



An Australian Government Initiative



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 2025 - 2030 Funding Agreement and sets out the obligations which accompany RDA program funding, administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts.

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The RDA Better Practice Guide (the Guide) is available on www.rda.gov.au. [Click here](#) to access the Guide's attachments and reporting templates.

Definitions

This Guide uses the following definitions:

RDA means Regional Development Australia Committees.

Committee means an RDA which is party to a Funding Agreement with the Commonwealth of Australia under the RDA program, and includes the:

- Indian Ocean Territories Regional Development Organisation (IOT RDO); and
- Victorian Regional Development Australia RDAs.

Funding Agreement means a 2025-2030 RDA Funding Agreement unless otherwise specified.

Australian Government Minister means the Commonwealth Minister with responsibility for the RDA program.

State Minister or Territory Minister means the minister who has the responsibility for the RDA program in the relevant State or Territory.

In addition to the definitions above, the Guide uses terms which are defined in the Interpretations Clause of the Funding Agreement.

For noting:

1. The July 2026 version of the Guide applies to the RDAs from 1 July 2026 and does not apply retrospectively.
2. In some jurisdictions, RDAs are referred to as RDA Boards. All references to 'RDA Committees' and 'Committees' include these RDA Boards.
3. Definitions of 'regions' vary for regional and state RDAs:
 - for the standalone capital city RDAs of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide Metropolitan, 'region' refers to the areas of their state outside of their metropolitan area; and
 - for all other RDAs, 'region' means the region covered by the local government and Territory areas within each RDA's boundary, as defined at item A.8.1 of each RDA Committee's Funding Agreement (Schedule B in the Victorian Funding Agreement).

Introduction to the Regional Development Australia Program Better Practice Guide

Application

The Guide assists RDA Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members of RDA governing bodies and personnel to manage their RDA and its business.

Purpose

The purpose of the Guide is to provide information and guidance, and outline certain requirements, in relation to governance, administration and operational matters.

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

The Guide is incorporated into the RDA Funding Agreements. Where sections of the Guide are referenced in the Funding Agreements, those sections are legally binding on RDAs. If there is any inconsistency between the Guide and the Funding Agreements, the Funding Agreement will prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, or equivalent, (the Department), encourages RDAs to build on the information in this Guide and to make use of the suggested references. This Guide supports RDAs to meet conformance and performance expectations, however it is not an exhaustive resource. The Guide may be updated by the Department to reflect changes in Australian Government policies and programs or variations to the Funding Agreement.

Questions about the Guide or the Funding Agreement can be directed to rda@infrastructure.gov.au.

The Department will provide written notification of changes to the Guide to all RDAs. This notification should normally provide 10 working days' advance notice of changes, to give RDAs an opportunity to provide comment.

Section 1 – the Regional Development Australia Program network

1.1 Overview

The Regional Development Australia (RDA) program is a national network of RDAs which are critical to the delivery of the Australian Government's vision for regional Australia of regions that are strong, connected and resilient.

RDAs play a role in helping to drive economic growth, innovation and entrepreneurship in regions through facilitating investment in community, industry and the environment. RDAs assist to bridge the regional development gaps in regions by working with a broad range of stakeholders across sectors and supporting the delivery of identified Australian Government strategic priorities.

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

RDAs are incorporated, not-for-profit community-based organisations (with the exception of the Victorian-based RDAs, which are not incorporated). Members of RDA governing bodies 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 RDA 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 each RDA. The Charter is available on www.rda.gov.au.

1.3 Outcomes and performance indicators

The Funding Agreement details the Outcomes that Committees are required to work towards for their region. These Outcomes are derived from the Charter:

- facilitation of regional economic development outcomes through investment in:
 - i. skills and local leadership
 - ii. opportunities for First Nations people
 - iii. infrastructure
 - iv. connectivity
 - v. decarbonisation
 - vi. industry growth
- support of regional stakeholders, including local government and the not-for-profit-sector, to seek grant opportunities that advance strategic regional priorities. (Regional RDAs only)
- contribution to, and where appropriate, drive local economic development planning and strategy development.
- contribution to relevant data and local intelligence to support the evidence base to inform regional development strategies, program design and policy responses.

RDAs must address the following performance indicators when reporting on their performance and delivery of Outcomes:

- for regional RDAs:
 - provide details of initiatives which will (for planning purposes) or have (for reporting purposes) contributed to investment in:
 - skills and local leadership
 - opportunities for First Nations people
 - infrastructure
 - connectivity
 - decarbonisation
 - industry growth and/or
 - provide details of where the RDA has:
 - supported awareness raising and/or engagement with grant opportunities
 - supported the preparation of grant applications.
 - Provide details of where the RDA has:
 - contributed to the development of local plans and strategies, and specify the lead stakeholders
 - provided evidence to support regional economic development
 - facilitated or been a member of local leadership groups/forums, and/or
 - provided other assistance
 - outline instances where the RDA has provided evidence-based data and local intelligence to the Australian Government.
- for capital city RDAs:
 - provide details of the activities that the RDA will undertake (for planning purposes) or has undertaken (for reporting purposes) to facilitate economic development outcomes for regional RDAs, during the financial year e.g. activities which facilitate investment in:
 - Skills and local leadership
 - Opportunities for First Nations people
 - Infrastructure
 - Connectivity
 - Decarbonisation, and/or
 - Industry growth
 - provide details of where the RDA has:
 - contributed to the development of local plans and strategies, and specify the lead stakeholders
 - provided evidence to support regional economic development
 - facilitated or been a member of regional leadership groups/forums, and/or development
 - provided other assistance
 - outline instances where the RDA has contributed to relevant data and regional intelligence to support the evidence base to inform regional development strategies, program design and policy responses.

Section 3 of this Guide explains how the performance indicators are to be addressed in the Annual Business Plan and Budget and Annual Report on Outcomes. RDAs can include additional relevant performance indicators if they assist in demonstrating how outcomes will be/have been achieved.

Schedule A, item A.3.2 of the Funding Agreement advises RDAs that the Australian Government Minister may write to RDAs during the preparation of the Annual Business Plan and Budget (i.e. by 30 April) to require that attention be directed towards an Outcome(s) in the following financial year. RDAs are required to take reasonable steps to implement this.

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

The Australian Government Minister with responsibility for the RDA program is responsible for setting the RDA Charter and providing government support to enable RDAs to deliver the outcomes set out in the Funding Agreement. Chair appointments are made by the Australian Government Minister¹. Further information on appointments processes is contained in Section 2 and detailed guidance provided is provided in the *Appointments Guide*.

The Department assists the RDA network and monitors the expenditure of Australian Government funding and Committee performance. It does this to help RDAs 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 RDA network, promotes the RDA network to other government agencies, assesses RDA outcomes and strategies, and distributes key messages.

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

All information provided to the Department by RDAs is 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, and about, the RDA network. The [RDA national website](#) provides communications resources, materials and information about the RDA network and partner programs.

The RDA national website provides for communication and the dissemination of information to RDAs, regional communities and stakeholders. It contains links to the RDA Charter, the Guide and case studies.

The website contains interactive maps of each RDA jurisdiction and the national RDA network, plus case studies and landing pages to each RDA.

There are two main contact points within the Department for each RDA, the Departmental Contract Manager and RDA Liaison Officers. All Departmental 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](#).

The Departmental Contract Manager and 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 RDAs
- receive feedback on the Guide and amend it as necessary
- remind RDAs 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

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.

- pay RDAs in accordance with the Funding Agreement without unnecessary delay
- monitor, support and assess the performance of RDAs 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 email address rdaapplications@infrastructure.gov.au relating to appointment processes in progress
- provide open and regular communication, including emails (from rdacommunications@infrastructure.gov.au) and via the [RDA national website](#) where appropriate.

The Department's RDA Liaison Officers are the primary points of contact within the Department for day-to-day operational enquiries and play a facilitative role to link RDAs with other sections of the Department as appropriate.

1.5 Program arrangements

The Australian Government has the following arrangements in place across Australia to support the RDA 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 RDAs are supported by Victorian Government funding and employees, with RDAs 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
- RDA Tasmania receives in-kind accommodation and administrative support from the Tasmanian Government and is collocated with the Department of State Growth
- in the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) the RDA program is delivered by the Indian Ocean Regional Development Organisation
- in the Jervis Bay Territory (JBT) the RDA program is delivered by RDA Illawarra Shoalhaven
- in Norfolk Island (NI) the RDA program is delivered by RDA Mid North Coast.

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

1.6 Arrangements in Victoria

1.6.1 Administration

The Funding Agreement for the 6 RDAs in Victoria is between the Australian Government and Regional Development Victoria (RDV). RDV is part of the Victorian Government's Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR).

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 RDAs, and employment of the Directors of Regional Development and support staff for the 5 regional Victoria RDAs (Barwon South West, Gippsland, Grampians, Hume and Loddon Mallee) and the Melbourne RDA.

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 from the RDA to the Department. Financial reporting should be submitted by RDV, on behalf of all Victorian RDAs, directly to the Department.

1.6.2 Regional Partnerships

An alignment between the nine Victorian Government Regional Partnerships (RP) consultative forums and the RDAs is encouraged by cross-membership where 2-3 RDA governing body 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.

1.6.3 RDA funding

Australian Government funding to the Victorian Government assists the RDAs 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 RDA's region, to support the operation of RDAs and delivery of outcomes
- operation of the RDAs
- 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 RDAs for the purposes outlined above. In addition to contributing direct funding of the RDAs, DJSIR and RDV provide additional support including, but not limited to:

- operational and policy support to RDAs from regional and Melbourne-based RDV staff
- alignment and coordination between the RDAs and the RPs
- access to RDV and DJSIR 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 RDAs, Directors of Regional Development and the Australian and Victorian Governments, of investment, information and reporting across all Victorian RDAs.

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 RDA funding see Financial reporting by Victorian RDAs (Section 3.4.1).

1.7 Legal framework

Note sections 1.7.1 and 1.7.2 do not apply to Victorian Committees as they are not incorporated.

1.7.1 Incorporation and Australian Business Number

Incorporation

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

This Better Practice Guide and the Funding Agreement are subject to applicable State, Territory and Commonwealth legislation, including the relevant state or territory incorporated association legislation. It is the responsibility of RDAs and their personnel to remain informed of their obligations and responsibilities under the relevant legislation and the RDA'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 RDAs 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 RDA constitutions and rules of association

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

RDAs must periodically review their constitution or rules of association and make any necessary amendments to ensure that it conforms to:

- applicable federal, state or territory legislation
- the Funding Agreement, including any variations made from time to time
- the requirements of the Guide, which also are subject to amendment.

Prior to making any amendment to their constitutions or rules of association, RDAs should:

- consult the Department (and state or territory and local governments, if appropriate). In doing this, the RDA should write to the Department's Contract Manager (Director of RDA Program Management), as prescribed in the Funding Agreement
- only alter their constitution (including an alteration to the association's name) by special resolution of the governing body members.

RDAs must include a reference to the Charter in their constitution.

RDAs must provide a revised copy of their amended constitution or rules of association 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 an RDA is considering changing its name it must address 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 RDA 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 RDAs 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 RDA wishes to pursue such a name change, and has the consensus support of the regional RDAs within its jurisdiction, it should notify the Department, who will then seek views from the relevant state government in considering the request.

Once the name change has been discussed with all parties, RDAs 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 and maps on the [RDA national website](#) and will engage with other program areas to amend their content, as appropriate.

1.7.4 Funding Agreement

The Funding Agreement for each RDA 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 RDA.

If an RDA 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 RDA. In Victoria, a single Funding Agreement with the State of Victoria (as represented by RDV) covers all Victorian RDAs.

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 propose to vary the Funding Agreement pursuant to its terms. It will endeavour to give RDAs adequate prior notice of all proposed variations.

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

Applicable laws and jurisdiction

ACT laws apply to the Funding Agreement. This means that the Funding Agreement will be interpreted with reference to ACT laws and any disputes regarding the Funding Agreements

will be heard in the ACT courts. This should not be taken to mean that RDAs 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, RDAs need to be aware of Commonwealth, state and territory legislation which includes, but is not limited to the latest versions of:

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](#)
- [National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022 \(Cth\)](#)
- [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 addressing:

- 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 RDA funding

1.8.1 Funding sources

Australian Government funding

RDAs 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 an RDA in response to administrative or government policy changes.

State or territory government and local government funding

RDAs 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, RDAs may obtain contributions from other sources. This includes from Australian Government agencies other than the Department. As outlined in the Funding Agreement, RDAs must:

- not negotiate for, or enter into, any arrangement with a third party which could be reasonably considered to bring the Commonwealth into disrepute
- provide at least 15 Business Days' notice in writing of any third-party arrangement which will generate income of \$50,000 (GST inclusive) or greater
- include a list of all third-party arrangements, regardless of value, in each Annual Report on Outcomes
- ensure, as far as practical, relevant expenses are costed to the third party, including an appropriate proportion of office expenses (such as rent, telephone, equipment and salaries).

Further information on third party arrangements is provided in Section 4.5.

1.8.2 Australian Government funding

Funding is provided to support the RDAs 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.

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

All expenditure must be necessary, reasonable, value for money and aligned with the approved Business Plan and Funding Agreement.

Clause 6.12 (Clause 6.15 of the Victorian Funding Agreement) of the Funding Agreement sets out that the RDA 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 that the Department is aware of any intention to change substantially the RDA's activities from those in the approved business plan.

International travel

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

If an RDA believes an exceptional case can be made for international travel, the RDA 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 Contract Manager 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 RDA, and
- the RDA wishes to treat that unspent amount as funding for the following year (note: this refers to funding to support the RDA to deliver the outcomes, not to specific project funding).

RDAs can identify any expected unspent funding at the end of the financial year when preparing their business plan for the next financial year. Once RDAs 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 RDAs from time to time to undertake specified activities.

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 an RDA 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

(other than for the ACT which is part of RDA Southern NSW and ACT). In most cases they incorporate complete local government areas and, where necessary, Australian territories and/or unincorporated areas in a jurisdiction.

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

In a small number of cases a local government area may be divided between two RDAs where a clearly definable district aligns better with one RDA, whilst the remainder aligns better with another RDA. Such arrangements are only entered into with the agreement of both RDAs 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 RDA boundaries.

RDAs, 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 emailed to rda@infrastructure.gov.au, 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 (for Committees in South Australia) with the President of the Local Government Association of South Australia.

Any changes to boundaries of RDAs will require a variation to those RDA's Funding Agreements, to reflect the changes to the area covered and funding levels.

Section 2 – RDA governance and appointments

2.1 RDA composition

RDA composition is determined by each RDA's constitution or rules of association. Typically, an RDA's governing body is made up of a Chair, Deputy Chair and 6-8 governing body members.

2.2 RDA meetings

RDAs should hold regular meetings to discuss key issues and make decisions in accordance with the requirements of the RDA's constitution and the Funding Agreement. RDAs are encouraged to take advantage of teleconferencing and videoconferencing facilities to maximise participation.

RDA meetings must be based on an agenda that has been approved by the Chair prior to the commencement of the meeting. RDAs 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 located²
- 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 RDA decisions and document any actions taken as a result of decisions
- include informed strategic discussion of regional economic priorities and solutions, and the RDA'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 a requirement that RDAs complete the 'Annual Governance Certification' each year (see Section 3.4.3).

2.2.1 Attendance at RDA meetings by Departmental employees

Clause 10.5 (Clause 9.5 of the IOT RDO Funding Agreement, Clause of the 10.6 Victorian Funding Agreement) of the Funding Agreement provides for Departmental employees to attend RDA meetings in an observer capacity.

Clause 10.4 (Clause 9.4 of the IOT RDO Funding Agreement, Clause 10.5 of the Victorian Funding Agreement) provides for RDAs to provide notices of meetings and agendas in advance of meetings if requested by the Department, as well as minutes, reports and financial statements. Departmental employees must provide adequate notice of their

² For a suggested wording for an acknowledgement of country see https://www.indigenous.gov.au/contact-us/welcome_acknowledgement-country and Section 8.

intention to attend and, in attending, will engage in such a way that provides support to RDAs but does not inhibit RDA discussions of strategic matters.

Departmental employees attend in an observer capacity only and cannot participate in decision-making by RDAs on their internal management. They can provide factual advice relating to the obligations of the RDA under the Funding Agreement, on wider Australian Government policy or other matters for which the Australian Government may have information that will assist RDAs 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 RDA after the meeting if they were not in a position to provide advice at the meeting.

2.3 RDA roles

Please see the *RDA Appointments Guide* for information about the roles, accountabilities and responsibilities of Chairs, Deputy Chairs, governing body members and Directors of Regional Development (DRDs). For a copy of the *RDA Appointments Guide* contact your RDA Liaison Officer.

2.4 Selection and appointment processes

Please see the *RDA Appointments Guide* for information about selection and appointment processes for Chairs, Deputy Chairs, governing body members and DRDs. It is strongly encouraged that any recruitment actions are not undertaken, where reasonably known, immediately prior to any Chair appointment process.

2.4.1 Public sector appointees to RDAs

APS employees can serve on RDAs. However, the Department and relevant applicants must be confident that the risk of conflicts of interests or duties associated with holding such dual roles is acceptable and manageable.

There is a greater risk of conflicts of interests or duties where the official:

- will have access to confidential information regarding:
 1. the Department's intentions regarding the RDA program; or
 2. the internal workings and conduct of the RDA, or
- holds a position that involves making formal recommendations, advice, or decisions in relation to the Funding Agreements or RDA program more broadly.

Appointees must ensure that they continue to monitor their circumstances and declare any potential, perceived or actual conflicts of interest that arise.

For further information on conflict of interest see Section 5.7.

2.5 RDA 'Essentials' training and induction package

RDA Essentials provides Chairs, Deputy Chairs, members and staff with an overview of the RDA program, how it operates, and the information required to effectively undertake these roles. This self-paced training module also outlines the Minister's expectations of the RDA network, the structure of the program and the key governance arrangements.

A link to access RDA Essentials has been provided to RDAs. Please email rda@infrastructure.gov.au if the link is needed again.

2.6 Absences, resignations and terminations

2.6.1 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 RDA. 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.

2.6.2 Resignation of the Chair, Deputy Chair or governing body member/s

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

2.6.3 Termination of appointment

Under Clause 8.1 of the Funding Agreement, the Australian Government Minister may, at their discretion, terminate the appointment of a Chair at any time through the provision of written advice. The RDA constitution or rules of association must provide for the Australian Government Minister to terminate the appointment of a Chair in alignment with Clause 8.1 of the Funding Agreement (not applicable to the IOT RDO or Victorian Funding Agreements).

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
- serious concerns regarding the administration or performance of the RDA
- a change in the Australian Government's regional priorities and/or policies

- a loss of confidence in the capacity of a Chair to fulfil their obligations and lead an RDA
- a view that a change of leadership would be in the best interests of the RDA.

A Chair may, in accordance with the RDA's constitution or rules, suspend or terminate the appointment of the Deputy Chair and or one or more governing body 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 Chair is required to provide written advice to the Department if a Deputy Chair or one or more governing body 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.

Procedural fairness must be demonstrated in any decision to terminate a Chair, Deputy Chair, or governing body member of an RDA. For the avoidance of doubt, procedural fairness in the suspension or termination of a Chair, Deputy Chair or governing body member involves:

- providing reasons for decisions
- allowing individuals to have a right of reply
- genuinely considering any response.

Section 3 – RDA deliverables under the Funding Agreement

3.1 Overview

The Funding Agreement requires each RDA 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.

RDAs **must** complete the mandatory elements in the format specified by the Department. RDAs will be asked to resubmit their document/s if the mandatory elements have not been included. RDA Liaison Officers can assist RDAs 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, they 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 2 July of each financial year also enables RDAs to demonstrate to stakeholders they have a clear and agreed set of objectives from the beginning of the year.

It is therefore very important that 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 RDA must prepare an Annual Business Plan and Budget (business plan). This is an operational document, which brings together all aspects of the RDA'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.

A template to assist RDAs with the preparation of their Annual Business Plan and Budget has been provided at [Attachment 3.A](#) (for regional RDAs) and [Attachment 3.A](#) (for capital city RDAs). RDAs are encouraged to use the template as it provides RDAs with assurance that the mandatory requirements referred to below have been addressed.

As noted in Section 1.3, the Australian Government Minister may write to RDAs during the preparation of the Annual Business Plan and Budget (i.e. by 30 April) to require that attention be directed towards an Outcome(s) in the following financial year. Any directives that are issued must be considered in the RDA's planning processes.

The Department has identified mandatory and recommended elements of a business plan below. The mandatory elements must be included in the business plan to satisfy the requirement of Schedule A.4 (Plans and Reports) in the Funding Agreement.

Once the Department has accepted a business plan, significant changes to it (i.e. changes resulting in more than 15 per cent of the total RDA program funding for that period being moved between expenditure items in the budget as a result of the change) can only be made by written approval of the Department.

Key elements of the business plan

Chair's foreword or executive summary (recommended)

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

Strategic context and regional priorities (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 RDA (please note that these are required to align with the Funding Agreement outcomes and performance indicators and the Australian Government's regional development priorities³). For Capital City RDAs, state level strategic priorities are to be outlined.

For regional RDAs, this section must include information about how the RDA's work program will complement the priorities set out in relevant Strategic Regional Plans for their regions.

Annual work plan (mandatory)

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 RDA's identified outcomes.

When preparing a business plan, the RDA 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 RDA 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 RDAs 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

³ [Microsoft Word - RMBS-combined.docx \(infrastructure.gov.au\)](#)

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.

RDAs may also wish to address their internal corporate governance and process improvement needs in this section. A number of RDAs 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 RDAs (mandatory)

State governments jointly fund RDAs in these jurisdictions. Local governments also provide funding to South Australian RDAs. 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 RDAs must detail:

- 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 (mandatory)

RDAs must include an Outcomes and Performance Indicators table. This allows the Department to determine how the RDA is addressing the Charter and delivering the outcomes required under the Funding Agreement.

The Department has provided templates for regional RDAs at [Attachment 3.A](#) and capital city RDAs at [Attachment 3.A](#) for presenting this information. It is a requirement that RDAs complete the relevant regional or capital city template and provide this to the department as part of their Annual Business Plan and Budget.

RDAs 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 RDAs to ministers and government agencies.

RDAs must complete Part 1 of the table, *What will we do?* for their business plan. Please note that measurable information in terms of values and quantities is not required in the business plan.

Part 2 of the table, *What did we do?* will be completed for the Annual Report on Outcomes at the end of the reporting period.

Budget table (mandatory)

RDAs 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 RDAs](#):

1. RDA Illawarra Shoalhaven and RDA Mid North Coast – these RDAs 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 RDAs – these RDAs 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 RDA 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 RDAs.

Communications strategy (recommended)

Including a communications strategy in the business plan is better practice as it assists in ensuring communication is integrated with a RDAs' overall operational strategy and work plans. Guidance regarding the preparation of a communications strategy is provided in section 8.2.

3.3 Annual Report on Outcomes

The Annual Report on Outcomes is the formal mechanism through which RDAs 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 RDA'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.

A template to assist RDAs with the preparation of their Annual Report on Outcomes is available at [Attachment 3.C](#) (for regional RDAs) and at [Attachment 3.C](#) (for capital city RDAs). Use of the template is encouraged as it provides RDAs with assurance that the mandatory reporting requirements referred to below have been addressed.

Mandatory items that must be addressed in the Annual Report on Outcomes are:

Guidance for Victorian and South Australian RDAs (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 RDA-specific activities.

Outcomes and Performance Indicators table (mandatory)

RDAs must complete Part 2 of the Outcomes and Performance Indicators table template that was provided in their business plan (i.e. **Attachment 3.A**. – please include the completed Part 1 of the table when submitting Part 2), 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 (mandatory)

RDAs must include at least 2 written case studies in their annual report.

These should:

- focus on key achievements during the reporting period
- demonstrate examples of where the RDA has made a difference in its region
- be new case studies (i.e. not used previously in an annual report) unless there has been considerable advancement in the project's status.
- include images and/or videos
- only contain personal information of individuals over the age of 18 years whose informed consent to use the personal information has been provided

Case studies are extremely valuable for the Department, as they assist in promoting RDAs' work to ministers, government agencies and community stakeholders. RDAs may wish to provide a further summary of their activities and lessons learned during the year.

Please provide, at a minimum, one high resolution image which relates to each case study. This information may be repurposed for inclusion on www.rda.gov.au. It may also be shared with other program areas or Australian Government Agencies so as to showcase the work RDAs are undertaking in Australia's regions (refer Section 8.1.3).

Third party arrangements (mandatory)

The Funding Agreement (Clause 11, not applicable to IOT RDO and Victorian Funding Agreements) requires that RDAs provide information in the annual report regarding all third-party arrangements that are in place.

This information must include who the arrangement is with and a short description of the activity being undertaken along with the contract start and end dates, the contract value and how the RDA intends to use any surplus funding generated from the contract.

3.4 Annual Audited Accounts

RDAs 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 RDA have been effective and financial risks are being controlled.

RDAs must also provide a completed version of the budget table (as per [Attachment 3.B](#) and [Attachment 3.B](#) for RDA Illawarra Shoalhaven; RDA Mid North Coast and the Victorian RDAs) 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 Management Letters (mandatory except for Victorian RDAs)

A Management Letter is a document that summarises an auditor's findings and recommendations for improving internal controls, and other management issues that have been found during the audit.

If an RDA receives a Management Letter (or a document of this nature with a different name), a copy must be provided to the Department as part of the Annual Audited Accounts. This must include the RDA's response to recommendations that have been reported by the auditor.

3.4.2 Deficits

Deficits are incurred when expenditure on RDA program activities exceeds RDA program funding. Any deficits incurred by an RDA during a financial year are to be funded from the RDA's retained earnings and cannot be carried forward into the following financial year.

3.4.3 Annual Governance Certification (mandatory except for Victorian RDAs)

An 'Annual Governance Certification' (the Certification) is provided at [Attachment 3.D](#) to assist RDAs to assess whether they have better practice governance arrangements in place which are being reviewed regularly and complied with. The Certification also assists RDA governing body members to demonstrate they have effectively completed their key fiduciary duties.

The Department views the Certification as a critical tool for RDAs, and one that also provides the Department with assurance that an RDA's governance arrangements are in place and operating effectively.

Completion of the Certification is mandatory, and a signed copy must be provided by RDAs as part of their Annual Audited Accounts.

3.4.4 Financial reporting by Victorian RDAs

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

- Income and expenditure for each RDA 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 RDAs 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 an RDA(s) by the Department.

3.5.2 Critical regional development issues

If critical regional development issues (positive or negative) are identified by RDAs, these must be 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 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 RDA completing key activities.

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

RDAs 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 it is aware of the issues).

The Department will also bring issues to the attention of RDAs, through teleconferences, update emails, their Departmental RDA Liaison Officers and other means, as appropriate.

Section 4 – RDA 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.

RDAs should adopt best practice corporate governance procedures, notably:

- clear definitions of responsibility, including roles of the Chair, Deputy Chair, governing body members and personnel, 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
- ensuring there is, wherever possible, segregation of duties between those who:
 - initiate and approve expenditure
 - create/maintain vendor records and process invoices
 - prepare invoices for payment and release funds.

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 RDA governing body members and personnel.

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 governing body members include:

- understanding and complying with all formal obligations, including the Code of Conduct for RDA Members and personnel (see Section 5)
- meeting specific roles and responsibilities as outlined in governance documentation
- formulating strategies, goals and business plans including RDA reports
- reviewing progress towards achieving those goals
- ensuring adequacy and efficacy of internal controls and reporting systems.

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 RDAs involves some degree of risk which must be managed.

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

- 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 RDA. It is considered better practice for RDAs 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 RDA should consider the following, but not limited to:

- outcomes and performance indicators – whether there are any risks that would impact the achievement of the RDA'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 RDA
- 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.

RDAs may wish to draw on the Australian Risk Management Standard (AS/NZS ISO 31000–2009 Risk Management - Principles and Guidelines)⁴.

⁴ The full text of this document is only available for purchase, but some websites provide summaries.

4.3 Financial management

4.3.1 Financial records

Each RDA 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 RDA's financial performance and financial position must be tabled at each RDA meeting and reviewed and endorsed by governing body 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 RDAs 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 RDA. See [Australian Tax Office](#).

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.

With regard to income tax, the Department refers RDAs to the Australian Taxation Office's [Income tax status review worksheet for self-assessing non-profit organisations](#). RDAs should also seek advice from a financial adviser.

4.4 Travel costs

Funding may be used, with RDA approval, to reimburse reasonable⁵ travel expenses incurred by RDA governing body members and personnel when they attend meetings related to the work of the RDA or perform RDA activities. Reasonable expenses mean items such as domestic travel and accommodation and meals and incidentals while travelling significant distances from their home.

Wherever possible, Committee approval should be provided prior to travel costs being incurred.

Motor vehicle use costs may be reimbursed by the RDA when personal vehicles are used by governing body members and personnel to attend RDA business meetings/events.

In all cases the RDA must ensure that the principles of reasonableness, accountability and value for money are upheld.

⁵ In some jurisdictions, a cap on expenditure which can be reimbursed to Committee governing body members may be in place.

International travel is generally not regarded by the Department as a reasonable expenditure of Australian Government funding (unless an exceptional business case is made out as outlined in section 1.8.2 of this document).

RDAs may also wish to refer to the current travel allowance remuneration rates, as set out in the Remuneration Tribunal's determination [Official Travel by Office Holders](#)⁶.

4.5 Honoraria and sitting fees

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 RDA's constitution or rules of association allow such payments.

4.6 Official hospitality and business catering

Official hospitality and business catering involves the purchase of meals and refreshments for internal and external business purposes.

This includes the purchase of simple refreshments or light working lunches at business meetings. The purchase of substantial or sit-down meals is not defensible except where the meal forms part of a significant event, such as a public launch, conference, seminar or training event.

Where appropriate, alcoholic drinks may be provided at significant business events, however this should be minimised.

Any decision to spend money on official hospitality and business catering must be publicly defensible and expenditure must be limited and controlled. Wherever possible, Committee approval should be provided prior to official hospitality and business catering costs being incurred.

Hospitality may be accepted by RDA governing body members and personnel. Members and personnel should consider, on a case-by-case basis, the appropriateness in accepting hospitality and whether the offer may give rise to a real or apparent conflict of interest. Where hospitality is accepted and the estimated value is \$100 (excl GST) or above, this should be reported to the Committee and recorded on the RDA's Gifts Register, to support transparency and uphold integrity.

4.7 Reimbursements

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

4.8 Other federal, state and local government contributions

4.8.1 Contributions from other government agencies

RDAs should be alert to the very wide range of programs managed by Australian, State and Local Government agencies which they may be able to access as support for specific activities. There may be opportunities, for example, for RDAs to obtain funding for

⁶ See [Official Travel determination 2025.pdf](#)

investment and industry attraction. Such funding will be subject to the requirements detailed in Section 4.8.2. Please note these requirements do not apply to Victorian RDAs and the IOT RDO.

4.8.2 Third party arrangements

Third party arrangements are defined in the Funding Agreements as any arrangement that generates income from a source that is not party to the Funding Agreement.

Clause 11 (not applicable to IOT RDO and Victorian Funding Agreements) of the Funding Agreement), Third-Party Arrangements, requires RDAs to provide the Department with advance notice (at least 15 business days), in writing, of any proposed arrangement that they intend to execute with a third party that will generate income of \$50,000 (GST inclusive) or greater.

Where third-party arrangements involve generation of income for the RDA, the RDA must ensure, as far as practical, relevant expenses are costed to the third party, including an appropriate proportion of office expenses (such as rent, telephone, equipment and salaries).

RDAs must ensure that all third-party contracts that do not relate to RDA program Activities as defined in the Funding Agreement, whether under or over \$50,000 (GST inclusive), do not require the support or use of RDA program funding provided by the Australian Government.

All third-party arrangements must be listed in the annual report (refer also to section 3.3). This information must include who the arrangement is with and a short description of the activity being undertaken along with contract start and end dates, the contract value and how the RDA intends to use any surplus funding generated from the contract.

RDAs 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 11.1 (Clause 9.6 of the IOT RDO Funding Agreement, Clause 10.7 of the Victorian Funding Agreement) of the Funding Agreement prohibits RDAs 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. RDAs should consult the Department as early as possible if they have any concern that a prospective arrangement could raise any such perceptions. Third parties should also be advised that their arrangements are separate from the RDA's Funding Agreement with the Department and that the Department does not have any role in administering their contract with the RDA.

RDAs must also have plans for how they will utilise surpluses derived from third party arrangements. We acknowledge that it is appropriate for surpluses to be used to develop a strong financial position, however, noting RDAs status as not-for-profit associations, amounts beyond this must be reinvested back into communities through activities that are consistent with the purpose of the RDA (as set out in RDAs' Rules of Association).

Section 4.9 provides further information regarding insurance coverage for third party arrangements.

4.8.4 Sub-leasing of premises

RDAs 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.

4.8.5 Sponsorships

The provisions in the Funding Agreement at Clause 11 on arrangements with third parties include sponsorships (not applicable to IOT RDO or Victorian Funding Agreements), where income is provided to the RDA. 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 RDA's activities, or may instead involve the RDA 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 RDAs entering into sponsorships, they must be mindful of any implications for their obligations under the Funding Agreement. This includes, but is not limited to, Clause 11.1 of the Funding Agreement. Entering into sponsorship arrangements either as a recipient or a provider involves potential risks for the RDA, including real or perceived conflicts of interest.

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

Any sponsorship proposals must then be considered against these principles:

- a sponsorship agreement must not impose or imply conditions that would limit, or appear to limit, a RDA's ability to carry out its functions fully and impartially. Instead, sponsorship agreements should be of assistance to carrying out the activities in the RDA's business plan
- there must be no actual conflict between the objectives and/or mission of the RDA (and the Australian Government) and those of the party receiving or providing sponsorship
- sponsorship received or provided must not be political or contentious
- it is inappropriate for any personnel or governing body member of the RDA 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 must 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 must be approved by the RDA and described in the reports the RDA 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.

RDAs receiving sponsorship funds

If RDAs seek sponsorship funding from third parties, this must be done using a transparent process outlined in the sponsorship policy which applies the principles outlined above. RDAs should note the types of sponsorship appropriate to their RDA *before* seeking sponsorship, including identifying the types of activities that would not be appropriate for sponsorship.

RDAs should also consider 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 RDA
- potential sponsors should have an acceptable sponsorship record with the RDA or other agencies
- goods or services provided would benefit the RDA 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 RDA
- where sponsorship involves the sponsor providing a product to the RDA, the RDA should evaluate that product for its fitness for purpose against objective criteria that are relevant to the RDA's needs.

RDAs 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. RDAs must maintain detailed records of their decision to enter into any sponsorship agreement.

RDAs providing sponsorship (must be defensible)

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

RDAs 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)*⁷. For more information, go to: <https://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/prevention/corruption-prevention-advice-topics/sponsorship>.

4.9 Insurance

4.9.1 Insurance coverage

The Australian Government will provide three types of insurance cover:

- Management Liability and Professional Indemnity (Not for Profit Organisation Liability Insurance, includes cover for 'wrongful act', 'employment practices' and 'personal injury or publishers' liability' and Social Engineering Fraud) to a limit of \$10,000,000 for any one claim and an annual aggregate for all RDA RDAs of \$10,000,000
- Volunteer Workers (provides Your RDA Members with personal accident insurance whilst undertaking the Activity including travel to and from meetings) to

⁷ See <https://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/232/Sponsorship%20in%20the%20public%20sector.pdf.aspx>

- a limit of \$100,000 for any one claim and an annual aggregate for all RDA RDAs of \$5,000,000
- Public and Products Liability Insurance (covers Personal Injury/Property Damage/Advertising Liability Insurance) to a limit of \$20,000,000 for any one occurrence, with an annual aggregate limit for all RDA RDAs of \$20,000,000.

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 RDAs to familiarise themselves with the content of these insurance policies. Each of these forms of insurance includes coverage of RDA volunteers.

Note that there is no age limit for insurance coverage for Public and Products Liability Insurance coverage and Management Liability Insurance, however Voluntary Workers Insurance is only provided for RDA governing body members who are 90 years of age or under.

Extraneous 'out of pocket' expenses incurred while undertaking RDA activities, such as damage to or loss of personal property, should be managed within the RDA'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.

It should also be noted that, under the terms of the insurance cover maintained by the Department for the benefit of RDAs, the 'Insured' (the RDA) 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. RDAs must also ensure that sub-contractors of the RDA are covered by insurance under either the RDA's insurance policies or separate insurance policies.

In general, the Department's insurance coverage for RDA RDAs, as detailed in Clause 17 (Clause 15 of the IOT RDO and Victorian Funding Agreements) 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 an RDA 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.

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

4.9.2 Workers' compensation insurance

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

4.9.3 Asset insurance

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

4.9.4 Motor vehicle insurance

RDAs 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 RDA. 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 an RDA meeting.

4.10 Assets

4.10.1 RDA responsibilities for assets

The Funding Agreement requires RDAs to use Assets for the purposes of the activity, to safeguard their assets, to have regard to comply with the 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 17 (Clause 15 of the IOT RDO or Victorian Funding Agreements) of the Funding Agreement.

RDAs are responsible for purchasing, leasing, managing and disposing of the Assets which they acquire with funding and must:

- ensure the purchase or lease is in accordance with the Funding Agreement, and not compromise the RDA's ability to comply with the Funding Agreement
- ensure all Assets are held securely to prevent theft, loss, damage or unauthorised use
- keep appropriate documentation of all Assets, including of their purchase or lease, as well as an Asset 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 RDA's assessment of them.

The following provides an outline of good practice Asset management that RDAs are encouraged to follow.

4.10.2 Asset management system

RDAs 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
- monitoring and recording the replacement of Assets
- disposal of Assets.

4.10.3 Register of Assets

The Register of Assets should record details of all Assets and all portable and attractive items.

The following is an outline of details which the Asset register should maintain for each Asset (where applicable):

- 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 i.e. 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 RDA.

4.10.4 Stocktake of Assets

RDAs 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 RDA
- 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.

4.10.5 Asset replacement account

An important part of Asset management is making provision for the replacement of Assets as their useful life expires. RDAs 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 RDA's general ledger and needs to reconcile to the Register of Assets.

4.10.6 Asset disposal

All RDAs 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 RDA and to avoid any actual or perceived preferential treatment, any disposal transaction should be transparent and at arm's length from RDA governing body members and personnel. Assets should therefore not be sold to:

- the Chair
- governing body members

- personnel engaged by the RDA
- contractors
- sponsors or third parties whom the RDA has entered into arrangements with
- 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 RDA'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 RDA to deal with an Asset in a particular way and will notify the RDA in writing what it must do. This advice does not apply to Assets that are owned by a third party.

4.11 Records management

Records refer here to information in any form that is created, received and maintained as evidence and documentation by the RDA or its personnel in pursuance of legal obligations, including undertaking RDA activities. Record keeping is an important part of transparency and accountability. RDAs 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.

RDAs must maintain records and documents consistent with relevant Commonwealth, state or territory legislation and the Funding Agreement. The Funding Agreement requires RDAs 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](#).

The National Archives of Australia also provides advice [on information management](#). This information has been developed for Australian Government agencies, much of this advice may also be useful for bodies such as RDAs.

Records may be subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982 \(Cth\)](#) and the relevant state or territory equivalent. Some RDA 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.

4.12 Complaints management policy and procedures

Complaints management is an important part of good corporate governance and sound management practice. All RDAs 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 RDA believes a complainant is vexatious.

When developing a complaints management policy, RDAs can find the Commonwealth Ombudsman's *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling* and other guidance at: [Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling and other guidance](#).

Complaints regarding RDAs should be directed to the RDA concerned in the first instance. However, the complainant may choose to make an initial approach directly to the Department if that is their preference⁸.

If the RDA 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 RDA concerned to account for how it:

- gave the complainant the opportunity to be heard by the full RDA
- 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 website⁹.

4.13 Privacy requirements

RDAs 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 RDAs not do anything which, if done by the Department, would be a breach of an Australian Privacy Principle or the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth).

The Australian Privacy Principles (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 [Office of the Australian Information Commissioner guidelines](#).

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

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

- ensure any RDA 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.

4.14 Disclosure

The Funding Agreement prevents RDAs from disclosing any Confidential Information without its permission (except where that disclosure is required by law).

⁸ Complaints about an RDA Committee should be submitted via rda@infrastructure.gov.au

⁹ See [infrastructure.gov.au : Contact Us](#)

Confidential Information may include (but is not limited to) information in the following categories:

- information specifically designated or marked as confidential by the Department
- personal information
- information concerning confidential business affairs
- trade secrets or commercially valuable information
- research by CSIRO or the Australian National University
- information relating to the 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.

4.15 Further information and resources

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

- [Australian Public Service Commission](#)
- [Better Boards](#)
- [Women on Boards](#)
- [Australian Institute of Company Directors](#)
- [Board Check-up](#)
- [Standards Australia](#) (please note this is a user pay resource).

Section 5 – Code of conduct and ethics for RDA governing body members and Personnel

5.1 Introduction

RDA governing body members and personnel 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. RDA governing body members and personnel need to be aware of the responsibilities attached to their roles.

The obligations outlined in this section of the Guide (**Code**) are in addition to, and do not replace, limit or modify obligations which are applicable to RDAs or their staff under applicable state or territory incorporated associations legislation.

It is the responsibility of each RDA to be familiar with their Code of conduct obligations under this Guide and the legal requirements in their jurisdiction.

5.2 Application

Compliance with this Code is mandatory for RDAs under Clause 18.1 (Clause 16.1 IOT RDO and Victorian Funding Agreements) of the Funding Agreement. In addition, RDAs must, under Clause 2.3(g) ensure that their governance documents and internal management practices give effect to its obligations under the Funding Agreement. Accordingly, RDAs must put in place procedures to ensure that governing body members and personnel adhere to the obligations in this Code. This may include referring to or including the Code in employment contracts, volunteer deeds/agreements, or internal policies of the organisation.

5.3 Principles

RDA governing body members and personnel 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 RDA 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 RDA, 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 RDA region
- disclosing any material or personal interest in RDA or regional economic development matters, and subsequently abstaining from any discussion or vote on those issues
- being bound by, and committed to, decisions legitimately taken by the RDA, 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 governing body members and auditors when asked with complete, accurate and correct information, which is not misleading in any respect
- complying with relevant laws.

Victorian RDA employees

Employees of the 6 Victorian RDAs are required to comply with the [Code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees - VPSC](#)

5.4 Personal and professional behaviour

Governing body members and personnel of a must perform their duties diligently, impartially and conscientiously to the best of their ability. Governing body members and personnel of an RDA must comply with all relevant state or territory and Commonwealth legislation. In particular, RDAs must provide a workplace that safeguards the health and safety of personnel, and is free from discrimination, bullying and harassment.

5.5 Fairness and equity

It is important that principles of fairness and equity are both complied with and are seen to be complied with by the Governing body members and personnel of an RDA.

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.

5.6 Use of information

Information provided to an RDA 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 Governing body members and personnel of an RDA are responsible and to respect the rights of the providers of information. In accordance with the Confidentiality Clause of the Funding Agreement {Clause 14 (Clause 12 of the IOT RDO Funding Agreement, Clause 13 of the Victorian Funding Agreement)}, RDAs should not disclose Confidential Information.

Confidential Information must only be released in accordance with Clause 14 (Clause 12 of the IOT RDO Funding Agreement, Clause 13 of the Victorian Funding Agreement), of the Funding Agreement.

5.7 Conditions of RDA governing body membership and employment

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

RDA governing body members and employees must:

- not tender for consultancy or contract work for or on behalf of the RDA (unless an exceptional case has been made to do so as provided in 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 RDA 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.

5.8 Conflict of interest

5.8.1 Overview

Conflict of interest is one of the most important governance issues for RDAs. As recipients of Australian Government funds, it is essential that RDAs 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, RDAs need to manage all conflicts of interest within an ethical, open and transparent framework that requires the Chair, Deputy Chair, governing body members and personnel to act with integrity, impartiality, good faith and in the best interests of the RDA at all times.

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

The Funding Agreement requires RDAs 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 RDA meeting agendas and should appear on the agenda prior to the discussion on any substantive issues.

5.8.2 Conflict definition

A conflict is defined in Clause 1 of the Funding Agreement as "an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest arising through [the RDA, a governing body member or personnel] engaging in any activity or obtaining any interest that is likely to or has potential to conflict with or restrict [the RDA] in engaging in the [activity] fairly and independently". When assessing conflicts of interest, the RDA 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?*

5.8.3 Identifying a conflict of interest

A conflict of interest arises when a Chair, Deputy Chair, governing body member or personnel:

- has a personal, business, or financial interest that could be considered to influence their work with the RDA, their contribution to debates by the RDA, and/or decisions taken by the RDA
- uses information and/or contacts gained through working in a professional capacity for the RDA to benefit their own personal business interests in any way, or inform other organisations that they are involved with outside the RDA 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, governing body member/s or personnel owning or having an interest in a business that is under consideration to provide goods or services to an RDA
- a close family member being employed by an organisation applying for support for a project
- the Chair, Deputy Chair, governing body member/s or personnel 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 RDA employs a partner, relative or close friend of an RDA governing body member or personnel, 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 RDA professional business
- a person holding both an operational (including management) and membership position, resulting in adequate objective scrutiny not being able to be applied to operational and management decision making
- the Chair, Deputy Chair or governing body member/s working in the office of an elected representative of the federal or state parliament, where their access to RDA information could be seen by the public to give the elected representative unfair access to RDA resources and influence over RDA decision making.

RDAs 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.

5.8.4 Disclosing a conflict of interest

RDAs must 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 RDA and sub-RDA meetings.

If, while performing RDA business, the Chair believes that they have a conflict or potential conflict of interest, they must disclose the nature of the conflict to the RDA. Similarly, the Deputy Chair, governing body members or personnel must disclose any real, perceived or potential conflict to the Chair of their RDA as soon as that conflict or potential conflict becomes apparent. Such declarations should be made immediately after the RDA 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 RDA meeting.

If a situation arises where any governing body member of the RDA (or any personnel) believes that there is an undisclosed conflict or potential conflict of interest relevant to an RDA governing body member, 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 RDA 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 RDA governing body 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 RDA 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 RDA 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 RDA must act to preclude the governing body 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 RDA (and the steps taken to resolve or deal with the perceived or actual conflict of interest) must be recorded in the minutes of the RDA 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.

5.8.5 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 RDA business or contribute to RDA discussions, deliberations and/or decision-making.

In the case of ongoing conflicts of interest, RDAs 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 RDA notifying the Department immediately if it is determined that a conflict restricts the RDA 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 conflicted individual should be excluded from all discussion on the matter, including receiving papers and records of discussion and decision. Depending on the nature and seriousness of a conflict of interest, an RDA may need to consider seeking independent legal advice on the most appropriate manner in which to manage a conflict.

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 or [Australian Charities and Not-For-Profit Commission](#) (ACNC).

Section 5.6 requires that ordinarily RDA governing body members and personnel must be excluded from tendering for consultancy or contract work for or on behalf of the RDA.

In rare cases, however, the RDA may resolve that a governing body member or personnel can tender for consulting or contracting work for or on behalf of the RDA.

This could only occur in circumstances where the RDA, after making inquiries, is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the individual is the only service provider that can deliver the services to the RDA on terms which are reasonable and represent a value for money outcome for the RDA.

In such a case, the RDA must follow the requirements of Section 5.6, including that the RDA 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 RDA's conflict of interest records.

5.9 Gifts, benefits and assets

An RDA governing body member or personnel of the RDA must never demand or request any gift or benefit for a governing body member or anyone else in connection with their RDA work. A governing body member or personnel must 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 governing body member or personnel to be influenced in the way they do their RDA work as a result of the gift.

Generally, non-token gifts would only be accepted in exceptional circumstances. Where non-token gifts are accepted, it would be appropriate to inform the Chair of the RDA or the next meeting of the RDA. If the governing body member or personnel 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 (section 4.10.6), RDAs must follow proper procedure for the disposal of assets, including not selling these to RDA governing body members, personnel or those people's friends or relatives.

5.10 Public comment

With respect to activities funded by the Australian Government, state or territory or local governments, the RDA must 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 RDA, its governing body members, personnel or representatives undertake with any company, firm or other body, or member of the public.

Whilst it is recognised that a governing body members or personnel of an RDA, as members of the community, have the right to make public comment and enter into public debate on political and social issues, comments must not, in any way, be made or be perceived to be attributable to the person in their capacity as a member or employee. This includes all forms of commentary on all social media platforms.

If it is not possible for an RDA governing body member or personnel to make it clear that they are speaking personally, public comment must not be made.

While constructive criticism of the operations of RDAs 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 must be taken to ensure public comments cannot be misinterpreted. The Chair is responsible for channelling matters relating to the operations of RDAs and the Department to the state, territory or Australian Government Ministers and/or senior employees of the Department.

5.11 Corrupt and unethical conduct

If a governing body member or personnel of the RDA is aware of any possible corrupt or unethical conduct by another governing body member(s) or personnel, it must be reported to the Chair. The governing body member or personnel 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 governing body member or personnel 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.

5.12 Breaches of the Code

RDAs 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 by RDA, its governing body members, or personnel may result in disciplinary action being taken by the Department pursuant to the Funding Agreement as necessary and reasonable in the circumstances.

Disciplinary action under the Funding Agreement may include:

- directing the RDA to remedy a breach
- investigating a conflict of interest
- removing personnel including RDA governing body members
- withholding or recovery of payments
- terminating of the Funding Agreement for default
- referral of matters to appropriate authorities as necessary.

5.13 Allegations of misconduct

This section deals with allegations concerning the conduct of Chairs, Deputy Chairs, governing body members and personnel which if true would constitute a breach of the Code (misconduct).

It is important that the conduct of Chairs, Deputy Chairs, Governing body members and personnel 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 governing body member are made, the person the allegations have been made against must immediately stand aside from the governing body of the RDA. Standing aside means a temporary leave of absence from the RDA. During this time the stood aside individual must not participate in RDA business.

Chairs must facilitate the standing aside of Deputy Chairs and governing body 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 governing body members may appoint an Acting Deputy Chair where this is required.

All allegations concerning the misconduct of a Chair, Deputy Chair, RDA governing body member, DRD or other RDA personnel are to be notified to the Department's Director, RDA Program Management and Governance Section and the Liaison Officer allocated to the RDA within 48 hours after the RDA 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 and Governance Section and the RDA's Liaison Officer) of allegations against the Deputy Chair, an RDA governing body member, DRD or other RDA personnel. If the allegations are against the Chair, the Deputy Chair must advise the Department (Director, RDA Program Management and Governance Section and the RDA's Liaison Officer). The Chair or Deputy Chair must advise the governing body member or personnel 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 24.5 (Clause 22.6 IOT RDO Funding Agreement, Not applicable to Victorian Funding Agreement) of the Funding Agreement regarding potential removal of personnel from the RDA'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
- the subject of an internal investigation involving a workplace health and safety matter.

Relevant authorities include any Department, agency or authority of the Commonwealth, State, Territory 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 governing body member may resume their governing body membership of the RDA when the relevant authority, court, tribunal or internal investigation makes a finding that the allegations are unfounded, or otherwise when the Australian Government and relevant state or territory governments and where appropriate the relevant state, territory or 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, governing body members and personnel in community organisations and institutions, such as service clubs, chambers of commerce and local government. However, all levels of government expect RDAs will ensure their operations remain apolitical at all times. RDAs must be particularly alert to incidents that may compromise the apolitical nature of the RDA's operations leading into a federal, state, territory or local government election.

6.2 Campaigning by Chairs, Deputy Chairs, governing body members and Personnel

Where Chairs, Deputy Chairs, governing body members or personnel 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 RDA. 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 governing body member. Clause 18.5 (Clause 16.5 of the IOT RDO and Victorian Funding Agreements) of the Funding Agreement provides for governing body 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 RDA (for IOT RDO governing body members or personnel they must exclude themselves from working on, or otherwise being involved in, the Activities for the duration of the campaign) 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).

Governing body members and personnel must also stand aside prior to caretaker conventions coming into force in situations where the apolitical nature of the RDA'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 must advise the RDA in writing. If a governing body member and/or personnel stands aside, the RDA must write to the Department to confirm the date that this occurred. Advice on alternative arrangements for personnel must also be communicated to the Department. Where a Chair is aware that an executive RDA position may become temporarily vacated due to this provision, the Chair may offer a replacement, from within existing RDA governing body members, at that time. If the Chair has stood aside, the Deputy Chair should assume the role as Acting Chair. The governing body members may appoint an Acting Deputy Chair where this is required.

RDA governing body members or personnel playing a significant part in a local government election campaign can maintain their involvement with the RDA. However, they must 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 RDA. They must not, for example, use clothing, badges or letterhead featuring the RDA name or logo, or introduce themselves as a Chair, Deputy Chair, governing body member or personnel of the RDA.

6.3 Launches, seminars and other public events

RDA launches, seminars or other public events that may take place during the caretaker period must avoid hosting ministers, other politicians or local government representatives. Flyers, speeches or media releases about the event must be apolitical. RDAs must 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 must be exercised to ensure that material used on RDA websites is not political material and printed material produced and distributed by RDAs 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 must not be added to websites or included in RDA printed material.

Events, items on RDA 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, must be avoided in the caretaker period.

6.5 Provision of information

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

6.6 Fundraising events

RDAs are apolitical and must 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 RDA funds and clearly not an RDA activity. Chairs, Deputy Chairs, governing body member or personnel may contribute to a campaign in a personal capacity but not from RDA funds.

6.7 Advertising

RDAs can advertise consultation meetings in the press where such advertisements relate to their usual business. All communication products including advertising must carry the 'An Australian Government Initiative' crest and the RDA brandmark (national or localised). Please refer to Section 8 for branding guidance.

6.8 Use of RDA facilities

RDA assets and premises must not be utilised for support of any political party or candidate. This includes producing or disseminating political material using RDA equipment or resources, for example photocopiers and office supplies. Party political material must not be put on the RDA's website and requests from political candidates to visit RDA premises for electioneering purposes must be declined. Party political meetings must not be held on RDA premises.

RDAs are to remain apolitical at all times. Display of party-political material including posters, leaflets and badges is not permitted on RDA premises or on the RDA'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 RDAs, and assist in the maintenance of the RDAs' apolitical status during the pre-election time.

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

6.10 Working with elected representatives

6.10.1 Communicating with elected representatives

Chairs, Deputy Chairs, governing body members or personnel should work cooperatively with their region's local, jurisdictional and federal government elected representatives. RDAs 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 RDA meeting each year. These representatives will only have observer status when attending the meeting. In some cases, RDA business may need to be considered privately and, in such cases, the Chair must 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 RDA and must not attempt to influence proceedings. They should not seek to give, and nor should RDAs accept, direction on matters relating to the RDA'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 RDA's work. This meeting could also provide an opportunity for the RDA 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.

Section 7 – RDAs as employers

This section only applies to incorporated RDAs.

Drawing on operational funding provided by the Australian Government, RDAs 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 RDA, as a separate legal entity, is required to meet its contractual and legal obligations as an employer. RDAs 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 RDA 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 RDAs are delivering their Funding Agreement Outcomes.

7.1.1 Legislation

Commonwealth legislation that applies directly to the workplace includes:

- [Fair Work Act 2009](#)
- [Work Place Health and Safety Act 2011](#) † (refer Section 7.3)
- [Privacy Act 1988](#)
- [Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988](#)
- [Commonwealth racial, sex, disability and age discrimination legislation.](#)

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](#)
- [The Fair Work Ombudsman.](#)

7.2 Management of RDA employees

7.2.1 Main obligations as an employer

RDAs 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 a formal employment contract. In developing the employment contracts between the RDA and its employees, RDAs could use the services of an independent employment expert, such as an industrial relations consultant, legal employment specialist or the Fair Work Ombudsman.

Each RDA 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 RDA should develop job descriptions and duty statements for all employee positions. Job descriptions should reflect the core business of the RDA and the RDA'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. RDA employees may not be governing body members of the RDA.

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. An example of a [diversity statement](#) is available on the national RDA website.

7.2.3 Selection of RDA employees

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

The Funding Agreement stipulates that employment contracts of staff (if for fixed terms) may be extended, however these decisions must be based on a transparent and thorough assessment of ongoing suitability, and be fully documented and approved by the RDA. Positions must be advertised when they are vacated, and the Department must be notified when a DRD position is to be advertised.

RDAs should take their known and anticipated budget into account when recruiting employees, and align employment contract terms and conditions with the NES to the extent possible.

All RDA 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 RDA.

Employment arrangements should be clearly recorded and documentation retained. RDAs 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.

7.2.5 Remuneration, leave and entitlements

RDAs 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 RDA 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. RDAs are provided with funding to cover all employment costs. RDAs must maintain an employee entitlement account, which holds funds to meet accrued employee liabilities and entitlements in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards.

RDAs 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

RDAs 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. RDAs 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 RDA's employee is terminated, including at the end of a Funding Agreement, the liability arising from such actions will have to be met by the RDA out of its operational budget. It is recommended that each RDA 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 RDAs, Clause 24.5 (Clause 22.6 IOT RDO Funding Agreement, not applicable to Victorian Funding Agreement) of the Funding Agreement provides the Australian Government with the power to give notice in writing requiring an RDA 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 24.5 (Clause 22.6 IOT RDO Funding Agreement, not applicable to Victorian Funding Agreement) will only be used where there is a compelling case for removal and after consultation with the RDA concerned.

7.3 Workplace health and safety

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

To ensure that obligations under the WHS Act are met, RDAs 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 RDAs, risks associated with undertaking activities relating to the Funding Agreement, and revisions to any activities which have been identified in the RDA'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 – RDA communications and branding

8.1 Overview: how we promote the RDA program

The Department supports RDAs by:

- raising awareness about RDAs and the Australian Government's commitment to regional development through the RDA program
- providing strategic communications advice and resources to RDAs
- sharing information on Australian Government policy, program, funding and training opportunities
- facilitating networking through face-to-face events, webinars etc.
- managing the application of Australian Government and Departmental brand standards.

The Department has an overarching communications strategy for the RDA Program. Key messages are:

- RDAs are local people developing local solutions to local issues in local areas.
- RDAs are a national 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.
- RDAs work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support the growth and development of their regions.
- RDAs support the implementation of the Australian Government's Regional Investment Framework (RIF), which guides a coordinated approach to regional development, underpinned by local engagement.
- RDAs help to drive economic growth, innovation and entrepreneurship in regions through facilitating investment in community, industry and the environment.
- RDAs assist to bridge the regional development gaps in regions by working with a broad range of stakeholders across sectors and supporting the delivery of identified Australian Government strategic priorities.

The target audiences for RDA program communication are:

- the RDA network (for direct communications)
- Other Australian Government Departments seeking to engage in the regions
- business and industry
- not-for-profit community groups, peak bodies and associations
- media – national, local, regional and specialist
- people planning to live or work in Australia's regions
- the Australia Local Government Association and local governments
- State and territory governments and agencies with an interest or responsibility for regional development
- the general public.

The Department's RDA program specific communication channels are:

Channel	Details
RDA website	RDA national website contains interactive maps of the national RDA network and states (jurisdictions). It also has an overview of the RDA network and landing pages for all RDAs.
DITRDCA website	www.infrastructure.gov.au and the Regional Development Australia page
Events	Ministerial briefings, webinars, roundtables, RDA National Forum and RDA Awards.
Social media	LinkedIn Facebook YouTube X 
Media releases and speeches	Ministerial issued by portfolio ministers Departmental issued by DITRDCA

8.2 Communications for your RDA

8.2.1 Communications strategy

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

The communications strategy should be used to support the direction of outcomes and performance indicators during the coming year and outline the various communication tactics and channels that will be used.

A communication strategy may include the following elements:

- **Objectives** – the communications goals aligned to your business plan
- **Audience** – your local target audiences
- **Key messages** – specific to your RDA in addition the RDA Program
- **Tactics** – what you will do to meet your communications objectives
- **Communications mix** – mix of communications channels e.g. website, social media, events, direct mail, media release, newsletter etc) you will use to execute your tactics
- **Evaluation** – how will you measure the objectives
- **Budget** – cost to deliver your communications including any paid advertising, website development etc.

Regular maintenance of the information contained on RDA 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 (refer Section 8.5.3).

Some RDAs 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.

8.2.2 Your target audiences

Your target audiences will depend on the area in which you operate but may include:

- local businesses and industry groups
- not-for-profit community groups, peak bodies and associations
- media – national, local, regional and specialist
- people planning to live or work in Australia's regions
- the Australia Local Government Association (state branches)
- local councils/shires (and alliances of local governments) in your area
- education institutions – secondary, vocational, tertiary
- research institutions located in or working on your area including research and development corporations
- State and territory governments
- other government agencies with an interest or responsibility for regional development.

8.2.3 Content

Example of content to share with your stakeholders/community:

- significant consultations undertaken with regional stakeholders, such as community groups, industry associations, businesses, government agencies and local government
- conferences attended by RDA governing body members or personnel, forums hosted, or submissions invited
- activities undertaken, especially significant activities initiated or completed by the RDA. This includes papers or submissions prepared by the RDA, research commenced or completed and progress on priority issues
- recent achievements including media coverage of the RDA, 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 RDA, 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 RDA's role in addressing these issues.

8.2.4 Branding

All RDA communications activities and resources must be appropriately branded as the program is administered by the Australian Government through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts.

8.2.5 RDA Logo and Template Packs and Guidelines

The Department has developed the [RDA Logo and Brand Template Packs and Guidelines](#) for a range of RDA a range of communication materials. The packs support RDAs to better understand their roles and responsibilities for compliance when using the Australian Government Coat of Arms and RDA brand.

The packs outline the various elements of the RDA brand and the application and use of these elements aligned to the [Australian Government Branding Guidelines](#).

Note there are two template packs:

- for RDAs
- for graphic designers with assets to prepare content/products for print/website/signage etc.

8.2.6 RDA Trademark



Image: the RDA national brandmark (registered trademark) used by the Department.



Image (above): an example of the Australian Government Coat of Arms with the RDA national brandmark, stacked.

8.2.7 Multiple logo application

When using multiple logos, the correct order (inline or stacked) is:

1. RDA national or localised RDA brandmark lockup logo
2. State/territory government logo
3. Local government/council logo
4. Private company or alliance.

8.2.8 Victorian and South Australian RDAs

As outlined in the [Australian Government Branding Guidelines](#), the *required* order of the logos, which can appear in an inline (from left) or stacked formation, is as follows:

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

When preparing any materials, RDAs in Victoria and South Australia should refer to refer to the Partnership Arrangements (Section 1.5) and the appropriate guidelines developed by:

- **Victorian Government** brandvictoria or email: branding@dpc.vic.gov.au
- **South Australian Government** dpc.sa.gov/govcommunications or email: govcommunications@sa.gov.au
- **Local Government Association of South Australia** lga.sa.gov.au [mailto:](mailto:lga) or email lga@lga.sa.gov.au.

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

8.2.9 National and region taglines

National tagline

The national tagline helps to explain the function of RDA to the audience and should be displayed in all communication products when possible.

“Local people creating local opportunities.”

Region Tagline

The region tag (the tag) has been developed to be used in conjunction with the RDA logo lockup. The tag highlights the RDA region.

“RDA is a national 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.”

8.2.10 Branding for websites

RDAs may find they have a need to be involved with cross-jurisdictional initiatives or websites outside the Australian Government domain either through a sponsorship agreement or entering into a collaborative arrangement.

When considering the use of the RDA brand, RDAs can negotiate to use the design in the most appropriate place on the site that recognises the Australian Government’s involvement, without compromising the intention of the initiative.

For information on how to establish and maintain online communications:

- [Australian Government Branding Guidelines](#)
- [Australian Government Style Manual](#)
- [Digital Transformation Agency](#)
- [RDA logo and templates](#)
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0.](#)

8.2.11 Your local RDA website

In addition to the RDA national website, each RDA is required to establish and maintain an accessible public website (refer Clause 23.4 of the Funding Agreement, Clause 21.4 IOT RDO and Victorian Funding Agreements).

RDA websites must be branded with the “Australian Government Initiative” branding and the Australian Coat of Arms.

The website must be updated regularly with current information and include, but not limited to:

- a link from an RDA’s website to the [RDA national website](#)
- acknowledge the support of the Australian Government, the Department through the compliant use of the Australian Government Coat of Arms and RDA logos
- information about the RDA’s role and activities, in terms of the activity as set out in the RDA Funding Agreement

- a current list of RDA governing body members and key personnel. A photo and short biography would be beneficial to enable stakeholders to know who committee members are
- the RDA's contact details such as address, phone and email
- links to the RDA's social media channels
- current [RDA Charter](#)
- copies of all newsletters or updates the RDA sends to stakeholders and any other significant reports produced relevant to the RDA's region
- Acknowledgment of Country
- any other information as required or requested by the Department.

Other information which RDAs may wish to include:

- First Nations engagement and action plan
- cultural safety message
- privacy statement
- diversity statement.

8.2.12 Images

Photographs can be used to enhance RDA publications, design material or websites. Overall, the photographic style should be locally focussed and progressive, linking both people and Australian regions together.

All photos should be high quality. Minimum resolution for web is 72dpi, and for print is 300dpi (at final print size).

8.2.13 Permission – use of images

When using photographs and videos, it is important RDAs obtain written permission of the photographer / videographer and all persons represented.

Please note additional privacy provisions apply for the use of images of minors. These provisions vary in each state or territory. There are numerous templates available online which RDAs may utilise for this purpose.

For tools on how to select, attribute and treat images, go to: [RDA Logo and Brand Template Packs and Guidelines](#).

8.2.14 Captions, alt text and attribution

Captions describe images to help users relate them to the text. All images should have captions, unless they are only decorative such as background patterns. An image is decorative, if it can be removed from the page without losing any meaning or information.

Alternative text (alt text) explains information in images for screen reader users. Alt text is a short description of the information an image conveys. Alt text should be less than 100 characters and based on user need.

Attribution (or credit) acknowledges and recognises the contribution or use of a third party's work ensuring it is properly attributed and linked back to the original source.

For more information, go to:

- [Australian Style Manual – captions and alt text](#)

- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)
- [WSC alt text decision tree](#)
- Inclusive Publishing in Australian Government.

8.2.15 Social media and your RDA

RDAs' social media accounts should be clearly identifiable through usernames and branding. Usernames should reflect the name of the RDA, for example @RDAKimberley. RDAs should *avoid* usernames that may misrepresent an RDA as a national body, for example @RDA.

Under the Department's [terms of use](#), RDAs can share content from its [platforms](#) (Facebook, LinkedIn, X, YouTube and Instagram). For more information on the [terms of use](#) go to:

- [Department's social media guidelines](#)
- [Social media: Guidance for Australian public Servants and Agencies](#)
- [Creative commons attribution license](#)
- [APS Code of Conduct](#).

RDAs are encouraged to use a range of social media accounts and promote the links on their websites.

8.2.16 RDA media policies and public comment

All forms of communications generated and channels managed by RDAs will be considered as official communications from the RDA. (refer Section 5.10)

RDAs must ensure appropriate measures and policies are in place to adequately protect these mechanisms for delivering official messages.

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

RDA governing body members and personnel must 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, RDA governing body members and personnel must adhere to the Code (refer Section 5).

As a starting point, **media policies** should be prepared with reference to public comment guidelines (refer Section 5.10). A media policy will help RDAs to **evaluate** opportunities to promote their activities and government programs and facilitate the take-up of appropriate funding opportunities to progress regional economic growth.

It is recommended RDAs utilise two or three different resources to support a broader audience reach and stakeholder engagement, and to leverage the Department's social presence and online resources as part of the communications mix.

8.2.17 RDA Events

RDAs should notify the Department of upcoming events such openings, launches, and award ceremonies. This information should be sent to your RDA Liaison Officer and copied to rdacommunications@infrastructure.gov.au.

8.2.18 General Communications

Email addresses

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

The Department encourages RDAs to establish email addresses for office holders that are reflective of a person's position, for example [chair@rda\[name\].xxx.au](mailto:chair@rda[name].xxx.au). This also helps to ensure continuity of communications when an office holder change. For examples of an email address in signature blocks, go to: [RDA Logo and Brand Template Packs and Guidelines](#).

Acknowledgment of Country

As outlined in Section 2.2, Committees should ensure during each of their meetings and (where appropriate) communication activities that an acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land/s where meeting participants are located is provided. For an example of an Acknowledgment of Country, go to: [RDA national website](#).

Regional Development Australia acknowledges First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia. We respect and celebrate the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their commitment to the land, waters and their communities. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

For more information, go to: [Acknowledgment of Country](#).