



**Community
Colleges
Australia**

Pre-Budget Submission to the NSW Government

Infrastructure Maintenance Funding for NSW Adult and Community Education Providers

**Prepared by
Community Colleges Australia**

19 January 2022

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

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Executive Summary

Pre-Budget Submission

NSW ACE Infrastructure Maintenance

Give our students a great place to learn and be inspired

Help us prepare our facilities and campuses with a COVID-19 economic resiliency plan

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 in April 2020 and August 2021, the state's ACE sector looks to post-pandemic medium-term economic recovery activities.

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) proposes that the NSW Government implement a 2022/23 ACE infrastructure maintenance program of \$250,000 per ACE provider, a total of \$8 million state-wide.

Infrastructure investment for not-for-profit community education providers is an investment in the viability and vibrancy of local communities. It provides direct employment for local tradespeople and businesses. Importantly, people who study with adult and community education (ACE) providers can gain relevant skills for a post-pandemic economic recovery in modern fit-for-purpose COVID-safe facilities *within* their communities. Two thirds of NSW ACE providers are outside metro areas, and they play a crucial yet often underestimated role in the delivery of skills to the people of regional NSW.

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. These build on 2019/20 (\$2.3 million) and 2021/22 (\$1 million) NSW ACE infrastructure maintenance programs projects, which demonstrated how targeted investment delivers quality student learning and supports local businesses.

This infrastructure maintenance funding will:

- support the *NSW Productivity White Paper* recommendation 3.1, to “continue to provide targeted workforce support to promote economic recovery”;
- align with almost every one of the Premier's policy priorities, especially ensuring a strong economy, highest quality education and breaking the cycle of disadvantage;
- complement existing NSW state training and infrastructure policies;
- enable NSW ACE providers to implement COVID-19 economic resiliency plans through targeted improvements;
- create a “long tail” of positive impacts arising from the investment;
- ensure a substantial return on investment (ROI) to the NSW Government; and
- underpin the operational continuity of the state-wide ACE provider network, so their training capacity will survive now to thrive in the future.

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NSW ACE Infrastructure Maintenance

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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 in April 2020 and August 2021, our sector looks to post-pandemic medium-term economic recovery activities.¹

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) proposes that the NSW Government implement a 2021/22 ACE infrastructure maintenance program of \$250,000 per provider, a total of \$8 million state-wide.

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

The need for economic stimulus in NSW presents an important opportunity to build on the successful 2019/20 (\$2.3 million) and 2020/21 (\$1 million) NSW ACE infrastructure maintenance programs. In allocating the first infrastructure funding, the NSW Government recognised:

ACE providers rely on a range of different building types to deliver services, including ageing buildings that require maintenance and modernising. By supporting the maintenance and refurbishment of ACE physical premises, the program aims to: increase the capacity of ACE providers to deliver relevant training to individuals to improve their employability, literacy and numeracy skills; and facilitate ACE providers' expansion into accredited VET delivery and/or ability to provide improved pathways into VET.

Current projects are substantially complete: the students and their communities now utilise and appreciate new facilities. **This request for a third – and more substantial – grant program will allow NSW ACE providers to undertake significant medium-size infrastructure upgrading and implement COVID-19 economic resiliency plans.**

This proposal directly supports the NSW Government priority to deliver on Recommendation 3.1 of the *NSW Productivity White Paper* (“A modern VET system to deliver the skills we need”), to “continue to provide targeted workforce support to promote economic recovery”. The *White Paper* states (p. 6): “The NSW Government controls key VET levers such as the delivery of

¹ See “NSW Government commits \$1 million to adult and community education providers for infrastructure maintenance,” 21 July 2021, <https://cca.edu.au/nsw-government-commits-1-million-to-adult-and-community-education-providers-for-infrastructure-maintenance/>; and “NSW Government supports adult and community education providers with COVID-19 relief funds,” 20 April 2020, <https://cca.edu.au/nsw-government-supports-adult-and-community-education-providers-with-covid-19-relief-funds/>.

training, the running of TAFE NSW, and the targeting of course subsidies.”² CCA notes that the NSW Government has an additional – and very powerful – VET lever, in its support for the state’s adult and community education (ACE) sector, which each year meets the needs of many of the state’s small businesses and vulnerable and disadvantaged learners (see Appendix A). The *White Paper* further states (p. 15): “Infrastructure enables economic activity. It moves commuters to work and freight to markets. It also provides critical services such as energy, housing, *education*, and healthcare. Investing in the right infrastructure is a powerful lever by which the Government can raise productivity.”

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 economic injection into local economies across the state. In addition, COVID-19 economic resiliency plans will enable them to fit safer air ventilation systems, CO2 devices, wider entry and exit points and other healthy building improvements.³

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

This new funding will:

- provide “shovel ready” modern projects in at least 33 locations around the state – two-thirds of them located in regional and rural NSW – for medium-size building and maintenance projects;
- protect important community-owned and operated infrastructure, preserving the facilities for future generations of learners;
- assist the delivery of high value education and training to priority communities and residents, many of whom now seek urgent re-training; and
- support and complement other NSW Government economic recovery efforts.

This infrastructure maintenance funding will also:

- support and complement almost all of the Premier’s policy priorities;
- align with existing NSW state training and infrastructure policies;
- build on the ability of NSW ACE providers to deliver infrastructure improvements, including past infrastructure programs;
- be delivered quickly to support NSW Government economic stimulus objectives;
- support existing NSW jobs throughout the life of each project;
- ensure a “long tail” of positive impacts arising from infrastructure investment;
- provide substantial return on investment to the NSW Government; and
- underpin the operational continuity of the state-wide ACE provider network, so their training capacity will survive now to thrive in the future.

² NSW Productivity White Paper Executive Summary, <https://www.productivity.nsw.gov.au/white-paper>.

³ See <https://cca.edu.au/training-room-ventilation-the-next-frontier/> and CCA’s proposals outlined in this article by Dr Don Perlmut: <https://cca.edu.au/will-omicron-devastate-australian-vocational-education-and-training-in-2022/>.

Background

NSW ACE providers – often 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.⁴

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 within less than nine months. They spent \$2.3 million efficiently and professionally to support their local communities and assist their learners.

CCA estimates each year at least 15,000 students will receive benefits from the two funded 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
- Bateman’s Bay
- Bathurst
- Bondi Junction
- Broken Hill
- Brookvale
- Carlingford
- Coffs Harbour
- Dubbo
- Griffith
- Guyra
- Hornsby
- Kiama
- Laurieton
- Lismore

⁴ See *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2020 Data – Australian VET Fact Sheet 2*, (18 October 2021), available at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Analysis-of-2020-data-Fact-Sheet-2-18Oct2021.pdf>.

- 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.”⁵

Direction Statement for VET: The 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; and
- ensure the benefits for students and ultimately jobs for NSW from the significant Government investment are maximised.⁶

NSW VET Review 2021 findings and recommendations also reinforce this alignment and reflects the ongoing development and implementation of quality and outcomes measures under Smart and Skilled.⁷

⁵ See https://www.ipc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/file_manager/NSW2021_WEBVERSION.pdf.

⁶ *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.

⁷ See *In the Same Sentence: Bringing higher and vocational education together*, by David Gonski AC and Peter Shergold AC, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, March 2021, available at https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/about-us/strategies-and-reports/Final_VET_Sector_Report.pdf; and <https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/about/smart-and-skilled-supports-quality-training-nsw>.

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; and
- drive high quality consumer-centric services and promote innovative service delivery models in infrastructure sectors.⁸

NSW 2040 Economic Blueprint: ACE provider 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.⁹

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 and 2020/21 infrastructure maintenance programs, the large majority completing their projects in less than eight months.

NSW ACE providers have shown their efficiency, flexibility and adaptability, reflected in their responses to COVID-19. All have actively engaged with digital, distance and blended learning, combined with other innovative ways to engage their students and conduct outreach to their communities.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.

⁸ See <http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/sis-2018>.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ 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>.

¹¹ For more detail, see <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/communityeducation/>.

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 to \$250,000, and larger grants up to \$1.5 million.¹²

In 2017, CCA surveyed 25 of the recipient providers nationally (the majority in NSW) 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.

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 2020, 17% of ACE government-funded VET students had an identified disability, well in excess of TAFE students (10%) and private for-profit VET providers (7%).¹³

As a direct result of the 2009 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 reporting) improved existing courses;
- 92% provided training to more students; and
- 84% hired new staff and/or improved the skills of existing staff.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ Many providers are dependent on access to rented facilities owned by local schools or councils, access that was frequently prevented at various times during the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 effectively.

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. A third – and larger – infrastructure maintenance funding program will:

¹² 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>.

¹³ See *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2020 Data – Australian VET Fact Sheet 2*, (18 October 2021), available at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Analysis-of-2020-data-Fact-Sheet-2-18Oct2021.pdf>.

¹⁴ See https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Per-Capita-CCA-conference-presentation_final.pdf.

¹⁵ *Vocational Education and Training in Rural and Remote Australia*, by Sue Kilpatrick and Rowena Bell, NCVER, 1998, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/data/assets/file/0014/3209/200.pdf>.

- 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 2019/20 summer bushfires and the current pandemic;
- build community confidence in and awareness of local ACE providers, through provision professional and modern facilities;
- 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;
- enable implementation of COVID economic resiliency plans for healthy learning environments; and
- support local community courses which build local health and wellbeing – so essential during a time of pandemic; the 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 adult and 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 of 109 years – back to 1913 when the WEAs were founded in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. 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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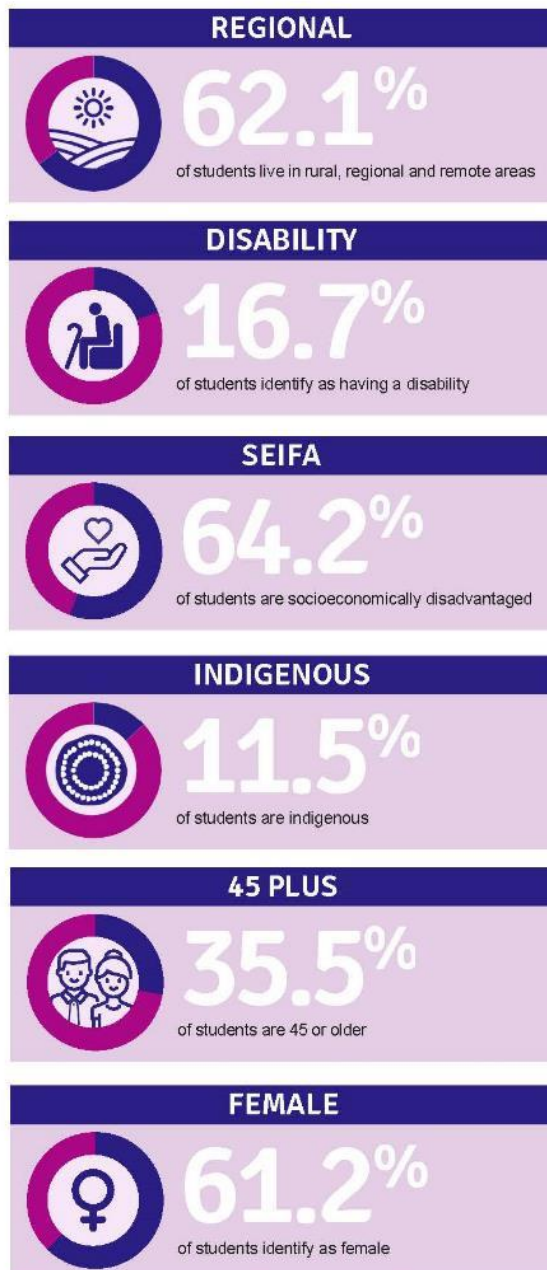
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Appendix A: Vulnerable & Disadvantaged Government-Funded VET Students in 2020

ACE SNAPSHOT

Government Funded VET in New South Wales 2020

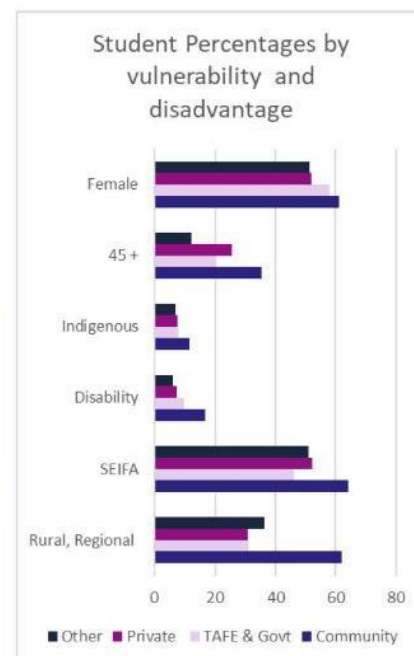


Reaching Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Learner

NSW adult and community education (ACE) VET providers disproportionately cater for students from the state's most disadvantaged groups and regions.

ACE providers overperform compared to TAFE, private for-profit and other VET providers, on almost all tracked measures of vulnerability and disadvantage.

These achievements result from the NSW Government's "ACE Program" and Smart and Skilled funding.





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