



Coordinator General for Migrant Services

Dear Grant Recipients

I would like to thank you for your ongoing commitment in delivering settlement-related grant programs during these challenging times.

The Department of Home Affairs continues its operations, focusing on work that must get done, protecting our borders and the community and supporting the Australian Government in its response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Paramount at this stage is the wellbeing of yourselves, your staff, your volunteers and your clients.

All grant providers should continue to heed updated Commonwealth and state and territory health advice and ensure that the delivery of your services are in line with government regulations and restrictions. The latest COVID-19 news, updates and advice from government agencies across Australia are available at www.australia.gov.au.

You deliver an 'essential' service and your business continuity plans are important. We are aware that the closures of certain venues (such as sporting facilities, community centres and schools) will have an impact. I encourage you to continue to look at alternative solutions to deliver services to ensure continued support to our vulnerable clients in the settlement sector. If you haven't already, you should consider how your organisation might retain contact with clients if face to face services are no longer able to be delivered, for example by providing alternate support such as phone or web-based and online supports.

The Department continues to work with other Commonwealth agencies to ensure a consistent, fair and equitable approach to grant recipients. We expect that no funding agreements will be terminated or grant funding withdrawn and that existing mechanisms under grant agreements will be implemented to manage issues in service delivery outcomes. I encourage you all to do the best that you can through the funding envelope that we are working within to ensure service delivery to our vulnerable clients remains at the forefront.

The Department is working with other Australian Government agencies to ensure a consistent, fair and equitable approach to supporting grant recipients during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, a decision has been taken that funding agreements are expected to continue as planned and agreed.

Existing mechanisms under grant agreements will be used to manage service delivery changes and emerging issues as a result of health warnings and government directives. I encourage you explore innovative ways to continue to deliver much needed services to vulnerable clients within your existing funding envelope and to prepare to re-establish your usual services when you have been advised that it is safe to do so.

Alison Larkins
Coordinator-General Migrant Services
Department of Home Affairs
31 March 2020



Frequently Asked Questions about the Coronavirus (COVID-19) - for settlement grant recipients

What is the government's response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Information and advice on the Australian Government's response to COVID-19 is available at the following sites. Service providers should refer to these websites on a regular basis for up to date advice.

- www.australia.gov.au/ - includes updated information on health and prevention, information for travelers, receiving financial support, information for education providers, information for businesses and employees, supporting the community, and state and territory government information.
- www.health.gov.au – includes updated information on public health prevention strategies and resources including in a range of community languages. The Department of Health also has a National Coronavirus Helpline (phone 1800 020 080), which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Local advice can also be sought through your state/territory government departments of health.
- www.homeaffairs.gov.au – includes news for overseas travelers and visa holders.
- Safe Work Australia (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) has information about work, health and safety considerations for managing staff in relation to the current pandemic.
- <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus> - includes updated information on the Australian Government's economic response including support for individuals, households and business.
- www.ato.gov.au - includes support measures for businesses experiencing financial difficulty

The following questions and answers have been developed by the Department of Home Affairs (the department) to assist funded settlement grant recipients in service delivery arrangements in light of the COVID-19. There will be evolving information and guidance provided by government and we encourage you seek up to date information.

This information sheet has been prepared specifically for settlement related grants providers, including:

- Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS)
- Youth Transition Support (YTS) services
- Youth Hubs trial
- National Community Hubs Program

Please contact your Funding Arrangement Manager in the first instance to discuss your individual circumstances and to find a flexible solution.

Impacts on service delivery and funding arrangements

What is the Community Grants Hub's response to COVID-19?

- The Community Grants Hub is adapting its approach to the ongoing management of grants to be as flexible as possible.
- This includes not pursuing current outstanding Data Exchange reporting or financial acquittals.
- At this stage, the next Data Exchange milestone remains at 30 July 2020.
- If your organisation cannot operate either due to staffing impacts from COVID-19, or your clients or customers have been impacted, your Funding Arrangement Manager will work with you to consider other viable options.
- It is important that services are in place throughout this period, where possible, but also standing ready to operate when this period of uncertainty is over.

What should I consider in a COVID-19 business continuity plan?

- Your business continuity plans are important. You should continue to look at alternative avenues for service delivery over the coming months, including.
 - Interim staffing arrangements and workforce issues, including options for flexible work arrangements for staff and communication mechanisms.
 - Alternative options to deliver services such as over the phone or online technology and how access to these services will work for clients with low English and/or technical skills.
 - How your clients would communicate to you if they need to self-isolate.
 - Ensuring the safety of your staff, your volunteers and clients, including staff knowing the symptoms of COVID-19, appropriate actions should staff or clients appear unwell, and what resources and support services are available for those concerned about the impact of the COVID-19.
 - Whether you are able to operate from your existing premises or need to consider alternative location/s.
 - You do not need to provide the Department with a copy of your Plan.

What should service providers do if their service delivery sites and or partner sites are closed?

- The Department is aware that a venue is based on a range of key factors such as client demand, location, suitability and operational hours.
- It is likely that in some instances a grants service provider will no longer be able to operate an activity/activities because a site is closed by a third party.
- Business continuity plans should provide avenues for alternative service delivery options, where practicable. This may include grants service providers relocating the activity to their own premises and considering alternative solutions such as phone or web-based and online support.

Should staff continue to be paid if my service is not being delivered?

- It is important that services are in place throughout this period, where possible, but also standing ready to operate when this period of uncertainty is over.
- Where staffing costs are an eligible cost under your grant agreement, you may continue to pay staff if the service is temporarily not being delivered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Service providers should take note of key impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on service provision, including details such as changes in client numbers, and/or particular cohorts, and the services and support offered.

Should service providers continue to hold group activities for clients?

- Keep up to date with and follow health advice warning from the Department of Health and local state or territory departments of health. This includes information regarding social distancing and non-essential gatherings.
- You are encouraged to explore alternative options to group activities to ensure business continuity.

What should I do if I cannot meet the deliverables and/or milestones in my funding agreement?

- Service providers should take note of key impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on service provision, including details such as changes in client numbers, and/or particular cohorts, and the services and support offered.
- These matters should be reported to your Funding Arrangement Manager, in accordance with the requirements set out in Funding Agreement grant conditions, at the appropriate time.

If the COVID-19 inhibits organisations ability to spend grant funds this financial year, can these be carried over into next financial year?

- The Department of Home Affairs and the Community Grants Hubs are committed to being as flexible as possible to ensure that organisations can continue to operate.
- The Department will consider variations to grant agreements to allow funds to be carried over into next financial year on a case by case basis.

Staff and client health and safety

How do I keep staff and clients safe?

- Service providers should be guided by current advice available from www.australia.gov.au, the Department of Health, and local state or territory departments of health on a regular basis.
- This includes guidance regarding social distancing, physical contact and hygiene protocols.
- Safe Work Australia also has information about work, health and safety considerations for managing staff in relation to the current pandemic.
- Consider options for alternative service delivery (such as via the phone or online technology) and how access to online or telephone information will work for clients with low English and/or technical skills.

What should I do if a client presents unwell?

- Contact your state or territory health authority to seek advice about management of any possible exposure to COVID-19, and act in accordance with advice provided.
- Please follow the latest advice, information and resources are available from www.australia.gov.au and/or the Department of Health.
- You may wish to advise clients that medical practitioners and pharmacies have access to the Free Interpreting Services to assist in communicating with people who have limited or no English language proficiency.
- Consider options for alternative service delivery (such as via the phone or online technology) and how access to online or telephone information will work for clients with low English and/or technical skills.
- Safe Work Australia has information about work, health and safety considerations for managing staff in relation to the current pandemic.

Should service providers advise the department of confirmed cases of COVID-19 among their staff or clients?

- Service providers should contact their state or territory health authority to seek advice about management of any possible exposure to COVID-19, and should act in accordance with advice provided.
- Pending any advice, service providers should exercise caution to limit further possible exposure, which may include temporary closure of the office and self-isolation of staff or participants present.