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1 Program Overview

1.1 University Accommodation Grants
Access to affordable accommodation is a significant barrier that impacts on Aboriginal tertiary education rates across New South Wales. The relatively high cost of accommodation is not only an issue for students looking to enter the tertiary education system, it is also a major challenge for existing students.

In response to this, the Aboriginal Housing Office is piloting a new program (University Accommodation Grants). The grants will provide eligible Aboriginal students with assistance to source affordable accommodation options, enabling them to either enter university as a new student or to remain enrolled as an existing student.

The Aboriginal Housing Office has partnered with three universities to administer the grants. The targeted universities were selected in consideration to their ability to attract a high number of Aboriginal students to the program and most importantly, their ability to provide strong cultural support to new and existing students.

1.2 Targeted Universities
The AHO sought to ensure that the grants were available across a wide geographical area. Accordingly, the following locations were targeted:

- University of New England, Armidale
- Charles Sturt University, Dubbo
- University of Technology, Sydney

Each university has a dedicated Aboriginal Student Cultural Support Centre and this was deemed essential in identifying appropriate organisations to manage the pilot program. All three universities have established Aboriginal student networks.

1.3 Program Objectives
The University Accommodation Grants Pilot Program has the following objectives:

- To overcome financial/accommodation barriers that prevent Aboriginal people from applying to study at university
- To increase the number of new Aboriginal enrollments at targeted universities through the issuing of accommodation grants
- To improve retention rates for existing Aboriginal students that are at risk of dropping out of university due to housing stress
- To effectively measure the cost benefit between the operation of the University Accommodation Grants Pilot versus the Employment Related Accommodation (ERA) Program

1.4 Program Budget
The total budget for the program is $259,875.00. This includes funding for 21 grants and a 12.5% management fee to each university
1.5 Promotion of the Grants

The grants will be promoted in a targeted way. Each university will be required to advertise the grants via their established Aboriginal student networks.

2 Applying for a University Accommodation Grant

2.1 Grant Application Flowchart

2.2 Eligibility criteria for the University Accommodation Grants

The grants will be awarded via a competitive merit based assessment process. To be eligible for a grant, individuals will need to demonstrate that they meet the following criteria:

- Provide evidence of Aboriginality
- Provide evidence of full-time enrolment in an approved university course at one of the targeted universities
- Provide evidence of housing stress (for this program - housing stress is defined as expending more than 40% of weekly income on accommodation)
- Provide a brief statement outlining why they need a university accommodation grant (less than 600 words)

2.3 Supporting Documents

Applicants must submit the following documentation in addition to a completed application form:

- Evidence of Aboriginality
• Evidence of independent living arrangements (via a rental bond notice, lease agreement or landlord letter)
• Evidence of enrolment in a fulltime university course at one of the three targeted universities
• Evidence of weekly or fortnightly income (pay slip, centrelink forms or bank statement)

Applications are required to be submitted on a prescribed application form, Attachment A.

2.4 Evidence of Aboriginality

The term 'Aboriginal' in these Guidelines includes Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

Evidence of Aboriginality can be provided in any of the following three ways:

1. Letter from a Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC)

The NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (as amended) states that to be a member of a Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC), a person must be an Aboriginal person. Under this option, a person seeking housing assistance will need to provide a letter of confirmation on LALC letterhead and signed by either the LALC Chairperson or Chief Executive Officer, confirming acceptance as a member of a LALC.

2. Letter from a registered Aboriginal Organisation

The Letter of Confirmation must be from a registered Aboriginal community organisation that is:

• an Aboriginal association incorporated under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 (formerly the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976), OR
• an incorporated Aboriginal community organisation where all the members of the organisation are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both, AND

on the organisation's letterhead, AND stating the person is of Aboriginal descent, identifies as an Aboriginal person, and is accepted by the Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal person, AND stating the person’s Aboriginality has been confirmed and resolved at a duly constituted meeting of the organisation’s governing body, AND signed in accordance with the rules of the organisation.

3. Statutory Declaration

If neither of the first two confirmation options is possible, a Statutory Declaration can be used but only in circumstances where an individual is unable to provide evidence from a Local Aboriginal Land Council or Aboriginal Corporation.

The statutory declaration MUST:

• declare that that the individual is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent, identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and is accepted by such in community in which they live or previously lived, and
• explain why neither of the letter of confirmation options were possible to obtain.

Evidence must also be provided to assist in the determination of Aboriginality and this includes, but not limited to:

• Details of the client’s Aboriginal family i.e. names and where they are from (land) and/or what they are doing about finding their family details/history, and
• An explanation as to why confirmation from a LALC or Aboriginal community organisation could not be provided, and
• Letters of support from Aboriginal community members, Aboriginal organisations (on the organisation’s letterhead) or government agencies that the client is known to. All such letters must be signed by Aboriginal people.

The housing provider may request additional information or seek further clarification regarding information provided in the Statutory Declaration.

2.5 Forms of evidence relating to independent living
• A rental bond notice
• A letter from a landlord outlining weekly rent payable
• A rental/lease agreement or contract outlining weekly rent payable

2.6 Forms of evidence relating to income
• A payslip
• A bank account statement and
• Documented evidence of Centrelink payments (if applicable)

2.7 Referee Reports
Applicants must supply the details of two referees when submitting their application. A referee must be able to comment substantively on the applicant’s compliance with the eligibility criteria. The referees cannot be family members.

3 Assessment Process

3.1 Assessment of the University Accommodation Grants
Applications will be assessed by a panel that is chaired by the Aboriginal Housing Office and includes representation from each of the three managing universities.

1. The grants will be open for advertisement for 28 days
2. The applications will be assessed by a Selection Panel convened by the AHO
3. The Selection Panel will convene within 14 days of the closing date for grant applications
4. The Selection Panel will apply a merit based scoring system to select successful applicants
5. The Selection Panel will select 7 successful applicants from each of the 3 targeted universities
6. All applicants will receive a written letter from the AHO, confirming the outcome of their grant application, within 28 days of the Selection Panel’s determination
4 Payment of the University Accommodation Grants

4.1 AHO payment to the University
The AHO will pay each university $86,625.00 up front, comprising $70,000 for seven $10,000.00 grants, plus GST on that amount, plus a management fee of $9,625 (GST inclusive) to cover expenses associated with managing the grants (calculated at the rate of 12.5% of the total GST inclusive grant payment).

4.2 University payment to the Accommodation Provider
- The grant recipient must provide evidence of an accommodation specific expense before any payment is made. (Evidence may be in the form of a rental bond notice, rental ledger, or letter from the landlord/real estate agent).
- The university and student will enter into a simple, one page agreement outlining the grant terms and conditions. Each managing university will design their own agreement.
- The university will pay the funds directly to the landlord or real estate agent on behalf of the student. The student does not receive a monetary payment, rather it. The AHO suggests that the payments be made via instalments to minimise risk.
- In cases where university accommodation is sourced on site, the university will exercise discretion regarding the transfer of monies. (For example, the university might elect to allow the student to uptake free accommodation for an equivalent period of time on campus and retain the grant funds).

5 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Role of the Universities
The universities will be required to deliver the following outputs:
- To attract applications to the program through targeted advertising of the grants
- To link new students with culturally appropriate support services available within the university
- To target existing students that qualify for the program
- To collect relevant data on students participating in the program
- To provide bi-monthly reporting data as prescribed in the funding and performance agreement
- To participate in the selection of successful applicants through the assessment process
- To meet with the AHO on a monthly basis via telephone throughout the duration of the program
- To conduct pre and post surveys with the students to inform case study examples
- To ensure that grant recipients expend the funds in accordance with the program guidelines

5.2 Role of the Aboriginal Housing
The AHO will support the universities through the provision of the following:
- A 12.5% management fee (equating to $9,625, GST inclusive)
- An application form for applicants
- Develop and distribute prescribed and streamlined reporting templates
• Design and make up of the pre and post student surveys

5.3 Obligations of grant recipients
Students who have submitted a successful application in the approved form along with all required supporting documents (see sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7) and who are awarded a grant:
• Will be required to enter into a signed agreement with the managing university (see section 4.2)
• Will be required to provide evidence of an accommodation specific expense before any payment is made (see section 4.2 for details as to how the managing university will pay the relevant accommodation provider)
• May be required to provide receipts to acquit the grant funds (upon request only)
• Will be required to participate in a pre and post survey

6 Performance Management
Each of the managing universities will be required to provide data at regular intervals throughout the duration of the pilot program, as stipulated in the table below.

6.1 Performance Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency of reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of applications that each university attracted through advertisement of the grants.</td>
<td>Sorted by age, gender, course type, geographic origin</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>To be supplied within 6 weeks of the closing date for grant applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target – 15 applications from each location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student retention rates</td>
<td>Number of students that remain in full time study for a minimum of 12 months beyond the grant payment. Percentage of students that remain in full time study for 12 months beyond the grant payment.</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>To be supplied 12 months after the date that the grants were awarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target - 85% retention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on the student</td>
<td>Post grant surveys</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Post surveys to be completed and supplied to AHO 4 weeks after 12 months has lapsed since the grant was awarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of accommodation sourced by students</td>
<td>Sorted by dwelling type</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>To be provided on the 5th bi-monthly reporting period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7 Special Requirements

7.1 Cultural support for new students
A key element of the program is effectively supporting new Aboriginal students in a culturally appropriate way. Each of the selected universities has a dedicated Cultural Unit that will be required to provide support to grant recipients. There is also potential for the Cultural Units to actively assist students in preparing their applications for the grants.

7.2 Compliance with the spirit of the program
It will be critical for the universities to ensure that all grant funds are expended within the scope of the grant guidelines. The grant guidelines state that all grant funds are to be spent exclusively on accommodation expenses only.

7.3 Case study examples to support evaluation
The AHO would like to include case study examples in the evaluation scope. The application form will collect baseline information and details on each student. It will be necessary for the universities to undertake post grant surveys with the grant recipients in order to inform the case study examples. Successful outcomes will also be useful to promote the program if it is eventually continued or expanded.