

Regional Skills Fund – Information Sheet

A targeted, place-based regional skills grants program driven by industry and Regional Partnerships in partnership with the tertiary sector, working to build local capacity, resilience and support jobs creation.

Priority will be given to strategic, whole-of-sector, new and innovative approaches to skills and workforce development that make a significant impact in rural and regional Victoria.

1. Context

1.1 Regional Jobs Fund

The primary aim of the Regional Jobs Fund (RJF) is to facilitate job creation and retain existing jobs. It is targeted at assisting regional businesses to grow their workforce, expand markets and create jobs of the future. It will attract and facilitate investment with a focus on regional competitive advantage or high growth potential businesses.

It will also assist to diversify the regional employment base. The fund aims to improve regional capabilities to innovate and capitalise on the potential of emerging industry sectors and new export markets. The RJF will provide support for strategic projects and infrastructure in the following five program streams:

- Investment Attraction
- Innovation and Productivity
- Market Access
- Employment Precincts
- Skills Development.

2. Skills development

2.1 Regional Skills Fund

This program stream aims to support regional industry and business skills and capability to ensure the long-term sustainability of employment and business growth.

It will give priority to projects that:

- are endorsed by relevant Regional Partnerships, aligning with their local priorities for skills and workforce development, that may be expressed in regional or sector workforce plans.
- create and strengthen long-term, collaborative and innovative partnerships between regional industry, businesses and the tertiary sector including TAFEs, Learn Locals, LLENs and universities.

- build on and strengthen regional workforce planning and support their implementation.
- support regional skills clusters to drive local innovation and research centres that identify future workforce needs and strengthen regional skills capability and workforce resilience.
- enable upskilling in new technology and production models; career mobility and new pathways; skills for new business ventures; export and e-commerce to access new markets and the digital economy; and strategies to diversify the local skills base.
- support disadvantaged groups as part of a long-term, strategic approach with industry on meaningful career-based employment.

The fund has been designed to align with and complement the Victorian Government's education and training reforms as well as initiatives that seek to support innovation, skills and workforce development, including the Jobs Victoria Employment Network program and the Future Industries Sector Strategies.

2.2 Assessment Criteria

In addition to demonstrating the project's ability to address the core RJF criteria outlined in the application guidelines, applications will be assessed for their capacity to deliver value for money and transformative benefits to regional Victoria against the following specific Regional Skills Fund criteria:

- benefits to a particular industry, sector or region in terms of addressing specific skills and workforce development needs (both immediate and long-term);
- creation or strengthening of partnerships to build local skills capacity, workforce resilience and innovation as part a place-based, locally-driven approach;

- supporting jobs creation, driving economic growth and increasing or improving business productivity of business and/or industry/sector;
- in the case of training providers, having a demonstrated track record or strong understanding of quality skills and workforce development training delivery for regional industry needs.
- Activities supported will also generally:
 - be consistent with local priorities for skills and workforce development identified by Regional Partnerships and in regional workforce plans;
 - align with areas of regional comparative advantage;
 - focus on the emerging and high growth industry sectors identified by the Victorian Government.

2.3 Role of Regional Partnerships

As part of a targeted, place-based approach, Regional Partnerships will consider and endorse relevant project proposals under the Regional Skills Fund.

Regional Partnerships will set directions, priorities and advocate for local skills and workforce development projects – building their influence and capability as they are established.

Regional Partnerships will establish regional skills working groups to ensure alignment of strategic local priorities and to develop project proposals.

2.4 Project Categories and Examples

The fund will support regional projects that improve business productivity; increase workforce skills and capability, incentivise workforce and training participation and that improve and create new career pathways.

It can support activities under four broad categories:

- Industry Growth – assisting regional businesses and firms to grow their workforce, innovate and expand into new markets and upskill to integrate new technologies, business models and processes;
- Workforce Development – improving regional workforce and sector capabilities, implementation of planning, supporting re-skilling and jobs retention, skills attraction, and building local resilience;
- Career Pathways – industry-led skills training, career progression planning, integrated workplace learning; leadership and mentoring programs, school-industry partnerships and cadetships;
- Aspiration and attainment – co-ordinated strategies and initiatives with other agencies and programs to improve regional post-school transition and pathways for employment and further education and training.

These categories should be viewed as examples only. New and innovative partnerships and approaches in skills and workforce development that make a significant impact in rural and regional Victoria will be highly regarded.

2.4.1 Industry Growth

Funding can be provided to enable upskilling in new technology and production models; skills for new business ventures; export and e-commerce to access new markets and the digital economy.

It can provide support for industry skills clusters that drive local innovation, and targeted skills development to enable major regional projects and precincts.

Examples may include skills and workforce initiatives for:

- Small to medium enterprises and business innovation;
- Export capability, e-capacity and digital readiness – particularly in the food and fibre and tourism sectors;
- On-farm productivity through hi-tech application of new farming techniques;
- Food processing and advanced manufacturing;
- Medical hi-tech, new energy technology and emerging sectors;
- New agribusiness ventures; business management;
- Asian and international engagement.

2.4.2 Workforce development

Funding can be provided to support activities that build on and strengthen regional industry and sectoral workforce plans and their implementation.

It can provide support for research centres that identify future workforce needs and strengthen regional skills and capability, build resilience as well as strategies to diversify the local skills base.

Examples may include:

- Agriculture and rural workforce initiatives – including support for low-skill workers, upskilling and specialised training for farmers and seasonal workers;
- Regional tourism skills and workforce development initiatives such as service skills and professional standards;
- Brokering to strengthen and establish new training partnerships that address skills shortfalls or identify future skills needs;
- Whole-of-sector workforce plans and strategies including career promotion and leadership development initiatives such as in the horticultural industry,
- Workforce transformation projects such as in advanced manufacturing and ICT;
- Business and risk management skills development to build resilience and diversify the workforce, protect against drought and economic shocks;
- Strategies to attract and retain a skilled workforce such as in health and social services.

2.4.3 Career pathways

Funding can be provided for projects that develop long-term, strategic approaches with industry to develop meaningful career-based employment, career mobility and new pathways for graduates.

Examples may include:

- Regional university, TAFE and industry/workforce partnership initiatives;
- Cadetships and integrated workplace learning programs for rural and regional young people;
- Initiatives designed to welcome new entrants to regional industries and support continued learning and career development;
- Rural and regional local government capacity building initiatives;
- Succession planning and strategies that address career path deficits in the regions, such as retail and tourism.

2.4.4 Aspiration and attainment

Funding can be provided for projects that support transition from school to employment and further educational pathways for regional Victorians, including disadvantaged cohorts. Examples may include:

- Project partnerships with the tertiary sector, Learn Local adult community education organisations and Local Learning and Employment Networks for post-school transitional programs and mature-age pathways;
- Local social enterprises and not-for-profit organisations brokering employment and training pathways with industry for young people and disadvantaged cohorts such as refugees or Aboriginal people;
- Industry projects with regional Tech Schools and the tertiary sector to equip secondary school students with the skills they need for industries in their regions projected to experience strong economic and jobs growth;
- Regional workforce and industry strategies to encourage inclusive and flexible workplaces to improve labour mobility such as women in traditionally-male dominated sectors.

2.5 Activities that will generally not be funded

In addition to activities outlined in the RJF guidelines, the following activities will generally not be considered for funding:

- The cost of training for students eligible for Victorian Training Guarantee subsidies;
- Direct training costs for unit competencies or targeted upskilling (see section 2.6 below);
- Projects without a clear jobs-focus, that are not industry-led or that do not align with regional priorities;

- Ongoing operating costs or salary subsidies except where a salary subsidy provides administrative and project management support for skills and workforce development, consultant fees for brokering, coordination, facilitation and research, accommodation and travel.

2.6 Funding support

The following information should be read in conjunction with the RJF guidelines.

Funding will be provided on a co-contribution basis, with applicants typically contributing at least one-third of the total project cost (ie. a 2:1 funding ratio).

Not-for-profit organisations may be eligible to receive up to 75 per cent of the total project cost (ie. a 3:1 funding ratio).

Where a project involves training costs which are outside of those eligible for Victorian Training Guarantee or subsidies such as unit competencies or targeted upskilling, these costs must be covered by the applicant's contribution. However, the grant can be used towards other components of the project such as brokering, coordination, facilitation and research, accommodation and travel.

In-kind contributions can be included as part of the total project costs in calculating the level of grant assistance.

In-kind contributions will be considered subject to the following requirements:

- no more than 50 per cent of applicant (and partners) contribution can be in-kind
- skilled labour costed at \$45 per hour
- unskilled labour costed at \$20 per hour
- equipment costed at standard commercial hire rate
- facilities costed at standard rental rate.

3. Application process

The assessment process for applications is outlined in the Regional Jobs Fund guidelines, with the exception of the Regional Skills Fund Assessment Committee (RSFAC) as outlined below.

Applications will be forwarded to the RSFAC, a sub-committee of the Regional Jobs Fund's Investment Committee, prior to consideration by the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister for Training and Skills.

The RSFAC is made up of representatives from RDV and DET. Where relevant, input may be also sought from other government departments and agencies.

Prior to submitting an application, applicants are advised to:

- Read this information sheet and the guidelines for the Regional Jobs Fund carefully to establish eligibility;

- Discuss the proposed application with your local RDV office, and the relevant DET Regional Manager;
- Read the terms and conditions of the funding offered.

3.1 RDV and DET regional model

RDV and the DET are working closely together to facilitate funding under the Regional Skills Fund.

RDV and DET regional staff may also be able to assist applicants in facilitating innovative partnerships between industry stakeholders and training providers to enable the development of viable project proposals.

4 Additional information and resources

The Regional Jobs Fund rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-jobs-and-infrastructure-fund/regional-jobs-fund

Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) – providing targeted support services for people looking for work and employers looking for workers vic.gov.au/news/jobs-victoria-employment-network

The Future Industries Fund – supporting industry sectors that have high-growth potential to create jobs and attract investment in Victoria invest.vic.gov.au/opportunities/future-industries-fund

The Back to Work Scheme – providing financial assistance to employers who hire disadvantaged jobseekers, see vic.gov.au/backtowork

Additional investment in Victoria's TAFE network det.vic.gov.au

5. Contact details for regional offices

For further information and details on the application process please contact your local RDV office. RDV regional offices are located across Victoria.

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