

Grant Guidelines

2026 Innovation Round

16 March 2026



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We live and work on the lands of the Darkinjung people, and the Gadigal, Wangal and Gayamaygal people of the Eora Nation. We recognise them and other Traditional Custodians of this unceded land. We pay our respects to elders past and present. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

1. About the Financial Counselling Industry Fund

The Financial Counselling Industry Fund (FCIF) is a registered charity established in 2024. Our charitable purpose is to help people experiencing financial vulnerability by reducing the level of unmet demand for financial counselling services. More than 80 companies across the banking, insurance, energy, wagering, telecommunications, credit and buy-now-pay-later industries have come together to provide \$36 million over three years in support of this mission.

We developed the [FCIF Grants Strategy 2025-2028](#) in consultation with stakeholders. Guided by this strategy, we undertake grant rounds in our three priority areas: Innovation, Expansion and Workforce.

Our grants programs aim to enable more Australians to get more timely access to financial counselling services. We fund activities that help to reduce wait times and, along with other funding bodies, enable financial counselling service providers to better meet the demand for financial counselling services now, and in the future.

Our [funding principles](#) describe how we ensure fair grants processes, sustainably support the financial counselling sector and focus on impact.

2. About the 2026 Innovation Round

The purpose of the 2026 Innovation Round is to reduce unmet demand by trialling and deploying new solutions that improve the efficiency of financial counselling service delivery.

There are two types of Innovation Grants in the 2026 Innovation Round:

1. **Seed Grants** – a competitive grant, funding projects to explore new ideas or solutions (one year, up to \$77,000)
2. **Scale Grants** – a closed grant by invitation only, to further develop and deploy proven innovations (up to two years, up to \$230,000).

We expect to award approximately 10 Innovation Seed Grants and up to 9 Scale Grants in the 2026 Innovation Round.

Organisations that are awarded a 2026 Seed Grant may be invited to apply for a Scale Grant in 2027 following the successful completion of their Seed Grant.

3. Who is eligible to apply?

To be eligible for a Seed Grant, applicants must:

- Be an organisation currently delivering financial counselling services in Australia through financial counsellors who are members of a financial counselling peak body or professional association; or
- Be a financial counselling peak body or professional association.

Applicants must be an Australian registered business. Government entities and private individuals (including sole traders) are not eligible to apply. The applicant is the legal entity that will enter into the Grant Agreement with FCIF.

Organisations may wish to form consortiums with other organisations. A consortium must nominate a lead applicant who is solely accountable to FCIF for the delivery of grant activities.

We strongly encourage collaborative applications.

Eligible organisations may submit multiple Seed Grant applications.

Unsuccessful applicants from previous funding rounds are welcome to amend their applications and apply for funding in subsequent rounds.

Scale Grant applications are by invitation only. There will not be an open application round for Scale Grants. To be eligible for a Scale Grant, applicants must have been awarded a 2025 Innovation Seed Grant.

4. Eligible activities and expenditure

Innovation Grants support the development, researching, prototyping, testing, piloting, evaluation or deployment of a new tool or service delivery approach that seeks to improve the efficiency of financial counselling service delivery that benefits the whole sector.

FCIF will fund the following:

- Staff
 - Including for example: project management, financial counsellors contributing to design/testing
- Consultants
 - Including for example: data analysts, IT or digital specialists
- Technology and Software
 - Including for example: software development, app or platform development, cyber security and privacy work, software licences and/or subscriptions, cloud hosting during the grant period, API integrations, prototype development costs, AI or data tools used to test the project
- Research and Evaluation
 - Including for example: evaluation and impact measurement tools, data collection tools and surveys, external evaluators or research partners, user testing, data modelling
- Other
 - Expenditure directly related to FCIF-funded grant activities, including for example domestic travel required for project delivery, assets and equipment such as laptops (up to \$10k)

5. Ineligible activities and expenditure

Innovation Grants must not be used to undertake:

- Commercial or profit-making activities
- Activities that promote, support or oppose a political party, candidate or elected official
- Activities funded by other sources
- Activities unrelated to financial counselling service delivery

FCIF will not fund the following:

- The employment of financial counsellors, financial capability workers or other administrative/support staff to deliver additional services
- Standalone financial literacy initiatives
- Cash payments, or other financial benefits, to clients
- Promotional or marketing activities to the general public
- Expenditure not directly related to the FCIF-funded activities
- Retrospective costs
- Litigation costs
- Overseas travel
- Funding for staff or operational costs, including ongoing licence or subscription costs, beyond the grant term

6. Assessment criteria

Innovation Grants will be evaluated against the following criteria:

1. **Efficiency:** The project could improve the efficiency of financial counselling service delivery
2. **Originality:** The project explores a new solution
(not applicable to Scale Grants)
3. **Sector-wide benefits:** The project delivers benefits to the wider financial counselling sector
4. **Deliverability:** The project is well planned, appropriately budgeted and has clear and measurable outcomes

All criteria carry equal weighting.

7. Assessment process

Applicants must complete the application form on FCIF's applicant portal.

Seed Grant EOIs and full applications will be assessed using the following process:



- **Expression of Interest (EOI) eligibility check and shortlisting:** The application will not progress if it does not meet the eligibility criteria. FCIF will undertake a shortlisting process based on the “impact”, “originality” and “sector-wide benefit” assessment criteria.
- **Invitation to submit full application:** FCIF will invite shortlisted EOIs to submit a full application. The full application will include project activities, budgeting, risk and outcomes.
- **Shortlisting:** FCIF will undertake a shortlisting process based on the assessment criteria. Shortlisted applications will be submitted to the Expert Advisory Panel.
- **Expert Advisory Panel review:** A panel of experts will assess applications using the assessment criteria and make grant funding recommendations to the FCIF Board. The expert advisers are appointed by the FCIF Board and reflect a diverse range of skills, experience and expertise.
- **Portfolio diversity review:** This process allows FCIF to consider the overall balance of the grant portfolio and, if appropriate, prioritise funding to applicants serving diverse community needs.
- **FCIF Board decision:** The FCIF Board awards all grants and their decisions are final. Applicants will be notified of the outcome in writing following the FCIF Board’s decision.

Due to the anticipated high volume of applications, individual feedback to unsuccessful applicants will not be provided. General feedback will be published on the FCIF website at the conclusion of the assessment process.

Scale Grant applications will be assessed using the following process:



- **Invitation to submit full application:** FCIF will issue invitations to submit a scale application to eligible applicants at its discretion. This decision will be informed by grantee reporting.
- **Eligibility review:** The application will not progress if it does not meet the eligibility criteria.
- **Expert Advisory Panel review:** A panel of experts will assess applications using the assessment criteria and make grant funding recommendations to the FCIF Board. The expert advisers are appointed by the FCIF Board and reflect a diverse range of skills, experience and expertise.
- **Portfolio diversity review:** This process allows FCIF to consider the overall balance of the grant portfolio and, if appropriate, prioritise funding to applicants serving diverse community needs.
- **FCIF Board decision:** The FCIF Board awards all grants and their decisions are final. Applicants will be notified of the outcome in writing following the FCIF Board's decision.

Applicants may be contacted at any stage of the assessment process to provide further information. There is no implicit guarantee of approval at any stage in the process.

8. Obligations for successful applicants

Successful applicants must:

- Enter into a legally binding Grant Agreement with FCIF outlining project activities, payment milestones, reporting requirements and funding terms and conditions.
- Submit six-monthly progress reports based on the project activities and outcomes, in a standard format as defined by FCIF.
- Complete a final report, using FCIF's template, detailing grant outcomes, learnings and impact. Impact reporting will be based on our impact measures.
- Provide a financial acquittal. Unspent funds must be returned to FCIF.

The obligations set out above will be linked to payments as set out in the Grant Agreement.

9. Grant payments

The Grant Agreement will specify the maximum grant amount.

The grant will be paid in instalments aligned with the obligations set out above, and as set out in the Grant Agreement. The first payment will be made on commencement of the Activity Period.

If your organisation is registered for GST we will add GST to the grant payment. Grantees will be issued a Recipient Created Tax Invoice (RCTI).

10. Grant variations

We recognise that unexpected events may affect planned activities and service delivery. In these circumstances, grantees can request a variation to their Grant Agreement. It should not be assumed that a variation request will be successful. We will consider your request based on provisions in the Grant Agreement and the likely impact on achieving outcomes. Requests to submit a grant variation must be submitted by email to grants@fcif.org.au.

11. Conflicts of interest

As part of your application, you will be asked to declare any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest or that, to the best of your knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If you later identify an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest, you must immediately inform FCIF in writing by email to grants@fcif.org.au.

12. Key dates & application information

All applications must be submitted via FCIF's applicant portal and in accordance with these Guidelines. You will need to register for an account or log in if you have an existing account.

Applications will close at **5pm Australian Western Standard Time (AWST)** on the date indicated below.

Seed Grant application stage	Date
Seed Grant EOI open	23 March 2026
Seed Grant EOI submission deadline	20 April 2026
Notification of Seed Grant EOI outcome	18 May 2026
Seed Grant Full Application submission open	18 May 2026
Seed Grant Full Application submission deadline	15 June 2026
Notification of Seed Grant Full Application outcome	10 August 2026
Seed Grant activity period	1 September 2026 – 31 August 2027

Scale Grant application stage	Date*
Invitation to submit a Scale Grant application	31 August 2026

Scale Grant submission deadline	28 September 2026
Notification of Scale Grant outcome	30 October 2026
Scale Grant activity period	1 December 2026 – 30 November 2028

*Please note, 2025 Innovation Seed Grantees who have been granted extensions to their activity period will be advised of their assessment timeline upon submission of the Final Report.

13. Late applications

We will not accept late applications unless an applicant has experienced exceptional circumstances that prevent the submission of the application. Broadly, exceptional circumstances are events characterised by the following:

- reasonably unforeseeable,
- beyond the applicant's control, and
- unable to be managed or resolved within the application period.

Exceptional circumstances will be considered on their merits and in accordance with probity principles. Requests to submit a late application must be submitted by email to grants@fcif.org.au.

14. Enquiries and contact information

FCIF can only provide general information on completing your application. To maintain the fairness and integrity of the application process, applicants cannot be offered individual support or help with their applications.

Please review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#) on our website. If you have any enquiries that are not addressed in this material, please contact grants@fcif.org.au.

15. Probity

We are committed to probity in all aspects of the grants cycle including application, assessment and ongoing grant management. FCIF will conduct the 2026 Innovation Round in accordance with its [Grants Probity Policy](#). The Grants Probity Policy establishes guidelines for ethical behaviour in all grant-related activities.

If you have any probity concerns, please raise them with FCIF by emailing info@fcif.org.au.