



# Visitor First Experience Fund

Program guidelines

March 2023





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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport respectfully acknowledges and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, winds and waters where we live, learn and work.

We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions and the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the nation.

We will walk together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations in our journey to enrich lives and strengthen community connections.

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# 1. Fund overview

The Visitor First Experience Fund (VFE) is a new \$3 million funding program supporting the Queensland Government's [Towards Tourism 2032](#) strategy, a plan to deliver uniquely Queensland experiences in step with the needs of visitors, communities, and the environment. The funding is available to bring forward the delivery of new and enhanced tourism-related projects.

The aim of the Fund is to strengthen Queensland's tourism industry and deliver economic benefits to Queensland through enhancing the state's tourism offerings.

Tourism businesses planning significant experiences and/or infrastructure projects are invited to apply.

VFE will support the development of new and enhanced tourism products and experiences that may include a contemporary refresh of existing products and experiences, diversifying the tourism offering in a region and/or improving the customer experience.

VFE will be offered under a two-stage application process. An Expressions of Interest (EOI) will be open to eligible applicants for a four-week period. After review and assessment of eligibility, selected applicants may be invited to submit a Full Business Case (FBC) detailing the project. Applicants will then have up to six (6) weeks to prepare and submit the FBC application.

The announcement of successful projects is forecast for August 2023.

The key priority of the VFE is to bring forward new projects that can be completed by June 2024. However, consideration may be applied to projects that can be completed by June 2025, where applicants can demonstrate significant tourism benefits.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that the projects will:

- be completed by June 2024 as a priority and by no later than June 2025
- be implementation ready and can commence within three months of funding approval
- build sustainable new and improved tourism experiences and products that diversify Queensland's tourism offering
- support new jobs in both construction/implementation stage and create on-going operational jobs
- increase overnight visitor numbers and expenditure
- deliver economic benefits to Queensland
- be delivered in line with a key priority as defined in the Queensland Government's [Towards Tourism 2032](#) strategy.

## 2. Available funding

VFE has a total funding pool of \$3 million (GST exclusive) available for significant tourism experience development projects that are implementation ready and can commence within three months of funding approval. The minimum funding per project is \$250,000 up to a maximum of \$1 million (GST exclusive).

To support confidence and attract private sector investment, applicants must provide co-funding contribution of 75% of the project's eligible project costs, i.e., a ratio of 3:1 investment.

For example, applicants applying for a \$4 million project would contribute \$3 million of their own funds to receive the maximum funding of \$1 million. Projects of a value higher than \$4 million are still eligible to apply and require costs over the grant value to be covered by the applicant.

The Funding Agreement will set out the terms of funding. Payments will be distributed in arrears, aligned to negotiated and agreed Milestones in the agreement and the satisfactory completion of Milestone activities and deliverables (refer to 6.1).

## 3. Eligibility

An eligible tourism product and/or experience project must meet the eligibility criteria.

### 3.1 Applicant eligibility

To be eligible to apply for funding, an organisation must:

- be an established tourism business operating in Queensland (e.g., for-profit entity) \*
- have an Australian Business Number (ABN), an Australian Company Number (ACN) or exemption from these
- be registered for GST.

\* Tourism-related operators from other jurisdictions who are actively establishing businesses within Queensland may be considered where applicants can demonstrate significant tourism benefits.

Applications will not be accepted from local government agencies, community groups, Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO) or economic development agencies.

Applicants that do not meet the mandatory eligibility criteria identified in these guidelines will be deemed ineligible.

If a consortium submits an application, one eligible organisation must be the lead partner and be responsible for execution of the Funding Agreement, contract Milestones (progress

reports) and project delivery including financial and project acquittal. Evidence of involvement and support of consortium partners, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), should be provided as part of any joint application.

### 3.2 Project eligibility and funding priorities

Projects must be completed by June 2025, however priority will be given to projects which can be completed by June 2024 and strongly align to key tourism strategies and priorities aimed at growing Queensland's tourism industry. For more information see the [Towards Tourism 2032](#) strategy.

In addition, projects which link to other government strategies and priorities will be highly regarded such as [The Year of Accessible Tourism](#) and [First Nations tourism](#).

VFE is designed to support product and experience projects involving the development of significant new and improved tourism experiences and infrastructure that will deliver sustainable benefits to Queensland and specifically to assist tourism-related businesses to bring forward new projects that are implementation ready. The aim is to support projects that can commence within three months of funding approval with design, engineering, Development Approvals, owner's consent and other requirements in place or progressed to an advanced stage at the time of application.

Projects which comprise a standalone element or individual stage of a larger project, which can be delivered ahead of the completion of a larger project within the eligible grant guidelines, will also be considered. The element or individual stage must be an activity which can be launched and made available to visitors and is not reliant upon completion of a larger project to generate immediate direct visitor benefits.

Priority will be given to projects that can demonstrate:

- alignment to the key priorities of the [Towards Tourism 2032](#) strategy such as tech wonderment, nature-based tourism, regenerative tourism and authentic culture
- project completion by June 2024
- access to or secured co-funding contribution, at the time of application.

### 3.3 Eligible and ineligible project costs

Project costs usually include a combination of eligible and ineligible expenditure (capital and non-capital). Applicants will be responsible for all ineligible project costs (non-capital) and any eligible (capital) project costs over and above the approved funding amount including any contribution proposed by the applicant.

Eligible project costs may include:

- costs relating to the creation of an experience, including infrastructure development
- new equipment and/or technology to enhance the tourism experience
- value-adding to existing experiences with additional activities
- capital construction costs (including all site works required as part of the construction)

- costs of construction-related labour (external contractors), materials, equipment hire
- project management costs (external contractors) for time directly related to managing the construction of approved works but excluding executive duties and overhead charges
- costs relating to the recording of progress, e.g., photography, time-lapse video

Ineligible costs may include:

- works that are deemed as maintenance for existing infrastructure
- activities that have commenced or been completed prior to approval of funding
- all preparatory work, such as planning, feasibility studies, conceptual design, obtaining regulatory approvals, community consultation, and compliance processes undertaken
- tender processes
- marketing, advertising and promotional activities including websites
- engagement and hiring permanent employees not associated with the project
- buying or leasing real estate, including the land on which the infrastructure is constructed
- costs relating to the delivery of major, local and/or regional events
- soft infrastructure such as décor, furniture, removable fixtures and equipment
- infrastructure that is temporary in nature and/or with a limited installation period.

Note: This list is not exhaustive. Other costs may be ineligible where it is determined they do not directly support the project outcomes or the objectives of the program.

Applicants must ensure they have adequate funds and resources to meet the costs of any ineligible expenditure associated with the project.

## 4. Application process

VFE application process has two stages: an Expression of Interest (EOI) followed by an invitation to submit a Full Business Case (FBC).

Funding amounts will range from a minimum of \$250,000 to a maximum of \$1 million with one application allowed per project. Applicants must contribute at least 75% of the project's eligible project costs. However, projects of a value higher than \$4 million, require costs over the grant value to be covered by the applicant.

Eligible applicants with projects that address the program's project eligibility and priorities can submit an EOI online through the [SmartyGrants portal](#).

### 4.1 Expression of Interest (EOI)

The EOI application form includes the submission of applicant details to verify applicant eligibility and the proposed project's alignment to key criteria. This will include a brief outline of the project and its tourism benefits, preliminary budget and cashflow, current planning

status and other information to show how the project meets the funding criteria – *refer 5.2 for details*.

The EOI form will be available on [SmartyGrants](#), linked from the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport's [website](#).

Applicants may submit an online EOI from Thursday 23 March 2023 to Monday 24 April 2023.

## 4.2 Full Business Case (FBC)

EOI applications will be assessed and eligible applicants, with projects that meet the program key priorities and funding criteria, may be invited to submit a FBC application.

FBC applications will need to include a detailed project plan, company financials for the past two years, evidence of 75% co-funding contribution towards the delivery of the project and confirming any financial contributions from other parties, evidence of land ownership or landowner's consent and, where applicable, Native Title.

Applications will also need to provide documentation that supports statements made in the application such as quotes, permits, permit applications, other operational requirements, evidence the project is implementation ready and able to commence construction within three months of funding approval - *refer 5.3 for details*.

FBC applications and supporting documentation will be submitted through the [SmartyGrants online portal](#) and a link will be provided to applicants that are invited to proceed from the EOI stage.

Applicants invited to submit a FBC submission will have a period of 6 weeks to submit.



## 5. Assessment process

Applications and proposed projects will be assessed by a panel chaired by DTIS comprising representatives from DTIS and Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ).

The assessment panel may seek tourism advice and expertise from other government agencies and regional tourism organisations during the assessment process. Applicants and projects will be subject to independent due diligence including financial and economic assessments.

All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their EOI and FBC application.

### 5.1 Assessment

EOI applications will be checked for eligibility and alignment to the funding priorities and government strategies, as well as the requirement to complete the project no later than June 2025 with priority given to projects which can be completed by June 2024. FBC submissions, including supporting information and documentation, will be assessed against the key criteria.

Applications which demonstrate projects that are implementation ready, to be completed by June 2024, and have access to 75% secured co-funding, will receive priority. It is important applicants submit all information and supporting documentation requested, at the time of the submission.

All applicants will be advised, in writing, of the outcome of their EOI application. Applicants invited to submit a FBC will have six weeks to submit their application online.

### 5.2 Expression of Interest (EOI) submission

The focus of the EOI process is for applicants to demonstrate their eligibility and that the proposed project meets the broad objectives of the fund by demonstrating the economic value of the project to the state, alignment to the [Towards Tourism 2032](#) strategy and:

- provides new tourism product/experience (or a standalone element of a larger project)
- will be implementation ready and commence within three months of funding approval
- will be fully completed no later than June 2025 with priority given to projects which can be completed by June 2024
- creates new jobs in both implementation and on-going operational phases
- increases overnight visitor numbers and expenditure
- delivers economic benefits to Queensland.

The provision of information and documents outlining the scope and scale of the project is also required to be submitted, including:

- total cost of the project to meet applicant contribution of 75% of project's eligible costs

- financing of the project with evidence of other sources of funding, as required
- project's implementation readiness – status of current stage
- evidence of ownership (including land tenure)
- evidence of permissions and/or approvals for the project
- statement of benefit to Queensland - projected direct tourism benefits.

### 5.3 Full Business Case submission

FBC applications will need to include:

- a detailed Project Plan which includes:
  - project's objectives and opportunities including economic and tourism benefits i.e., construction and ongoing jobs creation, increased visitation/overnight visitor expenditure
  - a cost benefit analysis or similar information on how the project will deliver a return on investment, including key metrics such as the Net Present Value, Internal Rate of Return and payback period
  - a Gantt chart or detailed delivery/works schedule showing timeframes for all project stages up to and including project completion and implementation methodology
  - cash flow forecast
  - risk assessment and mitigation actions
  - procurement plans including intention to contract Indigenous businesses and/or startups, where applicable
  - asset maintenance/management plans (where applicable) including how the infrastructure will be maintained in a viable and operational state for at least five years after construction
  - evidence of capability to deliver projects of a similar value and scale
- company financials for the past two years, signed by an approved auditor
- evidence of 75% co-funding contribution towards the delivery of the project
- letters confirming financial contributions from other parties, if applicable
- evidence project is implementation ready and able to commence within three months of funding approval with priority for projects that demonstrate completion by 30 June 2024
- evidence of land ownership or landowner's consent and, where applicable, Native Title. *Applicants must disclose any land ownership/access issues including Native Title.*

Applications must include documentation that supports statements made in the application and provide evidence of operational requirements such as permits, permit applications, licences and certifications.

## 5.4 Assessment criteria

All applications will be assessed against the following objectives and assessment criteria.

### Criteria 1: Economic value (40% weighting)

The applicant must demonstrate the proposed project:

- will deliver a value-for-money outcome to the Queensland Government
- has access to an amount which is equal to a minimum of 75% of total funds required
- has total project costs of between \$1 million and \$4 million, or greater, upon completion
- creates jobs through construction period and operational phases
- demonstrates innovative and enhanced tourism products and service delivery
- is technically, commercially, and practically feasible and viable
- has sound project risk assessment and mitigation strategies
- has forecast capital and operating costs, and expected project revenues
- results in a tourism product which can be booked online and be included in travel itineraries
- will extend the length of time visitors will spend in the region
- increases overnight visitor visitation and expenditure
- delivers economic benefits to Queensland.

### Criteria 2: Project readiness (40% weighting)

The applicant must demonstrate the proposed project is implementation ready and can be brought forward with the contribution of government co-funding supporting 25% of the project's eligible costs, up to \$1million.

The application should demonstrate following activities completed or substantially progressed (where applicable):

- extensive plans, sections and elevations of each element of the proposal, in the context of a functional layout of the overall facility
- architectural sketches and/or detailed design drawings and engineer design
- quantity surveyor quotations
- land ownership/tenure
- feasibility studies
- Development Approval(s)
- consideration of environmental impacts, including approvals where applicable
- Native Title agreement with relevant stakeholders, as required
- compliance with cultural heritage duty of care, where applicable
- evidence of local authority &/or economic development support for the project
- all other relevant approvals and operational requirements i.e., permits, permit applications.

### Criteria 3: Risk and cost allocation (20% weighting)

The assessment panel will consider the balance of risk and cost proposed between government and the applicant in determining whether a project presents an acceptable proposition to the State.

The application must demonstrate the applicant's capacity to undertake and deliver the project, in line with the Program Guidelines, with evidence of experience delivering projects of similar scope and scale highly regarded.

Proposals which present a lower risk proposition to government will have a greater likelihood of successfully satisfying this criterion.

## 6. Funding agreement

Successful applicants will be notified, in writing, with a written offer of financial assistance. If the applicant accepts the offer, they will be required to enter into a legally binding contract with DTIS acting on behalf of the State of Queensland.

The agreement will provide details on general and specific conditions associated with the delivery of the approved project including commencement and completion dates.

Key features of the Funding Agreement will include:

- the scope of the approved project
- start and end date of the agreement
- Milestone deliverables (progress reports) and dates
- funding amount and payment terms
- eligible and ineligible costs
- applicant's obligation to acknowledge Queensland Government support
- record-keeping requirements
- reporting and financial acquittal requirements.

Successful grant recipients will be required to execute the Funding Agreement and commence the project within three months from the date of the funding announcement.

An example of the terms and conditions of a standard DTIS contract is available [online](#).

### 6.1 Funding payments

VFE payments will be distributed in alignment with negotiated and agreed Milestones in the Funding Agreement and require the submission of regular acquittal reports which demonstrate the satisfactory completion of Milestone activities and deliverables.

VFE payments may be made in arrears (as a reimbursement of eligible capital costs incurred) and paid on the basis that any agreed matched cash amount has been contributed by the applicant at the time of payment claim.

VFE payment of the final grant instalment, up to the maximum approved funding amount, will be paid upon acceptance of the Final Report demonstrating the project has been satisfactorily completed in accordance with the approved Project Plan and the provision of a valid tax invoice by the recipient.

## 6.2 Reporting requirements

Projects are monitored through regular progress and financial reporting aligned to negotiated Milestones within the Funding Agreement. In addition, photographic evidence may be requested to support claims made.

Templates are provided to assist with financial reporting. All reporting, including the final acquittal, are completed online via the [SmartyGrants portal](#). Links to the appropriate forms and auto-generated reminders are emailed to recipients approximately one month prior to the Milestone due date, per the Funding Agreement.

Grant recipients will be expected to report on:

- progress against agreed project Milestones
- expenditure of grants funds and the recipient's agreed financial co-contribution to the project.

Grant recipients are required to keep all project related invoices and provide evidence of payment of invoices. All substantiation documents including invoices, receipts, permits, certificates, and photos are to be uploaded to the [SmartyGrants online form](#) prior to its submission.

## 7. Key dates

The following VFE dates are indicative only and subject to change by DTIS\*.

Activity	Date
Program announcement	Thursday 23 March 2023
Expression of Interest (EOI) open	Thursday 23 March 2023
Expression of Interest (EOI) close	Monday 24 April 2023
Full Business Case (FBC) invitations	from Monday 15 May 2023
Full Business Case (FBC) submissions close	Monday 26 June 2023
Funding Announcement	August 2023

\* Key dates - changes to these dates are found on the [department's website](#).

## 8. Privacy

The Queensland Government collects and collates information from the EOI and FBC application forms to assess applications for the Visitor First Experience Fund (VFE). Only authorised departmental officers and approved grant assessors have access to this information.

Applicants should note that broad details of successful projects, agreed outcomes, project progress and the level of funding awarded may be published by the Queensland Government. Some information may be used to promote funded projects.

Personal information will not be disclosed to any other third party without consent, unless required by law or for the purposes of *Information Privacy Act 2009*. For audit purposes, the Queensland Government is required to retain the applications and other supplied supporting material. The provisions of the *Right to Information Act 2009* apply to documents in the possession of the Queensland Government.

## 9. Complaints

All VFE decisions are made in relation to applications are final. Under the department's Complaints Management Policy, DTIS has established processes for dealing with complaints and is committed to effectively managing concerns in a fair, transparent and timely manner. If an applicant has any concerns in relation to the application or assessment process, a formal complaint may be submitted to the department by emailing [GrowingTI@DTIS.qld.gov.au](mailto:GrowingTI@DTIS.qld.gov.au).

## 10. Further information

If you require further information about the VFE or clarification of the Program Guidelines please contact the department by emailing [GrowingTI@DTIS.qld.gov.au](mailto:GrowingTI@DTIS.qld.gov.au).