New Colombo Plan Mobility Program
2026 Round
Advice to Applicants

This **Advice to Applicants** provides information to assist applicants for the 2026 round of the New Colombo Plan (NCP) Mobility Program. The Guidelines (available on GrantConnect) outline eligibility requirements, assessment criteria and how funding is allocated and administered. **Before applying please ensure that you read the Guidelines in full.**

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, announced the next phase of the NCP on 30 July 2025 to ensure the program delivers on the Australian Government's objective to strengthen the Indo-Pacific capability and Asia literacy of Australians. The Foreign Minister provided information on the next phase, including reforms, here. Key updates to the 2026 Mobility Program Guidelines aim to ensure consistency with these reforms and other policy priorities and can be found at Attachment 2.

Priority areas for selection and assessment criteria

As outlined in the 2026 NCP Mobility Guidelines priority in selection (as per section 2.2.1) will be given to:

Priority Host Locations

Projects which are to be undertaken in the Pacific NCP Host locations outlined in section 6.1 of the 2026 Mobility Guidelines. These priority locations for the 2026 round align with Australian Government foreign policy priorities for engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly with Pacific host locations, and will be reviewed annually.

Applications are welcome from all other eligible host locations where the application demonstrates how participants will develop Indo-Pacific capability.

Travel cannot proceed to locations for which Smartraveller advice is 'Do not travel' or 'Reconsider your need to travel' at the time of departure (see Guidelines Section 2.4 (c)).

Applicants must not propose programs to a host location (or a region within a host location) with such a travel advice, except where that advice is likely to be short-term, for example due to the temporary impact of a natural disaster.

Vietnamese Language Pathways

Projects which create Vietnamese language pathways.

Asian Language focus

Projects where the main focus is for the study of an Asian language, as outlined in section 6.1 of the 2026 Mobility Guidelines. See below for the definition of what meets the language target.

Definition of applications that may meet the language target

In the 2026 round, all NCP Programs (including the NCP Mobility Program) will have a language target set at 15 per cent. This means that the aim is to award 15 percent of all funding in the NCP Mobility Program to projects that meet the definition of the language target. To meet the language target, 50 per cent or more of the planned mobility experience duration will need to be language acquisition and learning through study of the official or commonly spoken language (other than English) of an eligible primary NCP host location, where the mobility project is to be undertaken via face-to-face mode.

For projects that meet this definition, universities will be asked to check a box on the application form confirming this and answer a supplementary question explaining how the project meets this definition along with specifying the language that will be studied.

Transnational Education

From the 2026 Round, universities will be able to propose Australian transnational education campuses as a host location as part of their applications. This should only be where participants will have a genuinely locally immersive experience. As examples, this may include Asian language learning or delivery of a program codesigned with a local organisation at an Australian transnational education campus.

How to address the assessment criteria

Applications are assessed on their merits. A satisfactory score must be achieved on each selection criterion at a minimum for a project to be successful. Please refer to section 6.2 of the Guidelines for a full description of the criteria.

Criterion 1 – Alignment

Applicants should consider:

- How the project aligns with Australia strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific, especially a priority Pacific host location. Higher scores will be provided to applications that focus on Pacific locations and which have a strong focus on building the Indo-Pacific capability of participating students. For project applications in Pacific host locations, applicants are encouraged to read the *Australia-Pacific Regional Development Partnership Plan 2025-29* to understand Australia's priorities in the Pacific.

    Applications which demonstrate Indo-Pacific capability building and align with Australia's strategic priorities to non-Pacific host locations are still encouraged.

    OR

- How the project will focus on Vietnamese language learning and contribute to building language pathways and future connections with Vietnam. Higher scores will be given to projects that can clearly articulate these pathways and future connections, however, those that can demonstrate a project with quality Vietnamese language components may also receive higher scores.

    OR

- How the project supports Asian language learning. Higher scores will be given projects that demonstrate a focus on a priority Asian language and the ongoing connections to build proficiency.

<u>At a minimum</u> all applicants will need to demonstrate how the project aligns with Australia's strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific and how the project will build the Indo-Pacific capability of participants.

Criterion 2 – Quality

- Applicants must address all four subitems in this criterion:

  a. **Partnerships** – applicants should demonstrate partnership arrangements in place, higher scores may be given to partnerships that demonstrate that enduring joint activities or innovative approaches. <u>At a minimum</u> all applicants must provide clear partnerships arrangements and provide a letter from the proposed host organisation indicating in-principle approval to hosting the project.

  b. **Project Outcomes** – applicants must describe the project's intended outcomes and how they will be measured. Highest scores will be given to those with realistic and measurable project outcomes in all assessment areas, such as how the project will build Indo-Pacific capability. Measuring the language learning of participating students, where relevant, should be clearly defined.

  c. **Implementation** – higher scores will be given to applications with clear plans for implementation including budget

  d. **Risk Management** – applicants should clearly articulate how risks will be managed throughout the project. Higher scores will be given to responses that clearly identify location/project specific risks with a nuanced management approach.

Tips for completing the application form

Project title

The project title should be succinct and include the host location, discipline/subject and type of educational activity. For example:

- Fiji Business Internships
- Vietnam Language Immersion
- Vanuatu Nursing Practicum

Project description

While the project description does not contribute to the assessment score, a clear description will help assessors understand the project's objectives, rationale and approach to implementation, including:

a) the activities participating students will undertake
b) how the project will be delivered (including any use of a third party provider)
c) justification for the proposed cost per student (value with money) including an indicative budget, and
d) whether/how the project addresses a priority area for selection

Mobility project grant value

- While there is no maximum project grant value, applicants should consider
  - their ability (considering past performance) to recruit students and utilise all grants within the project term for the desired duration
  - the capacity of host organisation/s to receive/support additional students
  - the amount of Mobility funds the applicant is holding for that host location
- Section 5.2.1 of the grant guidelines provides indicative student grant amounts. Applicants should determine the appropriate value student grant amounts that reflect actual in-location costs and ensure value for money. As per Guidelines, the student grant is intended to contribute, in the first instance, to the cost of a student's international travel and in-location living expenses during the project.

Use of third party providers

Universities may choose to outsource part or all of project implementation, including logistics, to third party providers. Where this is the case, that relationship must be outlined in the Project Description. The Australian university remains responsible for the project, including adherence to policies outlined in the Guidelines by third party providers.

Where a third party provider implements part or all of the project, the Australian university must outline how quality and risk management will be assured and how lasting relationships will be established between the Australian university and overseas partners. Australian universities must carry out due diligence on third party providers before including them in applications.

Third party providers are not considered to be NCP partners as they receive payment for their participation. Nor are third party providers able to be host organisations. If a third party provider is used to implement the project, a host institution in the host location must still be identified. ISEO now allows for the recording of third party providers separately from project partners in funding applications.

Host locations

Applications must nominate <u>one</u> primary host location. It is permissible for components of a project to be undertaken in a secondary location. The secondary location should be the location in which the minority of the mobility project is undertaken (e.g. four of 28 days).

Student grant numbers

Applicants should only seek Mobility grants for the number of students they confidently expect to recruit (based on past demand) and send offshore during the Mobility program term (1 January 2026 to 28 February 2028).

If applicants hold unused funding from previous rounds that they propose to use in 2026, particularly for the same project experience, they should only apply for funding in the 2026 round if both existing and any new round funding can be used for projects within the relevant project term.

Student grant amounts

Within a project, universities may provide grants of varying amounts to different students <u>where their costs to participate differ</u> (see section 5.2.1 of the Guidelines). For example, a rural student may incur additional costs to reach the international departure point.

Such cases require robust record keeping and justification in completion reports. A variation request outlining how grants will be managed to support these students must be submitted and approved before students' departure.

Applicants should proactively address these scenarios in the application.

Budget

In the project description, the applicant must provide a budget, including:

- the number of students participating in the project
- the average cost per student, including breakdown of transport and living costs.

Project partners

Applicants must list the local host institutions, based in the host locations, who will be their project partners. Please note that third party providers are not considered to be NCP project partners as they are paid for their participation. ISEO now allows for the recording of third party providers separately from project partners in funding applications.

Host location

Applicants must provide a letter from the proposed host organisation indicating in-principle approval to hosting the project.

Applicants must exercise due diligence in their choice of partners, including investigating partners' capacity to comply with NCP Guidelines (for example, by having appropriate policies and risk management processes in place).

Applicants should consider how their projects impact local communities. For example, paying to volunteer can lead to demand-driven activities in disadvantaged communities. Applicants whose projects include volunteering overseas should read Smartraveller advice on [responsible volunteering](#).

Attachment 2 - KEY CHANGES IN THE 2026 ROUND

Section in Guidelines	Change	Rationale
2.1	Updates to NCP objectives including a greater emphasis on participants learning Asian languages and undertaking longer-term immersive experiences in the Indo-Pacific, including a new Semester Program for longer term mobility projects	To ensure the next phase of the NCP delivers on the Australian Government's objective to strengthen the Indo-Pacific capability and Asia literacy of Australians
2.2.1, 6.1, 8.1	Changes to the priority areas of selection, including that priority during selection processes will be given to Mobility programs which are to be undertaken in priority host locations, include the study of Vietnamese language, or programs where the main focus is the study of an Asian language.	
2.2.1	Introducing a language learning target across all three program streams (including the NCP Mobility Program), set at 15 per cent in 2026, working towards 25 per cent of NCP participants undertaking language-focused programs by 2028.	
4.2	A new 'who is not eligible to apply' section to reflect the National Redress Scheme.	To ensure the integrity of the NCP Program, including alignment with legislative requirements and the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024*
5.5.1	The removal of Myanmar and Pakistan from eligible host locations	To ensure compliance and consistency with relevant policies and legislation
5.5.3	A requirement for separate applications for similar mobility experience in different locations. A secondary host location is where a project may be partially undertaken with the primary host location. It is not an alternative project delivery location.	
5.8	A new section that allows Mobility projects to be undertaken on Australian transnational education campuses that are able to offer a genuinely immersive experience to students.	To ensure the next phase of the NCP delivers on the Australian Government's objective to strengthen the Indo-Pacific capability and Asia literacy of Australians
6.1	New priority areas for selection, with identified priority locations and Asian languages. Applications for non-priority locations/languages will still be considered.	
6.2	New Assessment Criteria, including (a) alignment with the Australian Government's geographic and sectoral priorities in the Indo-Pacific region, and (b) the overall quality of the application.	

Section in Guidelines	Change	Rationale
12.2	Changes to reporting requirements, including when students are unable to complete their Mobility programs and efforts undertaken by applicants to recoup and return grant funding to DFAT.	To ensure the integrity of the NCP Program, including alignment with legislative requirements and the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024*
12.3	DFAT will only consider variation to a project in limited circumstances.	
12.8	New section on acknowledgement of Australian Government funding through the NCP Program, including use of logos.	To ensure appropriate recognition of Australian Government funding
13	New update to Probity requirements, such as reference to the *National Anti-Corruption Commission Act*, and privacy provisions.	To ensure compliance and consistency with relevant policies and legislation
Glossary	Updates to reflect relevant definitions, including as required under the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024*	