Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

Attraction and Retention Grants to Support the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce in WA 2026-27 – Round 2

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Guidelines

Closing Date and Time: 3.00pm (AWST), Friday 22 January 2027

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Guidelines

1 About the Attraction and Retention Grants to Support the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce in WA

In 2025, the State Government committed $3 million over four years to support the attraction and retention of early childhood educators across Western Australia.

The Attraction and Retention Grants Support Early Childhood Workers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), Family Day Care (FDC) and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) sectors in WA (the Grant Program) will provide $750,000 per annum from financial year 2025-26 to 2028-29, with grants of up to $25,000 per annum available to ECEC, FDC and OSHC services, to attract and retain educators throughout WA.

2 Background Information

The ECEC, FDC and OSHC sectors play a vital role in supporting children, families, and communities across WA, but face persistent challenges, particularly in attracting and retaining qualified staff in regional areas.

In 2026, a total of $750,000 in grant funding was awarded in the first round of the Attraction and Retention Grants for Early Childhood Workers in the ECEC and OSHC Sectors in WA.

The 2025-26 successful grant recipients represented services located across the State including Perth metropolitan regions (East Metro, North-West Metro, South-East Metro and South-West Metro) and regional Western Australia, including the Great Southern, South-West, Goldfields-Esperance, Kimberley, Mid-West, Peel, Pilbara, Gascoyne and Wheatbelt.

In 2026, Early Childhood services continue to face significant workforce pressures, with difficulties attracting and retaining high-quality permanent and qualified staff. Many Early Childhood Services rely heavily on casual or part-time staff. This reliance contributes to high staff turnover, reduced continuity for children and families, and added compliance pressures.

Legislated child-educator ratios are a critical safeguard that supports children’s safety, wellbeing and learning outcomes. These requirements also mean that workforce shortages immediately translate into reduced capacity.

Key workforce challenges currently impacting the ECEC, FDC and OSHC sectors in WA include:

- Difficulty attracting permanent staff, with most services reliant on casual staff, leading to reduced workforce stability and inconsistency in care.
- High turnover, leading to reduced continuity of care and pressure on service leadership to constantly recruit and induct new staff.

- Insufficient permanent qualified educators, including diploma-qualified staff required for compliance.
- Limited career pathways and lack of professional development tailored to the ECEC workforce.
- High costs of training and qualifications, discouraging people from joining the sector.
- Housing shortages in regional towns, making it harder to recruit and retain staff willing to relocate.

In addition to these systemic workforce challenges, ECEC, FDC and OSHC services in regional WA face further pressures linked to their location and community context, including:

- Housing shortages and high cost of living in regional towns, making relocation and retention difficult.
- Geographic isolation, reducing access to a qualified workforce and professional learning opportunities.
- Limited relief staff availability, increasing the risk of service closures or non-compliance.
- Community expectations and close personal ties in small towns, which can place additional pressure on educators.

The Grant Program aims to support local solutions to local challenges. Examples of projects that may be developed to address workforce issues include:

- Local Career Pathways:
    - Partnering with local schools, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and universities to create career pathways (for example school-based traineeships, practicums and work experience in ECEC and OSHC).
    - Promoting ECEC and OSHC as a sustainable career option, particularly in regional towns, through targeted campaigns.
    - Initiatives that promote FDC as a career option and support prospective educators to enter the sector, particularly in regional and remote communities.
- Professional Development and Leadership:
    - Delivering tailored professional development opportunities for ECEC and OSHC, including scholarships, mentoring, and leadership training.
    - Providing financial and logistical support for staff to complete ECEC and OSHC-specific qualifications and training.
- Improving Attraction and Retention:
    - Introducing retention incentives such as bonuses, recognition programs, and long-service awards.
    - Reducing barriers to becoming or remaining a Family Day Care educator by supporting ongoing professional development requirements.

- Address Regional Living Pressures:
  - Providing subsidised housing or relocation packages, in partnership with local governments or community housing providers.
  - Providing short-term housing support (for example rental subsidies, temporary accommodation, or assistance with relocation costs).
- Strengthen Sector Collaboration and Support in Regional Communities:
  - Building regional ECEC, FDC and OSHC networks to reduce isolation and improve service stability, share staffing resources, and provide peer-to-peer mentoring.

3 Grant Program Aims

The aim of the Grant Program is to fund initiatives that strengthen the attraction and retention of educators, with a particular focus on services located in regional communities, contributing to:

- Building a sustainable, high-quality ECEC, FDC and OSHC workforce across Western Australia.
- Increasing attraction of new educators through local pathways, traineeships, and partnerships with schools, TAFE, and universities.
- Supporting retention by improving workforce stability, recognition and professional development opportunities tailored to ECEC, FDC and OSHC.
- Addressing regional barriers such as housing shortages, geographic isolation, and professional isolation through locally driven solutions.
- Expanding access to qualifications and training, including support for diploma-level and OSHC-specific professional development.
- Strengthening collaboration across the sector to reduce isolation, share resources, and foster peer and leadership networks.
- Building Western Australia's evidence base on effective workforce attraction and retention strategies for the ECEC, FDC and OSHC sectors, particularly in regional and remote contexts.

4 Target Program Objectives

Through the Grant Program, funded initiatives may contribute to broader objectives, including:

- Creating increased awareness and understanding of ECEC, FDC and OSHC as a viable and rewarding career, particularly in regional areas.
- Reducing barriers to attraction and retention of qualified educators, including addressing workforce instability, professional isolation, and access to training and professional development.

- Enhancing workforce capacity through initiatives that support professional development, leadership and completion of diploma-level or OSHC-specific qualifications.
- Building strategic partnerships with schools, TAFE, universities, and other training providers to strengthen local career pathways and work experience opportunities.
- Partnering with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and regional community groups to enable culturally safe, community-led, and place-based workforce solutions.
- Supporting long-term sustainability of regional ECEC and OSHC services in implementing solutions that improve retention, reduce turnover, and strengthen community engagements.

Not all initiatives funded through the Grant Program are expected to address every outcome; each grant may contribute to one or more of these broader program objectives.

5 Grant Funding Available

A total grant funding pool of **$750,000 (excl. GST)** is available under the Attraction and Retention Grants to Support Early Childhood Workers in the ECEC and OSHC Sectors in WA 2026-27 – Round 2.

Eligible organisations may apply for **up to $25,000 (excl. GST)** for each ECEC, FDC or OSHC service.

Application limits

- Eligible approved providers may submit one application per ECEC, FDC or OSHC service.
- A separate application must be submitted for each service.
- Eligible approved providers may submit a maximum of five applications.

Assessment and funding considerations

- Each application must address the specific circumstances, workforce challenges and needs of the service.
- Applications will be assessed on their individual merits.
- If the number of eligible applications exceeds the available funding, Communities may prioritise funding to support an equitable distribution of grant funding across service types, regions and communities throughout Western Australia.

Applications involving an auspice organisation

An organisation acting as an auspice for an unincorporated organisation may also submit an application for its own organisation and may act as the auspice for more than one unincorporated organisation.

6 Grant Period

For successful organisations, grant funding will be paid in full in financial year 2026-27 upon execution of a Grant Agreement negotiated between both parties, regardless of the length of project duration.

All proposed project start dates are required to be after 1 June 2027.

7 Who Can Apply

To be eligible for funding under this Grant Program, applicants must operate within Western Australia and be one of the following:

- an incorporated not-for-profit community organisation;
- a local government authority (LGA);
- a for-profit organisation; or
- an unincorporated organisation or community group applying through the auspice of an incorporated body or a local government authority.

Not-for-profit organisations

A not-for-profit organisation is an organisation whose governing documents prohibit the distribution of profits or assets to members while operating and on winding up.

Unincorporated organisations

Unincorporated organisations and community groups must apply through an eligible incorporated not-for-profit organisation or local government authority acting as an auspice.

For further information, refer to Section 9 Auspice Arrangements (Unincorporated Groups).

8 Who cannot apply for this Grant funding?

Entities not eligible to apply for funding through this program include:

- Commonwealth or State Government agencies;
- individuals;
- unincorporated, community sector organisations (unless applying through an auspice who is an incorporated body, a for-profit organisation or a local government authority); and
- organisations located in the Indian Ocean Territories.

Organisations that have outstanding acquittal or evaluation requirements from previous Communities' grant or program funding are ineligible to apply until the required documentation has been submitted. Please contact Communities if there are any queries about an Organisation's acquittal status.

9 Auspice Arrangements (Unincorporated Groups)

If your organisation is unincorporated, you must apply through an eligible incorporated not-for-profit organisation or LGA acting as your auspice.

The auspice organisation will:

- accept and comply with all terms and conditions of the grant;
- manage the grant funds on behalf of the unincorporated organisation;
- maintain appropriate financial oversight and records;
- support compliance with reporting and acquittal requirements; and
- receive and administer grant payments.

As part of your application, you must upload a signed and dated auspice arrangement letter through SmartyGrants.

To ensure all required information is provided, applicants should use the **Auspice Letter Template** available below.

Download: Auspice Letter Template

Applicants should allow sufficient time to complete the auspice arrangement and supporting documentation before the grant closing date and time.

10 Pre-requisites

To be eligible to apply for a grant through this Grants Program applicants must also meet the below pre-requisite quality standards:

- **For metropolitan-based services**, the service must be rated either provisional, or meeting, or exceeding National Quality Standards
- **For regional-based services**, services must be rated either provisional, or working towards, meeting, or exceeding National Quality Standards.

Applications from providers that do not meet the above pre-requisites will not proceed to qualitative assessment against the advertised Assessment Criteria overpage.

11 Eligible expenses

Funding of up to $25,000 is available to deliver a range of activities including but not restricted to:

Accommodation and Relocation Support (Regional Services Only)

- Subsidised accommodation (rentals)
- Relocation packages

Travel

- Intrastate travel directly related to the project

Training and Professional Development

- Training and professional development activities
- Workshops, seminars and information sessions to recruit prospective educators
- Support for educators to undertake their practicum, including wages for relief staff

Equipment and Resources

- Purchase of minor capital equipment to support online learning

Please note: Funding for subsidised accommodation (rentals) and relocation packages is available to regional services only. Metropolitan-based services are not eligible for funding for these activities.

12 Ineligible expenses

Grant funding cannot be used for the following:

Operational and Ongoing Costs

- Operational costs, including insurance, power, water and pool safety checks
- Operational staff wages and salaries

Travel

- Interstate and overseas travel

Duplicate or Otherwise Funded Activities

- Projects that duplicate an existing or similar project or service within the community
- Projects that are typically funded through other sources, such as school activities and sporting or cultural events
- Projects that could be delivered under an existing service agreement or grant agreement with Communities

Prizes, Gifts and Sponsorships

- Purchase of prizes or gifts
- Visa sponsorships

Metropolitan Accommodation and Fuel Subsidies

- Housing or fuel subsidies for metropolitan-based services and locations

13 Examples of Projects Eligible for Grant Funding

- Partnerships between Local Government Authorities to establish a grant pool for professional development to be used in the ECEC, FDC or OSHC sector across a regional area.
- A professional development program including workshops and online learning modules for the educators working within the sector.
- A promotional campaign to advertise for qualified educators;
- In regional communities, provision of a housing subsidy or providing subsidised accommodation to offset the high cost of rentals.

14 Assessment Criteria

All proposed projects will need to demonstrate value for money given the aim of the project, number of participants and expected outcomes, including provision of a clear, realistic budget that includes verified costs for activities that meet the Grant Program Aims and Target Program Outcomes.

Applications will be assessed on value for money, and against the below criteria:

1. The extent to which the project addresses workforce issues.
2. Project outcomes are clearly defined and achievable.
3. Partnerships with a range of community organisations, ECEC, FDC or OSHC services involved in the development of the project planning and delivery.
4. Evidence of sound planning and demonstrated ability to manage the project.

The above criteria have equal weighting, and the application will be assessed on its merit in its entirety.

All information provided in the Application Form, and any supporting attachments, will be reviewed by an independent evaluation panel against the assessment criteria outlined above.

After meeting the above assessment criteria, Communities may also prioritise applications with consideration to the following:

- Funding a range of projects across WA, including regional and remote areas.
- Funding a range of service-types, including newly established OSHC services delivered on school sites as outlined in the WA Government’s 2025 election commitment.

15 How to Apply

1. Read these Guidelines thoroughly.
2. Complete the online Application Form in SmartyGrants.
3. Upload any required supporting documents.
4. Ensure the application is reviewed and approved by the organisation's authorised delegate.
5. Submit the completed application through SmartyGrants before the advertised closing date and time.

16 Closing Date and Time

Closing Time: 3.00pm (AWST)

Closing Date: Friday, 22 January 2027

Applications must be submitted on SmartyGrants by the advertised closing date and time to be eligible for assessment.

Late applications will not be accepted, as the SmartyGrants portal will automatically close at the advertised closing time. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit applications well before the deadline to avoid last-minute issues.

Once your application has been submitted through SmartyGrants, you will receive an automated email confirmation acknowledging receipt. This email will include a copy of your submitted application and a reference number for future correspondence.

If you do not receive a confirmation email:

1. Check your junk or spam folder.
2. Log in to SmartyGrants and confirm that your application status shows as submitted.
3. If your application is marked as submitted and you have not received a confirmation email, contact Communities at grants@communities.wa.gov.au for assistance.

17 Outcome Notification

All organisations that apply for funding will be notified in writing of the outcome of their submission in **May 2027.**

18 Successful Applicants

Communities will enter into a Grant Agreement with each successful applicant. An example Grant Agreement, including the relevant terms and conditions, is available for reference.

Successful applicants will be required to:

- enter into and comply with the Grant Agreement;
- undertake and complete the approved project within the agreed timeframe;

- report on activities undertaken, participants and partners involved, lessons learned, project effectiveness, and outcomes achieved;
- provide a certified statement of income and expenditure;
- submit an acquittal report at the completion of the project;
- comply with any reporting requirements, performance measures and reporting templates agreed with Communities prior to commencement of the Grant Agreement; and
- notify Communities of any unspent grant funds. Any unspent funds must be returned to Communities unless otherwise agreed in writing.

19 Grant Program Assistance

If you have any Grant Program queries when completing the application form, please contact the Communities representative below. Please ensure all communication in relation to this Grants Program is directed to this representative only.

Aaron Lee
A/ Procurement Officer, Grants
Telephone: 0403 990 103
Email: grants@communities.wa.gov.au

If contacting by email, please include “Attraction and Retention Grants to Support Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce in WA 2026-27 – Round 2” in the subject line.