



**Tourism
Midwest**
Victoria

Accessible Experience Accelerator Program Guidelines 2026

Supporting tourism businesses to create new accessible experiences or implement meaningful accessibility improvements.

CONTENTS

Overview

Objectives

Program features

Program structure and key dates

Program eligibility

Selection process

Page 3

Page 4

Page 5

Page 6

Page 7

Page 8

Funded Projects

Project Proposals

Project assessment

Project eligibility

Project delivery

Project completion, verification and reimbursement

Page 10

Page 11

Page 11

Page 12

Page 13

Page 14

Appendix

Appendix A – Accessible improvement and experience development examples

Page 16

Page 16



Overview

Tourism and hospitality businesses play a vital role in shaping the Midwest Victoria region as a welcoming and inclusive destination for all.

The **Accessible Experience Accelerator Program (AEAP)** supports small businesses to develop new accessible tourism experiences or improve the accessibility of existing experiences. By better understanding the needs of people with disability, businesses can create more inclusive offerings, bring new experiences to market, and expand their customer base.

Delivered over six months, the program provides tailored, one-on-one mentoring with an experienced access consultant to guide participating businesses through the planning and delivery of their project.

Projects may focus on developing a new accessible experience or improving access to an existing experience, including physical upgrades or service-based initiatives.

Eligible businesses can access up to \$5,000 (ex GST) of funding to support delivery of their project.

The program aims to strengthen the region's reputation as a welcoming and inclusive tourism destination, where more visitors can confidently explore and experience the region.

Objectives

The AEAP's objectives are to:



Strengthen Midwest Victoria positioning as a leading accessible tourism destination.



Reduce accessibility barriers for visitors and locals with disability across tourism businesses and experiences.



Equip businesses with the tools and guidance to develop new accessible experiences or make meaningful accessibility improvements to their existing experiences.

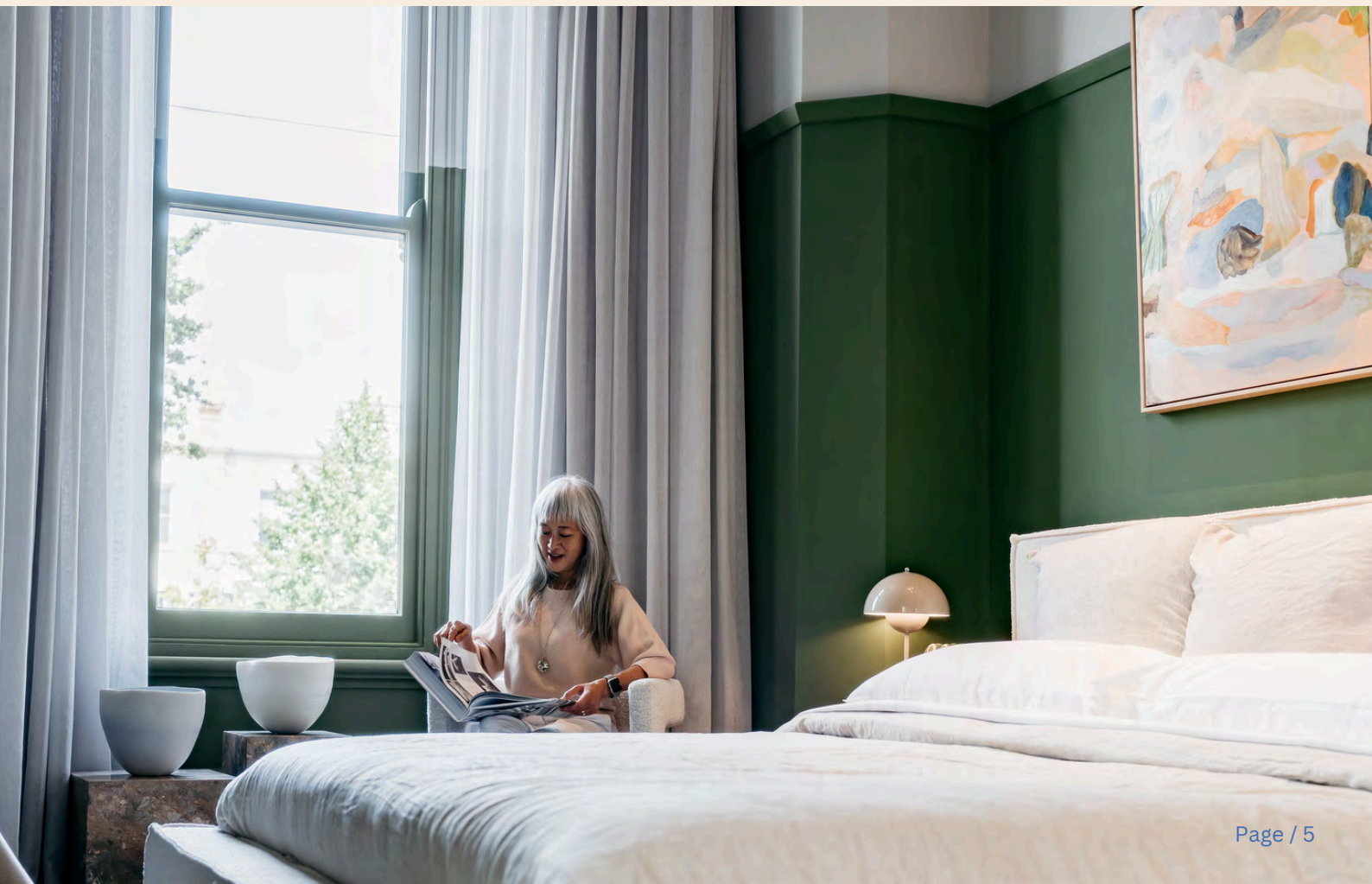


Support local businesses to diversify their customer base and strengthen financial performance through inclusive practices.

Program features

The Accessible Experience Accelerator Program (AEAP) will provide successful applicants with the following resources and services:

- **Five online mentoring sessions and one site visit:** Working with an expert accessibility consultant, valued over \$4,000 (ex GST) per business. Mentoring sessions will be delivered on a fortnightly basis, with multiple session times available to accommodate business operations.
- **Funding support:** Reimbursement funding of **up to \$5,000 (ex GST)** is available to support the development of a new accessible experience or improvements to an existing one. A 2:1 co-contribution is required, with Tourism Midwest Victoria contributing \$2 for every \$1 invested by the business, up to a maximum of \$5,000.
- **Online workshop:** Practical online workshop focusing on digital communication of accessibility information.
- **Project delivery support:** Each business is entitled up to two ad hoc one-hour sessions with their access consultant, to support the formulation of their funded project concept and/or support project delivery.
- **Resources & templates:** Practical online guides to implement small changes that make a big difference to customers with disability.

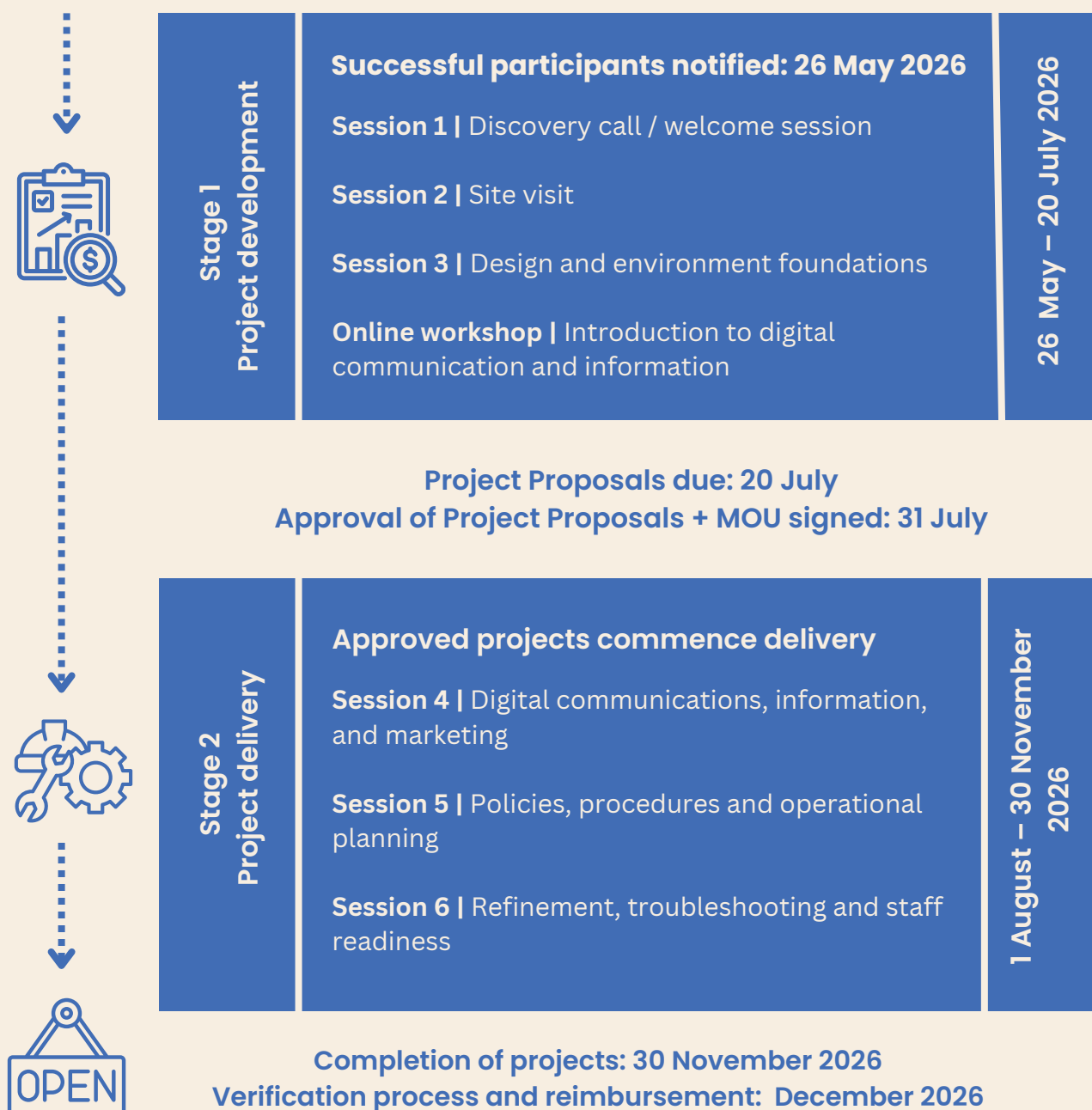


Program structure and key dates

The program is divided into two stages. During Stage 1 participants will undertake mentoring sessions, including an in-region site visit and group workshop, to develop a Project Proposal outlining their proposed accessibility initiative.

Upon successful completion of Stage 1, businesses will submit a Project Proposal to Tourism Midwest Victoria. This approach ensures each proposal is shaped by expert advice and co-design, with ideas grounded in practical insight before moving into delivery.

In addition to the six-core mentoring sessions, each business has access to two additional one-hour consultation sessions. These sessions can be used to support the development of their funded project concept and proposal, or to seek advice during delivery.



Program eligibility

To participate in the AEAP, businesses must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be located within the Tourism Midwest Victoria region. Our catchment takes in the City of Ballarat and the shires of Pyrenees, Moorabool, Golden Plains (south of Ballarat to Rokewood, postcode 3330, 3351 or 3360), and Hepburn (Creswick and Clunes, post code postcode 3370 or 3363).
- Be a Tourism Midwest Victoria Industry Partner; business holding an active Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) listing.
- Have a valid Australian Business Number (ABN).
- Be a standalone, independent business (i.e. not a franchisee or subsidiary of a larger company).
- Provide a customer-facing visitor experience, such as food and drink establishments, retailers, attraction or tour operators, accommodation providers, museums, galleries, and live music or cultural venues.
- Commit to participating in all aspects of the program, including workshops, 1:1 consultation sessions and site visits.
- Have a commitment to ongoing improvements in accessibility beyond the program and sharing outcomes or evidence of their funded project with customers (e.g. marketing and owned channels).

The following **businesses are ineligible** for the AEAP:

- Businesses with outstanding regulatory issues, such as permits, licenses and compliance with regulations.
- Franchisees, subsidiaries of larger companies, unincorporated associations.
- Entities that primarily operate as an office-based environment with limited or no direct public or customer-facing services.
- Businesses that do not own or have a long-term lease for their premises (not a short-term lease or operating from a temporary venue).

Selection process

Businesses can apply for the AEAP by submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI) application form on the Tourism Midwest Victoria website during the opening dates.

Submitting an EOI and meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee selection for the AEAP. Places and funding are limited and TMV reserves the right to accept or decline any application at its discretion.

Places are strictly limited to a maximum of 12 businesses. Expressions of interest from eligible businesses will be scored and participants selected on the merit of the application against the **Selection Criteria** below.

Following submission of the EOI, a Tourism Midwest Victoria staff member will contact the business for an initial discussion. This conversation will help clarify the business's needs, confirm eligibility and readiness, and outline the next steps for accessing the program.

Evaluation panel

Applications will be assessed by an Evaluation Panel comprising of three representatives from Tourism Midwest Victoria.

Regional advisory panel input

Prior to formal assessment, applications will be shared with the applicant's relevant Local Government Community Inclusion Officer, Economic Development Officer, Visitor Economy Officer or equivalent for feedback and endorsement. This input will provide local context, support alignment with council accessibility priorities, and assist the Evaluation Panel in its decision-making.

Selection Criteria

Participants will be selected based on the following criteria*:

Criteria	Description	Scoring scale	
Eligibility (mandatory criteria)	Must meet the requirements outlined in the AEAP Eligibility (above).	Yes/No	-
Commitment to program delivery	Demonstrated ability to commit to all program milestones, including nomination of a project lead, availability to participate within program timeframes, and agreement to meet the funding co-contribution requirements.	Score Scale (1–5): 5 – Clear project lead identified, full availability confirmed, co-contribution funding secured 4 – Minor gaps but strong overall readiness 3 – Moderate gaps in availability, leadership or financial commitment 2 – Significant gaps that may impact delivery 1 – Unable to demonstrate capacity to meet core requirements	35%
Capacity to implement and sustain outcomes	Business capability to apply program learnings in practice and bring new or enhanced visitor experiences to market. This includes the ability to integrate outcomes into operations and promotion via marketing channels.	Score Scale (1–5): 5 – Clear systems and resourcing to implement, market and sustain outcomes, with a defined pathway to market 4 – Strong implementation capability with some evidence of marketing and activation; minor gaps 3 – Some ability to implement, but limited structure or clear pathway to market 2 – Limited systems or resourcing; minimal evidence of implementation or activation 1 – No clear ability to implement, activate or sustain outcomes	25%
Impact of accessibility barriers identified	Extent to which identified accessibility barriers currently affect customer participation, experience and inclusion within the business offering.	Score Scale (1–5): 5 – Barriers prevent participation in core experience or development of new offering 4 – Significant barriers limit access for multiple customer groups 3 – Barriers compromise the experience but do not prevent participation or development of new offering 2 – Minor barriers with limited impact on experience 1 – No material impact on customer experience	15%
Existing accessibility initiatives	Evidence of current accessibility initiatives and demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement (e.g. physical upgrades, staff training, accessible information).	Score Scale (1–5): 5 – Four or more, well-implemented initiatives across physical, digital and service areas 4 – Three initiatives in place 3 – Two initiatives in place 2 – Minimal initiatives or early-stage improvements with little evidence of implementation 1 – No current accessibility initiatives or evidence of consideration	5%
Commitment to broader business improvement	Evidence of previous implementation of business improvement activities (e.g. Business Award nominations, participation in TMV programs and training, accreditations and staff training.)	Score Scale (1–5): 5 – Strong track record of implementing improvements, with three or more examples (e.g. programs, awards, accreditations). 3 – Some evidence of improvement, with at least two examples of activities. 1 – No evidence of prior business improvement initiatives	20%

*In addition to the above selection criteria, the panel may consider the balance of industry sectors (e.g. hospitality, retail, tourism, arts and recreation, etc.), and regional representation (between Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Pyrenees and Moorabool Shires) when selecting participants.



Funded Projects

The program provides funding on a **2:1 basis** (between Tourism Midwest Victoria and the successful applicant) in the form of a **reimbursement**. Funding of up to \$5,000 (ex GST) is available on a competitive basis for approved accessibility improvements or to support the establishment of a new accessible experience.

A \$7,500 project to introduce an accessible guided tour (e.g. involving purchase of adaptive equipment and accessible interpretation materials) could receive \$5,000 from Tourism Midwest Victoria, with the business contributing \$2,500.

This funding will be provided as a reimbursement upon completion of an approved accessibility project and AEAP milestones.

Funding will not be provided for retrospective activities (i.e. where project expenditure is incurred prior to execution of the AEAP MOU).

Project Proposals

Project Proposals do not form part of the initial AEAP Expression of Interest application.

Each participating business will be supported throughout Phase 1 of the program to identify and develop their **Project Proposal** in order to unlock funding. This proposal is to be submitted to TMV and will outline how the business intends to allocate the funding as well as co-contribution amounts.

Project Proposals will be due for submission to TMV following completion of Phase 1 of the program, comprised of sessions 1-3 with an expert accessibility consultant, including their site visit.

During these meetings potential new experiences and/or accessibility improvements will be discussed and recommended between the business and access consultant. Each participant will be provided a **Recommendation Report** from their access consultant to help inform their Project Proposal.

Project Proposals must be submitted through a form provided by TMV and should include details of the proposed initiative(s), including:

- Description of new experience or scope of the improvement(s) to an existing experience.
- A copy of the access consultant's report. The proposed project should align with the improvement(s) and/or new experience(s) recommended by the access consultant.
- Quotes outlining the costs and specifics of the planned improvement(s).
- Relevant accessibility specifications/technical notes for proposed project if applicable.

Assessment of Project Proposals

Once submitted, Project Proposals will be assessed in accordance with:

- Alignment with AEAP objectives.
- Eligible projects.
- Alignment with the access consultant's Recommendation Report and feedback.
- Consultation and feedback from the Regional Advisory Panel listed on page 8 (where relevant, Tourism Midwest Victoria may consult the City of Ballarat's Community and Inclusion Officer).
- Available funding
- Prioritising diversity in target customers (e.g. disability profiles)
- Agreement to sign the AEAP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Once an assessment is complete, businesses will be notified in writing of the approval and the allocation of funding available to them via reimbursement upon completion. Eligibility of projects is at Tourism Midwest Victoria's discretion. Tourism Midwest Victoria reserves the right to reject any proposal.

Tourism Midwest Victoria may request a revision or amendments to the Project Proposal.

Eligible projects

The following five categories of projects are eligible for funding/reimbursement:

1. **Creating inclusive spaces or experiences for neurodivergent customers** (e.g. creating sensory spaces, soundproofing, sensory kits, autism-friendly experiences).
2. **Improving an existing experience or creating a new experience for visitors with sensory, physical and neurological disability** (e.g. audio tours, adaptive technology, and equipment).
3. **Minor physical access upgrades to support participation in existing or newly developed experiences for visitors with physical disability** (e.g. installing ramps, upgrading restrooms, widening doorways, ensuring clear pathways, improved wayfinding/signage). Please refer to ineligible projects for further clarification.
4. **Accessible information and inclusive communication solutions** (e.g. providing alternative format materials, accessible websites, communication boards, hearing loop installation, improved booking systems).
5. **Employee training** (e.g. Hidden Disabilities training, learning modules, disability awareness workshops, training to support specific disability groups).

For more detailed examples of potential projects, please refer to Appendix A.

Project scope and approach

Project Proposals may include components **across multiple eligible categories**, recognising that creating a truly inclusive experience often requires a combination of improvements.

Businesses are encouraged to take a holistic approach, particularly when developing new experiences or enhancing existing ones to enable access and participation for visitors with disability.

Example:

A gin distillery develops a new accessible tasting experience. The project includes minor physical upgrades to improve access to the tasting area (step-free entry and clearer pathways), accessible booking information and/or website functionality improvements, and staff training in inclusive customer service.

Together, these elements create a more inclusive and welcoming experience from arrival through to participation.

Ineligible projects

The following types of **projects are ineligible** for funding/reimbursement:

- For tenant businesses, any project that does not have written approval from the property owner or landlord for proposed accessibility improvements.
- Projects involving physical changes that affect a building's structure or function (any works requiring a Council Planning Permit and compliance with National Construction Code (NCC)).
- Projects that do not directly enhance accessibility for customers with disabilities, such as general renovations or unrelated upgrades.
- Business as usual employee or operational costs.
- Routine maintenance, painting, repair or cleaning that does not contribute to accessibility improvements.
- Projects with limited or minor contributions to improving accessibility for customers with disabilities.
- Accessibility improvements that do not comply with relevant building codes, accessibility standards, or other applicable regulations.
- Cosmetic changes without measurable accessibility benefits, such as painting or decorations that do not address accessibility issues.

Eligibility decisions are at the discretion of Tourism Midwest Victoria, based on the alignment of the application with the program's objectives and selection criteria.

Project delivery

AEAP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Once the **Project Proposal** has been approved and written confirmation is received in writing from Tourism Midwest Victoria, the business will be required to sign a MOU funding agreement.

Once the MOU has been signed, the business can proceed to commission the work.

Project delivery support

Business will have access (beyond their pre-scheduled core mentoring sessions) to an access consultant to provide guidance specifically on their project delivery. This support includes up to two one-hour sessions.

Project completion and reimbursement

Upon completion of the funded accessibility improvements/project (as per the approved Project Proposal), each business will be required to undergo a **Project Completion Verification Process** in order to receive their funding/reimbursement.

This process will be agreed to by participants under their MOU. Funding in the form of a reimbursement will not be provided until the specified requirements are met.

This process will ensure that the project has been completed to the required standards and provides TMV with data to evaluate and report on the outcomes of the AEAP.

Project Completion Verification Process:

1. Tangible and intangible verification

For intangible projects (e.g. digital upgrades, training programs), businesses must submit evidence of completion, such as links to updated websites, collateral, e-learning resources, or images of training sessions completed.

For tangible projects such as physical access upgrades (e.g. building modifications, sensory spaces) or onsite accessible experiences (ie. tours, bookable activities), a final site or product inspection must be arranged with Tourism Midwest Victoria once the work is completed. The business must notify the team when the project is finished and ready for inspection.

The inspection may be carried out by a Tourism Midwest Victoria staff member and City of Ballarat Community Inclusion Officer. People with lived experience may also be invited to attend for product testing purposes and to provide feedback when relevant.

2. Evidence of expenditure

The team will also verify that the payment documentation is consistent with the budget outlined in the funding proposal and the scope of the accessibility improvements. This evidence must represent the total project value, including both grant funded and co-contribution components.

Evidence of expenditure includes supply of both invoices and receipts for completed works.

Once the evidence of payment is verified and all conditions are met, the team will mark the project as complete, and the business will invoice TMV for reimbursement of the approved project value as agreed under the businesses MOU.

Project completion and verification (cont)

3. Final Outcomes Report

Each participant who receives the reimbursement is required to submit a Final Outcomes Report within 18 months from their project completion.

Businesses will provide feedback on the impact of their accessibility improvements, including any changes in customer engagement, business performance, and enhanced accessibility for people with disabilities. Tourism Midwest Victoria will issue businesses with an electronic form to complete and submit.

Appendix A



APPENDIX A

Accessible improvement and experience development examples

This Appendix provides an overview of potential projects, with examples under each activity category.

1. Creating Inclusive Experiences for Neurodivergent Visitors:

- Designing and creating designated sensory spaces or quiet zones.
- Modifications to existing spaces (including entrances) to make them more accessible for the neurodivergent community, e.g. soundproofing, noise-reducing measures, dimmable lighting, or other environmental adjustments.
- Acquiring sensory kits or items for customers.
- Creating an Accessibility Guide or social stories.
- Creating sensory-inclusive menus.
- Planning, promoting, and running an autism-friendly event or experience.

2. Creating Inclusive Visitor Experiences for visitors who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Blind or Low Vision:

- Purchase of adaptive technology or equipment to enable greater participation in an existing or new visitor experience.

3. Minor physical access upgrades to support participation in existing or newly developed experiences for visitors with physical disability.

Experience design:

- Development of new targeted accessible experience catering for specific physical access needs (consultancy fees etc.).

Entrance and pathway improvements, including:

- Installation or upgrade of ramps for step-free access.
- Automatic doors or power-assisted door openers to assist with ease of entry.
- Widening of doorways to ensure adequate space for wheelchair access.
- Removal of minor physical barriers.
- Redesigning pathways to provide unobstructed access to the venue, ensuring clear and safe entry points.

Interior accessibility enhancements, including:

- Widening of internal doorways and pathways to meet minimum accessibility width standards.
- Installation of adjustable or lowered counters for wheelchair access at service desks or reception areas.
- Modifications to walkways to ensure accessibility and safe navigation for customers with mobility devices.
- Tactile indicators prior to steps, ramps, and directional changes.

Accessible toilets and restrooms, including:

- Modification of accessible toilets, including grab rails, signage, and appropriate seat/basin heights.

Lighting and signage, including:

- High-contrast and tactile signage for areas such as entrances, accessible toilets, and emergency exits, designed to aid individuals with vision impairments.
- Upgrading lighting in key areas such as ramps, entrances, and parking spaces to improve visibility and ensure safety for people with low vision.

4. Accessible Visitor Servicing Information and Inclusive Communication Solutions:

- Providing printed material (such as menus) in alternative formats, e.g. printed, large print, and electronic versions.
- Creating menus in plain language and with clear descriptions and photos.
- Producing key documents and materials in Easy Read alternatives.
- Upgrading website accessibility e.g. installing an Accessibility Menu widget.
- Creating communication boards or tablet devices with communication applications.
- Installation of assisted listening systems, e.g. hearing loops at key service areas or meeting rooms.
- Producing a mobility map of the site indicating nearby accessible parking, toilets, paths, public transport, and attractions.
- Establishing alternative or improving existing booking, contact, and customer feedback systems.
- Creating accessible and inclusive social media content.

APPENDIX A (cont)

Accessible improvement and experience development examples

5. Staff awareness and training (customer service)

- Developing disability awareness training that can be integrated into mandatory employee induction or onboarding programs for all new hires, ensuring that every new team member receives consistent and comprehensive training.
- Creating e-learning modules or other self-paced online resources that can be used by all new employees, providing ongoing accessibility awareness that can be easily updated as needed and is available for training new employees at scale.
- Partnering with relevant disability organisations to provide specialised training for staff on interacting with and serving customers with specific disabilities, such as autism, vision impairments, or mobility needs.
- Offering long-term, scalable training solutions that focus on developing skills over time, such as creating a training resource library that staff can refer to as needed, instead of relying solely on one-off training sessions that may not be retained if the business has staff turnover.

Got a question for the Sustainable
Destination Development team?

Reach out to
development@tourismmidwestvic.com.au

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