



Multicultural Community Water Safety Program

Saving lives, removing barriers
and building belonging.

FUNDING GUIDELINES



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS





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Community Programs

WE SWIM: Multicultural Community Water Safety Program is a national, evidence-informed initiative to reduce drowning risk, remove barriers to swimming and water safety education, and build belonging for refugees, recently arrived migrants and broader multicultural communities.

PROGRAM DETAILS AT A GLANCE

WE SWIM ALIGNMENT	WE SWIM Community Programs
APPLICATIONS CLOSE	24 September 2026
GRANT RANGE	Up to \$50,000 (excl. GST)
FUNDS AVAILABLE	Approximately \$1,200,000 (excl. GST)
APPLICATION TYPE	Open grant
DELIVERY TIMEFRAME	Grant outcomes must be delivered by 31 May 2027
FUNDED BY	Australian Government
LED BY	Royal Life Saving Society - Australia
PROGRAM CONTACT	weswim@rlssa.org.au

1. OVERVIEW OF THE FUNDING PROGRAM

1.1 About WE SWIM

WE SWIM: Multicultural Community Water Safety Program is a national, evidence-informed initiative to reduce drowning risk, remove barriers to swimming and water safety education, and build belonging for refugees, recently arrived migrants and broader multicultural communities. The Program is funded by the Australian Government and delivered by Royal Life Saving Society - Australia.

The Program responds to a clear national challenge. Multicultural communities experience higher drowning risk because of layered barriers that can include lower swimming and water safety skills, limited familiarity with local water hazards, and financial, language, cultural and access barriers to participation.

The Program is structured around three connected components: national coordination, multicultural community water safety partnerships and coordination, and reporting - monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). WE SWIM Community Programs are a targeted community-level funding stream within the partnership component, designed to support practical, locally anchored projects for specific communities, cohorts or barriers.

1.2 Program Objectives

The Program's objectives are framed around safety, access, equity, cohesion and opportunity. They are deliberately practical so they can guide decisions about funding, partnerships and delivery.

Over the life of the Program, WE SWIM will:

- Reduce drowning risk for refugees, recently arrived migrants, multicultural communities and international students by improving swimming and water safety skills, hazard awareness and safe behaviours around water.
- Increase access and equity in swimming and water safety education by removing financial, cultural, language, gender and geographic barriers to participation in priority areas.
- Strengthen social cohesion by creating new and deeper connections between multicultural communities and local aquatic centres, swim schools, clubs and councils.
- Grow a more diverse aquatic workforce by creating pathways into swimming instruction, lifeguarding and community water safety leadership for people from multicultural backgrounds.
- Build sustainable local capability so councils, aquatic providers and community organisations can continue culturally responsive water safety programs beyond the funding period.

1.3 Outcomes Framework

Progress against these objectives is tracked through four linked outcome domains. These are interpreted alongside Royal Life Saving's community prioritisation tool, so results are read in the context of migrant population profiles, settlement patterns and drowning risk — not raw participation numbers alone.

REACH AND PARTICIPATION

- Number and spread of funded partnerships by tier, geography, priority cohort(s), and cultural and language groups.
- Participant numbers by age, gender, cultural and linguistic background, and settlement stage.
- Retention and completion rates for lesson-based and program-based activities.

SKILLS AND SAFETY OUTCOMES

- Participants achieving agreed swimming and water safety benchmarks (for example, 25–50m swim, floating).
- Reported improvements in confidence, hazard awareness and supervision behaviours among participants and caregivers.

SOCIAL COHESION AND ACCESS OUTCOMES

- New or strengthened links between multicultural communities and pools, clubs, councils and other local services.
- Perceived cultural safety and welcome in aquatic settings, captured through feedback from participants and community partners.
- Co-investment and in-kind support secured from local partners, indicating shared ownership and sustainability.

WORKFORCE AND SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES

- Multicultural ambassadors, instructors, lifeguards, trainees and student leaders recruited, trained and, where relevant, employed.
- Evidence that water safety has been embedded into settlement services, local water safety plans, university programs or employer practices.

1.4 WE SWIM pillars

All funded activities under WE SWIM Community Programs must activate one or more of the four WE SWIM pillars.



WE CONNECT

Build and strengthen links between multicultural communities and local aquatic facilities, swim schools, swimming and lifesaving clubs, and councils.



WE WELCOME

Improve cultural safety, create welcoming aquatic environments, expand workforce and leadership pathways for people from multicultural backgrounds.



WE PROMOTE

Deliver targeted, multilingual water safety messages through trusted voices and channels.



WE LEARN

Remove barriers to participation in swimming and water safety education and build skills aligned to agreed benchmarks.

1.5 Purpose of WE SWIM Community Programs funding

WE SWIM Community Programs are community-level, partner-led initiatives that support targeted activity in a single local government area, a defined local community, or a tightly focused cluster of communities facing access and equity barriers around water. They are designed for projects that are smaller and more focused than WE SWIM Place-Based Partnerships, but still strong enough to produce practical local change, build trust, and create pathways into swimming and water safety participation.

WE SWIM Community Programs is suited to projects that address a specific barrier, support a clearly defined cohort, test a local partnership model, or help communities move from first engagement to sustained participation. This stream supports practical community action and can also help seed future place-based growth where local readiness, relationships and need are clear.

1.6 Policy alignment

WE SWIM Community Programs align with the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030, the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy, and the Multicultural Framework Review: Towards Fairness. This program aligns with Royal Life Saving's strategic approach to eliminating drowning, empowering communities strengthening safety, and succeeding together.

2. WHO CAN APPLY

2.1 Eligibility criteria

WE SWIM Community Programs applications must be submitted by a lead organisation on behalf of a partnership.

To be eligible, the partnership must:

- **Include at least one community-based organisation** with a clear role in serving multicultural communities, refugee-background communities, settlement cohorts or other priority groups facing barriers to participation.
- **Include at least one water safety organisation and/or aquatic provider**, such as a public pool, aquatic facility, swim school or other appropriate aquatic delivery partner.
- Demonstrate co-designed planning with the community or communities the project is intended to serve.
- **Focus on a single LGA, defined local community, or tightly focused local catchment** rather than a broad regional corridor.
- Commit to Royal Life Saving's safety, cultural safety and monitoring, evaluation and learning requirements.

The lead applicant must be an incorporated not-for-profit organisation or other incorporated body with the governance and financial capability to manage the grant and deliver the partnership activity.

2.2 Priority communities and geographies

WE SWIM Community Programs projects should focus on locally identified communities facing heightened drowning risk and access barriers, including refugees, recently arrived migrants, broader multicultural communities, and in some settings international students. Priority life stages may include school-aged children, young people and multicultural adults or caregivers whose choices shape family participation and safety around water.

Projects should be grounded in a single place or local community context, particularly where overseas-born populations are increasing, settlement is concentrated, aquatic participation is low, or local relationships are ready for targeted action.

2.3 Who is not eligible

The following are not eligible to be the lead applicant:

- State, Territory or Commonwealth Government agencies.
- Organisations without incorporated status.
- Commercial or for-profit organisations.
- Organisations with unresolved reporting obligations to Royal Life Saving from prior funding arrangements.
- Proposals that do not include a genuine community-based partner and aquatic partner combination.
- Projects operating at a broad regional or multi-LGA scale more suited to WE SWIM Place-Based Partnerships.

3. WHAT THIS FUNDING SUPPORTS

3.1 Eligible activities

WE SWIM Community Programs funding supports targeted, community-level activity under one or more of the four WE SWIM pillars. Projects may focus on a specific cohort, barrier, location, season or community pathway, provided the work is clearly connected to improved safety, access and belonging around water.

Illustrative eligible activities include:

- **WE CONNECT:** referral pathways from schools, settlement services, faith groups, universities or community organisations into aquatic participation; local partnership activity linking community groups with pools, swim schools, surf clubs or councils; family swim days; pool familiarisation visits; and orientation-linked community outreach.
- **WE WELCOME:** culturally responsive participation models; women-only or gender-sensitive sessions; family-centred scheduling; low-pressure orientation sessions; and venue practice improvements that help first time participants feel safe, respected and included.
- **WE PROMOTE:** community-led water safety awareness sessions; multilingual and trusted-voice communications; seasonal or local hazard messaging; and outreach that explains how to participate safely and what to expect in aquatic settings.
- **WE LEARN:** subsidised or free swimming and water safety lesson blocks; introductory beach or inland water safety sessions where relevant; beginner skill-building; small-scale workforce, volunteering or leadership pathways linked to aquatic participation; and practical supports such as transport, swimwear, translation or interpreting where these directly enable participation.

Projects may combine in-water and dry-side activity, but there should be a clear connection between the proposed activities and practical participation, confidence, safety or community connection around water.

3.2 Eligible costs

Eligible costs are costs that are necessary, reasonable and directly related to delivering the funded WE SWIM Community Programs partnership. All costs must support the approved project activities, community focus and delivery timeframe, with no more than 20% of the grant being used for coordination costs.

Illustrative eligible costs include:

- Short-term staffing or sessional workforce costs directly related to project delivery, coordination, outreach or participant support.
- Pool entry, lane hire, venue hire and other local delivery costs required for approved activities.
- Instructor, facilitator, bilingual worker, interpreter, translator and cultural support costs needed for safe and inclusive delivery.
- Multilingual communications materials, outreach resources and local promotion directly linked to recruitment, participation or water safety messaging.
- Transport and practical participation supports such as bus hire, public transport assistance, modest swimwear support or similar access items where these directly enable participation.
- Training or introductory pathway costs relevant to project delivery, cultural responsiveness, aquatic safety, volunteering or workforce participation.
- Modest catering for co-design, engagement or community information sessions where this supports local participation and project delivery.
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning costs directly related to the project, including agreed reporting, participant feedback and simple case study development.

Costs must be proportionate to the scale of activity and clearly explained in the budget. Royal Life Saving may determine that a cost is ineligible where it is not sufficiently connected to delivery, community benefit or the approved partnership plan.

3.3 What will not be funded

Funding is not available for costs or activities that are not directly related to the approved WE SWIM Community Programs project, do not advance the objectives of WE SWIM, or fall outside the approved funding period. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Ongoing organisational overheads or business-as-usual costs not specific to the funded project, such as core salaries, rent, utilities or general administration.
- Capital works or capital purchases, including buildings, renovations, land, vehicles or major equipment.
- Activities or expenditure incurred before the funding agreement is executed, including retrospective reimbursement.
- Activities primarily of a political, fundraising or religious proselytising nature.
- Projects without a clear link to swimming and water safety, aquatic participation, local hazard awareness, cultural safety or community connection around water.
- Cash prizes, gifts, gift vouchers or unapproved incentives.
- Conference attendance, accommodation, interstate travel or overseas travel unless specifically agreed in writing in advance by Royal Life Saving.
- Costs intended to cover existing debts, deficits, fines, penalties or liabilities of any partner organisation.
- Duplicate funding for the same activity or cost item from another grant source where this has not been clearly declared and approved.

Where there is uncertainty about a proposed activity or cost, applicants should seek clarification from Royal Life Saving before applying.

4. CO-INVESTMENT REQUIREMENTS

Cash and/or in-kind co-investment is expected for WE SWIM Community Programs. This may include venue access, lane space, staff time, outreach support, translation, transport, communications or other local contributions that strengthen delivery and community ownership.

Applicants should clearly describe all co-investment in the project budget and distinguish between cash and in-kind contributions.

5. GOVERNANCE REQUIREMENTS

A formal steering group is not required for WE SWIM Community Programs projects, but strong local partnership arrangements are expected. Applicants should describe how decisions will be made, how community input will shape delivery, and how project partners will work together to manage risks, solve problems and support community trust.

WE SWIM Community Programs partnerships should be proportionate to scale while still showing clear accountability, community voice and practical delivery readiness.

6. WE SWIM CODE OF CONDUCT - AQUATIC RISK MANAGEMENT, CHILD SAFEGUARDING AND CULTURAL SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

Successful grantees must ensure that programs and activities funded under the WE SWIM Multicultural Community Water Safety Program adhere to the WE SWIM Code of Conduct and demonstrate how they will do this in their application.

The WE SWIM Code of Conduct covers off eligibility criteria across all programs, including ethics, aquatic risk management, child safeguarding, cultural safety, public liability, privacy, and incident reporting and notification protocols.

The WE SWIM Code of Conduct can be found at www.royallifesaving.com.au/WESWIM.

7. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

The program's accountability framework is monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). Full participation in MEL is a condition of WE SWIM Community Programs funding, proportionate to project scale.

Royal Life Saving will provide common indicators, templates and guidance to support good data quality and useful learning. WE SWIM Community Programs partners should use MEL not only for accountability, but also to strengthen local adaptation, cultural responsiveness and future community partnership development.

8. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

All eligible applications are assessed against the WE SWIM Assessment Framework's five standardised criteria, weighted for this program as set out below.

#	Criterion	Weight	How this applies to Community Programs
8.1	Community need and local fit	20%	The application clearly identifies the priority community, the local barriers being addressed, and why the proposed place, cohort or activity is a strong fit, with a credible participation target.
8.2	Partnership strength, delivery capability and sustainability	30%	The application demonstrates a credible, genuinely community-informed partnership between the community-based organisation and aquatic provider, with clear roles, and shows how the model contributes to pathways that continue beyond the funded period.
8.3	Alignment to WE SWIM pillars and outcome pathway	20%	The application clearly identifies which WE SWIM pillars the proposal will activate and how it will contribute to safety, access, inclusion and belonging, naming expected skills or safety benchmarks where WE LEARN activity is involved.
8.4	Value for money and co-investment	20%	The application demonstrates a realistic and proportionate budget, with co-investment clearly described and linked to delivery quality and reach.
8.5	Monitoring, evaluation and learning readiness	10%	The application demonstrates readiness to collect a practical minimum dataset, provide milestone reporting, and participate in shared learning processes.

9. ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Applications will be checked for eligibility before merit assessment.

Eligible applications will be considered by a panel convened by Royal Life Saving with expertise in multicultural engagement, water safety, partnership management and program evaluation, with conflicts of interest managed in line with organisational procedure. The panel will make recommendations to the Chief Executive Officer, who will make final funding decisions within agreed delegations. Not all eligible applications will be funded, and in some cases partial funding or rescoping may be offered.

The assessment process will use the WE SWIM Program Balancing Thresholds to help guide funding decisions. The thresholds set indicative ranges for geographic areas, participant groups and cultural communities across all WE SWIM funding programs. They help the panel achieve an appropriate mix of place-based programs, community programs and Pathfinders, while ensuring funding supports the overall objectives of the WE SWIM Multicultural Community Water Safety Program. The WE SWIM Program Balancing Thresholds are published at www.royallifesaving.com.au/WESWIM.

10. APPLICATION PROCESS

10.1 Before you apply

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Royal Life Saving before submitting an application. Early discussion can help confirm program fit, eligibility, local partnership expectations, data requirements and cultural safety considerations.

10.2 How to apply

Applications must be submitted using the WE SWIM Community Programs application form provided by Royal Life Saving. Applications should include:

- A completed application form.
- Details of the lead organisation and project partners.
- A brief project plan covering activities, community focus, timelines and roles.
- A project budget, including co-investment.
- Evidence of incorporated status and appropriate insurance for the lead applicant.
- A short explanation of how the project has been shaped with community input.

10.3 Indicative timeline

Phase	Timing	Activity
Grant opens	18 August 2026	Application documentation released
Grant closes	24 September 2026	Applications close
Outcomes notified	16 October 2026	Applicants advised in writing
Funding agreements executed	30 October 2026	Agreements finalised
Outcome delivery period	1 November 2026 to 31 May 2027	Community Programs commence and report against milestones
Final reporting and acquittal	30 June 2027	Final reports submitted

11. SUCCESSFUL FUNDED PARTNERS

Successful partnerships will enter into a funding agreement with Royal Life Saving covering deliverables, milestones, payments, reporting, compliance and acquittal requirements. Funded partners are also expected to collaborate with Royal Life Saving on co-design, communications, shared learning and, where appropriate, stories of impact that connect local activity to the broader WE SWIM story.

12. REPORTING AND ACQUITTAL

WE SWIM Community Programs funded partners will be required to provide a mid-point report and a final report, alongside participation in monitoring, evaluation and learning processes. Reporting should cover activity delivery, participant data, access and inclusion outcomes, co-investment, risks, learnings and financial acquittal. The minimum dataset should be proportionate to the project, but should cover reach and participation, skills and safety outcomes where relevant, access and belonging outcomes, and practical learning about what worked in the local context.

13. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Royal Life Saving may publish information about successful partnerships, including lead organisation, project description, communities served and funding amount, in program communications and reporting. Applicants must declare actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest at the time of application.

All funded activity must be delivered in accordance with applicable privacy, safeguarding and workplace obligations, as well as Royal Life Saving's values and culturally responsive practice expectations.

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia accepts no responsibility for funded projects irrespective of the funding provided, and irrespective of any project being listed on Royal Life Saving's website or other publications.

Appendix A: WE SWIM Community Programs summary

Purpose	Targeted community-level projects that address specific barriers, cohorts or local opportunities in multicultural swimming and water safety.
Scale	Single LGA, defined local community or tightly focused local catchment.
Grant range	Up to \$50,000 per partnership (excl. GST)
Funds available	Approximately \$1,200,000 (excl. GST)
Application type	Open grant.
Minimum partners	At least 1 community-based organisation, and at least one water safety organisation and/or aquatic provider - a pool, aquatic facility, swim school or similar.
Co-investment	Cash and/or in-kind expected.
Use of funds	All costs must support the approved project activities, community focus and delivery timeframe, with no more than 20% of the grant being used for coordination costs.
Governance	Formal steering group not required, but clear partnership arrangements expected.
Reporting	Monthly check-in, Mid-point and final reporting, plus MEL participation.
Funded by	Australian Government
Led by	Royal Life Saving Society - Australia

Appendix B: Key contacts

Role	Contact
Program Contact	weswim@rlssa.org.au
Royal Life Saving website	royallifesaving.com.au/WESWIM



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