



Submission to the NSW Government

Infrastructure Maintenance Funding for NSW Adult and Community Education Providers

**Prepared by
Community Colleges Australia**

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*Shovel ready projects to support the NSW economy and train
the state's vulnerable workers*

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NSW ACE Infrastructure Maintenance: Executive Summary

Give our students a great place to learn and be inspired

Help us prepare our facilities and campuses to be in great shape for when our students return

Thanks to the early intervention and support by the NSW Government, providing COVID-19 relief funding for the state's adult and community education (ACE) providers, we can now look to post-pandemic medium-term economic recovery activities.

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) proposes that the NSW Government implement a 2020/21 ACE infrastructure maintenance program of \$150,000 per provider, a total of \$4.8 million state-wide.

Infrastructure investment by the NSW Government in not-for-profit community education providers is an investment in local communities, built by local tradespeople, ensuring these jobs and the associated benefits stay local. People who study with adult and community education (ACE) providers will return to modern facilities designed to provide them with the best skills for a post-pandemic economic recovery.

The current need for economic stimulus in NSW presents an important opportunity to build on the 2019/20 NSW ACE infrastructure maintenance program. Most of the current projects are now complete; the students and their communities have begun to utilise and appreciate this important new infrastructure. To support the NSW Government in delivering targeted economic stimulus, NSW ACE providers have identified practical and "shovel ready" projects that will enhance their ability to provide better quality training to their communities while simultaneously delivering the economic injection into local economies across the state.

Funding will ensure NSW ACE providers have the capacity to undertake appropriate, timely and targeted upskilling and training in professional environments. They will deliver accredited VET and foundation skills to priority groups such as the large number of newly unemployed, small businesses in trouble and other vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Funding will underpin the operational continuity of the NSW state-wide network of ACE providers, so their training capacity will survive now and thrive in the future.

This infrastructure maintenance funding:

- can be delivered almost immediately to support NSW Government economic stimulus objectives;
- will support existing NSW jobs throughout the life of each project;
- will provide a pipeline of projects for relevant employers to hire staff where required;
- supports NSW Government regional economic development efforts;
- strongly aligns with existing NSW state training and infrastructure policies;
- builds on the ability of NSW ACE providers to deliver infrastructure improvements;
- ensures a "long tail" of positive impacts arising from infrastructure investment;
- helps NSW ACE providers meet long-documented building management challenges; and
- provides substantial return on investment to the NSW Government.

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NSW ACE Infrastructure Maintenance

Give our students a great place to learn and be inspired

Help us prepare our facilities and campuses to be in great shape for when our students return

Introduction

Thanks to the early intervention and support by the NSW Government, providing COVID-19 relief funding for the state's adult and community education (ACE) providers, we can now look to post-pandemic medium-term economic recovery activities.¹

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) proposes that the NSW Government implement a 2020/21 ACE infrastructure maintenance program of \$150,000 per provider, a total of \$4.8 million state-wide.

Infrastructure investment by the NSW Government in not-for-profit community education providers is an investment in local communities, built by local tradespeople, ensuring these jobs and associated benefits stay local. People who study with community education providers will return to modern facilities designed to provide them with the best skills for a post-pandemic economic recovery.

The current need for economic stimulus in NSW presents an important opportunity to build on the 2019/20 NSW ACE infrastructure maintenance program. Most of these projects are now complete: the students and their communities have begun to utilise and appreciate this important new infrastructure. To support the NSW Government in delivering targeted economic stimulus, NSW ACE providers have identified practical and "shovel ready" projects that will enhance their ability to provide better quality training to their communities while simultaneously delivering the required economic injection into local economies across the state.

Funding will ensure NSW ACE providers have the capacity to undertake appropriate, timely and targeted upskilling and training in professional environments. They will deliver accredited VET and foundation skills to priority groups such as the large number of newly unemployed, small businesses in trouble and other vulnerable and disadvantaged people. The funding will underpin the operational continuity of the NSW state-wide network of ACE providers, so their training capacity will survive now and thrive in the future.

In summary, this new funding will:

- provide "shovel ready" modern projects in at least 33 locations around the state – two-thirds in regional and rural NSW – for small-to-medium building and maintenance;
- preserve and protect important community-owned and operated infrastructure;
- assist the delivery of high value education and training to priority communities and residents, many of whom now seek urgent re-training; and

¹ See "NSW Government supports adult and community education providers with COVID-19 relief funds," Community Colleges Australia website, 20 April 2020, available at <https://cca.edu.au/nsw-government-supports-adult-and-community-education-providers-with-covid-19-relief-funds/>.

- support and complement other NSW Government economic development efforts during the devastating COVID-19 emergency.

This infrastructure maintenance funding:

- *can be delivered almost immediately to support NSW Government economic stimulus objectives;*
- *will support existing NSW jobs throughout the life of each project;*
- *will provide a pipeline of projects for relevant employers to hire staff where required;*
- *supports NSW Government regional economic development efforts;*
- *strongly aligns with existing NSW state training and infrastructure policies;*
- *builds on the ability of NSW ACE providers to deliver infrastructure improvements;*
- *ensures a “long tail” of positive impacts arising from infrastructure investment;*
- *helps NSW ACE providers meet documented building management challenges; and*
- *provides substantial return on investment to the NSW Government.*

See details of each of these below.

Background

NSW ACE providers – historically known as community colleges – over-perform in their delivery of vocational education and training (VET) to the state’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents: regional and rural learners, Indigenous communities, people with a disability, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, older (age 45-plus) learners, and migrants and refugees; see Appendix A for details.²

NSW ACE providers have shown their ability to manage infrastructure maintenance funding effectively and efficiently: in 2019/20, the state’s ACE providers each received just under \$72,000 to undertake essential infrastructure projects. All but six providers completed their projects by the end of April 2020. They spent \$2.3 million efficiently and professionally to support their local communities and assist their learners.

CCA estimates each year at least 10,000 students will receive benefits from the soon-to-be-completed current projects.

Support for NSW Regional Economic Development

The ACE infrastructure maintenance program will support NSW state regional economic development goals by ensuring easy-to-contract small-to-medium construction and infrastructure projects, implemented around the state.

During 2019/20, the ACE infrastructure maintenance program delivered projects in 32 NSW locations, two-thirds of them outside of metropolitan Sydney:

- Albury
- Alstonville
- Ballina

² For more details, see *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Not-for-Profit Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2018 Data* (25 September 2019), available at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Community-Education-Providers-Analysis-of-2018-Data.pdf>.

- Bateman's Bay
- Bathurst
- Bondi Junction
- Broken Hill
- Brookvale
- Carlingford
- Coffs Harbour
- Dubbo
- Griffith
- Guyra
- Hornsby
- Kiama
- Laurieton
- Lismore
- Liverpool
- Moree
- Mullumbimby
- Murwillumbah
- Nelson Bay
- Newcastle (Cooks Hill)
- Newcastle (Maryville)
- Ourimbah
- Parramatta (two locations)
- Penrith
- Port Macquarie
- Rozelle
- Tamworth
- Tuggerah
- Wagga
- Wollongong

Alignment with NSW Training and Infrastructure Policies

Strategic Development Goals: The NSW Government has identified strategic development goals, detailed in the *NSW 2021 Plan*. Funding will support the objective to “deliver high quality, accessible and relevant training will support workforce participation and the growth of industry and business.”³

Direction Statement for VET: This funding will help to address the issues identified in the 2016 Smart and Skilled Review, which are reflected in the NSW *Direction Statement for Vocational Education and Training*, to:

- Give greater certainty to the NSW VET market
- Raise the profile of VET
- Ensure the benefits for students and ultimately jobs for NSW from the significant Government investment are maximised⁴

³ See https://www.ipc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/file_manager/NSW2021_WEBVERSION.pdf.

⁴ *Directions Statement for Vocational Education and Training*, NSW Department of Industry, Skills and Regional Development, July 2016, p. 14; available at https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/forms_documents/vet/directions_statement/directions_statement_vet.pdf.

State Infrastructure Strategy: Funding for ACE infrastructure maintenance projects directly supports four of the NSW Government's *2018-2038 State Infrastructure Strategy* cross-sectoral strategic directions:

- Optimise the management, performance and use of the State's assets.
- Ensure that existing and future infrastructure is resilient to natural hazards and human-related threats.
- Improve state-wide connectivity and realise the benefits of technology.
- Drive high quality consumer-centric services and promote innovative service delivery models in infrastructure sectors.⁵

NSW 2040 Economic Blueprint: ACE infrastructure funding directly supports two aspirations of the *NSW 2040 Economic Blueprint: Investing in the State's Future* – healthy & productive people and productive & vibrant regions. The funding also supports four of the seven policy levers: human capital, institutions, infrastructure and industry development.⁶

Proven Ability to Make Infrastructure Happen

NSW ACE providers have proved they have the management and organisational capability to implement a state-wide NSW Government infrastructure maintenance program. More than 30 NSW ACE providers participated in the 2019/20 infrastructure maintenance program, with the large majority completing their projects by late April 2020.

NSW ACE providers have shown their efficiency, flexibility and adaptability, reflected in their current responses to the Coronavirus emergency. Almost all have begun active planning for digital, distance and blended learning, combine with other innovative ways to engage their students and conduct outreach to their communities.⁷

ACE providers create and sustain community infrastructure. Starting from a base of action within their communities, they deliver inclusive place-based learning as their core business, operating through not-for-profit, community-based governance structures. They provide formal and informal learning opportunities, including foundation skills; engagement in accredited VET modules and qualifications; and skills for participation in work, along with community engagement, health and wellbeing.⁸

The “Long Tail” Impact of ACE Infrastructure Projects

Infrastructure maintenance support is an investment in the future of the State of New South Wales. CCA's research shows that infrastructure investment continues to pay huge dividends for many years: to the learners, to their communities and to their providers.

In 2009, the Commonwealth Government's “Investing in Community Education and Training” (ICET) program delivered funding to more than 50 Australian ACE providers. Small grants ranged from \$50,000 \$250,000, and larger grants up to \$1.5 million.⁹

⁵ See <http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/sis-2018>.

⁶ See *NSW 2040 Economic Blueprint: Investing in the State's Future*, NSW Treasury, 2019, available at <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/nsw-economy/nsw-2040-economic-blueprint>.

⁷ See CCA's E-learning page <https://cca.edu.au/member-services/professional-development/e-learning/> and developing E-learning resources list <https://cca.edu.au/resources/#E-Learning>.

⁸ For more detail, see <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/communityeducation/>.

⁹ See “Investing in Community Education and Training program guidelines,” May 2009, <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Commonwealth-Infrastructure-Funding-2009-10-ICET-Guidelines.pdf>.

In 2017, CCA surveyed 25 of the recipient providers and found that more than 100,000 new students undertook training with community education providers over the seven years following completion of the infrastructure projects.¹⁰

CCA found that 80% of recipients improved accessibility to their educational facilities for staff and students living with disabilities. This is particularly important given that NSW ACE providers over-perform in reaching learners with disabilities – in 2018, almost 19% of ACE government-funded VET students had an identified disability, well in excess of TAFE students (12%) and private for-profit VET providers (7.2%).¹¹

As a direct result of the infrastructure funding, the providers reported:

- 76% offered new courses;
- Of these new courses, two-thirds were vocational, providing new skills and pathways into employment;
- 96% (all but one of the organisations which reported) improved existing courses;
- 92% provided training to more students; and
- 84% hired new staff and/or improved the skills of existing staff.¹²

NSW ACE Providers Face Building Challenges

One of the greatest challenges facing community education providers is how to maintain existing and construct new buildings. Small and medium providers, especially in regional, rural and many outer metropolitan areas, face long-standing and unique challenges to maintain the high infrastructure costs imposed by accreditation and competitive tendering.¹³ Many providers are dependent on access to rented facilities owned by local schools or councils, access that can be stopped such as during the Coronavirus emergency. When ACE providers can maintain and protect their own professional training environments, they can sustain training through challenging moments, and continue to serve their communities.

Return on Investment to the NSW Government

Investment in the NSW ACE sector continues to result in substantial return on investment for the NSW Government. The infrastructure maintenance funding program will:

- increase capacity of the sector to provide differing modes of delivery that embrace progressive methodologies and technologies;
- Improve sector capacity to respond to significant community events, including regional and local natural disaster response and/or other emergencies such as the recent bushfires and the current Coronavirus emergency;
- build community confidence in and awareness of local ACE providers, through provision professional and modern facilities;

¹⁰ See https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Per-Capita-CCA-conference-presentation_final.pdf.

¹¹ See *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Not-for-Profit Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2018 Data*, Community Colleges Australia, 25 September 2019, <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Community-Education-Providers-Analysis-of-2018-Data.pdf>.

¹² See https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Per-Capita-CCA-conference-presentation_final.pdf.

¹³ *Vocational Education and Training in Rural and Remote Australia*, by Sue Kilpatrick and Rowena Bell, NCVET, 1998, https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0014/3209/200.pdf.

- enhance education and training across the sector for the benefit of individuals and groups – including small businesses, particularly the rapidly increasing numbers of the most vulnerable, who have limited or no other educational options;
- strengthen education and training pathways and options for local unemployed, underemployed or employed people seeking knowledge and skills necessary to carry out current or potential new employment;
- enhance economic and market benefits to local communities and support provide pathways to higher VET qualifications or higher education; and
- support local community courses which build local health and wellbeing – so essential during a time of pandemic; development of life skills, social capital, volunteerism, life purpose and motivation; and intergenerational connections.

About Community Colleges Australia

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) is the peak national body that represents community-owned, not-for-profit education and training providers. Our vision is for dynamic and vibrant communities, informed and empowered through learning. To make our vision a reality, CCA works to empower Australia's community education sector by increasing the awareness of the sector and its place in the economic and social fabric of our nation. CCA advocates at all levels of government on the value of the community education sector, and for our members' activities and programs.

CCA assists its members to sustain and grow, promoting learning innovation, focussing especially on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. They focus on student welfare and are strongly committed to employment outcomes for their learners.

Our members have been providing flexible and dynamic education and training opportunities to individuals, groups and businesses for a long time, with NSW members tracing an unbroken history back to 1913 years and a history in Sydney back to 1833. As well as operating in accredited VET, CCA members offer other learning opportunities, including non-accredited training, lifestyle and lifelong and cultural learning courses – education for which they are historically well-known. These educational activities help build self-esteem, re-engage “missing” learners and create and sustain social and community networks, which help to reinforce and sustain the communities in which our members operate.

Our sector's history permits our members to be strategic and innovative in their flexibility to employ a wide range of tools. ACE providers play a strategic role because they have the freedom to take considered risks. They are not bound by government structures in the way that TAFEs are, nor are they beholden to private shareholders to supply cash returns in the way of for-profit private providers.

ACE providers have an historic commitment to invest in their communities and respond to the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians, including a commitment to foundation skills. They do this through small class sizes, focussing on personal support, and creating connections to and collaborations with local non-government organisations, government agencies, social services and employers.

Further Information

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Appendix A: Vulnerable & Disadvantaged Government-Funded VET Student Percentages

ACE

Government Funded VET NSW 2018

SNAPSHOT

REGIONAL



68.3% of students live in rural, regional and remote areas

DISABILITY



18.7% of students identify as having a disability

SEIFA



65.5% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged

INDIGENOUS



12.6% of students are Indigenous

45 PLUS



41.9% of students are 45 or older

FEMALE



58.1% of students identify as female

ACE

Government Funded VET NSW 2018

OUTCOMES

POST TRAINING



83.6% of students employed or in further training

IN EMPLOYMENT



43% of students moved from unemployment to employment after training

JOB STATUS



57.2% of students had a better job after training

REASON



84% of students achieved their major purpose for training

SATISFIED



89.1% of students were satisfied with the overall quality of training



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