

Submission to Building Women's Careers Program: Informing Grant Guidelines

Introduction:

The Building Women's Careers Program, announced in the 2024-25 Budget, is a pivotal initiative providing \$50 million for partnership projects to drive systemic structural and cultural change within training and work environments. This submission emphasises the importance of integrating professional career guidance services into the program's grant guidelines to create scalable, high-quality, and inclusive training and employment opportunities for women.

Importance of Career Guidance:

Professional career guidance is essential in supporting women in navigating their career paths effectively, especially in male-dominated industries such as construction, manufacturing, clean energy, and digital technology. Career development practitioners with specialised qualifications and competencies provide evidence-based and tailored guidance that aligns with women's unique aspirations and circumstances.

Supporting workers' career development, including women, is a multi-faceted win for individuals, organisations, the economy, and society. Career guidance improves workers' awareness of their skills, needs, aspirations, and strengths, enhances their understanding of opportunities and the value of lifelong learning, and empowers them to make well-informed decisions. It supports achieving broader education, training, employment, and social policies, contributing to smoother and more inclusive transitions to emerging occupations and supporting vulnerable groups.

Quality career guidance helps women realise their full potential, progress vertically and horizontally in their careers, and find satisfaction and meaning in their career decisions. It is fundamental in enabling women to navigate the transitions caused by ongoing transformations in workplaces, occupations, economies, and societies (International Labour Organization, 2022).

Career guidance also contributes to organisational benefits by promoting better skills use, harnessing workers' experience, and contributing to productivity. It helps enterprises find, develop, and retain talent and implement age management strategies, increasing staff motivation and creating a positive work environment. For the economy and society, career guidance supports the achievement of wider education and training, as well as employment and social policies, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (International Labour Organization, 2022).

Quality career guidance is also associated with improved employment, education, and training outcomes. For example, UNESCO highlights that career guidance helps individuals make informed choices that align with their personal and professional goals, leading to better overall outcomes (UNESCO, 2021).

Key Components to Include in Grant Guidelines:

Accessible Career Guidance Services:

Ensure that grant-funded projects include provisions for professional career guidance services accessible to women across diverse demographics, including those from underrepresented and marginalised communities. Career guidance should be available through multiple channels, such as online platforms, community centres, and workplace settings, to ensure broad reach and accessibility (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2020).

Qualifications of Career Practitioners:

Projects should employ professional development practitioners listed on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners with recognised qualifications to ensure high-quality guidance.

Practitioners should possess expertise in career development theory, labour market information, ethical practices, and inclusive practices.

Adherence to the **Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners** should be mandatory. These standards ensure that practitioners are equipped with:

Core Competencies including career development theory, labour market information, communication and interpersonal skills, ethical practice, diversity and inclusion, technology, information and resources, and professional practice application.

Specialised Competencies such as career assessment, career counselling, program delivery, working with diverse clients, project management, employer liaison, and research skills (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2022).

Personalised and Inclusive Support:

- Career guidance services should offer personalised support, helping women identify their strengths, interests, and career goals.
- Inclusive practices should be employed to consider the intersectionality of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other factors, ensuring services are relevant and accessible to all women.
- Utilise the [Australian Blueprint for Career Development](#) (National Careers Institute, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth of Australia, 2022) to provide a framework for career management competencies and learning areas. The Blueprint includes the following:

Career Management Competencies:

- **Personal Management:** Build and maintain a positive self-concept, interact positively and effectively with others, and change and grow throughout life.
- **Learning and Work Exploration:** Participate in lifelong learning supportive of career goals, locate and effectively use career information, and understand the relationship between work, society, and the economy.
- **Career Building:** Secure/create and maintain work, make career-enhancing decisions, maintain balanced life and work roles, understand the changing nature of life and work roles, and understand, engage in, and manage the career-building process

Integration with Training Programs:

- Career guidance should be integrated into vocational education and training (VET) pathways to support women in reskilling or upskilling for higher-paying careers in male-dominated industries. This integration ensures women can access the training and skills development needed to thrive in these sectors.
- Projects should demonstrate innovative solutions for addressing barriers to women's participation in VET, such as flexible training schedules and support for work-life balance. Offering evening or weekend classes, providing childcare services, and facilitating remote learning can make VET more accessible to women with various responsibilities and constraints.
- Collaboration between career practitioners and training providers can lead to the development of customised training programs that align with industry demands and women's career aspirations. This partnership ensures the training is relevant, practical, and directly linked to employment opportunities.
- Embedding career guidance within training programs helps women understand the pathways available to them, the skills required, and the potential career outcomes. This guidance can include information on job placement services, internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities that enhance employability.
- Leveraging industry partnerships to offer on-the-job training and work placements as part of VET programs can provide women with real-world experience and a clearer understanding of their chosen fields. These experiences can also help build professional networks and increase job prospects.

- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of integrated career guidance and training programs can help identify best practices and areas for improvement. Continuous feedback from participants can ensure that the programs remain responsive to women's needs and evolving industry trends.

Collaboration and Partnerships:

- Encourage strong partnerships between industry, peak bodies, large employers, unions, community organisations, women's services, and training providers.
- Collaborative efforts can amplify outcomes by leveraging shared leadership, expertise, networks, and resources to drive structural and cultural change.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of career guidance services within grant-funded projects.
- Key performance indicators (KPIs) should be established to measure the impact of career guidance on women's career development, including metrics such as employment rates, career progression, skill acquisition, and job satisfaction.
- Collect qualitative and quantitative data from participants through surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gain insights into their experiences and outcomes. Analyse this data to identify trends, successes, and areas for improvement.
- Review and update the career guidance services regularly based on feedback and evaluation results to ensure they remain relevant and effective in meeting women's needs.
- Share findings and best practices with stakeholders, including training providers, industry partners, and policymakers, to inform ongoing improvements and drive systemic change in career development programs and services.
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement by encouraging innovation and experimentation in career guidance practices and by supporting professional development opportunities for career practitioners to enhance their skills and knowledge.
- Use evaluation results to advocate for sustained investment in career guidance services and to demonstrate their value and impact on women's career development and overall workforce participation.

Conclusion:

Integrating professional career guidance services into the Building Women's Careers Program's grant guidelines is essential for creating high-quality, scalable, and inclusive training and employment opportunities for women. By emphasising the importance of career guidance, the program can better support women in overcoming barriers to their career development and achieving success in male-dominated industries. This approach aligns with the program's goal of driving systemic structural and cultural change, fostering an inclusive workforce that values and promotes gender equity and diversity.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THIS SUBMISSION

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CICA MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

Australian Capital Territory Careers Association (ACTCA)
Australian Centre for Career Education (ACCE)
AIS Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement Network (AIS)
Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA)
Career Advisers Association of New South Wales & ACT (CAANSW/ACT)
Career Education Association of Western Australia (CEAWA)
Career Educators Association of the Northern Territory (CEANT)
National Association of Graduate Career Advisory Services (Aust) Inc (NAGCAS)
Queensland Association of Student Advisors (QASA)
Queensland Guidance and Counselling Association (QGCA)

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