



**One Gippsland**  
**National priority Fund - EOI Submission**  
**TAFE Gippsland Transport Pilot**

**About the initiative**

TAFE Gippsland in partnership with One Gippsland is seeking to develop a transport focused pilot program that aims to connect at risk remote students to continuing education.

Funding sought would appoint a Project Manager to investigate key transport related issues which are prohibiting young people in Gippsland in accessing post-secondary TAFE. The funding will also be used to design on demand transport solutions to connect these students to education opportunities.

Expected outcomes include the development of a business case that addresses:

- How the geographical and socio economic issues in Gippsland are contributing to low education attainment issues in the region; and
- Solutions to remove transport barriers in accessing TAFE courses so youth can continue skills development in the regions key employment sectors.

**Selection Criterion 1: Effectiveness of the initiative to address structural and other barriers to employment of Australian job seekers and/or job creation.**

Gippsland is a diverse region with vast natural beauty and rich resources. The region however has suffered a range of economic shocks that have devastated the economy and reinforced systemic disadvantage. This has resulted in a perfect storm of decline. The impacts of these issues has resulted in the following indicators:

- Unemployment rate: in Gippsland is 7.2% compared to the state (Victorian) rate of 4.4%;
- Labour force participation: in Gippsland it is 53% compared to 63.9% for Victoria;
- Year 12 completion rate: in Gippsland it is 35% compared to State average of 79%; and
- The Bachelors degree attainment: in Gippsland is 12% which half the Victorian average at 24.3%.

Between 2015 and 2020 the combined effect of the COVID-19 restrictions, bushfires, dairy crisis, drought and the closure of Hazelwood have further reduced the region's prosperity with the following impacts:

- Direct output loss of \$3.28 billion;
- Combined direct and indirect output loss was \$6.86 billion;
- A total of 10,213 job losses (direct and indirect).

The local context for Gippsland is also important to understand. At 41,556 square kilometres, Gippsland is Victoria's largest region. Despite its size, it is only home to just over



270,000 people resulting in a smaller population that is spread across a large land mass creating significant transport and digital connectivity challenges.

As identified in the Gippsland Local Jobs Plan 2020, a significant challenge is the “geographical dispersal of city and town centres and limited access to transport, which prevents local job seekers from undertaking education and accessing employment opportunities”.

Public transport routes and timetables in the region are limited and often incompatible with the location and shift times of available employment opportunities. This issue has also been identified through the Victorian Governments 30 year infrastructure Strategy which states, “those without their own means of transport are “significantly disadvantaged in terms of their ability to access jobs and services”.

The strategy further states that timely and reliable access to transport is “essential for Gippsland residents to access the healthcare, education and services they need and to foster social inclusion among more vulnerable residents”.

The following transport issues in Gippsland have also been identified through the Victorian Governments 30 year infrastructure Strategy:

- A need for more frequent buses between smaller towns and regional hubs – for example Warragul and Drouin;
- Little co-ordination between bus and rail services, combined with limited timetables during peak and business hours, meaning services cannot be used by those living in rural towns to commute to work in regional centres; and
- Poor connections to health, education and training centres from surrounding areas.

Lack of public transport means that Gippsland residents must be highly reliant on cars to get around. Less than 2% of the working population in Gippsland use public transport to commute to work and access to public transport across the region is low in all local government areas. For example, in South Gippsland only 9% of residence live within adequate access to public transport.

The connectivity issues also extend to digital challenges. The extent of this issue has been articulated in the Gippsland Digital Plan which identified:

- There were 496 registered mobile blackspots throughout the region; and
- Almost 75% of the regions cities and towns experienced “intermediate” supply shortfall in access to fixed line broadband.

These digital connectivity challenges got worse the further from major towns and population centres, meaning that there is no suitable alternative to on campus face-to-face learning when it comes to accessing education. And with the transport challenges outlines above, many in Gippsland are unable to access this face-to-face learning.

Overcoming the attainment and connectivity challenges in Gippsland are fundamentally important to the future of the region as there is a clear demand for VET qualifications in One Gippsland - National priority Fund - EOI Submission: TAFE Gippsland Transport Pilot



Gippsland as evidenced by our above average percentage of population having Certificate or Advanced Diploma qualifications (26% in Gippsland compared to the state average of 21%).

*The TAFE Gippsland Transport Pilot* seeks to address these challenges through three principles:

- **Local leadership:** One Gippsland partnering with TAFE Gippsland to strategically address transport barriers to accessing the education required to enter key workforce sectors in the region;
- **Local solutions:** addressing Gippsland's demographic and geographic challenges through targeted transport interventions; and
- **Locals first:** ensuring local Gippsland residents can contribute to the social and economic future of the region.

The key demand driven sectors in Gippsland as outlined in the Gippsland Regional Plan (the region's key strategic document) largely require their workforce to hold VET qualifications. These sectors include (% of employment share): Health Care and Social Assistance (12%); Construction (12%); Retail Trade (10%); Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (10%); and Education and Training (10%).

The development of a transport business case pilot will seek to pair disadvantaged youth with education opportunities to skill in these areas sectors in order to gain meaningful employments, contribute to reducing skills shortages in the region and participate in the economic development of their communities.

This will be achieved through investigating:

- Quantitative (demand) and qualitative (end user consultation) data to better understand the unique factors affecting TAFE Gippsland's students' transition to higher education; and
- Bespoke options for enhanced access to on demand transport services for TAFE Gippsland students.

**Selection Criterion 2: The extent to which the organisation demonstrates local knowledge and connections, organisational capacity and relevant experience in project delivery that will contribute to the achievement of the Fund objectives.**

As an initiative of the One Gippsland Alliance, TAFE Gippsland will work through One Gippsland and our partnerships to deliver the initiative by using partners' individual strengths and developing:

1. Terms of reference;
2. A project control board (including TAFE Gippsland, Local Government, Industry);
3. Project plan with project milestones; and
4. Financial reporting framework.



In addition to the reference group TAFE Gippsland has excellent networks across the region and will use these to work with partners in One Gippsland and across the region to enable the fund objectives to be achieved.

Our Business Partnership team and Education Delivery teams work with industry to address workforce challenges, and Skills and Jobs Centres and our Student Services consistently support students in enabling them to fulfil their skills pathways.

TAFE Gippsland has strong relationships with local training and employment services, including:

- Federation University
- Gippsland Tech School (business unit of TAFE Gippsland)
- schools across the region
- The three LLENs across Gippsland
- Gippsland Employment Skills Training
- ACFE Learn Locals and
- Community Houses.

We also have strong relationships with local employment services providers through the Skills and Jobs Centres and our student services team, The Institute also Industry Reference Groups Membership of One Gippsland, Committee for Wellington and Committee for Gippsland, Regional Development Australia and connections with Regional Partnerships Gippsland.

This submission has been endorsed by the One Gippsland alliance and all subsequent members. Membership includes all six local governments, Food and Fibre Gippsland, TAFE Gippsland and Federation University.

TAFE Gippsland has campuses across nine locations in Gippsland, as well as capacity to deliver services online. The Institute also employs a range of subject matter experts, (for example, data analysts) whose skills we can draw on to support the delivery and achievement of the Fund objectives. Through our connections with our regional partners, we can also access affiliated sites and resources.

### **Selection Criterion 3: The extent to which the proposed initiative contributes to economic and social benefits and the Fund objectives**

This initiative will achieve the Funds objectives and address both economic and social issues in the region by connecting disadvantaged and isolated youth to TAFE opportunities, providing them with the skills required to gain meaningful employment.

Addressing these challenges is essential in Gippsland as it has the highest rates of youth disengagement of all Victorian Employment Regions, sitting at 19.1% (Compared to 11.2% for Victoria). There is also growing unemployment in this cohort, with the youth



unemployment rate in Gippsland sitting at 11.2% in August 2020, increasing by 1% since March 2020.

These figures, whilst concerning are not surprising given the low socio-economic profile of the region with 24.8% of the working age population on income support, compared with 15.2% in Victoria as well as the challenges of distance and transport throughout the region.

Addressing these figures is extremely important for the economic and social benefit of young people in Gippsland. A report from the Centre for Social Impact found that youth economic disengagement can lead to serious long-term problems such as poorer health and social outcomes and entrenched unemployment. The report also found that economic disengagement is much more likely within rural and regional communities given their isolation from education and work opportunities.

There is also a clear link between educational outcomes and broader socio-economic challenges. The percentage of households earning less than \$650 per week in Gippsland is 27.8%, compared to the Victorian average of 20.3%, the regional Victorian average of 22.9% and national average of 18%.

Further, average weekly income in Gippsland sits at \$1,048, well below the Victorian, regional Victorian and National averages of \$1,718.5, \$1,124 and \$1,711.6 respectively. Increasing these income statistics to be in line with the regional Victorian Average is a key goal of the region as outlined in the Gippsland Regional Plan and will improve the social and economic outcomes for Gippsland's residents.

Working to reduce youth disengagement isn't only important for the social, economic and mental health outcomes of the individual, it is becoming increasingly important as the workforce ages.

This initiative will actively work to move the dial in the right direction on these figures by providing Gippsland's disadvantaged students with access to further skills and education, ensuring they can gain and sustain meaningful employment. It is essential in creating a strong and sustainable pipeline of qualified professions to fill workforce and skills shortages in the region's key sectors.

In disadvantaged regions such as Gippsland, finding the resources and capacity to research, engage and develop plans that can address these issues is often out of reach. By funding this initiative, TAFE Gippsland will be able to do the engagement, research and development work required to set Gippsland up long term to address workforce challenges and employment and job creation barriers with a partnership approach across the region.

**For more information**

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