International Student Welfare Grants

Guidelines 2015
Program pilot phase
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1. Overview

As part of the Study Melbourne Experience Program, the International Student Welfare Grants (the Program) seeks to fund organisations to deliver projects that support international students during their stay in Victoria.

The Program is administered by the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (the department or DEDJTR) and it is intended to benefit post-secondary international students, including those studying at:

- Universities
- TAFEs
- Registered Training Organisations (RTO)
- English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) Providers

This program commenced in August 2015 and will run until June 2019.

2. Context

In 2013-14 international education was Victoria’s largest services export sector. Victoria has a long-standing position as a leading provider of international education.

Victorian universities, TAFEs and private education institutions have decades of success educating hundreds of thousands of students globally, particularly across Asia.

This record of providing quality international education, training and research has delivered major benefits to the State. It has been instrumental in building global skills and knowledge across many countries, as well as Melbourne and Victoria’s reputation as an innovative, robust economy and inclusive society. The recent naming of Melbourne as among the best student cities in the world, second only to Paris, further underlines this reputation.

Student experience effects the attractiveness of an education destination. Word of mouth is an important source of information in the decision making process of potential international students. There is a strong correlation between a positive experience and the likelihood of recommending Victoria as a place to study.

Addressing welfare needs for international students plays a central role in creating a positive living experience in Victoria.

Welfare needs vary amongst the international student population and may include: consumer affairs matters, housing, health, financial management and safety. While there are a number of organisations actively involved in the support of international student welfare in Victoria, there remain gaps in the provision of services and also support for engagement and early information/preventative activities.

Additionally, research suggests that international students desire more opportunities for social interaction. Opportunities for students to connect with local communities and develop leadership skills are also an effective way of enhancing student experience.

The Victorian Government has continued to invest in improving student experience over a number of years. A key investment is the Study Melbourne Student Centre (SMSC) which is a welcoming ‘drop-in’ space in Melbourne’s CBD and provides free information and case management support to international students. Students also have access to support 24 hours a day, seven days a week through a 24 hour phone line.

The Centre is a flagship investment in student experience and the first centre of its kind in Australia. It continues and expands the work of the International Student Care Service (ISCS) which was established by the Victorian Government in 2010. The government also invests in the Study Melbourne Internship Program which aims to provide 150 internships per year to international students.
2.1 Student Profile
In 2014 there were approximately 160,000 international students studying in Victoria. International students make an indelible contribution to the vibrancy of our communities and connect Victorian communities and businesses globally, both during their time here as students, as well as when they return home.

For many international students, their time living and studying in Victoria is their first experience of independent living. Victoria’s international students are drawn from a diverse range of countries, including China, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Republic of South Korea, Colombia and Sri Lanka.

Whilst staying in Victoria, the overwhelming majority of international students live within metropolitan Melbourne, with a small niche across regional Victoria, primarily focussed in Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.

For recent student experience stories, visit the following websites: 

2.2 Study Melbourne Brand
The Study Melbourne website (www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au) is the primary mechanism for provision of information to potential students.

Through the website, the Study Melbourne brand has asserted itself as a trusted government brand for potential students.

The brand has significant promotional traction and established marketing channels, including: Study Melbourne eNewsletter with over 12,000 subscribers and the Study Melbourne Facebook group, the largest online student community in Australia (400,000 ‘likes’).

The MyStory toolkit http://mystory.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au/ provides a virtual experience for prospective students of life in Victoria. Projects funded under the Program would be conducted under the Study Melbourne brand, unless a specific exemption is approved.

3. Program Objectives, Principles and Approach

The Program will be delivered against the following objectives, principles and approach:

3.1 Objectives

- Support international students living in Victoria
- Increase reach of services available for international students in Victoria
- Ensure that a wide range of international student matters are considered. These could include (but are not limited to):
  - Social isolation
  - Consumer affairs
  - Housing
  - Health
  - Financial management
  - Safety
  - Community connectedness
- Respond to either existing international student welfare needs, or prevention of potential issues

3.2 Principles

The principles below will inform the approach that the department is taking in administering the grants program:

- Promotion of grants to groups that can improve international student support and inclusion. Grants will be available to student associations and not-for-profit organisations, local government and education providers operating in Victoria, in partnership with student associations
- Encouraging collaboration and partnerships to improve student welfare
- Providing opportunities to enable international student groups to undertake new activities or expand existing ones
- Leveraging of existing programs/services (including funding sources) in addressing international student welfare issues
- Ensuring projects cater to the diverse language needs of international students and projects are culturally responsive
- Ensuring projects supplement and do not duplicate existing offerings of the Study Melbourne Student Centre and education providers’ investment in student experience
3.3 Approach
The approach to delivery of the grant program during the pilot phase is:

- Expressions of Interest (EoI) can be lodged at any time. Following EoI assessment, selected applicants will be invited to lodge a grant application which can be done at any time. It is anticipated projects in an earlier stage of development at the commencement of the program may consider this option.

- At the commencement of the program, grant applications for well-developed, ‘ready to go’ projects will be considered (no EoI required).

- Following initial consideration of these grants, all projects must lodge an EoI.

- Projects funded under this program will be required to commence and complete their activities within a 12 month period. However, multi-year funding may be considered.

- The EoI process may reveal similarities in project activity or subject matter, in which case the department may facilitate compatible parties coming together for a joint proposal. In lodging an EoI, you agree to your name and contact details being shared at the discretion of the department, with one or more parties to facilitate entering into collaborative proposals.

- International student involvement in projects as interns, volunteers or paid employees will be encouraged and taken into consideration as part of the assessment. International student internships supported as part of this Program may be recognised under the Study Melbourne Internship Program.

- Successful projects would be delivered under the Study Melbourne brand (or co-branding where appropriate).

- Project activities must occur within Victoria.

4. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants must be:

- A legal entity operating in Victoria with an Australian Business Number (ABN) (Individuals not eligible to apply. Trusts and partnerships must consult with the department prior to applying to confirm eligibility).

- Have been in existence as a legal entity for more than two years.

- Applicants seeking between $10,000 – $50,000 must be willing and able to provide on request financial reports for up to the last two financial years to enable the department to conduct a risk assessment. (Note: local government and publicly funded educational institutions are exempt from this requirement).

Eligible organisations include:

- Industry associations
- Education providers
- Not for profit organisations
- Local government organisations
- Student associations
- Dedicated international student community organisations

Eligible organisations that are not international student associations are expected to partner with an international student support organisation or association.
5. Funding

The following parameters apply to the proposed funding arrangements:

• All applicants will be expected to contribute a minimum in-kind contribution matched to the level of the grant. The in-kind contribution may include items such as: staff hours, administration/office costs, materials and marketing and will need to be itemised in the budget section of the grant application. The department will assess appropriate rates of this contribution

• An additional cash contribution is also required for the project component related to any private, commercial or local government partners

• Funds from other State or Commonwealth Government programs forming part of the cash contribution will only be considered on a case by case basis

• The funding will be subject to a formal grant agreement with the department

• The department reserves the right to approach non-applying parties for proposals

• The department reserves the right to not proceed with any grants

Exclusions:

• Funding will not be supplied retrospectively, either for activities already completed or underway. Activities may only commence following execution of the grant agreement, except in very exceptional circumstances and only with prior written approval by the department

• Funding will not be supplied for activities occurring outside of Victoria

• Funding will not be supplied for salaries for existing ongoing staff

• Funding will not be supplied directly for recurrent operating costs, for example rent or utility costs, or projects establishing expectations of ongoing funding

• Funding will not be supplied directly to cover budget deficits

• Funding will not be considered for projects for religious or political purposes

• Funding will not be considered for proposals that are assessed as only offsetting the costs of existing program(s); that duplicate existing services which are considered to be more appropriately supported by other Victorian or Federal Government programs; or meeting regulation requirements (i.e. Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS))

5.1 Project Activities

Examples of the types of activities that would be considered include, (but are not limited to):

• Welfare services
  – Professional and financial advice
  – Counselling

• Events

• Sporting activities

• Workshops

• Volunteering/leadership programs

• Applied research to inform best practice and shareable with other Victorian organisations on improving student experience

• Practice guides shareable with other Victorian organisations on improving student experience

Excluded project activities include:

• Capital expenditure
• Purchase of major capital equipment
• Fundraising or competition activities
6. Evaluation Criteria

The assessment process will be competitive and merit-based. Each grant proposal will be assessed against the four criteria listed below. EoI submissions will be short-form and will not require direct and full response to the criteria, however the below criteria will be taken into consideration when assessing EoI submissions.

1. Capacity to deliver projects or activities for Victorian based international students
   - Can your organisation demonstrate abilities and sufficient dedicated resources to successfully manage the grant (i.e. governance arrangements)?
   - Does your organisation have experience in delivering similar projects or project outcomes for community, welfare or international student based projects?

2. Ability to demonstrate that the project addresses an existing gap/issue, targets potential issues by way of prevention or education, or enhances student experience
   - Why is the project needed?
   - What is the benefit of the project to international students studying in Victoria?

3. Quality of the project
   - Does your project have clearly articulated project outcomes?
   - How are you partnering with the international student community, including international student groups or associations?
   - What are the benefits of your collaborative partnership/s arrangements for the project?
   - How does your project provide a cost-effective solution with a budget that demonstrates an appropriate level of cash and/or in-kind contribution?
   - How will the project be sustained after the grant ceases?

4. Approach to engaging Victorian based international students in the proposed project
   - What is the expected reach/participation level in the project?
   - Do you have arrangements for intern, volunteer or paid employment roles for international students as part of the project?
   - How can the project be accessible for regional students?
   - How will the project be delivered?
   - How will the project be culturally responsive and consider the diverse language needs of international students?

7. Assessment Process

As noted above, a two-stage application and assessment process will generally apply. EoIs can be lodged at any time and will be considered promptly. It is envisaged that full grant applications will be considered and presented to the Minister for approval on a quarterly basis.

Grant assessment

Grant applications will be assessed based on eligibility, the submitted documentation and responses to the evaluation criteria. Where further clarification of applications is required, it will be conducted with each applicant as appropriate. Feedback will be provided to applicants.

- It is anticipated that Grant applications will be presented for approval on a quarterly basis
- At the conclusion of the grant assessment process, a formal funding offer will be made to the preferred applicant/s. Unsuccessful grant applicants will be informed of the outcome of their proposal in writing. Feedback can be provided on request

EoI assessment

- EoIs will be considered based on eligibility for the program, the submitted documentation and consideration of the evaluation criteria. Interviews may be conducted, contact will be made with applicants where this is required
- The EoI process may reveal to the department a number of similar proposals or activities from different parties. In its absolute discretion, the department may consider proposing resubmissions as joint proposals, if it considers that some projects could be combined having regard to the project activity and the governance requirements of a jointly managed program (refer to section 10)
- It is anticipated EoI applicants will receive feedback promptly (likely within 2 weeks of application). Selected EoI applicants will be invited to apply for a grant and will be provided with a link to the grant application form. Unsuccessful EoI applicants will be informed of the outcome in writing. Feedback can be provided on request
8. Application Process

Applicants should consider the intent and requirements of the program as outlined in section 3 prior to submitting proposals and they are encouraged to discuss their proposed project with the department’s International Education Unit.

For advice and guidance during the application period on eligibility requirements and evaluation criteria, contact the department via email at: study.melbourne@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Probity checks (and financial risk assessments where appropriate) will be conducted on all applying organisations and in some instances, collaborative organisations.

8.1 How to apply

An online form will be available on the Business Victoria website at: business.vic.gov.au for first round grant applications and EoIs. Selected EoI applicants will be emailed a link to a grant application to complete at any time. Grant applications for the first round must be submitted by the indicated closing date (refer to Business Victoria website for details). Printed, emailed, faxed, posted or hand-delivered applications will not be accepted.

All sections of the form must be completed. The form must be authorised by a person with delegated authority to apply. Any supporting material can be uploaded at the end of the online form prior to submission.

Supporting documentation

At EoI stage along with your EoI form, the supporting documentation you will be required to submit is:

- Letter/s of support/agreements from your collaborative partner/s

At grant application stage applicants will be requested to supply the following supporting documentation along with the grant application form:

- Full budget including in-kind breakdown and finance plan (templates provided)
- Insurance documentation
- Letters of support/agreements with collaborative partner/s
- For applicants seeking $10,000 and above, financial reports for the last two financial years. This should be the ‘final accounts’, with comparative figures for the previous year, Directors Report and Declaration and should include Profit and Loss Statement, Balance Sheet and Notes to the Accounts. Where the latest financial report is more than six months old, up to date management or interim accounts (Profit and Loss Statement and Balance Sheet. (Note: local governments and publicly funded educational institutions are exempt from this requirement)

9. Approval and Contracting Process

A Letter of Offer will be forwarded to approved grant applicants.

Successful grant applicants will be required to enter into a formal grant agreement with the Victorian Government. It is generally expected a grant agreement will be with the main applicant organisation only. It is generally expected collaborative partners will not form part of the grant agreement, however letters of agreement between collaborative partners may form part of the contracting requirements.

The agreement will cover items such as milestone/performance-based payment schedules, project management and risk management requirements, performance monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements, access and auditing requirements, including record keeping, insurances, indemnities and asset management requirements. Special terms and conditions may be required in particular cases. Successful applicants will need to ensure they have appropriate insurance cover at an adequate level.

It is anticipated that the successful applicants will have two weeks to accept the offer, reach agreement on terms and conditions and complete all contractual arrangements including the negotiation of applicable project milestones.

Grant recipients must agree to assist the department in preparation of materials used to promote the approved projects, such as a media release or case study.

10. Confidential Information

All applications received by the department will be treated as confidential but copies may be provided on a strictly confidential basis to other Victorian Government agencies or external experts for review as part of the assessment process.

The department reserves the right to facilitate collaborative proposals. In applying for this Program, you agree to the provision of your name and contact details to be shared with one or more applying parties, so the department can facilitate bringing compatible parties together for a joint proposal.
11. Further information

For further advice and guidance on eligibility requirements, contact the department via email at: studymelbourne@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Information sessions and grant writing introductions will be available for potential applicants. Upcoming sessions will be advertised in the online International Education bulletin.

To receive notification, please subscribe to the bulletin via: www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au/legal-and-policy/subscribe