isolation and loneliness.

Through 196 written submissions, and public hearings across the length and breadth of the state, the committee heard from experts, community leaders, service providers, government departments and people with lived experience, that social isolation and loneliness are critical issues in Queensland. The Queensland Government accepted all 14 recommendations of the Inquiry in full or in principle.

The Communities Innovation Fund was established to support trials of innovative new responses to social isolation and loneliness within Queensland communities.

17. Feedback and complaints

Due to the large volume of applications we expect to receive, we are unable to provide individual feedback on applications. Applicants may request generalised feedback on the grant application up to four weeks after they are notified of the outcome. Requests should be directed to grantqueries@families.qld.gov.au.

We are committed to effective complaints management and will deal with all complaints against our actions, decisions or officers' conduct in a responsive, confidential and fair manner. Please refer to the Customer service compliments and complaints section of our website Compliments and complaints | Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety.

18. Privacy

We treat your personal information according to the *Information Privacy Act 2009* (Qld). This includes letting you know:

- what personal information we collect
- why we collect your personal information
- who we give your personal information to.

In submitting a grant application, you agree to the Queensland Government collecting your personal information, including your name, contact details and role in your organisation, in order to assess your application and for the purpose of grants administration. If you do not provide this permission, we cannot assess your grant application.

The Queensland Government may also use and disclose information collected about you under this grant in any other Queensland Government business or function. This includes disclosing grant information on the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety website and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.

We may share information you give us in your application, including personal information, with other State entities, the responsible Minister and their staff, and with Members of Parliament, for other purposes including government administration, research or service delivery, or as otherwise authorised or required by law.

Further information and assistance

Questions about the grant program can be directed to: **grantqueries@families.qld.gov.au**

Questions about SmartyGrants can be directed to: **Service@smartygrants.com.au**

Please refer to the *SmartyGrants—HelpGuideforApplicants* https://applicanthelp.smartygrants.com.au/help-guide-for-applicants/ for assistance on completing your application form

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