
Terms of Reference

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Independent Grants Panel

Contact

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Overview

About ACCAN

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is the peak body that represents all consumers on communications issues including telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services. ACCAN provides a strong unified voice to industry and government as consumers work towards communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible and available for all.

About the Independent Grants Program

ACCAN's Independent Grants Program ('the Program') is administered as part of ACCAN's funding agreement with the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts in accordance with section 593 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997*.

The Program carries a budget of approximately \$1,350,000 over five years. Generally, one round of the Program will run each calendar year, with funded projects expected to commence on the 1st of July each year. More information about the Program is available from the [Grants section of the ACCAN website](#).

Objectives of the Program

The Program funds projects that work towards ACCAN's vision of **communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible and available for all**. The focus is on creating versatile resources for consumers and a strong evidence base for communications consumer representation. All projects must be aligned with ACCAN's [Strategic Plan](#).

About the Independent Grants Panel

The ACCAN Board supports the continuing operation of an Independent Grants Panel ('the Panel') to make recommendations for funding under the ACCAN Independent Grants Program.

Panel functions

The core responsibility of the Panel is to assess applications to the Program and make recommendations for funding to the ACCAN Board.

The Panel must ensure:

- Grant applications are assessed according to the rules and selection criteria found in the Program [Guidelines](#)
- Grant applications are assessed with consistency and fairness, and consensus is reached on recommendations for funding within budget
- Recommended projects are consistent with [ACCAN's strategic plan](#), are fit to scale and address any potential risks
- The recommendations of the Panel are impartial, appropriately documented and publicly defensible
- Deliberations of the Independent Grants Panel remain confidential.

Board report

At the conclusion of assessing all eligible applications for each Round of funding, the Panel must reach a consensus that meets the reporting requirements of the ACCAN Board. The Panel's report to the Board must prioritise the recommended applicants and outline the cost and timeline of these projects. The report must also state if any conflicts of interest were identified and detail any action taken to ensure the grants assessment process remained impartial and followed the Program Guidelines. The report will include sign off from the Panel that due process has been followed.

Panel membership

The Panel will consist of three (3) members who will be selected and appointed by the ACCAN Board.

The Independent Grants Panel members cannot be Directors on the ACCAN Board (as per [Constitution](#) Clause 31.4.3). The Panel Members must also not be members of an ACCAN Advisory Committee.

Independent Grants Panel members will serve in an individual capacity and will be appointed for their expertise. This is not a representational role and therefore there is no provision for an alternate to attend meetings.

Independent Grants Panel membership expertise will be reviewed in the light of the [Priority Themes](#) determined each year prior to the Guidelines being published. Should the Panel or ACCAN consider there to be a shortfall in skills, the Panel may seek external input on a confidential basis for assistance.

Term of appointment

Appointment to the Independent Grants Panel is for a period **of 3 years**. This will generally involve serving on three Rounds of the Program. Members will be eligible for re-nomination at the discretion of the Board, with a maximum of 2 consecutive terms allowed.

Members may resign at any time by written notice to the ACCAN Board. The Board will appoint a replacement in the event of any vacancy. Replacement appointments will serve out the remaining time of the above term of appointment.

Where, in the opinion of the ACCAN Board, an Independent Grants Panel member is unable to continue to contribute effectively to the functions of the Panel, the Board may terminate that member's appointment.

Availability requirements

To be a member of the Panel, you will need to be available at various intervals between January and July each year.

In addition to reviewing grant applications individually, the Panel generally meets for:

- A one-hour briefing (online) at the beginning of each Round.
- Two assessment days to discuss proposals and agree:
 - At Expression of Interest stage: A shortlist of applications to invite to submit a Full Application.
 - At Full Application stage: The projects to recommend to the Board for funding.

The group assessment days are generally held in March and May each year at the ACCAN offices, Sydney. Hybrid or fully virtual attendance can be arranged at the Panel's discretion.

Panellists are expected to participate in videoconferences and/or email discussion as needed to ensure due process is followed.

The timeline for meetings is agreed with Panel members in advance. All members of the Independent Grants Panel must be present for a quorum unless by reason of a conflict of interest a member has stood aside for consideration of a specific application.

Conflicts of interest

Where there is a potential conflict of interest identified during the process it must be declared. There are [Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#) in place for the Panel, which state that an appropriate ACCAN representative will decide on action taken once a potential conflict of interest is declared. If it is considered to be a remote connection that will not materially affect the recommendation it must be noted in the Panel Meeting minutes and the ACCAN Board Report along with the action taken to ensure the process remains impartial. If a conflict is identified, then the Panel member must not be a part of the deliberations or assessment of the relevant application.

Confidentiality

Panel members will be required to respect the confidentiality of the grant application process. Members must take all reasonable measures to protect from unauthorised use or disclosure, information provided to them by the ACCAN Secretariat and indicated by ACCAN to be "confidential", or information that members ought to have known to be "confidential". This

confidentiality clause shall survive the expiration or termination of members of the Independent Grants Panel.

Sitting fees

ACCAN will provide sitting fees for members of the Independent Grants Panel in accordance with ACCAN's Sitting Fee Policy. The rate of sitting fees is set at \$700 for each assessment meeting.

Travel expenses

ACCAN will arrange and pay for travel, accommodation and expenses incurred in attending any face-to-face meetings in accordance with the ACCAN Travel Policy.

ACCAN secretariat

ACCAN's role in relation to the Independent Grants Panel is to:

- Co-ordinate the application process, establish the eligibility of applications, and forward eligible applications to the Panel for assessment.
- Provide appropriate meeting resources and secretariat support including taking minutes so the Panel can conduct its work effectively.
- Set dates and at the relevant times book venues or open online meeting rooms as appropriate.
- Liaise for any external advice.
- Fulfil the reporting requirements to the ACCAN Board ensuring the report indicates (based on the Grant Guidelines) whether each application:
 - was eligible or not and why;
 - was successful or not and why; and
 - if any relevant comments or restrictions need to be noted
- Co-ordinate the implementation of the recommendations of the Panel once they are approved by the Board.

The ACCAN Secretariat will convene Panel meetings to provide input and support for the Panel.

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communication consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.

ACCAN is committed to reconciliation that acknowledges Australia's past and values the unique culture and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. [Read our RAP.](#)
