



Regional Development Australia

Better Practice Guide

This guide provides information for Regional Development Australia (RDA) Committee members and employees.

This guide is to be used in conjunction with the 2021–2025 Funding Agreement, and sets out the obligations which accompany RDA program funding, administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

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The Guide and attachments are available at www.rda.gov.au.

RDA Committees should access www.rda.gov.au to ensure the most up to date version of each attachment is used.

Terms defined in an RDA Committee's 2021-2025 Funding Agreement will apply to The Guide unless otherwise specified.

For noting:

1. The 2022 version of The Guide should be applied from the date of release to RDAs. New or revised guidance does not apply retrospectively
2. Where the term 'funding agreement' is used, this is referring to the 2021-2025 Funding Agreement unless otherwise specified.
3. The Indian Ocean Territories Regional Development Organisation (IOTRDO) is part of the RDA network. It is engaged to deliver the same Charter and is required to submit the same deliverables. It is governed differently to the other RDA Committees. All reference to 'RDA Committees' and 'Committees' include the IOTRDO.
4. In South Australia and New South Wales, RDA Committees are referred to as RDA Boards. All references to 'RDA Committees' and 'Committees' include these RDA Boards.
5. 'Australian Government Minister' and '[State] Minister' mean the minister with responsibility for the RDA program in that jurisdiction.
6. Definitions of 'regions' vary for regional and state RDAs:
 - for the standalone capital city RDA Committees of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide Metropolitan, 'region' refers to the areas of their state outside of their metropolitan area
 - for RDA Committees of Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory and Tasmania, 'region' means the area covered by that jurisdiction's government
 - for the IOTRDO, 'region' means Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands
 - for the other 44 RDA Committees, 'region' means the region covered by the local government areas within each RDA Committee's boundary. These are defined at item A.8.1 of each RDA Committee's funding agreement.

Introduction to the Regional Development Australia Program Better Practice Guide

This Better Practice Guide (the Guide) assists Regional Development Australia Committee Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and employees to manage their RDA Committee and its business.

The Guide provides information and guidance on governance, administration and operational matters. It also provides more detail on aspects of the funding agreement, which sets out the funding arrangements for RDA Committees and their obligations which accompany provision of this funding. As funding agreements may vary between states and territories and RDA Committees, this Guide should be read in conjunction with the funding agreement for the individual Committee.

Where there are differences between the Guide and the funding agreement, the funding agreement takes precedence. Where there are differences between the funding agreement and the Guide and state and territory incorporated associations legislation, the relevant legislation takes precedence.

The information in this Guide promotes principles of good governance. As RDA Committees receive Australian Government funding, they must operate in an open and transparent manner that reflects their accountability for the expenditure of government funds.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, or equivalent, (the Department), encourages RDA Committees to build on the information in this Guide and to make use of the suggested references. This Guide supports RDA Committees to meet conformance and performance expectations, however it is not an exhaustive resource. The Guide is a living document and may be updated from time to time to reflect changes in Australian Government policies and programs or variations to the funding agreement.

Questions about any aspect of the Guide or the funding agreement can be directed to rda@infrastructure.gov.au.

The Department will review this Guide as required and will provide written notification of changes to all RDA Committees. This notification should normally provide 10 working days' advance notice of changes, to give RDA Committees an opportunity to provide comment.

Section 1 – the Regional Development Australia Program network

1.1 Overview

Regional Development Australia (RDA) program is a national network (the network) of committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support the economic development of their regions.

RDA Committees (Committees) have an active and facilitative role in their communities with a clear focus on growing strong and confident regional economies that harness their competitive advantages, seize economic opportunities and attract investment.

The capital city Committees of Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney work with city-based stakeholders and the regional Committees in their states to identify and facilitate economic development opportunities in those regions. Capital city Committees are advocates, influencers and promoters of the regional areas of their state.

Committees are incorporated, not-for-profit community-based organisations (with the exception of the Victorian-based Committees, which are not incorporated). Committee members are volunteers drawn from the region who bring leadership, skills and experience from the community, business, industry, local government and not-for-profit organisations. Each Committee has a broad and diverse skills base, with demonstrated networks and connections.

1.2 RDA Charter

The RDA Charter (the Charter) sets out the Australian Government's priorities for the activities of Committees and supports the long-term priorities of government to grow Australia's regions.

The Charter was refreshed in October 2020, and comprises the following 4 points for Committees:

1. facilitate regional economic development outcomes, investment, jobs and local procurement
2. promote greater regional awareness of an engagement with Australian Government policies, grant programs and research
3. improve Commonwealth regional policy making by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues
4. co-ordinate the development of a strategic regional plan, or work with suitable existing regional plans that align with the Commonwealth's regional priorities.

1.3 Outcomes and performance indicators

The 2021-25 Funding Agreement (the funding agreement) details the outcomes that Committees are required to work towards for their region. These outcomes stem from the Charter items outlined in Section 1.2 above:

- facilitate regional economic development outcomes, investment, jobs and local procurement
- promote greater regional awareness of and engagement with Australian Government policies, grant programs and research
- contribute to Commonwealth regional policy making by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues.

The following performance indicators must be addressed by RDAs when reporting on their performance and delivery of outcomes:

- for regional Committees:
 - provide details and/or a copy of a suitable existing Strategic Regional Plan that your RDA is contributing to or that your RDA is developing in accordance with the Charter and RDA Better Practice Guide
 - provide details of the investment (in dollar terms), jobs (number), local procurement opportunities (in dollar terms) and other regional development outcomes that your RDA will facilitate (for planning purposes) or has facilitated (for reporting purposes) for your region
- for capital city Committees:
 - provide details of the activities that your RDA will undertake (for planning purposes) or has undertaken (for reporting purposes) to facilitate economic development outcomes for regional RDAs, during this financial year.
- provide details of where [the RDA has] supported awareness raising and/or engagement
- outline instances where [the RDA has] provided intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government.

Section 3 of this Guide explains the performance indicators Committees are required to report against in providing evidence of achievement against each of the outcomes. RDAs can include additional relevant performance indicators in their Annual Business Plan and Budget and report against these in their Annual Report on Outcomes.

1.4 The Australian Government's role in the management of Committees

The Australian Government Minister with responsibility for the RDA program may be jointly responsible for government support of the network with state and territory counterparts. Chair appointments are made by the Australian Government Minister¹. Detailed information on appointments processes is contained in Section 2, Committee governance and appointments.

The Department assists the network and monitors both the expenditure of Australian Government funding and Committee performance. It does this to help Committees achieve their goals within the Australian Government's announced policy intentions and in accordance with the obligations set out in the Charter and in the funding agreement. The Department strategically develops and reviews the national governance framework for the network, promotes the network to other government agencies, assesses Committee outcomes and strategies, and distributes key messages.

The Department also provides some administrative and operational support to Committees, including providing advice about sound governance practices, and managing the funding agreement. A summary of the Australian Government's and RDA Committees' key responsibilities is outlined in [Attachment 1.A](#).

All information provided to the Department by Committees will be treated in accordance with the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#) and held securely within the Department's records management system.

A key part of the Department's support is communication, both within the network and about the network. It maintains the www.rda.gov.au website and prepares promotional products

¹ Appointments of Chairs in Victoria are joint decisions of the Australian Government minister and the Victorian minister. In South Australia, they are joint decisions of the Australian Government minister, the South Australian minister, and the President of the Local Government Association of South Australia.

from time to time. The RDA website enhances communication and the dissemination of information between Committees, regional communities and the Department. It contains RDA maps of each jurisdiction and the whole network.

The website is also a repository for the program's important governance, operational and communications documents, such as Committee membership application forms, this Guide and national case study videos.

Each Committee will have various liaison points within the Department. All Departmental RDA Liaison Officers are bound to behave ethically and in line with [Australian Public Service Values and Employment Principles](#) and the [Australian Public Service Code of Conduct](#).

Departmental RDA Liaison Officers undertake to:

- manage the funding agreement in a manner that is proactive and transparent
- provide advice on the provisions of the Guide
- make any necessary variations to the funding agreement, including drafting and consulting Committees
- receive feedback on the Guide and amend it as necessary
- remind Committees of their outcome and performance indicator requirements and reports as they arise, to receive and assess these reports, and advise the results of assessment in a timely manner
- pay Committees in accordance with the funding agreement without unnecessary delay and to then advise when payments have been approved
- monitor, support and assess the performance of Committees in relation to the outcomes and performance indicators identified in the funding agreement and provide constructive feedback
- provide timely responses to enquiries either verbally or in writing
- manage Chair vacancies and appointments processes, including provision of a dedicated RDA phone line 1800 505 938 (Monday to Friday, 9:00AM - 5:00PM AEST) and email address rdaapplications@infrastructure.gov.au
- provide open and regular communication, including through RDA Update emails (update@infrastructure.gov.au) and the RDA website www.rda.gov.au.

The Department's RDA Liaison Officers are the primary points of contact within the Department and play a facilitative role to link Committees with other sections of the Department as appropriate.

1.5 Partnership arrangements

The Australian Government has the following partnership arrangements in place across Australia to support the network:

- in South Australia, a tri-partite arrangement includes financial support for Committees from the South Australian Government and the Local Government Association of South Australia
- Victorian Committees are supported by Victorian Government funding and employees, with Committees operating as part of the Victorian Government's regional and economic development structures. Further information on the arrangements for Victorian Committees is in Section 1.6
- the Northern Territory Government provides in-kind support for RDA Northern Territory in the form of rent-free accommodation for the Alice Springs office and works closely with that Committee on development issues
- RDA Tasmania receives in-kind accommodation and administrative support from the Tasmanian Government and is collocated with the Department of State Growth.

There are no formal arrangements currently in place with the jurisdictional governments in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia or the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

1.6 Arrangements in Victoria

Administration

The funding agreement for the 6 Committees in Victoria is between the Australian Government and Regional Development Victoria (RDV). RDV is part of the Victorian Government's Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR).

RDV is responsible for the overall administration of the funding agreement on behalf of the Victorian Government, coordination of activity and information across the 6 Victorian Committees, and employment of the Directors of Regional Development and support staff for the 5 regional Victoria Committees (Barwon South West, Gippsland, Grampians, Hume and Loddon Mallee) and the Melbourne Committee.

Victorian Committees should liaise with the Department's Liaison Officers when assistance is required. The submission of each Committee's Annual Business Plan and Budget and Annual Report on Outcomes will be directly to the Department. Financial reporting should be submitted by RDV directly to the Department.

Regional Partnerships

An alignment between the Victorian Government's Regional Partnerships (RP) regional consultative forums and the Committees is encouraged by cross-membership where 2-3 RDA Committee members sit on each RP. This integration enables comprehensive advice on the priorities for regional Victoria to both levels of government on the socio-economic remit of the RPs and the economic development focus of the RDA program.

Committee funding

Australian Government funding to the Victorian Government assists the Committees to perform their activities. The funding contributes towards:

- engagement of a Director of Regional Development and support staff, employed by the Victorian Government and based within Victorian Government offices in each Committee's region, to support the operation of Committees and delivery of outcomes
- operation of the Committees
- implementation of the Charter and Australian Government priorities within the Annual Business Plans. Annual Business Plans and Annual Reports on Outcomes should demonstrate that Australian Government funding has been expended in line with the Charter and Australian Government priorities.

The Victorian Government provides additional funding to the Committees for the purposes outlined above. In addition to contributing direct funding of the Committees, DJPR and RDV provide additional support including, but not limited to:

- operational and policy support to Committees from regional and Melbourne-based RDV staff
- alignment and coordination between the Committees and the RPs
- access to RDV and DJPR meeting spaces, video conferencing and associated equipment and resources across numerous sites
- shared presence and branding across numerous sites
- facilitated access to other relevant areas of the Victorian Government

- communications and media support
- place-based business and project intelligence
- coordination, on behalf of the Committees, Directors of Regional Development and the Australian and Victorian Governments, of investment, information and reporting across all Victorian Committees.

Reporting in the Annual Business Plans and Annual Report on Outcomes should outline the allocation and expenditure of the additional funding provided by the Victorian Government and identify where an activity has been funded by both the Australian and Victorian Governments.

For reporting to the Australian Government on Committee funding see Financial reporting by Victorian Committees (Section 3.4.1).

1.7 Legal framework

Note this section does not apply to Victorian Committees as they are not incorporated and they receive funding from the Australian Government via Regional Development Victoria.

1.7.1 Incorporation and Australian Business Number

Incorporation

To receive funding, each Committee must be an incorporated not-for-profit association under the relevant state or territory incorporated association legislation.

Incorporated association legislation takes precedence over this Guide and the funding agreement. It is the responsibility of Committees and their employees to remain informed of their obligations and responsibilities under the relevant state or territory legislation and the Committee's constitution. Such responsibilities may cover governance requirements, conflict of interest arrangements, record and account keeping, auditing obligations, and taxation arrangements.

Australian Business Number

All Committees must:

- hold an Australian Business Number (ABN)
- notify the Department within 14 days if they cease to hold an ABN
- correctly quote their ABN on all documentation to the Department and any other Australian Government agency.

1.7.2 Committee constitutions and rules of association

Legislation requires incorporated associations to develop a *constitution* or *rules of association* (depending on the jurisdiction). The constitutions² of incorporated Committees include the rules for running an incorporated legal entity.

It is the responsibility of each Committee to periodically review its constitution and to make necessary amendments to ensure that it conforms to:

- current state and territory laws relating to incorporated associations, as these can be subject to regular changes
- the funding agreement, including any variations made from time to time
- the requirements of this Guide, which also are subject to amendment.

² Called Rules of Incorporation or Rules of Association in some jurisdictions.

To give effect to amendment to their constitutions (and rules of association), Committees should:

- consult the Department (and state or territory and local governments, if appropriate) on any proposed significant changes to their constitution. In doing this, the Committee should write to the Department's Liaison Officer, as prescribed in the funding agreement
- only alter their constitution (including an alteration to the association's name) by special resolution of the members.

The Department recommends each Committee include a reference to the Charter in its constitution.

Committees must provide a revised copy of their amended constitution to the Department within 30 days of the amendments being registered with the relevant state or territory government authority.

1.7.3 RDA name changes

Where a Committee is considering changing its name it must consider the following:

- 'Regional Development Australia (RDA)' must be retained in the name
- the proposed new name must reflect the geography and characteristics of the region. Generic names or names which do not reflect the nature and location of the Committee are not appropriate
- the proposed re-naming must be discussed with, and supported by, key stakeholders including the Department and state, territory and local government partners.

The Department does not encourage the standalone capital city Committees changing their names to be that of their state. In many cases this will result in names that are similar to the names of state government regional development agencies, leading to confusion amongst stakeholders. If a capital city Committee wishes to pursue such a name change, and has the consensus support of the regional Committees within its jurisdiction, it should notify the Department. The Department will then seek views from the relevant state government in considering the request.

Once the name change has been discussed with all parties, Committees must undertake the necessary legal processes to formally change their incorporated name with the relevant state or territory bodies and advise the Department in writing within 30 days of the formal name change being implemented. The Department will then update the content on www.rda.gov.au including the maps.

1.7.4 Funding agreement

The funding agreement for each Committee sets out the funding that the Australian Government provides, the terms and conditions attached to the provision of funding, and agreed outcomes, performance indicators and reports. The funding agreement also sets out standard obligations for Committees.

If a Committee breaches its obligations under the funding agreement, the Australian Government may terminate the funding agreement and cease providing funding to the Committee. Grounds for termination are set out in the funding agreement.

Arrangements with state and territory governments vary. In most jurisdictions, the funding agreement is between the Commonwealth of Australia (as represented by the Department) and each individual Committee. In Victoria, a single funding agreement with the State of Victoria (as represented by RDV) covers all Victorian Committees.

The funding agreement sets out the commitments and obligations of all parties to that funding agreement.

Variations to the funding agreement

The Department, from time-to-time, may vary the funding agreement. It will endeavour to give Committees adequate prior notice of all proposed variations.

Copies of a formal deed of variation document will be sent to the Committees concerned, with a request that they be signed by a delegated officer of the Committee and then returned to the Department for signature by a representative of the Commonwealth. The variation will come into effect once both parties have signed. A copy of the fully signed version will be returned to the Committee.

Deeds of variation will be accompanied by covering correspondence from the Department clearly explaining the aims of the proposed variation.

Applicable laws and jurisdiction

ACT laws apply to the funding agreements. This only concerns interpretation of the funding agreement in and of itself. This should not be taken to mean that Committees are subject only to ACT law on other matters. The relevant Commonwealth, state and territory legislation still applies to Committees in the normal manner on matters such as workplace relations, occupational health and safety, planning and the environment.

In a broader sense, Committees need to be aware of Commonwealth, state and territory legislation which includes, but is not limited to:

Commonwealth legislation:

- [Age Discrimination Act 2004](#)
- [Archives Act 1983](#)
- [Competition and Consumer Act 2010](#)
- [Copyright Act 1968](#)
- [Criminal Code Act 1995](#)
- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)
- [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999](#)
- [Fair Work Act 2009](#)
- [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#)
- [Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986](#)
- [Privacy Act 1988](#)
- [Racial Discrimination Act 1975](#)
- [Sex Discrimination Act 1984](#)
- [The Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012](#)
- [Trade Marks Act 1995](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)

State and territory legislation and regulations:

- Incorporated Associations Act
- Planning and Development Act and Environmental Protection
- Equal Opportunity
- Fair Work or Industrial Relations
- Work Health, Safety and Welfare

- Whistleblowers Protection
- Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation
- Anti-Discrimination
- Freedom of Information
- Regional Development.

1.8 Committee funding

1.8.1 Funding sources

Australian Government funding

Committees receive funding from the Australian Government, under the funding agreement which is administered by the Department. Subject to the provisions of the funding agreement, the Australian Government may change the level of funding it provides to a Committee in response to administrative or government policy changes.

State or territory government and local government funding

Committees may also receive funding from state or territory governments and local government bodies, in either cash or in-kind form.

Third party arrangements

Subject to provisions of the funding agreement on third party arrangements, Committees may obtain contributions from other sources. This includes from Australian Government agencies other than the Department. As outlined in the funding agreement, Committees must:

- in relation to clause 6.2.g, seek Departmental agreement in writing if they wish to use any RDA program funding for the third party arrangement. This applies regardless of the value of the arrangement.
- in relation to clause 10.6, provide the Department with at least 15 business days' notice in writing of significant proposed arrangements that they intend to enter into with a third party, including those involving major payments. A major payment is regarded as \$50,000 or greater. Committees must write to their RDA Liaison Officer about such proposed arrangements. Please note, unless the arrangements involve subcontracting or the use of RDA program funding, Departmental approval is not required, only advance notice of intent. This provides us with an opportunity to highlight to RDAs any potential risks for consideration prior to entering into agreements.

1.8.2 Australian Government funding

Funding is provided to support the Committees in delivering outcomes and reports, as set out in Schedule A of the funding agreement. Funding amounts, any additional terms or restrictions and a payment schedule, are also set out in Schedule A of the funding agreement.

Committees prepare annual budgets to use these funds in undertaking their approved Annual Business Plan and Budget (business plan). The Committee must submit the business plan to the Department for approval. (See Section 3 for the relevant mandatory templates).

Committee expenditure must be clearly aligned with the approved business plan. The Department generally regards costs such as accommodation, employee salaries, office supplies and equipment, marketing expenses, motor vehicle costs, travel costs, and providing for stakeholder consultation or information sessions as reasonable expenditure.

Clause 6.11 of the funding agreement sets out that the Committee must seek the Department's approval if it wishes to transfer more than 15 per cent of its RDA program funding for the period from one expenditure item to another in a financial year.

The main purpose of this requirement is so that the Department is aware of any intention to change substantially the Committee's activities from those in the approved business plan.

International travel

While it is generally a matter for a Committee to decide whether costs incurred in achieving outcomes are reasonable, the Department does not generally regard international travel as a reasonable cost.

If a Committee believes an exceptional case can be made for international travel, the Committee must write to their RDA Liaison Officer for consideration of approval. This must include a business case that demonstrates the relevance of the travel to the outcomes and approved business plan and provide any other information requested by the Department.

The Department may impose terms and conditions, including the provision of a report summarising the outcomes from the travel.

End of financial year funding surplus

The funding agreement requires Committees to:

- write to the Department if more than 20 per cent of the Australian Government's RDA program funding for a financial year remains unspent at the end of the financial year in which it was paid to the Committee, and
- the Committee wishes to treat that unspent amount as funding for the following year (note: this refers to funding to support the Committee to deliver the outcomes, not to specific project funding).

Committees can identify any expected unspent funding at the end of the financial year when preparing their business plan for the next financial year. Once Committees have completed their Annual Audited Accounts and finalised the exact carry over amount they should present a business case to the Department outlining the final surplus and intended use.

The following information must be included when writing to the Department with that request:

- the amount
- the reason for delay in completing the approved activity
- what the carry-over amount would be used for and by when if approved
- the impact on delivering the outcomes, performance indicators and reports
- the benefit of the carry over to the program as a whole and to the Committee's region.

1.8.3 Project funding

Project funding may be provided by the Australian Government to particular Committees from time to time to undertake specified activities, as agreed by both parties and is set out in a schedule to the funding agreement.

The broad requirements for the management of such funding are the same as for annual funding, but the timing of payments and reporting requirements will be as specified in the relevant schedule(s) to the funding agreement. Acquittals and reporting may be additional to that provided for in the main body of the funding agreement.

1.9 RDA boundaries

The geographic area a Committee is funded to service (its boundaries) is defined in the funding agreement at Schedule A (or Schedule B of the Victorian funding agreement).

RDA boundaries have been set to generally accord with state regional development boundaries or structures where possible, and currently do not cross jurisdiction borders. In most cases they incorporate complete local government areas and, where necessary, Australian territories and/or unincorporated areas in any state.

For the standalone capital city RDA Committees of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide Metropolitan, 'region' refers to the areas of their state outside of their boundaries.

In a small number of cases a local government area may be divided between 2 Committees where a clearly definable district aligns better with one Committee, whilst the remainder aligns better with another Committee. Such arrangements are only entered into with the agreement of both Committees and the support of relevant stakeholders such as the local governments affected and partner state or territory governments.

1.9.1 Boundary adjustments

Boundaries may be adjusted where changes to state and/or local government boundaries, changing demographics or other relevant factors make such changes desirable. Generally speaking, the Department's preference is to have alignment with state and territory regional development areas where possible, so a change to a state or territory-based regional development area may be a reason to suggest an adjustment to Committee boundaries.

Committees, and partner state or territory governments and local governments, may request boundary adjustments. The Department may initiate boundary changes where necessary.

Boundary adjustment requests must be made in writing to the Department's RDA Liaison Officer specified in the funding agreement, and include:

- a clear business case for the proposed change
- written support from all Committees affected by the proposed changes
- proposed funding adjustments (within current funding levels) that have been agreed between Committees
- where relevant, written support from a partner state or territory government
- written support from other relevant stakeholders such as local governments, chambers of commerce or local members of parliament.

A Boundary Change Request form is provided at [Attachment 1.B](#) to assist with written requests.

Consideration of requests for boundary changes will be on a case-by-case basis by the Australian Government Minister, in conjunction with their state or territory ministerial counterpart in partner jurisdictions, and with the President of the Local Government Association of South Australia for Committees in South Australia.

Any changes to boundaries of Committees will require a variation to those Committees' funding agreements to reflect the changes to the area covered and funding levels.

Section 2 – Committee governance and appointments

2.1 Committee composition

Committees are made up of a Chair, Deputy Chair and several ordinary members, with typical committee sizes varying from 6-8 members in most cases, taking into account the legislative requirements of the Committee's jurisdiction.

2.2 Committee meetings

Committees should hold regular meetings to discuss key issues and make decisions in accordance with the requirements of the Committee's constitution and the funding agreement. Committees are encouraged to take advantage of teleconferencing and videoconferencing facilities to maximise participation.

Committee meetings must be based on an agenda that has been approved by the Chair prior to the commencement of the meeting. Committees should ensure that the following matters are addressed during each of their meetings:

- acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land/s where meeting participants are located³
- reiterate conflict of interest procedures at the commencement of the meeting, and record all declarations of conflicts of interest in the minutes and the action taken to address them. Best practice has conflicts of interest as a standing agenda item
- report on year-to-date expenditure against the operational budget
- report on progress against achieving outcomes and performance indicators
- record all Committee decisions and document any actions taken as a result of decisions
- include informed strategic discussion of regional economic priorities and solutions, and the Committee's ongoing role in these.

Committees must keep accurate minutes of meetings, including action items, and may be required to provide these to the Department.

Committees must table and acknowledge the RDA program's Code of Conduct at least annually (see Section 5).

It is also recommended Committees complete the 'Annual Governance Certification' each year (see Section 4.1.1).

2.2.1 Attendance at Committee meetings by Departmental employees

Clause 10.5 of the funding agreement provides for Departmental employees to attend Committee meetings in an observer capacity.

Clause 10.4 provides for Committees to provide notices of meetings and agendas in advance of meetings if requested, as well as minutes, reports and financial statements. Departmental employees must provide adequate notice of their intention to attend and, in

³ For a suggested wording for an acknowledgement of country see https://www.indigenous.gov.au/contact-us/welcome_acknowledgement-country

attending, will engage in such a way that provides support to Committees but does not inhibit Committee discussions of strategic matters.

Departmental employees attend in an observer capacity only and cannot participate in decision-making by Committees on their internal management. They can provide factual advice relating to the obligations of the Committee under the funding agreement, on wider Australian Government policy or other matters for which the Australian Government may have information that will assist Committees in achieving their objectives.

Departmental employees should ensure they are in a position to provide advice that might be requested prior to attending the meeting and must actively follow up on advice requested by the Committee after the meeting if they were not in a position to provide advice at the meeting.

2.3 Committee roles

Please see the *RDA Appointments Guide* for information about the roles, accountabilities and responsibilities of Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and Directors of Regional Development (DRDs). The *RDA Appointments Guide* contact the RDA Liaison Officers.

2.4 Selection and appointment processes

Please see the *RDA Appointments Guide* for information about selection and appointment processes for Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and DRDs.

2.4.1 Public sector appointees to Committees

There is no necessary legal impediment to a person holding a position as a member of a Committee in an individual capacity (that is not *ex officio*) while they are a public servant or other paid employee in the public sector. However, they must take care to ensure that their duties as a Committee member do not otherwise interfere with their duties and obligations to their employer and vice versa. This may include disclosing their appointment to their employer. They must also seek to avoid any conflict of interest, by not improperly using their employment to gain a benefit or advantage for the Committee through the provision of information that would not normally be available outside the organisation.

Although a conflict of interest may be more apparent than real, even the appearance of such a conflict may harm public confidence in the Committee concerned. Committee members who are public servants must ensure that any real or potential conflicts of interest are declared. The Australian Public Service Commission provides advice on such issues for Australian Government public servants that may also be of broader interest to Committees. For further information on conflict of interest see Section 5.7.

2.5 Absences, resignations and terminations

2.5.1 Leave of absence – Chairs

A Chair may take leave at any time and must follow relevant procedures set out in the constitution/rules of their Committee. During any absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair will act as Chair and will assume that role's position and duties. The Chair is required to notify the Department of all periods of leave.

For periods of leave over one month, the Chair should also write to the Australian Government Minister. In Victoria, the Chair should also advise the State Minister. In South Australia, the State Minister and the President of the Local Government Association of South Australia must also be advised. Advice should include the period of leave and the Deputy Chair's willingness

and availability to assume the role for that period. In the case of absences exceeding 6 months, the appointment of the Chair may be reviewed by the Australian Government Minister.

2.5.2 Resignation of the Chair, Deputy Chair or member/s

Chairs, Deputy Chairs and members may resign at any time, but need to follow relevant procedures set out in the constitution/rules of their Committee. This should include details of arrangements and procedures for advising the Committee about the resignation and the timing of acceptance. The Chair must ensure all resignations are consistent with the Committee's constitution/rules.

Chairs must inform the Department of their resignation in writing. Chairs must also advise the Department, in writing, of the resignation of a Deputy Chair and a member within 5 days of receiving notice. In the case of a Chair resigning, the Deputy Chair will be asked, by the Department, to assume the position and duties of the Chair until a new Chair is appointed.

When a Deputy Chair has resigned, the Chair may invite a current member of the Committee to fill the role in an acting capacity until a new Deputy Chair is appointed through an open and transparent application process, as per the *RDA Appointments Guide*. The Department's preference is that the acting period not exceed 6 months.

2.5.3 Termination of appointment

Under Sections 8.1 and 8.2 of the funding agreement, the Australian Government Minister may, at their absolute discretion, terminate the appointment of a Chair at any time through the provision of written advice. The termination of appointments is taken seriously by governments and will normally be preceded by consultations and discussion about issues of concern. In Victoria these decisions are made jointly, or after consultation with, the relevant State Minister and in South Australia, decisions are made jointly, or after consultation with, the relevant State Minister and the President of the Local Government Association of South Australia.

Reasons for the termination of appointments could include, but are not limited to:

- breaching the Code, as outlined in Section 5
- concerns regarding the administration or performance of the Committee
- a change in the Australian Government's regional priorities and/or policies.

A Chair may, in accordance with the Committee's constitution or rules, suspend or terminate the appointment of the Deputy Chair and or one or more members through the provision of a written notice. To suspend or terminate the Deputy Chair, the Chair must **first** seek the agreement of the Australian Government Minister. In Victoria, the Chair should also seek agreement from the State Minister. In South Australia, agreement must also be sought from the State Minister and the President of the Local Government Association of South Australia.

The Committee is expected to demonstrate it has applied procedural fairness in the suspension or termination of a Deputy Chair or member, seeking legal advice where deemed necessary.

The Chair is required to provide written advice to the Department if a Deputy Chair or one or more members have been suspended or terminated. This advice must be provided within 5 days of the Chair's decision, and must provide details of the circumstances and the procedure/s that were applied prior to the decision being made.

Section 3 – Committee deliverables under the funding agreement

3.1 Overview

The funding agreement requires each Committee to submit the following documents to the Department by the due dates specified in item A.4.2 of the funding agreement:

- Annual Business Plan and Budget
- Annual Report on Outcomes
- Annual Audited Accounts (or Annual Certified Accounts in Victoria).

Guidance for these documents is provided below and in the attachments. Some elements of each are mandatory, and these are identified as such in the guidance. The majority is provided as better practice guidance only, and Committees can determine how they choose to complete their documents.

Committees **must** complete the mandatory elements in the format specified by the Department. Committees will be asked to resubmit their document/s if the mandatory elements have not been included. RDA Liaison Officers can assist Committees in the preparation of these documents by reviewing drafts and providing timely, constructive feedback during the preparation process.

These documents not only provide important program acquittal information, but are utilised extensively by the Department to promote RDAs, reply to Ministerial requests for information and to demonstrate to the Government and the Minister the impact of RDA work throughout regional Australia.

Having an Annual Business Plan and Budget in place by 1 July of each financial year also enables Committees to demonstrate to stakeholders they have a clear and agreed set of objectives from the beginning of the year.

It is therefore very important documents are provided on time. RDA Liaison Officers will follow up on documents not received by due dates with the DRD in the first instance, then with the Chair and Deputy Chair if the required information is not provided.

Extensions to due dates will be considered for up to one month in extenuating circumstances, on a case by case basis and should be submitted prior to the report due date for consideration.

3.2 Annual Business Plan and Budget

Each Committee must prepare an Annual Business Plan and Budget (business plan). This is an operational document, which brings together all aspects of the Committee's activities for the coming financial year, including its work program, priorities and resources. It is required to provide operational parameters for the DRD, Executive Officer and employees, and assist with determining staffing structures and required skill sets.

Committees can determine how they set out the majority of their business plan. The Department has identified key elements (below) it considers a better practice business plan addresses or is informed by. This guidance can be supplemented with additional information the Committee feels is needed, providing it addresses the key elements below.

Once the Department has accepted a business plan, changes to it can be proposed during the financial year but require the Department's approval where they represent a significant shift in activity or focus (whether a shift is significant will be judged on whether the changes result in more than 15 per cent of the total RDA program funding for that period being moved between expenditure items as a result of the change).

Key elements of the business plan

Chair's foreword or executive summary

This should provide a reflection by the Chair on the lessons learned from the previous year and summarise the Committee's key focus areas for the coming year. This section could provide an overview of how the skills of Committee members and employees will be used to deliver the business plan and how the Committee will work with other regional development stakeholders to facilitate economic development.

Strategic context and regional priorities (this item is mandatory)

Consideration should be given to the strategic priorities and needs of the region over the next 3-5 years and the potential impacts of external influences (such as local, national and international market forces and public policy changes) on these. Based on this, outline the short-, medium- and long-term outcomes and performance indicators of the Committee (please note that these are required to align with the funding agreement outcomes and performance indicators and the Australian Government's regional development priorities⁴). For Capital City RDAs, state level strategic priorities are to be outlined.

For regional RDAs, this section must include information about the region's Strategic Regional Plan/s that the RDA has adopted or developed in collaboration with key stakeholders and how the Committee's work program will complement the priorities identified therein.

The Department has produced guidance for Committees to assist them to identify and or develop a Strategic Regional Plan, as well as outlining the process Committees are to follow to achieve this. There are timeframes attached to each step in this process, and Committees must be aware of these. Please see the Department's fact sheet about Strategic Regional Plans⁵ for more information.

Annual work plan

This section should operationalise the strategic context identified in the previous section and include the activities that will be completed in the year to commence, continue or complete the delivery of the Committee's identified outcomes.

⁴ The Australian Government's regional priorities are as follows:

- **Connectivity and infrastructure** incorporating digital connectivity, transport links, and freight and supply chain infrastructure
- **Human capital and skills** to provide skilled and adaptable workforces, regional universities and training and schooling
- **Regional employment and business** to develop regional businesses and industry, local R&D and innovation and a strategic regional vision
- **Leadership and collaboration** by investing in regional leadership, capable local government and the Indigenous community
- **Amenity and liveability** providing services, facilities and liveability, and support for local priorities
- **Sustainable natural resources** to build future resilience, ensure sustainable foundations and provide economic opportunities and jobs.

⁵ See <https://www.rda.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/strategic-regional-planning-fact-sheet.pdf>

It is acknowledged that some specified outcomes and performance indicators will be higher priority than others and this mix will change for each Committee throughout the duration of the funding agreement. Therefore, the funding agreement specifies the business plan should clearly detail those outcomes and performance indicators that are considered to be high priority or focus areas for the Committee during the coming year.

When preparing a business plan, the Committee may also wish to specify any outcomes and performance indicators that it believes are not relevant to its region or are addressed by other economic development stakeholders. Analysis should be provided which explains the reasons why the Committee has chosen to focus on particular outcomes and performance indicators and also why it believes others require a lower (or no) level of activity.

The Department will agree this position with Committees via acceptance of the business plan. Reporting against the funding agreement outcomes and performance indicators will then be tailored accordingly in the Annual Report on Outcomes, with a greater level of performance being demonstrated against those areas that were defined as high priority and a lower (or no) level of performance being reported for areas that are low priority or not relevant to the region.

Committees may also wish to address their internal corporate governance and process improvement needs in this section. A number of Committees use a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to assist them with this aspect of their planning as it helps to identify areas of their business that may need attention and opportunities for improving organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

Guidance for Victorian and South Australian Committees (this item is mandatory)

State governments jointly fund Committees in these jurisdictions. Local governments also provide funding to South Australian Committees. It is acknowledged that for these states, some outcomes and performance indicators sought by the Victorian Government, the South Australian Government and local governments (as appropriate) will be the same, and others may be different but complementary.

Therefore, the business plans of Victorian and South Australian Committees must provide commentary regarding:

- The outcomes and performance indicators being sought by state and local governments
- the activities that will contribute to the achievement of common outcomes and performance indicators
- the activities that will contribute to the achievement of state and local government specific outcomes and outputs.

Outcomes and Performance Indicators table (this item is mandatory)

Committees must include an Outcomes and Performance Indicators table. This allows the Department to determine how the Committee is addressing the Charter and delivering the outcomes required under the funding agreement.

The Department has provided 3 templates for regional RDAs and 3 templates for capital city RDAs at [Attachment 3.A](#) for presenting this information, and Committees may choose the template that best suits their needs. The first two templates use the funding agreement outcomes and performance indicators as the starting point for detailing activities and reporting performance. The third template allows Committees to use their strategic priorities as the starting point, with activities to be reconciled to the funding agreement outcomes and

performance indicators so that the Department can ensure Committee work programs are consistent with the Australian Government's policy directives (that is the Charter) for Committees.

Committees are required to provide their top 5 strategic priorities and key business activities for the year as part of the Outcomes and Performance Indicators table. This will assist the Department in reporting key focus areas for Committees to ministers and government agencies.

Committees must complete Part 1 of the table, *What will we do?* for their business plan. Please note that targets in terms of the value of investment and local procurement, and the number of jobs created are not required in the business plan.

Part 2 of the table will be completed for the Annual Report on Outcomes (see Section 3.3) at the end of the reporting period.

Budget table (this item is mandatory)

Committees must provide a detailed budget for the year in the format provided at [Attachment 3.B](#). This provides the Department with assurance that RDA program funding is being allocated appropriately.

There are 2 versions of [Attachment 3.B](#), one for the majority of RDAs and a separate version for the following Committees:

1. RDA Far South Coast and RDA Mid North Coast – these Committees receive 2 separate streams of RDA program funding under their funding agreements, to cover the delivery of the RDA program to the Jervis Bay Territory and Norfolk Island respectively. Their variation to the template allows them to separately budget and acquit both streams of funding
2. Victorian Committees – these Committees have different reporting requirements due to their arrangements with the Victorian Government. Their variation to the template allows both Australian and Victorian Government funding to be budgeted and acquitted.

When submitting their Annual Audited Accounts (see Section 3.4), a representative of the Committee or the auditor must complete the 'Actual' column of the template. This information enables the Department to effectively acquit the program funding that it provides to Committees.

Communications strategy

Including a communications strategy in the business plan is better practice as it assists in ensuring communication is integrated with Committees' overall operational strategy and work plans.

The communications strategy should analyse how communication can be used to support the achievement of outcomes and performance indicators during the coming year and outline the various communication processes that will be implemented.

Regular maintenance of the information contained on Committee websites and a plan for how social media will be used should also be factored in to ensure that current and accessible information is continuously available to stakeholders (see Section 8.5.3). Some Committees provide regular, structured information to regional stakeholders generally in the form of updates or newsletters, and this could also be considered as part of the communications strategy.

This information typically addresses:

- significant consultations undertaken with regional stakeholders, such as community groups, industry associations, businesses, government agencies and local government
- conferences attended by Committee members or employees, forums hosted, or submissions invited
- activities undertaken, especially significant activities initiated or completed. This includes papers or submissions prepared by the Committee, research commenced or completed and progress on priority issues
- recent achievements including media coverage of the Committee, grants or contracts awarded to or successfully supported by the Committee, new partnerships formed and major projects completed
- emerging 'hot' issues for the region and/or the Committee, including significant changes in employment levels, new industries moving into or out of the region, and the local impact of significant natural events and the Committee's role in addressing these issues.

If the Committee is continuing to apply the principles of a communications strategy that has been provided to the Department previously, please note this in the business plan.

3.3 Annual Report on Outcomes

The annual report is the formal mechanism through which Committees share their successes and achievements with the Department, including how their activities relate to the strategic priorities of their region and of all levels of government.

Each Committee's annual report is required to provide both qualitative and quantitative reporting against the outcomes and performance indicators outlined in the funding agreement. The strategic priorities and key business activities from the business plan for the reporting period must be included and referred to.

Committees can choose what they include and how they set out the majority of their annual report, with the exception of the following mandatory items:

Guidance for Victorian and South Australian Committees (this item is mandatory)

The mandatory business plan requirements outlined in Section 3.2 must be reported in the annual report. The information provided regarding activities that have contributed to the achievement of shared outcomes and performance indicators, as well as those that are state and local government-specific, must be easily identifiable from the reporting provided on Committee-specific activities.

Outcomes and Performance Indicators table (this item is mandatory)

Committees must complete Part 2 of the Outcomes and Performance Indicators table that was provided in their business plan (which included the completion of Part 1 of the table), in order to provide information against the *What did we do?* (qualitative input) and *Performance indicators* (quantitative input) items for each of their previously-nominated activities. Reporting needs to detail these activities' progress and achievements against the outcomes and performance indicators specified in the funding agreement, as agreed with the Department via the business plan.

Case studies (this item is mandatory)

Committees must include at least 2 written case studies in their annual report. These should focus on key achievements during the reporting period and demonstrate examples of where the Committee has made a difference in its region. The Department's preference is for case studies previously provided to not be provided again, unless there has been considerable advancement in the project's status.

Case studies are extremely valuable for the Department, as they assist in promoting Committees' work to ministers, government agencies and community stakeholders. Committees may wish to provide a further summary of their activities and lessons learned during the year. The format and amount of detail provided is up to each Committee to determine. Images should also be included as they help to enliven the content. Please seek and record permission for every person represented in the image/s and also note there are separate permissions required for people under the age of 18 years. Video is also encouraged as a support for written case studies – please also ensure permission has been sought people represented in videos before providing these to the Department.

Third party arrangements (this item is mandatory)

The funding agreement (clause 10.6) requires that Committees provide information in the annual report regarding significant third party arrangements that are in place (that is those with a contract value of \$50,000 or greater).

This information must include:

- a description of the activity being undertaken
- risks to the Committee in completing the activity and the mitigation strategies for these
- contract start and end dates
- contract value and payment milestones
- activity progress to date.

Committees may choose to reference this information in the body of their annual report or in an attachment.

3.4 Annual Audited Accounts

Committees must provide the Department with a complete copy of their independently-audited financial accounts each year (audited accounts). The audited accounts allow the Department to determine if the financial management practices of the Committee have been effective and financial risks are being controlled.

Committees must also provide a completed version of the budget table (as per [Attachment 3.B](#)) that was supplied with the business plan at the beginning of the reporting period, with the 'Actual' columns completed for each line item. Certification by the Chair and the auditor regarding the accuracy of this table is required. Certification that RDA program income and expenditure has been reported correctly by the auditor also gives the Department assurance that funding has been recorded correctly and spent appropriately.

3.4.1 Financial reporting by Victorian Committees

RDV will provide the Department with detailed financial reports, including:

- Income and expenditure for each Committee of Australian Government, Victorian Government funding and all other funding (as per [Attachment 3.B](#))
- an aggregated financial statement
- a reconciliation and balance statement of the RDA Trust Fund into which RDA program funding is paid.

3.5 Ad hoc reports to the Department

3.5.1 Requests from the Department

The Department may request ad hoc reports, and/or verbal or written information from Committees from time to time for the purposes of providing briefing content for the minister, the Department or the wider government, or for Departmental engagement and program management activities. If any particular format is needed with such a request, that will be conveyed to the Committee by the Department.

3.5.2 Critical regional development issues

If critical regional development issues (positive or negative) are identified by Committees, it would be appreciated if these were reported to the Department. This allows the Department to proactively respond to these issues.

Critical issues are those which are likely to have a significant impact on the current or future economic performance and growth of the region. They can be positive or negative in nature. For example, identified critical issues could be those which:

- have a major impact on key industries in the region, or could have flow on impacts to related industries, which in turn have consequences on the comparative advantage and business competitiveness of the region
- relate to infrastructure, which could affect access to key international, national and regional markets
- have a relationship to human capital in the region, particularly education and skills
- affect the sustainable growth of the region. This may include major changes in the political, physical or regulatory environment, which may impede economic growth
- impact effective cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships in the region
- stop or adversely affect the Committee completing key activities.

Where possible, critical issues should be supported by evidence or data.

Committees can also provide advice on critical regional issues via their business plan and annual report, through discussions with their Departmental RDA Liaison Officer, and through correspondence to the minister (please provide a copy of the correspondence to the Department to ensure its awareness of the issues).

The Department will also bring issues to the attention of Committees, through teleconferences, update emails⁶, RDA Liaison Officers, the www.rda.gov.au website and through other means, as appropriate.

⁶ Emails sent from update@infrastructure.gov.au

Section 4 – Committee operational management framework

4.1 Corporate governance

Good governance arrangements are essential for an organisation to demonstrate to stakeholders that it can deliver on its intended outcomes. Such arrangements inspire confidence in stakeholders that the organisation has the necessary skills and expertise to run its business, and that it has established robust administrative arrangements efficiently, effectively and ethically.

There are 3 main areas of good governance requirements for organisations:

1. **Performance** – whereby the organisation uses its governance arrangements to contribute to its overall performance and the delivery of its goods, services or programs
2. **Risk management** – whereby the organisation manages risk and has contingencies in place to deal with identified risk (see Section 4.2)
3. **Conformance** – whereby the organisation uses its governance arrangements to ensure it meets the requirements of the law, regulations, published standards and community expectations of probity, accountability and openness.

Committees should adopt best practice corporate governance procedures, notably:

- clear definitions of responsibility, roles of the Chair, Deputy Chair, members and employees, with clear lines of reporting
- transparent management processes and procedures for addressing conflicts of interest of those entrusted to manage resources and deliver outcomes
- delegations must be clear, formalised and reviewed to ensure they are still appropriate
- open, transparent and independent merit-based recruitment processes
- accountability in all operations, particularly in management of expenditure in accordance with the funding agreement.

Corporate governance is underpinned by a values system and specifically the Code, which outlines minimum standards of integrity and ethical behaviour and highlights the transparency and consistency in actions of Committee members and employees.

Good corporate governance also requires sound risk management and reporting to the Australian Government on the findings of conformance reviews.

The basic responsibilities of individual members include:

- understanding and complying with all formal obligations
- meeting specific roles and responsibilities as outlined in governance documentation
- formulating strategies, goals and business plans including Committee reports
- reviewing progress towards achieving those goals
- ensuring adequacy and efficacy of internal controls and reporting systems.

4.1.1 Annual Governance Certification

An 'Annual Governance Certification' (the Certification) is provided [Attachment 4.A](#) to assist RDAs to assess whether they have better practice governance arrangements in place which are being reviewed regularly and complied with.

Use of the Certification is not mandatory. However, the Department views the Certification as a valuable tool to enable RDAs to assess the adequacy of key governance arrangements and RDAs are therefore strongly encouraged to table, discuss and complete it at one meeting each year. RDAs may consider it timely to do this as part of their meeting to discuss and endorse the Annual Report on Outcomes or Annual Financial Statements.

It is also anticipated the Certification will assist Committee members to demonstrate they have effectively completed their key fiduciary duties and provide useful information for the financial statement auditors in completing their work.

The Certification is provided as guidance for Committees, and RDAs may wish to add to it, or amend it, to suit their specific needs.

4.2 Risk management

4.2.1 Importance of risk management

Risk management is an important part of good corporate governance and sound management practice. The business of Committees involves some degree of risk which must be managed.

Identification and management of risks which must be managed by each Committee:

- provides a more confident and rigorous basis for decision-making and planning
- creates a clearer understanding of opportunities and threats
- improves the ability to manage uncertainty and variability
- supports active consideration of change
- supports effective allocation and use of resources
- improves the security of assets
- improves stakeholder confidence and trust.

The methodology used to identify risk and procedures to be implemented for managing these should be documented and endorsed by the Committee. It is considered better practice for Committees to prepare a risk management strategy and review this annually.

4.2.2 Developing a risk management strategy

When developing a risk management strategy, the Committee should consider the following, but not limited to:

- outcomes and performance indicators – whether there are any risks that would impact the achievement of the Committee's outcomes and performance indicators
- financial matters – procedures to authorise and monitor expenditure
- budget matters – procedures to monitor expenditure against agreed budget items and identify unauthorised expenditure
- contractual matters – procedures to ensure that funds are expended in accordance with the funding agreement, monitoring of the funding agreement and prevention of breaches of the funding agreement

- insurance coverage – for litigation or professional misconduct, occupational health, safety and welfare, workers' compensation and motor vehicle
- taxation matters – procedures to ensure adherence with Australian Tax Office requirements and the maintenance of full records for the purposes of fringe benefits and other taxes
- assets – procedures to ensure accurate recording of and accounting for assets, prevention of misuse of assets, and that leasing arrangements are entered into only after approval by the Committee
- administrative matters – procedures to ensure that accurate financial records are kept, breaches of financial policies are identified and addressed, audit reports are obtained and supported by complete documentation, and that appropriate back-ups of electronic records are kept
- employment of employees – procedures and processes to ensure fair and transparent recruitment, workplace safety, and the use of employment contracts which meet government regulations and enable performance monitoring.

Committees may wish to draw on the Australian Risk Management Standard (AS/NZS ISO 31000–2009 Risk Management - Principles and Guidelines)⁷

4.3 Financial management

4.3.1 Financial records

Each Committee should implement financial management controls, guidelines and management information reports consistent with Australian Accounting Standards. They should also maintain financial records that comply with the requirements of the funding agreement. At a minimum, a report addressing the Committee's financial performance and financial position must be tabled at each Committee meeting and reviewed and endorsed by members.

4.3.2 Interest from bank accounts

Any interest earned on funding should be used as if it were a part of the funding. Interest earned on RDA program funding should be recorded separately from interest earned from other contributions. An estimate of interest to be earned on Australian Government funds should therefore be included in the relevant parts of the annual budget. Actual interest earned should be included in the relevant part of [Attachment 3.B](#) when it is submitted as part of the audited accounts.

4.3.3 Taxes, duties and government charges

In resolving or clarifying any issues relating to taxation, it is the responsibility of individual Committees to obtain financial and legal advice. This may include gaining advice or a Private Ruling from the Australian Tax Office on matters which are particular to the Committee. See www.ato.gov.au.

The Department does not include Goods and Services Tax on funding agreement payments, based on section 9–17(3) of the [A New Tax System \(Goods and Services Tax\) Act 1999](#) which deals with payments made between government-related entities.

⁷ The full text of this document is only available for purchase, but some websites provide summaries.

With regard to income tax, the Department refers Committees to the Australian Taxation Office's *Income tax status review worksheet for self-assessing non-profit organisations*⁸. Committees should also seek advice from a financial adviser.

4.4 Reimbursements, honoraria, sitting fees and travel costs

Funding may be used, with Committee approval, to reimburse reasonable⁹ travel expenses incurred by members and employees when they attend meetings related to the work of the Committee or perform Committee activities. Reasonable expenses mean items such as domestic travel and accommodation, meals and motor vehicle allowances. In all cases the Committee must ensure that the principles of reasonableness, accountability and value for money are upheld. International travel is generally not regarded by the Department as a reasonable expenditure of Australian Government funding.

Funding may not be used for payment of Chair or member honoraria or sitting fees. Sitting fees or honoraria may be paid from funding sources other than the Australian Government's funding where that source permits such fees to be paid and where the Committee's constitution or rules of association allow such payments.

For further information on reasonable expenditure and travel (see Section 1.6.2).

Committees may wish to refer to the current travel allowance remuneration rates, as set out in the Remuneration Tribunal's determination *Official Travel by Office Holders*¹⁰.

No member, including the Chair, is entitled to claim the cost of employing a person to look after their business while they are performing Committee duties.

4.5 Other contributions, third party arrangements and sponsorships

4.5.1 Contributions from other Australian Government agencies

Committees should be alert to the very wide range of programs managed by Australian Government agencies which they may be able to access as support for specific activities. There may be opportunities, for example, for Committees to obtain funding for investment and industry attraction. Such funding will be subject to the advice on third party arrangements (see Section 4.5.3).

4.5.2 Contributions from state or territory agencies

Other contributions may be provided to a Committee from a state or territory government. This may be for operational purposes or for specific activities. Such funding is subject to the following advice on third party arrangements.

4.5.3 Third party arrangements and contracting

Clause 10.6 of the funding agreement, Reporting and Third Party Arrangements, requires Committees to provide the Department with advance notice, in writing, of any significant proposed arrangement that they intend to enter into with a third party (see Section 3.3 for information RDAs need to provide). This does not cover the provision of day to day supplies or services.

⁸ See <https://www.ato.gov.au/Forms/Income-tax-status-review-worksheet-for-self-assessing-non-profit-organisations/>

⁹ In some jurisdictions, a cap on expenditure which can be reimbursed to Committee members may be in place.

¹⁰ See <https://www.remtribunal.gov.au/document-library-search/determination-201607-official-travel-office-holders>

'Significant' proposed arrangements include those with potential to have a notable impact on the Committee's activities, such as by involving major payments (regarded as \$50,000 or greater), necessitating the re-allocation of resources, taking up considerable amounts of Committee personnel time and/or having potential to alter the Committee's relations with stakeholders. Please note, unless the arrangements involve subcontracting or the use of RDA program funding (refer below), Departmental approval is not required, only advance notice of intent. This provides us with an opportunity to highlight to RDAs, any potential risks for consideration prior to entering into agreements.

Third party arrangements often involve the provision of goods or services to the Committee. Where this involves the performance of any of the Committee's obligations under the funding agreement, such an arrangement amounts to subcontracting, which requires the Australian Government's written approval in all cases.

Some third party arrangements may involve generation of income for the Committee. These activities should, as far as practical, be fully costed to the third party, including a proportion of office expenses (such as rent, telephone, equipment and salaries).

Committees should ensure that third party contracts do not require the support or use of RDA program funding provided by the Australian Government. Clause 6.2(g) of the funding agreement requires the Department's written agreement if Committees intend to use RDA program funding for this purpose.

Committees should be confident that any additional business undertaken on behalf of other organisations does not compromise their activities, including those set out in the funding agreement and the business plan.

Clause 10.7 of the funding agreement prohibits Committees from negotiating for or entering into any arrangement which may bring the Australian Government into disrepute. This encompasses a very wide range of scenarios, which could be expected to cover anything perceived to be contrary to law, the policies of the Australian Government, or the values that it promotes. Committees should consult the Department as early as possible if they have any concern that a prospective arrangement could raise any such perceptions.

Section 4.6 provides further information regarding insurance coverage for third party arrangements.

4.5.4 Sub-leasing of premises

Committees should advise the Department before sub-leasing office space to third parties. The Department prefers such sub-leases to be with a 'like' body, particularly where there are opportunities to support and build networks or to build a relationship to progress the priorities identified in the business plan.

4.5.5 Sponsorships

The provisions in the funding agreement at Clause 10 on arrangements with third parties include sponsorships. Sponsorship is a commercial arrangement in which a sponsor provides a contribution of money or in-kind to support an activity in return for certain specified benefits. Sponsorship can be provided by the corporate sector or private individuals in support of a Committee's activities, or may instead involve the Committee itself granting sponsorship. This does not include unconditional gifts, donations, bequests or endowments. Sponsorship is not philanthropic - a sponsor expects to receive a reciprocal benefit beyond an acknowledgement.

Although there is no prohibition on Committees entering into sponsorships, they should be mindful of any implications for their obligations under the funding agreement. This includes, but is not limited to, Clause 10.7, concerning arrangements that may bring the Australian Government into disrepute, and Clause 10.6, concerning third party arrangements. Entering into sponsorship arrangements either as a recipient or a provider involves potential risks for the Committee, including real or perceived conflicts of interest.

There are a number of principles that all Committees should consider prior to entering into any sponsorship agreement, regardless of whether the Committee is the party seeking or providing the sponsorship. These should be addressed in a sponsorship policy, which should be published by the Committee in advance or circulated to organisations interested in providing or receiving sponsorship.

Any sponsorship proposals should then be considered against these principles:

- a sponsorship agreement should not impose or imply conditions that would limit, or appear to limit, a Committee's ability to carry out its functions fully and impartially. Instead, sponsorship agreements should be of assistance to carrying out the activities in the Committee's business plan
- there should be no actual conflict between the objectives and/or mission of the Committee (and the Australian Government) and those of the party receiving or providing sponsorship
- sponsorship received or provided should not be political or contentious
- it is inappropriate for any employee or member of the Committee to receive a personal benefit from a sponsorship
- in most circumstances, the public interest is best served by making sponsorship opportunities widely known. To this end, sponsorship should be sought and granted by using broadly based, open processes that are not limited solely to invited sponsors
- a sponsorship arrangement is a contract and should be described in a written agreement
- all sponsorship arrangements should be approved by the Committee and described in the reports the Committee submits to the Department (that is the business plan and annual report) in a form commensurate with the significance of the sponsorship.

Further considerations regarding receiving or providing sponsorship funds are below.

Committees receiving sponsorship funds

If Committees seek sponsorship funding from third parties, this should be done using a stringent broad and transparent process appropriate for the targeted sponsorship activity. Committees should note the types of sponsorship appropriate to their Committee *before* seeking sponsorship, including identifying the types of activities that would not be appropriate for sponsorship.

Committees should also give consideration to the desirable attributes of an acceptable sponsor, including but not limited to:

- potential sponsors must be reputable individuals or bodies
- the objectives and products of potential sponsors cannot conflict with the values and the objectives of the Committee
- potential sponsors should have an acceptable sponsorship record with the Committee or other agencies

- goods or services provided would benefit the Committee and/or the general public and be of the type and quality that is required
- the objectives and missions of potential sponsors' parent companies or subsidiaries must not conflict with those of the Committee
- where sponsorship involves the sponsor providing a product to the Committee, the Committee should evaluate that product for its fitness for purpose against objective criteria that are relevant to the Committee's needs
- sponsorship of a Committee activity should not involve explicit endorsement or advertising of the sponsor or the sponsor's products.

Committees should be clear on the benefits they will provide to sponsors, and must ensure these benefits are consistent with their funding agreement, the Charter, and the Code of Conduct.

Committees providing sponsorship (must be defensible)

As well as the principles listed above, Committees must ensure that any sponsorship being granted is within the Committee's budget.

Committees are encouraged to consult the ICAC publication *Sponsorship in the public sector—a guide to developing policies and procedures for both receiving and granting sponsorship (2006)*¹¹. For more information, go to: <https://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/prevention/corruption-prevention-advice-topics/sponsorship>.

4.6 Insurance

4.6.1 Insurance coverage

The Australian Government provides three types of insurance cover:

- Management Liability (also referred to as Not for Profit Organisation Liability) to a limit of \$10,000,000 for each claim
- Voluntary Workers/Personal Accident (also referred to as Personal Accident) to a limit of \$100,000 for each claim
- Broadform Liability (also referred to as General and/or Products Liability) Insurance of up to \$20,000,000 for each claim.

The policies for all three of these types of insurance coverage and the Certificates of Currency are available by contacting your RDA Liaison Officer or rda@infrastructure.gov.au. It is important for all Committees to familiarise themselves with the content of these insurance policies. Each of these forms of insurance includes coverage of Committee volunteers.

Note that there is no age limit for insurance coverage for Broadform Liability Insurance coverage and Management Liability Insurance, however Voluntary Workers/Personal Accident Insurance is only provided for Committee members who are 90 years of age or under.

Extraneous 'out of pocket' expenses incurred while undertaking Committee activities, such as damage to or loss of personal property, should be managed within the Committee's budget where these incidents are not covered under the existing insurance policy. The Australian Government will not pay for this type of additional cover.

¹¹ See <https://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/232/Sponsorship%20in%20the%20public%20sector.pdf.aspx>

It should also be noted that, under the terms of the insurance cover maintained by the Department for the benefit of Committees, the 'Insured' (the Committee) is required to pay the 'Deductible Amount' (the excess) specified in the policy. The Australian Government will not pay the excess for any insurance claims. Committees must also ensure that sub-contractors of the Committee are covered by insurance under either the Committee's insurance policies or separate insurance policies.

In general, the Department's insurance coverage for RDA Committees, as detailed in Clause 16 of the funding agreement, does not extend to third party arrangements. However, coverage may be able to be provided if the arrangement involves an Australian Government agency. If this is the case, please contact your RDA Liaison Officer who will contact the Department's insurance broker to determine whether the arrangement can be accommodated under the Department's existing policies.

If a Committee has any questions when an incident arises, the DRD should consult with the RDA Liaison Officer in the first instance or email rda@infrastructure.gov.au. The Department will seek advice from the insurance broker as required.

Committees will be advised by the Department of any updates to insurance coverage.

4.6.2 Workers' compensation insurance

Committees are responsible for taking out and maintaining workers' compensation insurance under the relevant state or territory legislation to cover their employees. Committees must be aware of and comply with their legal responsibilities regarding workers' compensation insurance and workers' health and safety.

4.6.3 Asset insurance

Committees are responsible for taking out and maintaining comprehensive and contents insurance for all assets owned or controlled by the Committee. This includes contents insurance for Committee premises and specific cover for items not located at the premises.

4.6.4 Motor vehicle insurance

Committees are responsible for taking out and maintaining comprehensive insurance of any motor vehicle leased (subject to the terms of the lease) or owned by the Committee. The use of personal motor vehicles is not covered by the insurance which is procured by the Department, for example driving a personal motor vehicle to and from a Committee meeting.

4.7 Assets (where required)

4.7.1 Committee responsibilities for assets

The funding agreement requires Committees to use assets for the purposes of the activity, to safeguard their assets, to have regard to sections on assets in this Guide and follow any processes in it, and to maintain an asset register. This also applies to assets that are owned by a third party and are under lease, hire or finance arrangements. Assets that are lost, damaged or destroyed should be promptly reinstated from the proceeds of asset insurance referred to in Clause 16 of the funding agreement.

Committees are responsible for purchasing, leasing, managing and disposing of the assets which they acquire with funding:

- the purchase or lease should be in accordance with the funding agreement, and not compromise the Committee's ability to comply with the funding agreement

- all assets should be held securely to prevent theft, loss, damage or unauthorised use
- Committees should keep appropriate documentation of all assets, including of their purchase or lease, as well as an assets register.

Asset purchases or leases should also provide value for money, so competitive quotes should be obtained and kept on file. The Department may ask to see these quotes and the Committee's assessment of them.

The following provides an outline of good practice asset management that Committees are encouraged to follow.

4.7.2 Asset management system

Committees should implement an asset management system that sets out procedures to record, monitor and manage assets.

Such a system should cover:

- purchasing assets
- registering assets on the asset register (see below)
- testing the assets for impairment as per [Australian Accounting Standard AASB 136](#) 'Impairment of Assets'¹²
- monitoring and recording the replacement of assets
- disposal of assets.

4.7.3 Register of Assets

The Register of Assets should record details of all significant assets (such as those valued over \$10,000) and all portable and attractive items.

The following is an outline template for Committees to follow:

- description of the asset
- date of purchase or lease of the asset
- purchase or lease price of the asset
- amount of funding used to purchase or lease the asset
- details of lease arrangements (if applicable)
- location of the asset
- amount of depreciation on the asset
- details of disposal of the asset (such as the date and method of disposal, sum received and sales particulars)
- a separate addendum listing all portable and attractive items that is those with a high inherent risk of theft, are easily portable or transferrable, and are attractive in terms of their personal use or for resale. This includes mobile telephones, laptops, iPads, tablets, televisions, DVD players and other similar communication tools.

The Register of Assets should be updated whenever assets are acquired or disposed of by the Committee.

¹² See https://www.aasb.gov.au/admin/file/content105/c9/AASB136_08-15_COMPmar20_07-21.pdf

4.7.4 Stocktake of assets

Committees should complete a stocktake of their assets every 12 months. This should involve:

- confirming that all items are correctly recorded in the Register of Assets and still in the custody of the Committee
- checking on the condition of assets, including testing for impairment as per [Australian Accounting Standard AASB 136](#)
- adding any unrecorded existing assets to the register and removing assets no longer held.

4.7.5 Asset replacement account

An important part of asset management is making provision for the replacement of assets as their useful life expires. Committees should budget for the replacement of assets from their funding and, to support this, may maintain an Asset Replacement account. The dollar value of this account should reflect the accumulated depreciation recorded in the Committee's general ledger and needs to reconcile to the Register of Assets.

4.7.6 Asset disposal

All Committees should have clear procedures for the disposal of assets. Appropriate means of asset disposal include through sale at auction, tender, trade-in or via a second-hand dealer. If sale is not practical, another option is to gift the asset to a charitable organisation, local school or library. To ensure a fair return to the Committee and to avoid any actual or perceived preferential treatment, any disposal transaction should be transparent and at arm's length from Committee members and personnel. Assets should therefore not be sold to:

- the Chair
- members
- personnel or employees engaged by the Committee
- contractors
- friends or relatives of any of the persons set out above.

The sale process should be clearly documented. Profit from the sale of any asset (disposal price less accumulated depreciation) should be deposited into the Committee's operating account on receipt. That profit remains part of the funding and must be used for the activity.

When the funding agreement expires or if it is terminated, the Department may require the Committee to deal with an asset in a particular way and will notify the Committee in writing what it must do. This advice does not apply to assets that are owned by a third party.

4.8 Records management

Records refer here to information in any form that is created, received and maintained as evidence and documentation by the Committee or its personnel in pursuance of legal obligations, including undertaking Committee activities. Record keeping is an important part of transparency and accountability. Committees should implement a records management system, keep accurate records of operations, and store records securely. Some information recorded may be considered sensitive or 'in-confidence', for which particular care should be exercised to ensure integrity and security.

Committees must maintain records and documents consistent with relevant Commonwealth, state or territory legislation and the funding agreement. The funding agreement requires

Committees to make and keep full and accurate records of their conduct of activities and retain them for a period of no less than 7 years after the end of the activity period.

The Australian and international standard for records management, AS ISO 15489, provides guidance on records policies and procedures to help meet business needs, legal requirements and stakeholder expectations. It is widely used in Australia and internationally in both private and public organisations. AS ISO 15489 may be purchased from Standards Australia (www.saiglobal.com).

The National Archives of Australia also provides advice <http://www.naa.gov.au/information-management/>. This information has been developed for Australian Government agencies, much of this advice may also be useful for bodies such as Committees.

Records may be subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982 \(Cth\)](#) and the relevant state or territory equivalent. Some Committee records may also be deemed to be Australian Government records and must be treated accordingly. The [Archives Act 1983](#) provides further details and clarification of responsibilities.

4.9 Complaints management policy and procedures

Complaints management is an important part of good corporate governance and sound management practice. All Committees should have a complaints management policy that sets out how they will handle any grievances.

Feedback, including formal complaints, can be vital in improving the quality of services to a community. All formal complaints should be dealt with in a professional and accountable manner, even where the Committee believes a complainant is vexatious.

When developing a complaints management policy, Committees can find the Commonwealth Ombudsman's *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling* and other guidance at: <https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/publications/better-practice-guides>.

Complaints regarding Committees should be directed to the Committee concerned in the first instance. However, the complainant may choose to make an initial approach directly to the Department if that is their preference¹³.

If the Committee is unable to resolve a complaint to the complainant's satisfaction, the complainant may raise the matter with the Department. The Department will then investigate and may require the Committee concerned to account for how it:

- gave the complainant the opportunity to be heard by the full Committee
- investigated the complaint, deliberated on the course of action and recorded the deliberations
- chose to act in response to the formal complaint
- responded to the complainant.

Evidence such as minutes of meetings may also be sought.

Any feedback or complaints concerning the Department itself can be made using the feedback facility located on the Department's website¹⁴.

¹³ Complaints about an RDA Committee should be submitted via rda@infrastructure.gov.au

¹⁴ See <https://infrastructure.gov.au/utilities/contact.aspx>

4.10 Privacy requirements

Committees should be aware of all their legal responsibilities under privacy legislation, as well as those specified in the funding agreement. The funding agreement requires that Committees not do anything which, if done by the Department, would be a breach of an Australian Privacy Principle.

The Australian Privacy Principles that were introduced in March 2014 regulate the handling of personal information by Australian Government agencies, businesses with a turnover of more than \$3 million or those trading in personal information and all private health service providers. For further information, go to Office of the Australian Information Commissioner <https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/australian-privacy-principles-guidelines/>.

Each Committee should develop a privacy plan for handling personal information.

Consistent with privacy legislation and good management practice, Committees should:

- ensure any Committee personnel who are required to deal with personal information for the purposes of the funding agreement are made aware of the privacy obligations set out in this Guide and the funding agreement
- immediately notify the Department if they become aware of a breach or possible breach of any of privacy obligations.

4.11 Disclosure

The funding agreement prevents Committees from disclosing any material designated by the Australian Government as confidential without its permission (except where that disclosure is required by law).

The Australian Government will seek to use this power cautiously and with restraint. It will usually bear in mind the exemption provisions of Freedom of Information legislation in considering what sorts of documents are to be designated as confidential.

The types of documents that could feasibly involve Committees include (but are not limited to) the following broad categories:

- personal privacy
- business affairs
- trade secrets or commercially valuable information
- research by CSIRO or the Australian National University
- enforcement of law and protection of public safety
- documents subject to legal professional privilege
- documents containing material obtained in confidence
- documents, disclosure of which would be in contempt of Parliament or in contempt of court.

4.12 Further information and resources

There are a number of available resources on corporate governance that Committee members and employees may find helpful to draw on when developing procedures and reviewing their own practices. Committees may wish to consider the following (not an exhaustive list):

- The Australian Public Service Commission - [Governance | Australian Public Service Commission \(apsc.gov.au\)](https://www.apsc.gov.au/governance)

- Better Boards - <https://betterboards.net/>
- Women on Boards - <https://www.womenonboards.net/en-au/home>
- Australian Institute of Company Directors - <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/resources>
- Board Checkup - <https://www.boardcheckup.com/>
- Standards Australia (note that users must pay to access these publications) - <https://standards.org.au/>.

Section 5 – Code of conduct and ethics for Committee members and employees

5.1 Introduction

Committee members and employees are required to be people of good character who reflect accepted standards of behaviour. They need to be open, honest and accountable, and to act in good faith. Committee members and employees need to be aware of the responsibilities attached to their roles.

This section should be read in conjunction with relevant state or territory incorporated associations legislation. In some jurisdictions legislation may differ from the Guide, particularly with respect to the timeframe for reporting conflicts of interest. It is the responsibility of each Committee to be familiar with the legal requirements in their jurisdiction.

Please also see Political Participation (see Section 6) and Communications (Section 8), in particular Public Comment and Public Comment on Political and Social Issues (see Section 8.2).

5.2 Principles

Committee members and employees are to always act in the best interests of the community in their dealings with government agencies, the business sector, other organisations and individuals by:

- being honest and exercising all due care and diligence in the performance of their duties and functions
- maintaining the confidentiality of information made available in the course of their duties and of Committee decisions
- never making improper use of their position, or the information gained through that position, to the unfair advantage of themselves or any other person
- never taking any course of action that would bring into disrepute or otherwise disadvantage the Committee, the Department or the Australian Government, the relevant state or territory government Department, the relevant state or territory minister responsible for regional development or local government in the Committee region
- disclosing any material or personal interest in Committee or regional economic development matters, and subsequently abstain from any discussion or vote on those issues
- being bound by, and committed to, decisions legitimately taken by the Committee, whether or not they agree with the decision
- demonstrating loyalty to the public interest and to the standards set out in the funding agreement and this Guide
- providing authorised persons, fellow members and auditors when asked with complete, accurate and correct information, which is not misleading in any respect
- complying with relevant laws.

Victorian Committee employees

Employees of the 6 Victorian Committees should refer to the Victorian Public Service Code of Conduct https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/VPSC_Code_VPSE_WEB.pdf.

5.3 Personal and professional behaviour

Duties must be performed diligently, impartially and conscientiously to the best of each member's ability. Members must comply with all relevant state or territory and Commonwealth legislation. In particular, Committees must provide a workplace that safeguards the health and safety of volunteers, employees and contractors, and is free from discrimination, bullying and harassment.

5.4 Fairness and equity

It is important that principles of fairness and equity are both complied with and are seen to be complied with.

These principles are:

- taking all relevant information into consideration and not taking any irrelevant information or opinion into consideration
- dealing with like situations in a consistent and fair manner, but treating each matter on its merits
- acting in a reasonable, just and non-discriminatory manner
- taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the information upon which decisions or actions are based is factually correct
- only acting for proper and relevant purposes, and on proper and relevant grounds
- operating in a transparent manner and allowing equal access for the community to contribute and access services.

5.5 Use of information

Information provided to a Committee may come with the understanding that it will be treated as confidential, commercial-in-confidence and/or sensitive. It is important to ensure the integrity and security of official documents for which Committee members are responsible and to respect the rights of the providers of information. In accordance with the Confidentiality clause of the funding agreement (Clause 13), Committees should not disclose information that the Australian Government has designated as confidential.

Confidential information must not be released unless:

- required by law
- Freedom of Information / Right to Information legislation requires the release
- permission has been granted by the Australian Government or, where relevant, the state or territory government, local government, or the provider of the information.

The above does not affect the application of specific contractual arrangements to particular confidential information under any contract entered into by the Committee.

5.6 Conditions of Committee membership and employment

Committee members are expected to represent their Committee's interests in the region, rather than those of any particular organisation(s), business or local council, and must be available to participate in Committee meetings and activities.

Committee members and employees must:

- as a matter of principle, be excluded from tendering for consultancy or contract work for or on behalf of the Committee (see Section 5.7.5)
- comply with the relevant state or territory associations' incorporation legislation, and the conditions stipulated by the Department and the relevant state or territory government Department in the funding agreement(s) with the Committee regarding the allocation of administration and/or project funds
- be people of good character who reflect accepted standards of community behaviour. This includes, but is not limited to, not having a civil or criminal conviction punishable by a period of imprisonment and not being an undischarged bankrupt.

5.7 Conflict of interest

5.7.1 Overview

Conflict of interest is one of the most important governance issues for Committees. As recipients of Australian Government funds, it is essential that Committees undertake their activities in a fair, non-biased and apolitical manner, without actual or perceived conflicts of interest in their decision-making.

As some conflicts of interest may be unavoidable, Committees need to manage all conflicts of interest within an ethical, open and transparent framework that requires the Chair, Deputy Chair, members and employees to act with integrity, impartiality, good faith and in the best interests of the Committee at all times.

Transparency is fundamental to the principles of good governance and managing conflicts of interest. Committees should build an ethical culture by consistently requiring conflicts of interest to be identified, recorded and dealt with properly.

The funding agreement requires Committees to take all reasonable steps to identify any conflicts of interest and to maintain a register of these. Declaration of conflicts of interest should be a standing item on all Committee meeting agendas, and should appear on the agenda prior to the discussion on any substantive issues.

5.7.2 Conflict defined

A conflict is defined in Clause 1 of the funding agreement as “an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest arising through [a member or personnel] engaging in any activity or obtaining any interest that is likely to or has potential to conflict with or restrict [the Committee] in engaging in the [activity] fairly and independently”. When assessing conflicts of interest, the Committee should always take a conservative approach and carefully consider the perception of a conflict by the general public. The test should always be: *Could a member of the community, on the face of it and with limited information, consider the matter to be a conflict of interest?*

5.7.3 Identifying a conflict of interest

A conflict of interest arises when a Chair, Deputy Chair, member or employee:

- has a personal, business, or financial interest that could be considered to influence their work with the Committee, their contribution to debates by the Committee, and/or decisions taken by the Committee
- uses information and/or contacts gained through working in a professional capacity for the Committee to benefit their own personal business interests in any

way, or inform other organisations that they are involved with outside the Committee where those organisations could benefit directly or indirectly from the information.

Conflicts of interest can be direct or indirect, for example:

- the Chair, Deputy Chair, member/s or employee/s owning or having an interest in a business that is under consideration to provide goods or services to a Committee
- a close family member being employed by an organisation applying for support for a project
- the Chair, Deputy Chair, member/s or employee/s participating in a decision that results in their gaining an economic or financial benefit or a non-financial benefit, such as a gift being given to the individual involved in making the decision
- the Committee employs a partner, relative or close friend of a Committee member or an employee, who is then responsible for approving benefits such as reimbursement of travel or salary increase for that person
- progressing personal business or personal business relationships through the course of Committee professional business.

Committees should contact their RDA Liaison Officer if they have any questions about conflict of interest arrangements or whether a particular activity may constitute a conflict.

5.7.4 Disclosing a conflict of interest

The Australian Government expects all Committees to have clearly documented principles and procedures for handling conflicts of interest, consistent with their constitution, the funding agreement and this Guide. In addition, declaration of conflicts of interest should be a standing agenda item for all Committee and sub-committee meetings.

If, while performing Committee business, the Chair believes that they have a conflict or potential conflict of interest, they must disclose the nature of the conflict to the Committee. Similarly, the Deputy Chair, members or employees must disclose any real, perceived or potential conflict to the Chair of their Committee as soon as that conflict or potential conflict becomes apparent. Such declarations should be made immediately after the Committee has received the agenda and papers for its next meeting.

The interests of immediate family members and close associates need also be disclosed to the extent that they are known and could be considered to lead to a conflict of interest. All disclosures, discussions and decisions on conflicts of interest must be recorded in the minutes of the relevant Committee meeting.

If a situation arises where any member of the Committee (or any employee) believes that there is an undisclosed conflict or potential conflict of interest, the matter will, in the first instance, be raised with the party who may be conflicted. Such a discussion should be sufficient to suggest that a potential conflict exists and the matter then be listed for discussion by the Committee at its next meeting. If doubt continues to exist, the matter is to be raised with the Chair or with the Department if related to the Chair.

Following disclosure, the remaining Committee members must determine whether or not there is a conflict of interest. Where it is determined that a conflict of interest exists, or may be perceived to exist, the Committee must determine a course of action which ensures that any subsequent decisions and/or actions are, and are seen to be, free of undue influence or bias.

In doing this, the Committee should refer to its constitution, which may prescribe arrangements with respect to voting on decisions where a conflict or the perception of a

conflict of interest exists. In the absence of such direction, the Committee must take action to preclude the member with the identified conflict from:

- receiving any subsequent or related papers
- being present and/or participating in the consideration, discussion or debate on the matter
- voting on the matter
- being counted in quorum for the vote on the matter
- being privy to the record of discussion of the matter, including the record which is set out in the minutes of the meeting.

The decision of the Committee (and the steps taken to resolve or deal with the perceived or actual conflict of interest) must be recorded in the minutes of the Committee meeting.

Where a conflict of interest arises or is perceived to arise, the Department may investigate the circumstances of the conflict to determine that the action taken to address the conflict is appropriate.

5.7.5 Managing an ongoing conflict of interest

A different situation arises when a conflict of interest is ongoing and may continue to affect an individual's ability to perform Committee business or contribute to Committee discussions, deliberations and/or decision-making.

In the case of ongoing conflicts of interest, Committees should conduct an initial investigation into the conflicts of interest, including the evaluation of any potential remedies, and a risk assessment which:

- identifies the risks
- evaluates the nature of the risks (for example, if the risk eventuated, would the consequences be serious?)
- evaluates the likelihood of the risks (for example, is it probable the risk will occur?)
- considers whether the risk may be acceptable to the Australian Government, relevant state or territory governments, and the public
- determines whether the proposed remedies (if any) would adequately resolve or otherwise manage the risk
- leads to the Committee notifying the Department immediately if it is determined that a conflict restricts the Committee from undertaking activities in a fair and independent way, including advice of what measures are being taken to prevent any such restriction.

All action taken to address these situations must be documented and readily accessible. Where the risk cannot be mitigated, the Chair, Deputy Chair or member should be excluded from all discussion on the matter, including receiving papers and records of discussion and decision.

For general advice on procedures and templates to manage conflicts of interest and conflicts of role, go to Australian Public Service Commission [Conflict of Interest](#) page **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** or Australian Charities and Not-For-Profit Commission (ACNC).

Section 5.6 requires that, as a matter of principle, Committee members and employees must be excluded from tendering for consultancy or contract work for or on behalf of the Committee. In rare cases, however, the Committee may be able to substantiate that a

member or employee is the only provider that can reasonably provide a service in that region due to the nature of that service and the location of the Committee.

In such a case, the Committee must follow the requirements of Section 5.6, including that the Committee approves the work, the terms are reasonable and comparable with those elsewhere, and that the selection process is open and transparent, documented and stored in the Committee's conflict of interest records.

5.8 Gifts, benefits and assets

A Committee member or employee of the Committee must never demand or request any gift or benefit for a member or anyone else in connection with their Committee work. A member or employee should not accept any gift or benefit if they think, or a reasonable person would think, the person offering the gift is likely to expect the member or employee to be influenced in the way they do their Committee work as a result of the gift.

Generally, non-token gifts should be accepted only in exceptional circumstances. Where non-token gifts are accepted, it would be appropriate to inform the Chair of the Committee or the next meeting of the Committee. If the member or employee is in any doubt about whether or not a gift is token, they should notify the Chair.

As set out in the guidance on asset disposal, Committees should follow proper procedure for the disposal of assets, including not selling these to Committee members, employees, contractors, or those people's friends or relatives.

5.9 Public comment

With respect to activities funded by the Australian Government, state or territory or local governments, the Committee should not make any statements or give any undertaking that could be interpreted as committing the Australian Government Minister or relevant state or territory minister or the Australian Government, state or territory or local governments to a particular action or expenditure. This position should be made clear in any negotiations which the Committee, its members, employees or representatives undertake with any company, firm or other body, or member of the public.

Whilst it is recognised that members as members of the community have the right to make public comment and enter into public debate on political and social issues, care must be taken not to convey the impression that such comment is an official comment made in their capacity as a member or employee.

If it is not possible for the member or employee to make it clear that they are speaking personally, it may be appropriate not to make any public comment.

While constructive criticism of the operations of Committees and the Department is welcome, it is inappropriate for such criticism to be reflected in press releases, public documents or statements, or on social media platforms. The utmost care should also be taken to ensure public comments cannot be misinterpreted. The Chair is responsible for channelling matters relating to the operations of Committees and the Department to the state, territory or Australian Government Ministers and/or senior employees of the Department.

5.10 Corrupt and unethical conduct

If a member or employee of the Committee is aware of any possible corrupt or unethical conduct by another member(s) or employee, it must be reported to the Chair. The member or employee does not need to have proof that corruption or unethical conduct is occurring - they need merely to suspect it on reasonable grounds. The Chair can then seek specialist advice for managing the particular issue. Corrupt and unethical conduct can also be reported to the Department, or the relevant state or territory Departmental manager responsible for regional development, where appropriate. This does not alleviate any right or obligation of the relevant member or employee to also report the conduct to relevant authorities (for example, the police) as required under relevant legislation.

People who report possible corrupt or unethical conduct will not be penalised for making their report.

5.11 Breaches of the Code

Committees should be vigilant for any actual or perceived breaches of the Code, and be prepared to take their own disciplinary action as necessary. Breaches of the Code are likely to result in disciplinary action. Sanctions, including termination of a member's appointment by the Chair or termination of a Chair appointment by the Australian Government Minister, will be considered in the event of a serious breach of the Code.

In addition, the Australian Government can make use of formal powers under various provisions of the funding agreement to help ensure that Committees meet the standards of the Code. In particular, the conflict clause of the funding agreement requires Committees to have regard to the Code, and specifies that the Department may investigate the circumstances of the handling of the conflict or breach of the Committee Code and determine the action that the Chair or the Committee must take to resolve or otherwise deal with the conflict or breach. Failure to do so can lead to removal of Committee member(s), removal of employees, the withholding or recovery of funds, or the termination of the funding agreement. Grounds for termination for default expressly include a Committee undertaking any act, including relating to its internal management procedures, that the Australian Government considers will seriously compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee's conduct.

More broadly, Clause 2 of the funding agreement requires all Committees to:

- comply with all relevant laws and, in particular, maintain robust practices and procedures regarding fraud control
- ensure that their internal management practices, including governance documents such as their constitutions and internal policies and procedures, give effect to and remain consistent with their obligations under the funding agreement and relevant laws.

Under Clause 6 of the funding agreement, all Committees are required to carry out the activity in accordance with the funding agreement and 'diligently, effectively and to a high professional standard.'

Depending on the nature of the breach of the Code, referral to appropriate authorities may also be necessary.

5.12 Allegations of misconduct

This section deals with allegations concerning the conduct of Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and employees which if true would constitute a breach of the Code (misconduct). It is important that the conduct of Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and employees is at all times perceived in the community to reflect the principles and ethical requirements set out in the Code. If allegations concerning the misconduct of a Chair, Deputy Chair or member are made, the person the allegations have been made against must immediately stand aside from the Committee.

Chairs must facilitate the standing aside of Deputy Chairs and members and, if the matter involves the Chair, the Australian Government will facilitate the Chair standing aside. If the Chair is required to stand aside, the Deputy Chair will be asked to assume the role as Acting Chair. The members may appoint an Acting Deputy Chair where this is required.

All allegations concerning the misconduct of a Chair, Deputy Chair, Committee member, DRD or other Committee employee are to be notified to the Department's Director RDA Program Management Section and the Liaison Officer allocated to the RDA within 48 hours after the Committee becoming aware of the allegations and in any case, within 24 hours of the allegations being made public. The Chair is responsible for advising the Department (Director RDA Program Management Section and the RDA's Liaison Officer) of allegations against the Deputy Chair, a Committee member, DRD or other Committee employee. If the allegations are against the Chair, the Deputy Chair must advise the Department (Director RDA Program Management Section and the RDA's Liaison Officer). The Chair or Deputy Chair must advise the member or employee that the Department has been advised.

Notification of any such allegations should include the allegations and the context in which they have been made. The Department will, with the Chair (or with the Deputy Chair if the allegations concern the Chair), consider an appropriate way to address the allegations. The Department reserves the right to apply the provisions of Clause 23.8 of the funding agreement regarding potential removal of employees from the Committee's activities. This provision is covered in Section 7.2.8 of this Guide.

Allegations include, but are not limited to, being:

- referred to a relevant authority for investigation or review in relation to misconduct
- referred to in sworn evidence (either oral or written) in any court or tribunal proceeding in relation to misconduct
- the subject of or named as a person of interest in any investigation by a state or territory ombudsman or Commonwealth Ombudsman
- the subject of or named as a person of interest in any investigation, review or proceedings in relation to misconduct by any relevant authority, court or tribunal in any jurisdiction.

Relevant authorities include any department, agency or authority of the Commonwealth, State or local government (however described) with functions including the review, prevention, detection, investigation, remedying, prosecution or punishment of criminal offences, breaches of a law or improper conduct.

It is important to note that the Chair's or Deputy Chair's responsibility to notify the Department about allegations of misconduct does not require them to have been proven or established.

The member may resume their membership of the Committee when the relevant authority, court or tribunal makes a finding of fact that the allegations are unfounded, or otherwise when the Australian Government and relevant state or territory governments and where appropriate the relevant state or territory local government association, so determines.

Section 6 – Political participation

6.1 Contesting elections and other political participation

The Australian Government acknowledges the involvement of Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and employees in community organisations and institutions, such as service clubs, chambers of commerce and local government. However, all levels of government expect Committees will ensure their operations remain apolitical at all times. Committees should be particularly alert to incidents that may compromise the apolitical nature of the Committee's operations leading into a federal, state, territory or local government election.

6.2 Campaigning by Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and employees

Where Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members or employees are playing a significant part in a political campaign there is potential for a perceived or actual conflict of interest between issues raised in the campaign and their involvement with the Committee. Significant political campaigning includes, but is not limited to:

- running as a candidate in an election for public office
- acting as a campaign director, or similar, for a candidate for public office
- providing full-time, or substantial part-time (over 15 hours per week), administrative or other support to such a candidate.

It may also be difficult for individuals who are involved in campaigning to maintain their commitment as a Chair, Deputy Chair or member. Clause 17.5 of the funding agreement provides for members or personnel who have a significant involvement in an election campaign for office in a federal, state or territory election to stand aside from the Committee from the date that caretaker conventions apply until such time as these conventions cease to be in force (caretaker conventions begin when the Parliament is dissolved and end when the result of the election is clear or, if there is a change of government, when the new government is appointed).

Members and employees should also consider whether it would be appropriate to stand aside prior to caretaker conventions coming into force in situations where the apolitical nature of the Committee's operations could be compromised. For example, this may include situations where they have been pre-selected to be a candidate in a future election and will commence campaigning prior to the application of caretaker conventions, or they have been appointed to a position that will involve early co-ordination of a future election campaign.

Where these circumstances arise, the individual should advise the Committee in writing. If a member and/or employee stands aside, the Committee must write to the Department to confirm the date that this occurred. Advice on alternative arrangements for employees should also be communicated to the Department. Where a Chair is aware that an executive Committee position may become temporarily vacated due to this provision, the Chair may offer a replacement, from within existing Committee members, at that time. If the Chair has stood aside, the Deputy Chair should assume the role as Acting Chair. The members may appoint an Acting Deputy Chair where this is required.

Committee members or employees playing a significant part in a local government election campaign can maintain their involvement with the Committee. However, they should be aware that in participating in an election for any level of government they need to avoid creating the impression that they are representing the Committee. They should not, for example, use clothing, badges or letterhead featuring the Committee name or logo, or introduce themselves as a Chair, Deputy Chair, member or employee of the Committee.

6.3 Launches, seminars and other public events

Committee launches, seminars or other public events that may take place during the caretaker period should avoid hosting ministers, other politicians or local government representatives. Flyers, speeches or media releases about the event must be apolitical. Committees should also take steps to address a situation where a politician has been invited to a public event prior to the election having been called, with the result that the event takes place during the caretaker period. This may involve cancelling the invitation, deferring the event or inviting representatives of other parties that could form government.

6.4 Information campaigns and promotional activities

Some information and promotional campaigns related to government programs and initiatives may need to be suspended or curtailed depending on the nature of the campaign and whether they are likely to affect voting. Caution should be exercised to ensure that material used on Committee websites is not political material and printed material produced and distributed by Committees is not electoral matter (that is, matter which is intended or likely to affect voting in an election). Information that is of a political nature should not be added to websites or included in Committee printed material.

Events, items on websites and newsletter articles which highlight the role of particular ministers or other government representatives or which address issues which are matters of controversy between the major political parties should be avoided in the caretaker period.

6.5 Provision of information

During the caretaker period, a Chair, Deputy Chair, member or employee should not give any member of any political party information that may be used for political advantage.

6.6 Fundraising events

Committees are apolitical and should not, at any time (caretaker period or otherwise) contribute funds or resources towards any political party or candidate for election—this is either directly through a donation or attendance at or contribution to fund raising events.

The provision of equal contributions to all parties is not an acceptable use of Committee funds and clearly not a Committee activity. Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members or employees may make a contribution to a campaign in a personal capacity but not from Committee funds.

6.7 Advertising

Committees can advertise consultation meetings in the press where such advertisements relate to their usual business. All communication products including advertising should carry the 'An Australian Government Initiative' crest and the RDA landmark (national or localised). The Australian Government Initiative logo must take the position of prominence either above or to the left of the RDA landmark. The landmark must be no larger than the official logo.

6.8 Use of Committee facilities

Committee assets and premises must not be utilised for support of any political party or candidate. This includes producing or disseminating political material using Committee equipment or resources, for example photocopiers, fax machines and office supplies. Party political material should not be put on the Committee's website and requests from political

candidate to visit Committee premises for electioneering purposes should be declined. Party political meetings must not be held on Committee premises.

Committees are to remain apolitical at all times. Display of party political material including posters, leaflets and badges is not permitted on Committee premises or on the Committee's website.

6.9 Practical application of pre-election guidelines

When the Australian Government assumes its caretaker role, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet issues [Guidance on Caretaker Conventions](#) which apply during the caretaker period. Several of these conventions apply to the operations of Committees, and assist in the maintenance of the Committees' apolitical status during the pre-election time¹⁵.

The Committee needs to develop a policy and/or operational arrangements that reflect these guidelines, and which set out actions to be taken when a member or employee of the Committee is significantly involved in election campaigning.

6.10 Working with elected representatives

6.10.1 Communicating with elected representatives

Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and employees should work cooperatively with their region's local, jurisdictional and federal government elected representatives. Committees will be an effective conduit between governments and regional communities, and will provide advice to governments about the strengths and weaknesses of regional Australia.

6.10.2 Attendance at meetings

The Chair may invite their region's local, jurisdictional and federal government representatives to attend one Committee meeting each year. These representatives will only have observer status when attending the meeting. In some cases, Committee business may need to be considered privately and, in such cases, the Chair should request any observers or guests to absent themselves from the meeting for the duration of those discussions.

Elected representatives do not have an active role in the decision-making processes of the Committee and must not attempt to influence proceedings. They should not seek to give, and nor should Committees accept, direction on matters relating to the Committee's work.

Chairs should note that conflict of interest procedures for elected representatives are to be observed. Elected representatives are required to declare any personal or professional conflict with any item on the agenda. In cases where a conflict is identified, the elected representative will not receive papers or background information on that item nor participate in the discussion on that item.

6.10.3 Advice on outcomes of consultations

It would be reasonable for the Chair to meet annually with its local elected representatives to update them on the Committee's work. This meeting could also provide an opportunity for the Committee to present a copy of its annual report or other public document. Advice and information provided to elected representatives should be in writing and refer only to publicly available material.

¹⁵ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/government/guidance-caretaker-conventions>

Section 7 – Committees as employers

This section only applies to incorporated Committees.

Drawing on operational funding provided by the Australian Government, Committees will employ a DRD (or equivalent) and such other employees as they require to provide management skills and support to deliver Outcomes.

7.1 Legal obligations as an employer

Each Committee, as a separate legal entity, is required to meet its contractual and legal obligations as an employer. Committees should, as necessary, seek professional and/or legal advice on human resource management issues such as recruitment and management (including contracting), wages and conditions, workplace relations, performance reviews and grievance procedures, workplace health and safety, employee training, and superannuation.

As each Committee is a separate legal entity, the Department does not have a role in resolving employment related disputes. However, the Department may take appropriate action to ensure Committees are delivering their funding agreement outcomes.

7.1.1 Legislation

Commonwealth legislation that applies directly to the workplace includes:

- the [Fair Work Act 2009](#)
- the *Work Place Health and Safety Act 2011*
https://www.comcare.gov.au/the_scheme/the_whs_act (see section 7.3 below)
- the *Privacy Act 1988* <https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy-law/privacy-act/>
- the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*
https://www.comcare.gov.au/the_scheme/the_src_act
- Commonwealth racial, sex, disability and age discrimination legislation
www.humanrights.gov.au/about/legislation/index.html.

Comprehensive information about an organisation's obligations to its employees can be found via the Australian Government Business Entry Point website, see:
<https://www.business.gov.au>.

7.1.2 National Employment Standards

Most Australian workplaces are governed by the system created by the [Fair Work Act 2009](#). On 1 January 2010, the National Employment Standards (NES) replaced the Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard. Together with modern awards (also applicable from 1 January 2010), the NES make up a safety net for employees covered by the national workplace relations system. In addition to the NES, an employee's terms and conditions of employment generally come from an award or agreement.

The NES are set out in the [Fair Work Act 2009](#) and comprise a safety net of ten minimum conditions for all employees in the national workplace relations system. The NES apply to all employees covered by the national workplace relations system (but only certain entitlements apply to casual employees). Employer obligations under the NES include giving every new employee a copy of the Fair Work Information Statement before or as soon as possible after they start work.

For more information, go to:

- The Fair Work Commission <http://www.fwc.gov.au/>
- The Fair Work Ombudsman <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/>

7.2 Management of Committee employees

7.2.1 Main obligations as an employer

Committees should aim to position themselves as employers of choice, capable of attracting and retaining skilled employees in a competitive labour market. They should provide a safe and supportive work environment, and present employees with learning and development opportunities. For further information regarding general good employer practice, go to: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/best-practice-guides>.

All employees are to be engaged under an employment contract. In developing the employment contracts between the Committee and its employees, Committees could use the services of an independent employment expert, such as an industrial relations consultant, legal employment specialist or the Fair Work Ombudsman.

Each Committee should maintain a human resources policies and procedures manual that is provided to all employees. This could cover the following:

- recruitment procedures
- employment conditions, including probation, remuneration and leave
- workplace health and safety, covering general provisions and also workplace specific security and safety procedures
- policies and legislation on ethical behaviour, including privacy, harassment, discrimination and conflict of interest
- management of funds
- workplace grievances
- appropriate use of workplace technology by employees
- employee resignation and termination.

7.2.2 Job description and duty statement

The Committee should develop job descriptions and duty statements for all employee positions. Job descriptions should reflect the core business of the Committee and the Committee's role as defined by the funding agreement and business plan. These should also set out the role of the employee, duties and responsibilities and reporting arrangements. Committee employees may not be members of the Committee.

When advertising a position, by law employers should not use discriminatory language that may exclude potential employees on the basis of race, age, sex, marital status, family status or responsibility, pregnancy, religious and political beliefs, disability, gender history or sexual orientation.

7.2.3 Selection of Committee employees

The selection of all Committee employees should be based on the merit principle and follow a transparent and public process. This means that selection decisions are based on merit, having regard to the qualifications, skills and experience of candidates in relation to the duties of the position and that the process is, and is seen to be, fair and open with all candidates having an equal opportunity for success.

Vacant positions should be advertised and interviews conducted by a panel. It is desirable that this panel includes a person who is independent of the Committee. The *RDA Appointments Guide* contains information regarding the appointment of the DRD, including an application pack which must be used during recruitment processes.

7.2.4 Employment arrangements

The Committee should agree to the terms and conditions of employment of the DRD, or their equivalent, and of all other Committee employees prior to the positions being advertised and appointments made.

The funding agreement stipulates that the DRD position must be advertised at the conclusion of each contract period or when the position is vacated, and that the Department must be notified when the position is to be advertised.

Committees should take their known and anticipated budget into account when recruiting employees.

All Committee employees are to be engaged under a formal employment contract that has been developed independently of the employee (for example by an independent organisation such as the Fair Work Ombudsman, an industrial relations consultant, a legal employment specialist, or as agreed by the Department) and endorsed by the Chair and/or the Committee.

Employment arrangements should be clearly recorded and documentation retained. Committees should ensure that each employee has a copy of the agreed terms and conditions prior to commencement of their employment.

The employment contract for the DRD should include a duty statement and clearly outline the conditions of employment. The conditions of employment should be comparable to other similar positions, especially with regard to work arrangements, pay, leave, notice and termination clauses – an independent employment expert can advise on these matters. Details on performance measures and reviews and reporting requirements should be clearly stated.

As noted in the funding agreement, employment contracts for DRDs must not have an end date beyond 30 September 2025. This is to ensure that there are not significant termination costs associated with longer term contracts for these positions should the RDA program cease at the conclusion of the current funding agreement and the Committee not be in a position to continue its operations. For the same reason, Committees should carefully consider employment contract periods for all other employees.

7.2.5 Remuneration, leave and entitlements

Committees should determine and document remuneration rates and processes, including non-cash items and reimbursement of expenses for employees. Increases in remuneration should be in line with industry standards and clearly linked to performance assessments.

As an employer, each Committee is responsible for complying with all relevant legislative requirements for employees such as annual leave, sick leave, long service leave, maternity leave, superannuation and other post employment benefits. Committees are provided with funding to cover all employment costs. Committees must maintain an employee entitlement account, which holds funds to meet accrued employee liabilities and entitlements in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards.

Committees should allocate a portion of their budgets for employee training and development. Individual employee development plans should be negotiated between the Chair and the DRD, or between the DRD and other employees as appropriate. Specific training and development activities should be linked to each employee's performance agreement.

7.2.6 Employee performance

Committees should have an employee performance management framework in place. Individual performance agreements should be negotiated between the Chair and the DRD, or between the DRD and employees as appropriate, and be linked to training and development activities, and ensuring efforts are directed toward delivery of the Charter.

Performance reviews should be conducted at least every six months throughout the employment contract. Performance reviews are an opportunity to provide two-way performance feedback, assess an employee's overall performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, develop a plan to address weaknesses, reward performance and to manage performance where it does not meet expectations or agreed outcomes.

7.2.7 Grievances

Organisations with an effective formal grievance procedure that is open and accessible to employees will encourage the early reporting of grievances. This means that grievances can be resolved early and will be less likely to escalate into more difficult management problems. Unresolved grievances can be financially expensive to organisations because they result in increased absenteeism, increased leave due to stress, low morale within the workplace, high turnover of employees and underperformance. Committees should implement a documented formal grievance procedure which is open and accessible to all their employees.

7.2.8 Termination of employment contracts

If the employment contract of a Committee's employee is terminated before the end of a contract period, the liability to meet the early release costs will have to be met by the Committee out of its operational budget. It is recommended that each Committee maintain an employee redundancy account to hold funds to meet any potential employee redundancy entitlements should they be required under the relevant award or the individual's employment contract, in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards.

Although management of employees is up to Committees, clause 23.8 of the funding agreement provides the Australian Government with the power to give notice in writing requiring a Committee to remove employees from activities relating to the funding agreement. This is subject to reasonable grounds and relevant legislation. Without limiting this power in any way, it is expected that clause 23.8 will only be used where there is a compelling case for removal and after consultation with the Committee concerned.

7.3 Workplace health and safety

Under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#) (WHS Act), all RDA Committees have a responsibility for Work Health and Safety.

To ensure that obligations under the WHS Act are met, Committees are to:

- comply with all duties under applicable work health and safety laws
- undertake risk assessments of all safety issues for their workers

- implement appropriate control measures, including putting in place an appropriate management system to address health and safety
- provide the Department with a copy of their risk assessment and plan and a copy of their implementation report, if requested by the Department.

At any time, the Department may wish to discuss with Committees, risks associated with undertaking activities relating to the funding agreement, and revisions to any activities which have been identified in the Committee's WHS risk assessment, plan and reports as posing unmanageable risk.

For more information on the WHS Act, go to: <https://www.comcare.gov.au/scheme-legislation/whs-act> and <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/>.

Section 8 – Communications and branding

8.1 Public comment

Refer to Section 5.9, Code of conduct and ethics for Committee members and employees.

8.2 Public comment on political and social issues

It is understood and welcomed that Chairs or their appointed delegates will make public comments on issues relating to economic development and programs in their region and that this may include advocating support for or opposing a change in Commonwealth law, policy or practice. Nothing in the funding agreement or this Guide is intended to inhibit this. In commenting publicly, Committee members and employees should consider the opportunities for their Committee to promote Australian Government programs and facilitate the take-up of appropriate funding opportunities to progress regional economic growth in accordance with their funding agreement. Public comment should complement the role of Committees, be constructive in resolving an issue, and recognise the contribution that the Committee is seeking to make to progress an issue for the community.

Committee members and employees should also take care when they are speaking on behalf of the Committee to uphold its status as an apolitical organisation that is not aligned with any particular political party. The conduct of operations of Committees should remain politically neutral at all times, and be undertaken in an impartial and professional manner.

8.3 Regional Development Australia website - www.rda.gov.au

The Regional Development Australia website is maintained by the Department for the purpose of enhancing communication, raising the profile of the network and disseminating information between Committees, regional communities and the Department. The website contains RDA maps for each state and territory and of the national network. One of the key features of the website is the Members' tab, which allows Committees to access important operational and governance documents, such as the Charter and the Guide. The website also contains information for people considering applying for a position on a Committee, including the application process and selection criteria for all positions.

8.4 Communications and branding guidelines

The RDA communications and branding guidelines (the Guidelines) have been produced as a reference guide for Committees when conducting communications activities. They outline the correct use of the RDA national brandmark and the expectations of the Australian Government regarding the quality, format and standard of the communications activities to be produced by Committees.

The Guidelines have been developed to:

- equip Committees with the information and tools needed to effectively deliver their communication roles and responsibilities
- ensure a consistent, national approach to the RDA national brand
- ensure Australian Government and state and territory and local government support and involvement in the delivery of the initiative.

These Guidelines work in accordance with [Australian Government Branding Guidelines](#), the [Australian Government Style Manual](#) and the registered RDA program Trade Mark.

Committees in Victoria and South Australia should also consider guidelines developed by the Victorian Government, the South Australian Government and the Local Government Association of South Australia (as appropriate) in the preparation of any materials.

If you need more information or design files, please email: update@infrastructure.gov.au.

8.4.1 Communication aims and objectives, target audiences and key messages

The overarching aim of RDA communication products and activities is to encourage community support for and regional stakeholder engagement with Committees.

The objectives of communications activities are to:

- increase understanding and awareness of Committees and of the benefits the national network offers to regional communities
- encourage Australian Government agencies to consider utilising the regional intelligence Committees can provide in program design
- promote the achievements of the national network
- highlight Committees' capacity to deliver Australian Government programs in their regions
- encourage and promote joint government, business and stakeholder support in promoting the network
- promote the achievements of the network.

The target audiences for communication products and activities include:

- business, industry and community peak bodies and associations
- national and regional electronic and print media
- people living in regional communities (general public)
- local government
- state and territory governments
- the Australian Government.

The key messages that can be conveyed via communication products and activities include:

- Committee members are local people developing local solutions to local issues
- Committees work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support the growth and development of their regions
- Committees have an active and facilitative role in their communities and a clear focus on growing strong and confident regional economies that harness their competitive advantages, seize on economic opportunity and attract investment.

8.4.2 Committee communication products and activities

All communication products and activities are required to follow the advice provided in this Guide and in the funding agreement.

Communication products and activities should acknowledge the financial and other support Committees receives from the Australian Government. Where applicable, Committees should also acknowledge support from state and territory governments and local governments and, in doing so, consider guidelines developed by these funding partners.

Outlined in this section are the communications products and activities Committees are encouraged to develop and undertake, as well as the branding requirements. The Department will also produce communication products and activities Committees can draw on to further promote themselves.

For guidelines on communication activities during caretaker periods see Section 6.9, or go to: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/government/guidance-caretaker-conventions>.

8.4.3 Branding

All communication products and activities should carry the 'An Australian Government Initiative' crest and the RDA landmark (national or localised). It's recommended not to modify the templates so as to maintain a consistent look and feel of the RDA brand across all RDA offices and materials.

The RDA landmark (the landmark) has been designed to symbolise the partnership between the Australian Government and the states and territories. The landmark is bright and fresh, the colours are primary and distinctive, and the stylised map of Australia draws attention to the landmark.

While there is no tagline, the vision statement for the network can be used in documents / promotional items with the landmark but not as part of it: *Local people developing local solutions to local issues*.

Co-funding state, territory and local government logos should be obtained by Committees from relevant government authorities.

Committees in Victoria and South Australia should also seek the approval of the Victorian Government, the South Australian Government and the Local Government Association of South Australia (as appropriate) for the placement of their logo/s.

8.4.3.1 The RDA national landmark – used by the Department



The national landmark has been created for use on all materials about the network. In this case, the RDA logo always appears with the Australian Government's branding, in either a stacked or inline configuration, on the right.



Any additional logos to be featured, such as state or territory government logos, will be to the right of the national landmark.

8.4.3.2 The RDA localised landmark – used by Committees

The localised brandmark has been created for use by all Committees. It incorporates the name of the Committee as part of the design.



The 'An Australian Government Initiative' crest must appear before (either above or to the left of) the localised brandmark and any other logos, for example state, territory or local government logos.

There are 2 versions, shown below – the stacked version and the inline version.



An Australian Government Initiative



An Australian Government Initiative

Note: the minimum width for the Commonwealth Coat of Arms is 20mm. For more information, go to: [Australian Government Branding Guidelines](#).

These brandmarks may be adjusted in size to appropriately fit onto materials of varying size, but cannot have their proportions adjusted.



8.4.3.3 Branding of Victorian Committees

Primary RDV offices in Victoria will display, in a clear and visible place at the public entrance, agreed RDA signage.

The contributions made by the Australian and Victorian Governments towards the ongoing operation of Committees and any services Committees may deliver will be acknowledged in any printed or electronic correspondence or promotional materials.

In Victoria, an alternate landmark to the RDA national landmark is used on all Committee products and marketing materials. This landmark represents the partnership between the Australian and Victorian Governments.

The required order of the logos, which can appear in an inline or stacked formation, is as follows:

1. An Australian Government Initiative' logo with the Commonwealth Coat of Arms
2. the national or localised RDA landmark
3. the Victorian Government landmark.

8.4.3.4 Colouring of the landmark

It is intended that the landmark be reproduced in full colour wherever possible. However, it may be reproduced in one colour – mono (or other colour if prior permission is sought from the Department).





In keeping with these guidelines, the 'An Australian Government Initiative' logo can only be used as stipulated in the [Australian Government Branding Guidelines](#).

NATIONAL NETWORK LOGO



LOCAL RDA NETWORK LOGO



			
PMS 289 C	PMS 364 C	PMS 382 C	PMS 356 C
C 100 M 64 Y 0 K 60	C 65 M 0 Y 100 K 42	C 29 M 0 Y 100 K 0	C 95 M 0 Y 100 K 27
R 0 G 44 B 90	R 65 G 119 B 48	R 190 G 214 B 0	R 0 G 120 B 56
WEB 002B5C	WEB 417630	WEB BED600	WEB 007836

One colour landmark

In the case of one colour used, the landmark can be used as black or mono (or other colour if prior permission is obtained from the Department).

Reversed landmark

The brandmark can be reversed out of black or another **dark** colour if necessary. It is essential that the background colour be of sufficient contrast to not jeopardise the integrity of the brandmark.

Pastel or light coloured backgrounds should not be used if the mark is reversed, as this application will not create sufficient contrast.

NATIONAL NETWORK LOGO



LOCAL RDA NETWORK LOGO



BRANDMARK REVERSED OUT OF BLACK



BRANDMARK REVERSED OUT OF A SUITABLE BACKGROUND COLOUR



BRANDMARK REVERSED OUT OF AN INCORRECT BACKGROUND COLOUR, THERE IS NOT ENOUGH CONTRAST

8.4.3.5 Typeface

Primary font

The typeface featured in the brandmark is 'Rotis Sans Serif'. Rotis Sans Serif should be used for all applications wherever possible - address panels on both letterhead and with compliments slips, internal and external signage. The recommended weight is regular 45 light, with 55 and 65 bold also available.

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPp
QqRrSsTtUuVvXxYyZz0123456789

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPp
QqRrSsTtUuVvXxYyZz0123456789

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPp
QqRrSsTtUuVvXxYyZz0123456789

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPp
QqRrSsTtUuVvXxYyZz0123456789

Local RDA logo font

Rotis Sans Serif 821em tracking

Supporting font

The supporting typeface chosen for the brand is 'DesertDogHmk', which ideally should only be used as headings.

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPp
QqRrSsTtUuVvXxYyZz0123456789

8.4.3.6 Positioning, including clear space requirements

The Australian Government Initiative crest must appear to the left of the localised brandmark. The inline version is recommended.

The RDA brandmark must not be any bigger than the Coat of Arms. It is essential the brandmark always appears with sufficient clear space to ensure that its integrity is not jeopardised. The clear space measure is defined by [Australian Government Branding Guidelines](#).

The clear space measure 'X' is based upon the difference between the bottom of the capital 'R' in Regional and the top of the capital 'A' in Australia as illustrated on this page.



8.4.3.7 Usage of brandmark

The brandmark should only be used in the formats and colours stipulated in these guidelines. A localised brandmark is used in the below examples.



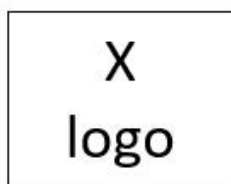
The elements which make up the brandmark should not be altered or adjusted in any way.

For example:

1. The brandmark should not be reproduced in colours that are light or pastel which do not provide sufficient contrast.



2. The brandmark must appear entirely in the same colour application. The brandmark should not appear partially in colour and partially in black and white.
3. State, territory and local government logos must not appear before either the brandmark or the 'An Australian Government Initiative' logo.



4. The brandmark should not be placed on a pastel coloured background that does not provide sufficient contrast.



4. THE BRANDMARK SHOULD NOT BE PLACED ON A PASTEL COLOURED BACKGROUND THAT DOES NOT PROVIDE SUFFICIENT CONTRAST.

5. The brandmark should not be placed on a background image or photograph.



5. THE BRANDMARK SHOULD NOT BE PLACED ON A BACKGROUND IMAGE OR PHOTOGRAPH.

6. The wording of the brandmark must not be edited for any purpose.



6. THE WORDING OF THE BRANDMARK MUST NOT BE EDITED FOR ANY PURPOSE.

7. The fonts used in the brandmark must not be changed nor other fonts added to the brandmark.



7. THE FONTS USED IN THE BRANDMARK MUST NOT BE CHANGED OR OTHER FONTS ADDED TO THE BRANDMARK.

8.4.4 Images

When using photographs and videos, it is important that the Committee obtain written permission of the photographer / videographer and all persons represented. There are numerous templates available online that Committees can utilise for this purpose. Please note additional privacy provisions apply for the use of images of minors

8.4.5 Stationary

Please note: the Department is undertaking a design refresh for a range of RDA products and collateral to support the operations of Committees. The new templates with accompanying visuals will demonstrate correct positioning and design elements. These resources will be provided to all Committees in due course.

In the meantime, Committees should develop stationery, such as letterheads and business cards, to support their operations. For assistance with logo positioning and design queries, please email: update@infrastructure.gov.au.

Australian Government Initiative logo should be top left and before RDA brandmark. Letterhead and business card templates are pictured below.

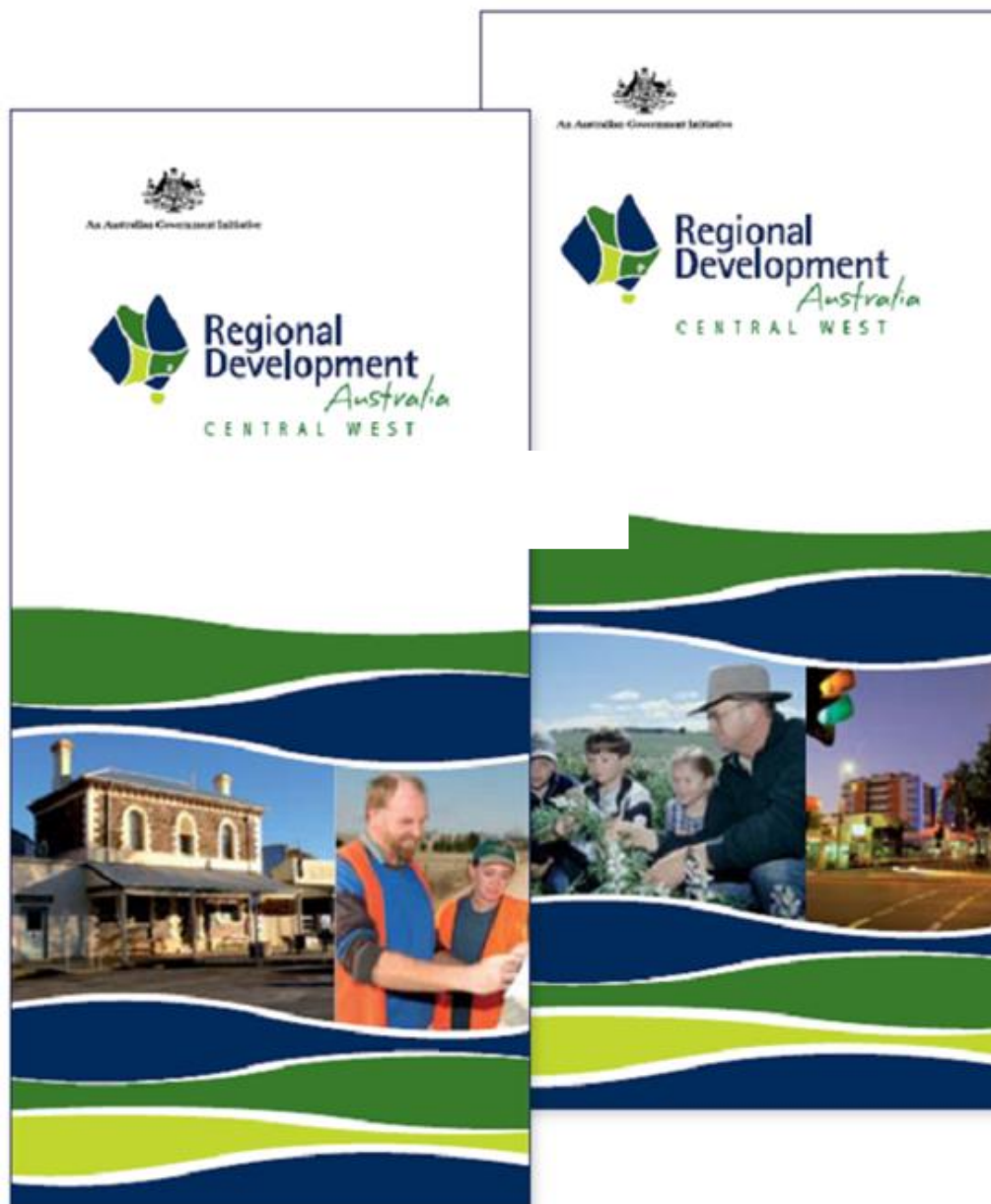




8.4.6 Promotional banners

Having a promotional banner with the Committee logo provides Committees with a higher level of visibility at events, such as workshops, launches and expos.

Pending the release of the refreshed branding guidelines, the *current* banner template is pictured below. For design files, please email: update@infrastructure.gov.au.



8.4.7 Office signage

Committees must arrange office signage featuring their localised RDA logo.



8.4.8 Reports

Reports released by the Committee must include the following words (or other such words as requested by the Australian Government):

“This report was produced by RDA [insert RDA name] and does not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government, its officers, employees or agents.”

Inclusion of this statement does not preclude acknowledgment of the Australian Government’s support and contribution, which should be reflected through branding or through text if additional funding has been supplied.

8.5 Online presence

8.5.1 Websites

The Department maintains a national RDA website www.rda.gov.au.

In addition, each Committee is required to establish and maintain an accessible public website which includes, but not limited to:

- information about the Committee’s role and activities, in terms of the activity as set out in the funding agreement
- a current list of Committee members and key employees and the Committee’s contact details (including links to the Committee’s social media pages)
- a link to the Australian Government’s RDA website www.rda.gov.au
- a copy of the current Charter
- copies of all newsletters or updates that Committees send to stakeholders and any other significant reports that you produce or are produced by others and are relevant to the Committee’s region
- any other information the Department may request / require to be included.

As an Australian Government initiative, Committees should refer to the [Australian Government Style Manual](#) for guidance on how to establish and maintain their online presence. These guidelines also work in conjunction with the principles outlined in the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#), the [Australian Government branding guidelines](#) and the registered RDA program Trade Mark.

8.5.2 Website branding

The branding of the national RDA website and Committee websites are slightly different.

National website

The branding of the national RDA website and Committee websites are slightly different. The national website is branded with the Australian Government logo at the top left to indicate that it is a website created and maintained by an Australian Government agency.

Committee websites

Localised Committee websites must be branded with the 'An Australian Government Initiative' logo in a subordinate position on the web page and, if applicable, with other state/territory/local government logos following. A website template is pictured below. Design files are available by emailing update@infrastructure.gov.au.



8.5.3 Social media

It is strongly recommended each Committee use social media to promote their activities and the network and program more broadly. Committees are encouraged to utilise the various functions and capabilities of different social media platforms to engage with their communities and each other.

All Committees are required to regularly report on their social media use as part of the reporting framework under the funding agreement.

Social media refers to a set of internet-based tools used for sharing and discussing information. It refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared and discussed over open digital networks¹⁶.

Social media dashboards may include, but are not limited to:

- social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ and Instagram

¹⁶ This definition of social media is from the [Australian Communications and Media Authority](http://www.acma.gov.au), with minor amendments.

- photo sharing, infographics and video websites such as Flickr, SnapChat, Pinterest and YouTube
- blogs, and video blogs (vlogs) including corporate, government and industry blogs
- micro-blogging such as Twitter and Tumblr
- forums, discussion boards and groups such as Google, Facebook and Reddit
- wiki sites and forums such as Wikipedia
- video on demand (vod) and podcasting
- email and instant messaging such as Whatsapp and Facebook Messenger

Social media also includes other emerging electronic/digital communication applications.

It is recommended Committees utilise 2 or 3 different social media platforms for broader audience and stakeholder reach.

Social media platforms

The Department uses a range of [social media](#) platforms to share latest news, research and information, to engage with our stakeholders, and to promote the policies' outcomes policies and programs for communities and regions.

The Department has a suite of social media handles. RDAs are permitted use these resources in *appropriate* social media activities, which are subject to the Department's use of [social media guidelines](#), [Social media: Guidance for Australian public Servants and Agencies](#) and aligned to the [APS Code of Conduct](#).

The Department's social media handles are:

- @AusGovRegional
- @AusGovInfra
- @AusGovMediaTech
- @AusGovArts

Developing social media policies

Social media accounts operated by Committees are considered to be official RDA communication channels. Comments made on these accounts by Committee members and employees could be considered to represent an official statement or position of the Committee.

Care must be taken to ensure that any criticism of the RDA program, the Department, other government departments and governments is not reflected in comments or statements posted by Committee members and employees on RDA Committee-operated social media accounts (see Section 5.9 Public comment).

The Department strongly recommends each Committee develop its own internal policies for social media to clarify roles and responsibilities (including internal moderation and approval policies) for employees and Committee members on the appropriate use of social media accounts operated by Committees.

Policies should be prepared with reference to the guidelines on public comment (see Section 5.9) and Committee social media presence (see Section 5.6). As a starting point, Committees should consider the following when developing rules or policies on social media activity:

- evaluate opportunities to promote their activities and government programs and facilitate the take-up of appropriate funding opportunities to progress regional economic growth
- public comment on social media should complement the role of Committees, resolve any issues constructively and recognise the contribution that the Committee is seeking to make to progress an issue for the community
- committee members and employees should take care to uphold the Committee's status as an apolitical organisation that is not aligned with any particular political party or ideology
- moderation – develop a policy on managing inappropriate comments and activities
- comments and statements made on social media should be impartial and of a professional nature
- with respect to activities funded by the Australian Government or state or territory or local governments, the Committee should not make any statements or give any undertaking that could be interpreted as committing the Australian Government Minister or relevant state or territory minister or the Australian Government or state or territory or local governments to a particular action or expenditure.
- create accessible and inclusive content¹⁷
- establish a regime to regularly review on line content, especially web content and hyperlinks
- copyright – only use or reproduce copyright material or the intellectual property of others if permission has been provided from the creator or the owner. This includes applications, sound and music recordings, video footage, graphics, artworks, images photographs and publications. If someone else's work is used, always make sure it is properly attributed and linked back to the original source
- attribution – always attribute the source of any material reproduced or used¹⁸
- use of images – do not post images without permission. Always seek (and retain) the express written permission of anyone who appears in any photographs, image, video or other footage before sharing it via any form of social media. Please note there are separate permissions required for people under the age of 18 years. If requested, remove materials as soon as practicable
- defamation – defamation laws are actionable regardless of the medium. Even if the Committee did not create the defamatory material, anyone who shares information on social media can also be liable for defamation action. There are some exceptions to defamation, including that the statement was an honest opinion or was true.
- privacy – be sure to maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy and property of others. Only discuss publicly available information and preserve the confidentiality of internal discussions and personal or private information about people.

Committee members and personnel should also keep their professional and personal social networking accounts separate. As with any public forum, when participating in social media, whether on their personal or RDA account, Committee members and employees should adhere to the Code (see Section 5).

Establishing and securing social media accounts

Committees should be clearly identifiable through usernames and branding. Usernames should reflect the name of the Committee, for example @RDAKimberley. Usernames that

¹⁷ APS Style Manual: <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content>

¹⁸ It is recommended before reproducing any comment or image the Committee should verify the entity's attribution requirements and include the appropriate / prescribed attribution adjacent to the content or in production credits.

misrepresent a Committee as a national body, instead of a regional body, should be avoided, for example @RDA.

Committees should make sure social media accounts are appropriately secured and are controlled and managed only by authorised employees. Like other forms of communications, social media communications coming from official Committee social media accounts will be considered as official communications from the Committee. Committees should therefore ensure appropriate measures are in place to adequately protect this mechanism for delivering official messages.

Appropriate use of social media by Committees

It is appropriate for Committees to use social media to promote the range of activities, programs and interests they are involved in. The Department expects that Committees will use their social media platforms to:

- engage with private and public industry sectors to promote the Committee's activities and leverage regional investment opportunities
- promote and disseminate Australian Government policies, grant programs and projects, particular those which are located in the Committee's region
- advertise for applications for Chair, Deputy Chair and member positions and to publicly announce Committee appointments
- provide information, updates and progress on Committee activities
- engage with and grow online communities on issues relevant to the Committee's region and its economic development
- facilitate real-time communication with stakeholders
- promote official visits to regions by Australian Government Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators.

In line with the Charter, Committees should actively promote social media engagement with:

- fellow Committee members and employees across the network
- all levels of government
- public and private sector stakeholders
- regional businesses
- industry sectors with international trade partners
- community stakeholders
- regional entrepreneurs.

The above lists are not exhaustive but are intended as a guide for Committees to begin building relevant and effective social media networks to promote the work of their Committees and to facilitate economic development within their regions.

Benefits of social media

Used effectively, social media can have all the benefits of word of mouth on a large scale, helping to broaden the reach and prominence of Committees. Potential benefits include:

- increased publicity and awareness
- reduced marketing and advertising costs
- increased traffic to Committee websites
- promote recruitment of Committee members and employees
- greater engagement with business, community and government, including the Australian Government Minister specifically
- greater access and engagement with the international community

- opportunities for business and community feedback
- opportunities to conduct research
- improved networking opportunities with community, business and government.

Social media – risks

Some of the potential risks associated with social media include, but not limited to:

- lack of clear social media strategies may result in reduced benefits
- social media is 24/7 and requires regular monitoring
- unwanted or inappropriate behaviour and how to moderate
- content and hyperlinks need to be checked and updated
- exposure to negative feedback, information leaks and hacking.

As with traditional media, ill-considered comments and poor responses to particular issues and circumstances can rapidly develop into negative issues which may reflect negatively on a Committee's reputation. A particular nuance of social media is that both negative and positive articles, comments or posts can spread rapidly and may require an organisational response at a speed that is difficult within traditional organisational structures.

Having a social media strategy and carefully preparing social media policies and procedures beforehand can help manage risks.

Email addresses

Committee members and employees are encouraged to maintain an email address at their individual domain, which can be used for all work related to their Committee, for example [john.smith@rda\[name\].xxx.au](mailto:john.smith@rda[name].xxx.au)

The Department encourages Committees to establish email addresses for office holders that reflect that person's position, such as [chair@rda\[name\].xxx.au](mailto:chair@rda[name].xxx.au), to ensure continuity of communications when office holders change.

8.6 Media

Media releases

The Australian Government reserves the right to announce government policy or program decisions, including project funding. Committees may distribute media releases that complement or provide more details after the announcement has been made. These media releases may provide information on how the announcement relates to their region.

In addition, Committees may wish to issue media releases to highlight achievements, activities, consultations or events for example:

- local RDA office launches
- local events/launch announcements and invitations
- regional and other national conferences
- visits to Committee premises
- visits to major initiatives and projects driven by Committees
- other major achievements.

Media releases need to acknowledge funding support from the Australian Government, for example: 'The RDA program is an Australian Government Initiative.' They also need to

include the RDA logo (or the localised Committee logo, if appropriate) and the 'An Australian Government Initiative' logo.

Media releases do not require approval from the Department. However, to assist the Department in being informed of Committee announcements and activities please include your RDA Liaison Officer and cc update@infrastructure.gov.au in the distribution list of all media releases.

Media queries

Communication with the media about the Committee is encouraged and topics for discussion may include, but are not limited to:

- the role, work, aims, goals, or progress of initiatives of the Committee
- the regional or local context/situation/experience (including anecdotal)
- the overall network initiative in broad terms.

When engaging with the media it is also important to note:

- while the Chair is the official spokesperson for the Committee, they may nominate a spokesperson from the Committee as a representative
- Committee members are not federal, state or territory public servants or elected officials and, as such, do not speak on behalf of the Australian Government or state and territory governments. While some Committee members may be elected officials of local government they need to be clear that they are representing the Committee, not their local government
- comments or discussion regarding the policy and programs of the respective governments should be fair and balanced
- spokespeople should be well-versed in the key messages and aims of the RDA initiative
- when speaking as a Committee spokesperson, views expressed will be taken as those of the Committee and not the individual
- anything said, even in general conversation, can be used by the media.

Committees should contact the Department:

- for advice on matters for discussion or information on government initiatives
- to provide advance notification of intention to speak to the media where practical
- to provide a subsequent debrief of media contact (short email of matters discussed).

When representing the Committee, a member should not express their personal opinion on a political or social issue if that is not the opinion of the Committee (see Section 5.9 Public Comment)

8.7 Events

Committees should notify the Department of upcoming events (openings, launches, award ceremonies etc.) at least one month prior to the event via an email to your RDA Liaison Officer and cc update@infrastructure.gov.au.

8.8 Further information

For any queries regarding RDA communications products, resources and activities please email: update@infrastructure.gov.au.