

Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program Standing Open Call for Proposals Grant Guidelines

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Section 1: Australia's International Cyber and Critical Technology Engagement

Australia's Foreign Minister, Senator The Hon Marise Payne, launched Australia's [International Cyber and Critical Technology Engagement Strategy](#) (the Strategy) on 21 April 2021.

The Strategy sets out Australia's goal for a safe, secure and prosperous Australia, Indo-Pacific region and world enabled by cyberspace and critical technology. It provides a framework to guide Australia's whole-of-government international engagement across the spectrum of cyber and critical technology issues in support of this vision, and the practical actions Australia will take to advance our objectives.

The Strategy identifies three main pillars — Values, Security and Prosperity — to guide Australia's international cyber and critical technology engagement. The Strategy emphasises Australia's commitment to working with international partners to protect and promote our cyber and critical technology interests, including by enhancing our engagement with industry and civil society. More information about the Strategy can be found [here](#).

Like Australia's 2017 International Cyber Engagement Strategy, the 2021 Strategy is global in perspective and regional in focus. It focuses Australia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, including working in partnership with governments on cyber capacity building investments.

Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program

The [United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) recognises digital technologies are vital to ending poverty, expanding access to quality education, achieving gender equality and social inclusion, promoting inclusive economic growth, improving health outcomes and supporting cross-sectoral innovation. Australia recognises that harnessing the opportunities of cyberspace and critical technologies in the Indo-Pacific is crucial for the region's future economic growth and security, and the stability of our shared region.

The Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program (the Program) is Australia's flagship cyber and critical technology capacity building investment in the Indo-Pacific. Through the Program, Australia works with regional partners to strengthen capacity to maximise the opportunities and mitigate the risks related to the use of cyberspace and critical technologies.

First established in 2016 as the Cyber Cooperation Program, it uses Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding for projects that enhance resilience across the spectrum of cyber and critical technologies issues – including cyber security, cybercrime prevention and prosecution, international law and norms, and upholding liberal democratic values and principles in the use of cyberspace and critical technologies. Gender equality and diversity are mainstreamed across Program activities.

On 14 November 2020, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a broad package of economic, development and security measures to support Southeast Asia's recovery from COVID-19. This included:

- AUD11.9 million (2020-21FY to 2023-24FY) to support critical technology standards in Southeast Asia; and
- AUD8.6 million (2020-21FY to 2023-24FY) to strengthen cyber and critical technology resilience in the Mekong sub-region (through the broader AUD232 million Mekong-Australia Partnership).

These elements will be delivered through the Program, which has expanded to include critical technology. This reflects Australia's interests and objectives in cyberspace and critical technology consistent with the Strategy. More information about the Program and existing activities can be found [here](#).

Geographic Focus

The program has a specific focus on Southeast Asia and the Pacific. This reflects Australia's broader strategic policy interests and where we can best leverage resources to maximise development impact.

The Program recognises that the Southeast Asia and Pacific regions are highly diverse, comprising developed, emerging and developing economies, each at a different point in their digital journey. Many Indo-Pacific countries are global leaders at the forefront of production and global exportation of new critical technologies, with expanding digital economies, established cyber security industries and mature cyber policy and governance structures.

However, the region is also home to some of the world's least connected countries, with limited Internet penetration and digital opportunities yet to be fully harnessed. These challenges are particularly acute for Pacific island countries.

Both regions have identified these issues as a priority. The Pacific Island Forum Leaders Boe Declaration, endorsed in September 2018, highlighted cyber security as an emerging security challenge for the region and recognised the need to maximise the protections and opportunities for Pacific infrastructure and societies in the digital age. The 2018 ASEAN Leaders' Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation highlighted the need to build closer cooperation among ASEAN Member States, as well as with other partner countries, on cybersecurity policy development and capacity building initiatives.

The Program works closely with partner countries to ensure funded activities are tailored to the country context and their needs, as well as with likeminded donor countries to complement investments.

Section 2: Standing Open Call for Proposals

The Program's Standing Open Call for Proposals invites prospective partners to submit concepts for capacity building on an ongoing basis. Through the Open Call, the Program seeks to explore and test new, innovative approaches to achieving Program outcomes, with new partners and in diverse sectors.

The Open Call is available to Australian and non-Australian academic institutions, non-government organisations, regional and multilateral organisations and the private sector.

DFAT will manage the administration of the Open Call and outcomes, as well as the direction and selection of activities.

Section 3: Operational Objectives

The Program has a specific geographic focus on ODA-eligible Southeast Asian states and Pacific island countries. Activities are focused at the bilateral level (Indonesia, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Samoa) and regionally (ASEAN and Pacific). While the above-mentioned countries are prioritised, the Open Call will consider proposals for other ODA-eligible Southeast Asia or Pacific countries.

In addition to the geographic requirements, proposals must align to the goals and objectives set out in Australia's [International Cyber and Critical Technology Engagement Strategy](#).

The three pillars which guide Australia's engagement on cyber and critical technology are:

1. *Values* – technology is used to uphold and strengthen liberal democratic values
2. *Security* – secure, resilient and trusted technology which fosters international peace and stability
3. *Prosperity* – technology fosters sustainable economic growth and development

Within these three pillars sit 15 thematic chapters. These chapters focus on specific themes and outline the actions Australia will take to protect and promote our interests in these areas. More information on these chapters can be found [here](#).

DFAT welcomes proposals on an ongoing basis for activities which either align to the package of measures to support Southeast Asia's recovery from COVID-19 or one of the Strategy's thematic chapters. The sections below outline the Southeast Asia measures and the thematic chapters that are currently prioritised, noting the Program's commitment to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment priorities through project activities.

Critical technology standards in Southeast Asia

The objective of the critical technology standards investment is to enhance the development and implementation of internationally recognised and industry-led critical technology standards at regional and national levels in countries across Southeast Asia, positioning their economies for the future.

In support of this objective, the Open Call seeks project proposals that address one of the following intermediate outcomes:

- Southeast Asian states shape and implement critical technology standards that foster interoperability, innovation, transparency, diverse markets and security by design;
- Southeast Asian states' coordination on critical technology standards is enhanced and effective; and
- Government, industry and civil society representatives in Southeast Asian states have an increased awareness of the role that international standards play with respect to geopolitical change, technology trajectories and economic advantage.

Cyber and critical technology resilience in the Mekong

The objective of the investment is to strengthen cyber and critical technology resilience in the Mekong by bolstering regional capacity, particularly in telecommunications and critical infrastructure security. This will support a stronger Mekong subregion, a more resilient Southeast Asia region, and an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific. This will also support the objectives of the broader Mekong-Australia Partnership.

In support of this objective, the Open Call seeks project proposals that address one of the following intermediate outcomes:

- Cyber and critical technology policy and legislation in targeted Mekong states is developed and strengthened;
- States in the Mekong region display an effective and enhanced resistance to technology-enabled influence; and
- Secure, transparent and economically viable telecommunications policy and legislation is developed and across the Mekong region.

Online Harms & Safety

Australia seeks to enable a safe and inclusive online environment. More information about Australia's interests in this and the actions we will take can be found in the [Strategy](#).

The Open Call seeks project proposals that contribute to enabling a safe and inclusive online environment, including but not limited to:

- strengthening institutional and societal capacity to identify and assess risks to counter online harms and foster a safe and inclusive online environment;
- research and implementation of findings around online harms and safety, including gender-based abuse online;
- considering the role of legislation and regulatory frameworks in enabling a safe and inclusive online environment; and
- building capacity of partner countries to engage with international mechanisms and technology platforms and providers to notify and remove abhorrent and illegal material present on their services.

Regional Connectivity

Australia seeks to support a connected and prosperous Indo-Pacific region comprised of independent sovereign states enabled by secure and economically viable critical technology. More information about Australia's interests in this and the actions we will take can be found in the [Strategy](#).

The Open Call seeks project proposals that contribute to harnessing connectivity in a safe, secure and sustainable manner, including but not limited to:

- building awareness and assisting in the development of policy and legal frameworks to manage security risks relevant to telecommunications infrastructure (particularly 5G);
- considering regulatory reform approaches to manage telecommunications security, foreign investment, competitiveness and privacy; and
- promoting accessible e-platforms for governance and education.

Disinformation & Misinformation

Australia seeks to build international resilience to digital disinformation, misinformation and its effects. More information about Australia's interests in this and the actions we will take can be found in the [Strategy](#).

The Open Call seeks project proposals that contribute to building international resilience to digital disinformation, misinformation and its effects, including but not limited to:

- building institutional capacity for governments to mitigate the impact of, respond to and manage disinformation and/or misinformation;
- research and implementation of findings around digital disinformation, misinformation and its effects, including impact on vulnerable groups; and
- considering the role of disinformation and/or misinformation in democratic processes.

Theory of Change

The Program has a basic theory of change that focuses on improving human capital and capability to address cyber challenges within the region. DFAT has identified¹ its most successful strategies for generating institutional change as:

- taking an incremental rather than comprehensive approach to improving existing capacities and functions;
- seeking flexible, localised, fit for purpose solutions rather than relying on institutional templates; and
- focusing on issues where there are local constituencies for change that could be mobilised and supported, for example local providers who can assume ownership once a project is complete.

Applicants should ensure their project proposals are guided by the following principles underpinning the Program:

- **Context matters:** The Program takes into account the political, economic and socio-cultural contexts across the various countries and regions in order to provide tailored solutions. It adds value to existing initiatives and works collaboratively with other Australian-funded initiatives and with like-minded organisations and governments to achieve outcomes.

¹ ODE LIS Evaluation, <https://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/Documents/lawjustice-building-on-local-strengths.pdf>, p.48

- **Multi-stakeholder approach:** The Program advocates for a multi-stakeholder approach to internet governance that is inclusive, consensus-based, transparent and accountable in recognition that all stakeholders have valuable contributions to make.
- **Gender equality and diversity:** The Program advocates for gender equality and diversity principles to be applied to all activities and at all relevant stages in the project management cycle. This ensures that gender equality and diversity is actively pursued in activities supported through the Program and that professionalisation of a global cyber workforce promotes technical and leadership opportunities for diverse groups.
- **Sustainability:** The Program promotes lasting impact through approaches that promote counterpart ownership. By working through core delivery partners, it encourages the use of local, private sector and other non-ODA funding to broaden stakeholder buy-in and support for outcomes. Similarly, it uses local systems and processes as a means to strengthen local institutions as a basis for ongoing country-led delivery.
- **Change through diplomacy:** Long-term relationships between Australian and counterpart governments build confidence that will endure beyond the individuals involved in the Program today. The Program informs and sensitises people and governments to the benefits of an open, free and secure Internet, through evidence, technical assistance and influence.
- **Embracing innovation:** Innovation is a critical factor in sustaining an open, free and secure cyberspace. Innovators develop new ways for people to participate and collaborate online. This ensures that cyberspace remains an ever-evolving force for inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. The Program tests and pilots new ideas for achieving outcomes, introducing new and affordable technological platforms, being willing to learn from successes and failures, and bringing successes to scale through support for replication.

Section 4: Selection Criteria

When reviewing the concept notes, the Evaluation Committee will consider the following questions to assess suitability for funding:

- Does the proposal pursue Australia's national interest?
- Does the proposal have a positive impact on promoting growth and reducing poverty?
- Does the proposal take advantage of Australia's value-add and leverage?
- Is the proposal value-for-money and focused on results?

Project proposals will be scored according to the below scale:

Score	Rating Scale
5	Very Good: Satisfies criteria in all areas. The activity is sound and represents low risk.
4	Good: Satisfies criteria in almost all areas. The activity is workable and well substantiated in key areas. The activity is low risk and any residual risks can be managed.
3	Adequate: on balance satisfies criteria; does not fail in any major area. The solution is plausible but some shortcomings and/or deficiencies could give rise to a lack of complete satisfaction.
2	Less than adequate: on balance does not satisfy criteria and/or fails in at least one major area. The solution is medium/high risk.
1	Poor: Does not satisfy criteria in all/most areas. The solution is unworkable with a high probability of failure. The solution is high risk.

The Program will not support project proposals:

- without strong potential to have a positive impact on cyber resilience in the identified countries/region;
- that duplicate existing programs and projects;
- that include salary replacement or supplementation for in-country partners; or
- that involve social research of a primarily investigative nature without strong potential for policy and/or human resource development impacts.

Individuals with conflicting commitments and current and recent DFAT employees (see below) must not be included in the project proposal or as individuals who may be engaged if selected through the assessment process. DFAT may reject any project proposal that does not disclose that a proposed team member has an existing and continuing commitment to another DFAT program or project. Project proposals compiled with the assistance of current or recent DFAT employees will be excluded from assessment.

Recent DFAT employees are those whose employment ceased within the nine months prior to the submission of the project proposal and who were substantially involved in the design, preparation, appraisal and/or review of this or substantially related programs.

Applicants must ensure that proposals meet all eligibility requirements at the time of submission and for the duration of the period of assessment and review.

Proposed Budget and Project Duration

Depending on the project scope and size of the applicant's organisation, consideration will be given to provide funding of up to AUD500 000 for an estimated duration of up to three years. Actual duration and funding levels will be determined by the Evaluation Committee in consultation with successful applicants.

The **indicative budget** may include the following costs:

- *Personnel* – Proposed salaries for each member of the team and/or associated staff should be based on operational requirements
- *Capacity development activities* – Costs of capacity development activities in these areas can include specialised training, mentoring, seminars and workshops
- *Fieldwork* – In-country fieldwork expenses, including costs associated with establishing the project in-country
- *Travel* – Costs for domestic and/or international economy class airfares and modest accommodation and per diems that are essential for delivery of the project
- *Equipment* – DFAT will only fund ‘small equipment’ or software specific to the project proposal. ‘Small equipment’ is defined as equipment under a total of \$10,000 that is used collaboratively and, where possible, is Australian-made. Computing equipment or software should be specialised and required for the completion of the project. DFAT will not fund general equipment or software that would be normally provided by institutions, such as standard computers or the Microsoft software suite
- *Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)* – As a key component of the program, costs associated with MEL processes and activities to inform program reporting and learning should be identified separately within the indicative budget outline. Indicative MEL costs are approximately 5-7% of the total project budget.
- *Administrative support*
- *Other associated costs* – Budget items that cannot be appropriately placed in other categories.

Section 5: Application Process

Submission

Completed concept notes should be submitted to CyberAffairs@dfat.gov.au, with ‘Standing Open Call – submission of concept note from [insert entity name]’ in the subject line.

Concept notes will be checked by DFAT for conformity in terms of the requirements set out in these Guidelines and the concept note template. At the discretion of DFAT, those proposals deemed non-conforming will be excluded from assessment and applicants will be advised by DFAT in writing.

Applicant Briefing

As this is a standing Open Call for proposals, DFAT will not hold applicant briefings. Enquiries about the Open Call or guidelines should be emailed to CyberAffairs@dfat.gov.au. All questions and answers and any resulting addenda to these Guidelines will be published on the Strategy website.

Selection Process

DFAT has a standing Evaluation Committee to assess and rank conforming concept notes against the selection criteria. The committee will include members with appropriate expertise to:

- a. review concept notes
- b. review budgets to ensure value for money
- c. score applications to produce a ranked list of concept notes with recommendations for funding to provide to DFAT.

The Evaluation Committee is conducted on a confidential basis and members are required not to discuss matters relating to the assessment of any proposal with any external party. Applicants must not seek contact with any members of the Evaluation Committee, and any such contact will be considered a breach of confidentiality and may result in DFAT rejecting the proposal of the applicant concerned.

If an applicant's concept note is shortlisted by the Evaluation Committee, the applicant will be invited to submit a full application.

Indicative timeline

1. The indicative timeline for this Process is summarised below:

Assessment of submitted concept notes by DFAT in consultation with Australian Government partners	Up to three (3) weeks from date of receipt of application
Evaluation Committee consideration and decision of submitted concept notes	Up to six (6) weeks from date of receipt of application
DFAT invites shortlisted applicant(s) to submit a full application	Up to seven (7) weeks from date of receipt of application
Shortlisted applicants submit full application	Up to four (4) weeks from notice of offer to shortlisted applicant(s)
DFAT final decision on full application	Up to three (3) weeks from date of receipt of application
Negotiation of Grant Agreements, including due diligence assessments	Up to six (6) weeks from notice of final DFAT decision to shortlisted applicant(s)
DFAT advises unsuccessful applicants	Following signing of Grant Agreement with shortlisted applicant(s)

Debriefing Applicants

Unsuccessful applicants are entitled to request a written debriefing on the results of the assessment of their proposals. DFAT will not enter into discussion or communication on the content of the debrief once it has been issued.

Complaints

DFAT's Complaints Handling Procedures Relating to Procurement will apply. More information can be found [here](#).

Section 6: Assessment of Grant Proposals

In making final funding decisions, DFAT may consider additional factors relevant to the suitability, capacity and qualifications of an applicant, including but not limited to:

- a. checking with other persons or organisations on the accuracy of information and quality of previous work performed, including the resourcing of previous work (past performance information); and
- b. information obtained from any legitimate, verifiable source which is relevant to the capacity of the applicants.

Such information will be raised with the applicant if needed.

On receipt of the Evaluation Committee's recommendations, the DFAT delegate will make final decisions on which proposals to fund and to what value. In making final decisions, DFAT reserves the right to ensure an appropriate balance of investments across the relevant geographical areas in the Indo-Pacific region.

Section 7: Social Safeguards and Risk Management

DFAT Safeguards for the Australian aid program apply to environmental protection, displacement and resettlement, and child protection. Implementing partners are required to adhere to and apply these safeguards throughout the life of the Program. Implementing Partners should refer to DFAT's [Environmental and Social Safeguards](#) on the DFAT website for the most up to date versions.

Child Protection

The Program will apply the DFAT [Child Protection Policy](#) and Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy, which applies to all implementing partners and any sub-contractors who are using DFAT funds. DFAT's Policy sets out standards that provide a framework for managing and reducing the risks of child exploitation and abuse. The Policy recognises the shared and collective responsibility of all adults to prevent child exploitation and abuse and DFAT's own responsibilities as the Australian Government's lead overseas aid agency, to working with its partners to prevent and respond to child exploitation and abuse. It further recognises that child sex offenders often seek employment or volunteer placements in organisations that work with children in Australia or overseas in order to access vulnerable children. Therefore the Policy is designed to protect children across the world from (or from further) exploitation and abuse and sexual, physical and psychological violation. The Policy takes a risk-based approach to Child Protection, requiring active engagement with Child Protection at all levels of the organisation and program to identify, mitigate, manage and reduce the risks to children. The goal of the Policy is to protect children from exploitation and abuse of all kinds in the delivery of Australia's overseas aid program.

The Program is obliged, under DFAT's Child Protection Policy, to have a DFAT-compliant Child Protection Policy. Any activities by implementing partners that may have contact with, or impact on children must apply the Minimum Child Protection Standards and should seek to build upon these standards where possible. All DFAT funded partners working with, or having contact with children, must also adhere to the Child Protection Professional Behaviours while undertaking business on behalf of DFAT.

Safeguards, Inclusion Policies and Risk Management

Further information on DFAT's gender equality and disability inclusion policies and approaches is available online:

<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy.aspx>

<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/development-for-all-2015-2020.aspx>

Further information on safeguards and DFAT's approach to risk management is available at:

<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/child-protection-policy.aspx>

<http://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/safeguards-risk-management/Pages/default.aspx>

Section 8: Contractual, Reporting and Acquittal Requirements

Successful applicants will be engaged under a Grant Agreement with DFAT that will detail agreed implementation, accountability, funding, reporting and acquittal requirements. DFAT may request applicants amend parts of their proposals, such as project plans, budgets or risk management approaches, during this process.

The Grant Agreement template is available [here](#).