# TALKING POINTS

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| **Subject** | Disability Employment Centre of Excellence grant opportunity public briefing | |
| **Date & Time** | 13 September 2024 |  |
| **Presenter** | Sara Whale (MCEE), Kellie Spence and Alex Buckley | |

## Slide 1/Title

‘Public Briefing for the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence grant opportunity

* Good afternoon, everyone.

## Slide 2/Acknowledgement of Country

* I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we meet today and their connections to land, water, culture and community.
* I pay respects to the Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

## Slide 3/QR Code

* We invite you to join the discussion using the QR code on the slide on screen.

## Slide 4/Probity Statement

* Before we go further, I firstly need to read the Probity Statement.
* The Department of Social Services is committed to conducting a fair, honest, and transparent process for the establishment and implementation of the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.
* These guidelines may be changed by Department of Social Services. When this happens, the revised guidelines are published on Grant Connect.
* The Australian Government will make sure that the grant opportunity process is fair, according to the published guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct and is consistent with the Commonwealth Grants Rules Principles 2024.
* For today's event, this means that:
  + this presentation will be made publicly available on the DSS website; and
  + any views expressed, or information provided, by attendees to this event will be considered, along with the views expressed and information provided by other stakeholders.
  + If there are any inconsistencies between today’s briefing and the documentation published on the Grant Connect website for this grant, the documentation as published on the Grant Connect website takes precedence.
* I am really pleased to be hosting this public briefing for the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.
* Today we have Kellie Spence, the Group Manager, Disability Employment and Alex Buckley, the Branch Manager, Disability Employment Policy.
* Kellie will provide an overview of the Centre of Excellence grant opportunity and Alex will provide information about the grant requirements and assessment criteria.
* At the end of the presentation, we have time for questions and answers.
* I’ll now hand over to Kellie.

## Slide 5/ Overview

* Thank you, Sara.
* [Kellie to introduce herself and give a visual description]
* The Government committed $23.3 million in funding over 4 years to establish a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence or Centre of Excellence to improve disability employment outcomes.
* To start, I will provide an overview of Disability Employment Centre of Excellence or Centre of Excellence grant opportunity, including:
  + purpose and intended outcomes.
  + grant opportunity guidelines.
  + eligible and ineligible organisations
  + establishment and operational activities
  + activities to deliver the core functions of the Centre, including:
    - * development and delivery of resources
      * website development
      * collaboration
      * promotion, communication and evaluation.
* Alex will then outline the selection criterion, provide additional information on key aspects of the grant opportunity and outline the application process.
* Before I provide the overview, I want to be clear that the grant opportunity guidelines provide the intended purpose and outcomes of the Centre and activities that must be undertaken for establishment and implementation.
* We expect applicants to use their expertise and knowledge in providing their vision for the Centre, including details on collaboration, engagement, governance, resource development and delivery, based on the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, as part of their applications.

## Slide 6/ Purpose and intended outcomes

* The Centre of Excellence will be an evidence-informed, best-practice hub.
* The intended outcomes of the grant and the Centre of Excellence is to:
  + Increase the delivery of quality employment services and supports that lead to improved disability outcomes.
* Have an improved understanding of employer needs and the skills and knowledge to help employers hire and support employees with disability.
* The purpose of the Centre is to provide resources, tools and training to help providers deliver quality employment services and support - to both participants with disability and employers.
* In the consultation process we undertook we heard that there were resources out there, but these resources are not always easy to access or to put into practice.
* The Centre will support all providers who help deliver employment outcomes for people with a disability, including the new specialist disability employment program, Workforce Australia, remote employment services, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and supported employment, including Australian Disability Enterprises.
* The Centre will not be a physical hub located within a building, rather, it will be an online hub that will develop and deliver disability employment resources over time. They will still be highly connected with a range of stakeholders to work out what works in disability employment to make a difference on the ground.
* Once established, the Centre will collect, translate, and disseminate disability employment related research and evidence of what works into best practice resources, bringing together and using existing resources available both nationally and internationally.
* Engagement will be really important and there are a wide range of stakeholders the Centre will need to work with including employment service providers, provider peaks, disability employment experts, universities and research institutes to both build the evidence and ensure it is used. As well as, people with disability, their families and advocates or representatives and employer representative groups to ensure it is meeting both their needs.
* The Centre of Excellence will improve disability outcomes by ensuring that providers and their diverse staff have:
  + Higher levels of disability awareness to support participants more effectively.
  + Knowledge of evidence-based models and approaches.
  + An improved understanding of employer needs, and the skills and knowledge to help employers to hire and support employees with disability.
* The Centre is intended to commence in March 2025, to support the introduction of the new Specialist Disability Employment Program from 1 July 2025.
* The Centre has been designed to be closely connected to the new Specialist Disability Employment Program through its role in developing and disseminating best-practice resources and tools for providers. It will foster collaboration across employment providers by working with employment service providers, employers, and other stakeholders to improve the quality and effectiveness of services.

## Slide 7/ Centre of Excellence Timeframes

The slide provides a summary of key timeframes for the Centre of Excellence Grant Opportunity. Key dates include – any questions regarding the grant should be sent no later than 5pm 16 October. The Grant Opportunity will close at 9pm 23 October. Indicative timings for notification is January for commencement in February/March.

There are some key early deliverables which we will cover off during the presentation.

## Slide 8/ Grant Opportunity Guidelines

* The Grant opportunity guidelines are a framework for providers. We would like your ideas and plans on how to implement this framework to achieve the Centres intended outcomes. The successful grantee will work with the department and stakeholders to agree a forward work plan and priorities.
* It is essential that the grantee collaborates and works with Disability Employment Service Providers, people with disability, their families and stakeholders in to draw on a range of perspectives in developing the Centre.
* Engagement and will inform and ensure information and resources are collated, accessible and useable.

## Slide 8/Applying for the grant opportunity

### Applicant Criteria

* We are seeking applications from an individual eligible organisation or a consortium of eligible organisations that have:
  + a strong understanding of the disability employment sector
  + a demonstrated organisational leadership in employing people with disability.
  + a demonstrated ability to leverage relationships across of a range of relevant stakeholders, including people with lived experience of disability.
  + a track record in establishing and leading partnerships to effectively deliver the Centre of Excellence, and
  + expertise in developing practical resources and evidence that will make a difference to practice on the ground.
* Individual eligible organisations or a consortium of eligible organisations can apply for the grant opportunity.

### Ineligible organisations

* Providers receiving funding from the Commonwealth to deliver an employment service as an Australian Disability Enterprise, Disability Employment Services, Workforce Australia or a National Disability Insurance Scheme providers are not eligible.
* The decision to exclude these services has been made to protect the Centre’s capacity to collaborate equally and without prejudice with all willing providers of an employment service to people with disability.

## Slide 9/Consortium requirements

* If you wish to apply as a consortium, you must appoint a lead organisation who will be solely accountable for the delivery of grant activities and applying on behalf of the consortium members.
* You can only submit one application for this grant as either a single eligible organisation or as the nominated lead eligible organisation of a consortium.
* Eligible organisation can be a partner in multiple consortium applications but only the lead organisation in one consortium application.
* When applying as a consortium, the application must identify all other members of the proposed consortium, and the application must have letters of support from each of the consortium members.
* Each letter of support should include:
  + details of consortium members
  + confirmation that the consortium member supports the grant application and is aware of the requirements of the grant application.
  + confirmation that the consortium members will work with the lead applicant and the other consortium members in establishing the Centre, and
  + details of a nominated management level contact officer.
* The successful provider or consortium lead provider will enter into a 4-year, Individualised Grant Agreement to deliver the Centre.

## Slide 10/ Establishment and Operational Activities

* The successful organisation or consortium must undertake the following to deliver the Centre. They must:
  + Undertake all necessary planning and administrative steps relating to the establishment and running of the Centre.
  + Select, appoint and maintain suitably qualified and experienced staff, noting that staff with lived experience of disability are to be considered a priority during recruitment.
  + Recruit a suitably qualified director of the Centre. The director should have extensive experience in disability employment through employment services, research and advocacy and lived experience of disability is desirable.
  + They must also establish and provide governance of the Centre.
* The department will assist the successful applicant in setting the Centre’s work program, undertake market research to develop the Centre’s name and branding elements for the Centre and distribution of material ahead of the Centre’s website being launched.

## Slide 11 Activities to deliver the core functions of the Centre - Development and delivery of resources.

* The successful organisation or consortium must develop and deliver free and accessible resources (including easy read versions), tools and training for employment services that are practical and digestible and influence practice, including:
  + an evidence-base of what works in disability employment.
  + a suite of evidence-based best practice resources to meet the need of employment services and improve their practice.
  + mapping existing research, resources and tools both nationally and internationally
  + developing and delivering a range of resources suitable for
    - individuals, organisations and groups including: First Nations organisations, intersectional groups, LGBTIQA+, young people and school leavers.
    - and as per the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission, developing and delivering information, practice-based resources and training targeted to employment service providers. Topics highlighted by the Royal Commission include:
      * disability awareness with a focus on employment service practice
      * employer engagement
      * cultural competency
      * human rights, and
      * customised employment
* Of this list, disability awareness and employer engagement for service providers has been identified as a priority to support the commencement of the new specialist disability employment program on 1 July 2025. It must be progressively delivered up to 13 June 2025.
* We will talk more about this later on in the webinar.

## Slide 12/ Activities to deliver the core functions of the Centre - Website development.

* The successful applicant must develop a Centre of Excellence website, which must be delivered by 1 September 2025.
* The website will host resources, tools and information about the Centre.
* The website will launch with some initial material and will evolve over time with additional resources and functionality.
* The hosting of Centre resources will be supported by the department until the launch of the website.
* The website must be fully accessible and meet standard requirements.
* While the website will be created by the successful grantee, the domain name, website and all content, code databases and related materials will be owned by the Commonwealth.
* The website must be compliant with
  + the Digital Transformation Agency’s Service Standards
  + Australian Privacy Principles
  + Australian Government Style Manual
  + Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 at a minimum AA standard and where possible a AAA standard
  + use of plain language principles with the user’s needs at the forefront.
* And now for some technical stuff - the website must:
  + Be hosted on a secure hosting service with greater than 99.9 per cent uptime.
  + Use of a Web Application Firewall (WAF) or Content Delivery Network (CDN) software.
  + Regular backups must be captured, and a full site recovery should be achievable in under 2 days.
  + Have no public user accounts, and
  + Be built on the Drupal Content Management System (CMS). Where possible, the site should be [based on the GovCMS distribution](https://www.drupal.org/project/govcms).

## Slide 13/ Activities to deliver the core functions of the Centre – Collaboration & Engagement

* Collaboration and engagement with a variety of stakeholders will be essential for the Centre to be successful. The successful applicant must:
  + Engage and collaborate with employers, employment consultants, people with disability, their families and carers, peak bodies, advocacy organisation and representative bodies.
  + Establish ongoing collaborative relationships or partnerships with research centres or hubs, learning platforms or other relevant organisations to share knowledge, coordinate easy access to resources and avoid duplication of work.
  + Collaborate with various employment service providers to learn from their experience and expertise on what works, and to work out what learnings and training resources are needed.

## Slide 14/ Activities to deliver the core functions of the Centre – Promotion, communication and evaluation

* Promotion and communication activities must be undertaken.
* These activities will help build trust with employment service providers and ensure providers are aware of and using the resources and tools developed by the Centre.
* The successful applicant will need to participate in evaluation activities and work with an independent evaluator.
* Alex will provide more details on this a little later in the webinar.

## Slide 15/ QR Code

* In case you missed it earlier, here is the QR code to support questions and feedback throughout the webinar.
* I’ll now handover to Alex to go through information on the assessment criteria and grant requirements.

## Slide 16/ Assessment Criteria

* I’ll now go through the assessment criteria.
* It is important that applicants read through the assessment criteria carefully as outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines as each assessment criterion must be addressed.
* The department will assess applications based on the weightings given to each criterion.
* There are 5 criterions to respond to as part of this grant opportunity. I will go through each of these now. These are set out in section 6 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

### Criterion 1 – Capacity and capability to establish and operate the Centre of Excellence.

* Applicants will be expected to demonstrate their capacity and capability to establish and operate the Centre, including:
  + Demonstrating experience in delivering similar projects, and
  + Displaying a clear understanding of potential risks and issues that may be encountered and mitigation strategies.
  + Demonstrating how they will ensure efficient and economical use of grant funds in establishing and operating the Centre.
  + Outlining how the online hub will be established and maintained.
  + Demonstrating their ability to effectively establish and operate the Centre, including the ability to access resources and personnel with relevant expertise, skills and experience.
  + Demonstrating how success will be measured.

### Criterion 2 – Proposed model, governance, and staffing structure of the Centre of Excellence.

* Applicants are expected to provide their proposed model for the Centre including the governance framework and expected staffing structure.
* This criterion should also cover:
  + the proposed approach to working with stakeholders and developing partnerships including how:
    - The applicant will meet the collaborative requirements of the grant; and
    - How existing partnerships with key stakeholder will be used to deliver the Centre.
* Applications should also include how the successful applicant will operate as a genuine inclusive entity that has the needs of people with disability at its core.

### Criterion 3 – Delivery of core functions of the Centre of Excellence

* Applicants are required to describe how they would operate the Centre to ensure its core functions are met.
* There are two deliverables with specific deadlines for the Centre that must be addressed as part of this response. They are:
  + a suite of information and practice-based resources on the topics of disability awareness and employer engagement for use by employment service providers must be delivered progressively up to 13 June 2025 to support the commencement of the new specialist disability employment program on 1 July 2025, and
  + a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence Online Hub (stand-alone website) capable of hosting information and practice-based resources and training in a range of formats by no later than 1 September 2025.
* In addition to criterion 3, applicants are required to complete a draft Activity Work Plan which includes sections for a budget plan, stakeholder engagement and risk management plan for the 4-year grant period.
* I will provide more detail on the Activity Work Plan in a moment.

### Criterion 4 – Demonstrate how engagement and collaboration will be used to establish the Centre

* Applicants will be expected to demonstrate how engagement and collaboration will be used to develop the Centre, including:
  + Outlining how the centre will be established as a collaborative institution.
  + Outlining how collaboration and engagement will be used within the governance structure of the Centre and decision-making processes.
  + Demonstrating the applicant’s ability to collaborate and engage with relevant research institutions, service providers, peak bodies and employers to develop and deliver quality, practice-based resources, tools and training.
  + Outlining how the applicant will disseminate outputs of the Centre to the sector, and
  + Outlining the applicants understanding of the current disability employment landscape, including employment options, challenges to the sector and the role of employment services providers.

### Criterion 5 – Deliver value for money for Government

* Applicants must provide a project budget, with an outline of a proposed payment structure, information on how accessibility requirements will be met and how diverse cohorts needs will be met.

## Slide 17/ Targeted information

* I am now going to take a moment to outline a few important aspects of the grant opportunity, including:
  + The draft activity work plan
  + The evaluation, and
  + Specific intellectual property clauses contained in the grant agreement.

### Draft Activity Work Plan

* The successful applicant must demonstrate clearly in the draft Activity Work Plan the objectives, deliverables, timeframes and measures of success to establish the Centre and deliver the Centre’s core functions.
* The draft activity work plan from the successful applicant will:
  + Clearly outline how the successful applicant will achieve a collaborative Centre providing a detailed stakeholder engagement strategy. It is expected that activities in this draft workplan will then be tested with stakeholders after commencement.
  + Provide a detailed budget for all items, the budget plan should be comprehensive and provide a breakdown of costs for establishment and operations of the Centre.
  + And document a detailed risk management plan for the Centre
* The department will work with the successful applicant regarding their draft activity work plan to ensure it meets the departments requirements.

### Independent Evaluation

* The Department will be undertaking an independent post implementation review and evaluation of the Centre.
* A grant agreement requirement is that the successful grantee will work closely with the independent evaluator in all evaluation activities including:
  + Identifying data and embedding data collection and information sharing into the Centre’s ongoing operations.
  + Identifying measurable outcomes and impacts
  + Sharing evidence and insights with the evaluator, and
  + Sharing relevant stakeholder information with the evaluator.

### Intellectual property clauses

* The department is requiring full intellectual property rights of the content developed by the successful grantee for the Centre of Excellence.
* This is to ensure that the resources, tools, and training materials produced by the Centre are freely accessible to all stakeholders across the disability employment sector.

## Slide 18/ Application process

* To apply for the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence grant opportunity visit the GrantConnect website ([www.grants.gov.au](http://www.grants.gov.au)).
* This is where you will find the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, online application form, required templates and questions and answers.
* Your application must be submitted to the Community Grants Hub by 9pm AEDT on 23 October 2024.
* Late application will not be accepted, unless the applicant has experienced exceptional circumstances that prevent the submission of the application.
* The grant activity is expected to commence March 2025 with the end date of 30 June 2028.
* Please contact the Community Grants hub for any questions about the grant opportunity.
* The contact details are displayed on screen.
* You can also find the contact details in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.
* Questions should be sent no later than 5:00 pm AEDT on 16 October 2024.

## Slide 19/ Assessment of grant applications

* The Community Grants Hub will review your application against the eligibility criteria.
* Only eligible applications will move to the next stage.
* If eligible, the department will assess applications against the assessment criteria, and we will assess your applications on its merits based on:
  + how well it meets the assessment criteria.
  + how it compares to other applications.
* A Selection Advisory Panel will consider:
  + whether the application provides value for money.
* When assessing the extent to which the application represents value for money, the Selection Advisory Panel will have regard to:
  + the overall objective/s to be achieved in providing the grant.
  + the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates that it will contribute to meeting the outcomes/objectives of the grant.
  + how the grant activities will target groups or individuals, and
  + how the application compares to other applications.
* Applicants may also be subject to a financial viability assessment.

### Notification of application outcomes

* The department will write to all applicants on the outcome of their application.

## Slide 20/ Questions and Answers

* We now have approximately 15 minutes to answer your questions on the Centre of Excellence grant opportunity.
* Please note that per the probity statement at the start of this session, any views expressed, or information provided, by you will be considered, along with the views expressed and information provided by other stakeholders.

## Slide 21/ Thank you

* That’s all we have time for today.
* A quick reminder that this presentation will be published on the Centre of Excellence DSS website and any questions and answers raised today will be added to the questions and answers document available on GrantConnect.
* If you have any further questions on the grant opportunity, please contact the Community Grants Hub.
* Questions should be sent no later than 5:00pm AEDT on 16 October 2024.