

Guidelines for ACT Women's Return to Work Grants Program

Introduction

These guidelines are designed to explain:

- The aims and objectives of the ACT Government's Women's Return to Work Grants Program
- Who is eligible to participate in the Program
- What the Program offers to eligible women
- How to apply for the Program
- Options for women who are not eligible for the Program

General information about the Program

Throughout these guidelines the Community Services Directorate will be referred to as the CSD and Women's Information and Referral Centre is referred to as WIRC. Similarly, the ACT Government Women's Return to Work Grants Program is referred to as the Program.

These guidelines will be updated as needed. All program information can be found on the Women ACT website at www.women.act.gov.au. Please remember to check the website regularly for any changes to ensure that your copy of these guidelines is kept up-to-date.

If you do not have access to the Internet and have any questions regarding the Program that are not covered in this document, please contact the Women's Return to Work Grants Program Coordinator on 6205 2885.

What is the Women's Return to Work Grants Program?

In 2007/08 an ACT Government Budget initiative was announced, providing funding to establish a grants program for women on low incomes including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disabilities, younger women and older women requiring assistance in returning to paid work following caring for a child for more than twelve months.

In March 2011 the Program was expanded to include any women who have been out of the workforce for an extended period due to caring responsibilities.

The Program aims to enable the provision of practical financial support to women returning to the workforce by providing funding for them to attend short courses, pay for child care to attend interviews as well as more formal training or education. It may also provide support for the purchase of equipment or clothing directly related to the woman's return to work.

Each grant provides up to \$1,000 in assistance for women enrolling in training that will improve their workforce skills.

What kind of training can I do?

The \$1,000 grant is to be used for training and job readiness skills which improves your prospects of successfully gaining paid work.

Training under the Program must be in courses that:

- increase work-related skills;
- improve future job prospects; and
- prepare you for re-entry to the workforce.

Such courses must be:

- accredited
- industry specific or non-specific
- module/s of an accredited course.

What is a Return to Work Plan?

Return to Work Plan, designed to be completed by applicants with assistance from the Project Coordinator (if required), has been developed to assist you to determine the best training for you to undertake based on your skills, interests, life goals and values to achieve your desired employment goal. On completion of the training, the Return to Work Plan will provide you with clear direction on your next steps and future pathways.

What costs can the grants cover?

Participants can use the grant to cover the costs of the following:

- accredited training;
- training related costs such as child care with a registered child care provider while undertaking the training;
- support materials required for the course;
- part payment of Commonwealth Supported Student Contribution Scheme (HECS - HELP) fees for any new university course of study undertaken; or
- other items which the CSD may approve if related to returning to work, such as clothing.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for a \$1,000 grant under this Program, an individual must meet the following criteria:

- low income (based on Centrelink means testing);
- have been out of the workforce due to caring responsibilities for 12 months or more;
- not worked for more than four months (full-time or part-time equivalent) during the past 12 months;
- not currently employed;
- not currently on maternity, or paid/unpaid leave;
- plan to return to paid work within the next 12 months;
- has been a resident of the ACT for more than three months;
- is not receiving financial support for all training and related costs through a Jobs Services Australia provider or through ACT Government assistance such as Canberra Institute of Technology scholarships while participating in this Program
- not previously received a grant through the ACT Women's Return to Work Program.

The Program has an employment focus. Training approved through the Program will therefore be in courses that increase work-related skills or improve job prospects.

Grant Conditions

The grant may be used only on items and activities specified on the Return to Work Plan. If you wish to change how the funds are to be spent you will need to obtain a written approval for a variation of the agreement through the Grants Coordinator.

You are required to complete a Financial Acquittal form within 6 months of receipt of the grant. If you do not provide this you may be required to repay the grant.

What is an Acquittal?

An acquittal is a financial document where the expenditure items are listed against their costs, supported by receipts or statements. You will be provided with a Financial Acquittal form and will be required to attach receipts to verify costs.

How do I apply?

You can access an application form on the Women ACT website www.women.act.gov.au, which can be emailed back to rtw@act.gov.au, or returned by fax or mail. Alternatively you may request an application form by contacting the Project Coordinator. All contact details are at the end of these guidelines.

Once you have submitted your application your eligibility will be assessed. If you are eligible the following will occur:

- You will receive confirmation that you are eligible;
- You will be required to meet with the Program Coordinator to discuss training options and complete the Return to Work Plan; and
- You will also be required to provide all your supporting evidence documents.

Following confirmation that your application is approved you will be required to contact the Program Coordinator to receive and sign a Letter of Offer and payment details forms.

You can now begin to enrol as an eligible Program participant in a course with an accredited training provider.

How many times can I apply for the Program?

You can only apply for one grant through the Women's Return to Work Program.

How long is the Grants approval valid for?

From the date you commence your training/course you have a further six months to spend your funding, unless the training/course undertaken is longer.

You can pay training fees directly

Providing the Program guidelines are met, the ACT Government will provide a grant of up to \$1,000 for training and associated costs. Payment of any costs in excess of this amount is the responsibility of the individual.

What about costs associated with the training?

If there are any funds remaining after paying for training fees they may be used for costs associated with training and returning to work such as:

- materials certified by the training provider as costs directly related to the training course being undertaken under the Program;
- purchase of text books directly related to the course; and
- child care at an accredited child care centre and after school care whilst you are attending training.

Other costs such as stationery and transport may be considered.

Child care Costs

Particular requirements under the Program relating to child care costs are:

- participants will be responsible for arranging their own child care; and
- child care must be with a registered child care provider.

Can I use the Grant for more than one course?

Yes. The grant may be used for more than one training course, provided that:

- there is a sufficient balance remaining in the recipient's grant to cover the cost of that training; and
- the training is commenced within six months of the date shown on the letter of offer for the grant.

The participant must retain original receipts and submit these to the Program Coordinator with a completed Financial Acquittal form within six months of receipt of the grant.

Are there any other options available for me if I am not eligible?

WiRC conducts regular Career Sessions for women who know that they would like to re-enter the workforce, but have not considered the type of work that they would like to do or which would be suited to them, or need some guidance on what course/s they should undertake to do so. The sessions will be available to assist in determining these issues and preparing a Return to Employment Plan. Women not eligible for grants may also attend these sessions.

Other Scholarships/financial help

The Return to Work Program Coordinator is able to assist women who are not eligible for the Program with information and referral to other programs that can support them to enter or re-enter the workforce including;

- ACT Women's Micro-credit program funded by ACT Office for Women and administered by Lighthouse Business Innovations. Interest free loans of up to \$3000 for eligible women to boost their business idea. Visit www.brilliantidea.com.au or contact Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre on 1300 365 514.
- ACT Government Fee Assistance. Available to CIT students experiencing financial difficulties to assist with fees and course materials. Visit www.cit.edu.au or call 6207 3100.
- CIT Indigenous Scholarships. Available to Indigenous students through CIT's Yurauna centre. Contact 6207 3309.
- Fee-Help and Hecs-Help. A loan scheme that assists eligible fee paying students to repay fees for degree courses. The loan is repaid through the Australian Tax Office once the designated income threshold is reached. Vet-help is another Australian Government assistance program for people studying in Vocational Education and Training for diploma courses. Visit www.goingtouni.gov.au

- Centrelink Education Payments. Extra financial support to Centrelink recipients on particular types of payments including Parenting, Carer and Disability Pensions who are studying. Visit www.centrelink.gov.au and click on 'studying and training'.
- YWCA Great Ydeas Small Grants Program. The grants provide financial assistance to women in Canberra and the surrounding regions to help them develop their skills and enhance their contribution to themselves, their families and their community. Offered at the beginning of each year. Phone YWCA Canberra on 6175 9900 for more information.
- Pinnacle Foundation Scholarships. Available for people aged 16 - 24 who wish to undertake full or part-time study and can show leadership potential within the LGBTIQ community. Phone (02) 9990 4708 for more information.
- Country Education Foundation of Australia grants. For young people up to 22 years of age from rural areas wishing to study at specified institutions (including the CIT). Assists with text books, moving costs and other study-related expenses. Visit www.cef.org.au

Contacts:

ACT Women's Return to Work Grants Application forms and more information can be found on the website www.women.act.gov.au or by contacting the **Women's Information and Referral Centre** 13 London Circuit, Civic. Phone: 6205 2885, Email: rtw@act.gov.au.