

ACOLA’s Disability Responsiveness Program 2025-8

Request for Quote:

Work Package 1.1: MEL Advisor(s) (with embedded GEDSI focus)

No.	Work Package
1.1	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Advisor(s) (with embedded GEDSI focus)

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Background

The Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA), through the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Inclusion and Accessibility Fund, is delivering the Disability Responsiveness Program (DRP) - a national initiative to reduce harm and strengthen inclusion through rights based professional practice. DRP builds on ACOLA's 2021 report [Ensuring Occupations are Responsive to People with Disability](#) and will inform sector specific training toolkits and a 3–5 year roadmap for embedding disability responsiveness across professional training and organisational systems.

For more information go to [Appendix 2: Funding Context](#) on page 13.

Summary

ACOLA invites proposals from Academies and suitably qualified experts to contribute to the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) function for the Disability Responsiveness Program (DRP), with a specific focus on ensuring Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) is meaningfully integrated across the program. The DRP is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's Inclusion and Accessibility Fund.

The MEL function applies to the program as a whole, spanning governance, design, delivery, learning and accountability across health, education and justice sectors. GEDSI is a core program lens within this broader MEL scope, rather than a standalone evaluation stream. ACOLA anticipates that this function may be delivered through one or more Advisor/s resources, depending on expertise and approach.

The role(s) will be embedded and will provide specialist expertise across the life of the DRP (through to May 2028) on an as needs basis. Engagement will be structured around key program phases and milestones, with both planned and responsive inputs at critical points in program design, delivery, learning and governance. The purpose is to ensure MEL and GEDSI capability is progressively established, applied and strengthened as the program evolves.

Item	Detail
Budget	Not to exceed \$120,000.00 (ex-GST)
RFQ Release Date	8 March 2026
RFQ Submission Close	22 April 2026
Program Contacts	Ros.kewley@acola.org.au
Submission	Via email in Microsoft suite or PDF format to info@ACOLA.org.au

1. RFQ Process

1.1 Request for Quote (RFQ) Release and Open Period

This RFQ sets out the background, purpose, scope, required expertise, methodology, outputs, budget, submission requirements, and evaluation criteria.

Respondents must submit a Capability Statement (≤ 800 words) and a Service Delivery Plan. Submissions may be individual or consortia/partnerships.

Details of the [Submission Requirements](#) can be found on page 10; and [Evaluation Criteria](#) on page 11.

1.2 Submission, Assessment and Selection

The RFQ will remain open for 2 weeks from the date of release. Proposals will be assessed against published criteria, including capability, experience, methodological quality, feasibility, lived experience/GEDSI approaches, and value for money. Assessment is led by the DRP Program Team with Steering Committee guidance and expert input as needed.

1.3 Selection and Notification

Selection will occur within 2 weeks of RFQ close. Successful respondents will receive formal notification, contracting documents, and onboarding information. Unsuccessful respondents may request feedback.

1.4 Work Package Delivery

Advisor/s support will be delivered on an as needs basis aligned with program requirements, with ample flexibility to respond to program needs, with activity increasing at key program milestones. This support may come from a single Advisor or a small, coordinated team, appropriate to the expertise required at each stage. Ongoing touchpoints throughout the life of the program will be required to maintain oversight of progress, risks, accessibility needs, and adherence to program standards, including [WCAG 2.2 AA](#).

2. Role Overview

The MEL function will support the program's monitoring, evaluation, reporting and accountability requirements, while also developing approaches, tools and learning assets that can be adapted and applied beyond the DRP. This includes producing scalable frameworks, indicators and practices to support disability responsive, rights based professional capability development across sectors.

Overall, the MEL function will design and embed an integrated MEL framework, incorporating GEDSI sensitive indicators, inclusive methods and capacity building supports. This framework will generate actionable insights to strengthen program outcomes and support the embedding of measurable, inclusive practice across health, education and justice workforces.

The Advisor/s will design and implement a comprehensive MEL system, comprising a clearly articulated MEL framework, implementation plan, indicators, data collection and analysis approaches, learning and feedback loops, and reporting processes across every phase of the DRP. GEDSI principles, including disability inclusion, will be integrated throughout the MEL framework as a core lens rather than treated as a standalone evaluation focus. This approach will operate as a coherent system to ensure program outcomes are inclusive, measurable, and actionable, and to support evidence based decision making and adaptive management throughout and beyond the life of the program.

The Advisor/s will work in close collaboration with ACOLA, operating within ACOLA's governance, timelines, and program management arrangements, and responding to evolving program needs and priorities.

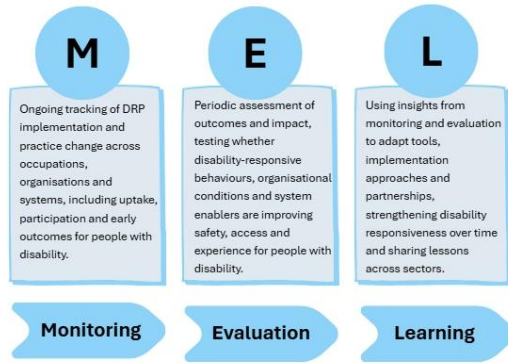
Additional information about the Program including the phases and timelines can be found at [Appendix 3: ACOLA's Approach to Delivering this Work](#) on page 14.

The sections below outline the expected approach, core activities, and outputs of the role. Respondents are invited to propose an approach and methodology that meets or strengthens the scope.

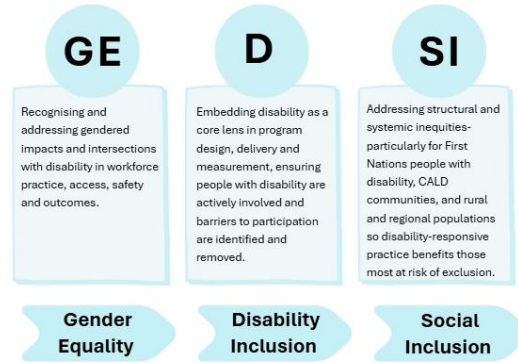
The diagram below outlines the MEL framework and how they interact for the DRP Program.

The Disability Responsiveness Program (DRP) MEL–GEDSI framework ensures accountability, measures practice change, and supports continuous learning to strengthen disability-responsive systems across health, education and justice.

MEL ensures accountability, measures success, and supports continuous improvement throughout the DRP.



GEDSI embeds equity and inclusion principles into the DRP design, delivery, and measurement.



3. Scope

The MEL Advisor will provide specialist advisory support to design, establish and embed integrated monitoring, evaluation and learning across the Disability Responsiveness Program (DRP), with GEDSI considerations embedded across methods, indicators, analysis and learning processes.

GEDSI is a foundational element of the program and will be addressed within the broader MEL function, supporting inclusive practice, intersectional analysis and accountability across health, education and justice sectors.

3.1 Approach

The Advisor/s is expected to apply a fit for purpose, value for money approach aligned approach with recognised industry standards and best practice. It should:

- balance quantitative and qualitative methods
- enable meaningful disaggregation and intersectional analysis
- provide meaningful measures and data for continuous improvement
- support adaptive management through timely analysis and practical recommendations
- work closely with ACOLA within established governance, timelines, and priorities;
- make GEDSI findings visible and used in measurement, reporting, and learning; and support post program learning where relevant.

3.2 Core Activities

The Advisor/s will:

- **Design and maintain** an integrated MEL system aligned to the DRP's enablement and behavioural change intent and program phases.
- **Establish** baselines to inform targets, learning and adaptive management, including GEDSI relevant starting points
- **Undertake research and data analysis** to inform baseline, indicator design, reporting, and program learning.
- **Develop** a suite of measures and indicators spanning outputs, outcomes and impacts, incorporating GEDSI-sensitive and intersectional dimensions (e.g. disability, gender, culture and language, First Nations status, location/region, age), where relevant and feasible
- **Develop and apply** a data strategy and tools (such as surveys, interview and focus group guides, observation rubrics) with inclusive consent, safeguarding, and data management processes.
- **Establish and support** learning and adaptation processes, including structured reflection cycles, decision logs, feedback loops, and after action reviews.
- **Produce** regular reports to ACOLA Program Manager, including templates and an accessible dashboard, with Plain English and Easy Read versions. The frequency of reporting should be outlined in the response.
- **Build capability** across ACOLA, delivery partners, and governance groups through practical training and coaching.
- **Ensure** ethical practice and accessibility compliance, including trauma informed and culturally safe approaches, First Nations engagement protocols, and WCAG 2.2 AA compliance for digital outputs.

Note: ACOLA acknowledges that respondents may identify other relevant functions or enhancements that would add value to the program. Proposals may therefore include additional suggested components, provided they align with the objectives and intent of this Work Package.

3.3 Outputs and Deliverables

The outputs and deliverables below are grouped by functional stage to provide clarity on scope and intent. These categories are indicative and reflect the nature of the work rather than a strict delivery sequence; some outputs may be developed iteratively or delivered in parallel depending on program timelines and implementation needs.

Additional information about the Program phases can be found at [Appendix 3: ACOLA's Approach to Delivering this Work](#) on page 14.

1. Inception & Design

- Inception meeting and brief
 - Program MEL Framework and Plan (including theory of change and/or logic model)
 - Indicator Reference Sheet including GEDSI sensitive measures and data dictionary
2. Tools, Baseline & Analysis
- Data collection tools (surveys, interview and focus group guides, consent materials)
 - Analysis plan (including data disaggregation and intersectional analysis strategy)
 - Baseline data collection and analysis (and/or rapid baseline where feasible)
3. Learning & Reporting
- Learning and Adaptation Plan (cadence, roles, feedback loops)
 - Ongoing data analysis and synthesis to inform reporting, learning, and adaptive management
 - Reporting templates and dashboard (including accessible and Easy Read versions)
 - Capacity building sessions for ACOLA DRP Program team (2–3 practical workshops plus coaching)
 - Advisor/s notes to inform toolkit design, pilots, and scaling
4. Close out & Synthesis
- Final analysis and synthesis report outlining findings, lessons, and recommendations
 - Handover of analysis tools, templates, and guidance for ongoing use

All outputs are subject to quality assurance, technical review, oversight, approval, and monitoring. The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing may provide input, through ACOLA, on the outputs.

4. Required Expertise

Respondents should demonstrate:

- Proven experience designing & implementing MEL systems for complex, multi sector programs.
- Strong capability in embedding GEDSI considerations with MEL framework,

indicators, tools and analysis

- Expertise in inclusive, trauma informed, and culturally safe methods (including First Nations engagement protocols).
- Capability to design accessible measurement (WCAG 2.2 AA) and Easy Read materials.
- Strong facilitation and capacity building skills across diverse stakeholders.
- Ability to produce clear, actionable reporting for governance and delivery teams.

5. Budget

Not to exceed \$120,000 (GST exclusive). Funding is tied to deliverables and released upon successful review and approval at agreed milestones. Your budget should outline the following:

- A detailed cost breakdown by output and/or phase, aligned to the Expected Outputs.
- Professional fees, including daily or hourly rates and estimated level of effort.
- Disbursements and expenses, if applicable (e.g. travel, accommodation), clearly itemised.
- Milestone based payment schedule, linked to deliverables and review points.
- Any assumptions or dependencies underpinning the proposed budget.
- Identification of any optional or value adding activities, costed separately where relevant.

All proposed costs should represent value for money and be clearly justified in relation to the scope of work and deliverables.

6. Submission Requirements

Respondents must submit a Capability Statement (up to 800 words) and a Service Delivery Plan outlining:

- Methods & data approach (incl. GEDSI integration and accessibility)
- Resourcing capability, capacity and timeline against deliverables, including any subcontractors
- Staff credentials and suitability
- Proposed methods, data sources, and consultation plan
- Accessibility and lived experience engagement approach

- Risk identification and mitigation
- GST inclusive budget

7. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be assessed against:

Criterion	Weighting
1. Resourcing capability and capacity	30%
2. Approach and methodology	35%
3. Engagement with lived experience	20%
4. Cost	10%
5. Risk profile	5%
Total	100%

These weightings reflect ACOLA's intent to prioritise methodological rigour, engagement and delivery capability in specialist Advisor/s expertise, while ensuring value for money and appropriate management of delivery and reputational risk.

Appendix 1: Definitions

Term	Meaning
Disability	<p>As in ACOLA’s 2021 report, this project will adopt a broad definition of disability, where:</p> <p>“[D]isability is understood as encompassing any kind of impairment, whether existing at birth or acquired through illness, accident or the ageing process, including physical, cognitive, sensory and psychosocial disability (United Nations, 2022).” (ACOLA 2021, 13)</p> <p>We also adopt a social model of disability, where:</p> <p>“Attitudes, practices and structures in the social environment can be disabling and act as barriers preventing people with disability from leading fulfilling lives and exercising their rights as equal members of their communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).” (ACOLA 2021, 13)</p>
Disability Responsiveness	<p>In the context of an occupation, disability responsiveness refers to the extent to which workers, leaders and organisations demonstrate attitudes, behaviours, structures and practices that enable respectful, inclusive and effective engagement with people with disability. At the individual level, it includes workers’ attitudes and behaviours towards people with disability (ACOLA 2021, p.4) and their ability to respond through adaptive and inclusive practice (ACOLA 2021, p.18).</p> <p>Disability responsiveness is not solely an individual attribute. It is shaped and sustained through managerial, organisational and system-level capacities, including leadership, supervision, policies, workflows, resourcing and accountability mechanisms. As such, improving disability responsiveness requires organisational and system change that creates the conditions for workers to consistently enact inclusive and responsive behaviours in practice (ACOLA 2021, p.18; Appendix, p.16).</p>
Lived experience	<p>Direct, personal experience of disability—either as a person with disability or as someone closely connected to their support, rights, or advocacy. In the DRP, lived experience involvement means meaningful participation in design, decision making, analysis and review processes.</p>
CALD	<p>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse. Refers to people and communities whose cultural background, language, or heritage differs from the dominant or majority culture. In the DRP, CALD perspectives are part of an intersectional approach to equity and inclusion.</p>
Inclusion	<p>Ensuring that people with disability can participate fully, safely and with equal opportunity in services, organisations and communities. Inclusion focuses on removing attitudinal, environmental, communication and systemic barriers so that all people can belong and contribute.</p>
Accessibility	<p>The design of environments, systems, communications and services so that people with disability can access, understand and use them independently or with support. Accessibility includes physical access, digital accessibility, communication access, cultural safety, and inclusive processes.</p>
WCAG 2.2 AA	<p>The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 AA represent the internationally recognised standard for digital accessibility. They set requirements to ensure online content is perceivable, operable, understandable and robust for people with disability. All DRP outputs must comply with WCAG 2.2 AA.</p>

Appendix 2: Funding Context

As part of its response to the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*, the Australian Government has introduced the Reducing Harm Towards People with Disability through Increased Inclusion and Participation measure. This initiative includes a \$19.6 million (GST exclusive) investment in the Inclusion and Accessibility Fund (the Fund), which will operate over four years (2024–25 to 2027–28).

The Fund aims to:

- Support grassroots efforts to create safe and inclusive communities.
- Improve understanding and shift mindsets regarding disability.
- Address barriers to inclusion for people with disability.

ACOLA is one of 25 grant recipients under this Fund and is delivering its program through a non-competitive grant.

Across the Inclusion and Accessibility Fund, projects must:

- Align with policy objectives under Australia’s Disability Strategy (ADS) and demonstrate measurable progress against ADS outcomes, Closing the Gap cross cutting disability outcomes/Priority Reforms, broader disability reform objectives, or gender equality commitments.
- Be developed and delivered by or in partnership with people with disability.
- Build skills, knowledge, and attitudes in disability and inclusion, preferably through experiential/on the job learning for professional workforces.
- Enhance learners’ ability to critically reflect on attitudes and behaviours toward people with disability, including intersectional considerations.
- Demonstrate potential to scale up regionally, statewide, or nationally—either broadly or for specific groups (e.g., First Nations people, CALD communities, women, girls, LGBTQIA+ professionals).
- Address the intersectional impact of prejudicial attitudes on inclusion and participation.

Appendix 3: ACOLA's Approach to Delivering this Work

Background and Context

In 2021, ACOLA was commissioned by the Australian Department of Social Services to deliver the report *Ensuring Occupations are Responsive to People with Disability*. The report examined the adequacy of disability related education and training in Australia and identified systemic gaps across professional preparation and development.

The report produced:

- A Good Practice Guide, outlining principles and objectives for disability responsive education and training;
- An Action Plan for governments, professional bodies, employers, education providers, and individuals; and
- An Education and Training Analysis Tool to support alignment between training content and disability responsive practice.

This work provides the evidence base and conceptual foundation for the Disability Responsiveness Program.

What is Disability Responsiveness?

Disability responsiveness, in an occupational context, refers to the extent to which workers, leaders and organisations demonstrate attitudes, behaviours, structures and practices that enable respectful, inclusive and effective engagement with people with disability. It encompasses individual practice as well as the organisational and system conditions that support workers to respond appropriately to the rights, needs and lived experiences of people with disability.

While awareness of disability issues has increased, ACOLA's work demonstrates a persistent gap between attitudes and practice. Addressing this gap requires changes to education, training, and professional development systems, and leadership from those who design, deliver, regulate, and accredit professional learning.



Enabling a Disability Responsive Training System

ACOLA’s research identifies three core conditions for a disability responsive education and training system:

1. Meaningful involvement of people with disability in the design, delivery, and evaluation of training.
2. Development of confidence, skills, and capability among professionals to respond effectively and respectfully to people with disability.
3. Sustained capability uplift, supported through ongoing professional development and systemic reinforcement.

The Disability Responsiveness Program is designed to operationalise these conditions in practice.

Program Purpose and Direction

ACOLA will build on the 2022 report to support the practical implementation of the Good Practice Guide, Action Plan, and Education and Training Analysis Tool.

The program will:

- Develop sector specific Toolkits to support disability responsive professional education and training; and
- Produce a three to five year Roadmap with integrated sector plans to support sustained, system level change.

The intent is to move beyond conceptual guidance toward practical, scalable, and sustainable implementation of disability responsive practice in workplaces.

Governance and Co design

Strong governance and co design are central to ACOLA’s delivery approach.

The program will be overseen by:

- A **Steering Committee**, providing strategic direction and oversight; and
- An **Expert Advisory Panel**, comprising Fellows of the Academies, education and sector specialists, and people with disability or lived experience.

People with disability will be meaningfully involved throughout the program, ensuring accountability, relevance, and credibility.

Sectors and Focus Occupations

ACOLA's previous work examined health, education, justice, and social services. For this program, ACOLA will focus on three priority sectors aligned with Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031:

1. Health
2. Education
3. Justice

Within each sector, **two priority occupations** will be selected based on:

- Frequency and intensity of interaction with people with disability; and/or
- Degree of influence on the quality of life and rights of people with disability.

Professional and industry bodies will be engaged early to ensure relevance, feasibility, and sector ownership.

Phased Delivery Approach

ACOLA will deliver the program through a **collaborative, phased approach**, allowing learning and evidence to inform subsequent stages.

Phase 1: Project Initiation

- Establish governance arrangements (Steering Committee and Expert Advisory Panel).
- Confirm program scope, priorities, and co design arrangements.

Phase 2: Evidence Gathering

- Conduct a targeted literature review and environmental scan.
- Undertake stakeholder engagement with DPOs, DROs, professionals, and people with lived experience.
- Develop guiding principles to inform Toolkit design.

Phase 3: Toolkit Development

- Develop draft sector specific Toolkits informed by evidence and co design input.
- Test content for relevance, accessibility, and practical application.

Phase 4: Testing and Implementation

- Pilot Toolkits with sector partners (e.g. RTOs, employers, professional associations).
- Monitor uptake, feasibility, and effectiveness.

Phase 5: Embedding Disability Responsiveness

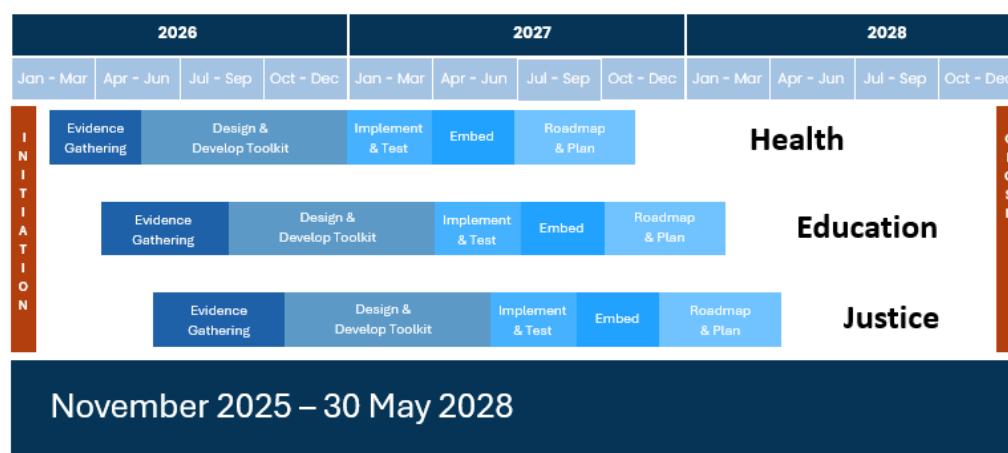
- Support sector buy in and adoption.
- Develop communication and enablement resources to support sustainability.

Phase 6: Roadmap Development

- Synthesize evidence and learning across the program.
- Co develop a three to five year Roadmap outlining strategies for scaling and embedding disability responsiveness nationally.

Timeline

The timeline below presents the indicative sequencing of program phases and key activities, recognising that timing may be adjusted in response to program needs, co design processes, and emerging learnings.



Methodological Foundations

The program is designed to drive behavioural, organisational and system-level change, with training positioned as one enabling mechanism rather than an end in itself.

ACOLA will draw on a blended methodology to ensure consistency, quality, and scalability, including:

- **ADDIE** for structured instructional design;
- **Prosci ADKAR** for change adoption and reinforcement;
- **Design Thinking** for user centred co design; and
- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** to ensure inclusive training artefacts.

These methodologies guide, rather than constrain, delivery and are adapted to sector contexts.

Toolkit Development and Delivery

Toolkits will be tailored to sector needs while grounded in shared principles and indicators to support consistency and future expansion.

Delivery approaches may include:

- Peer led or co facilitated training involving people with disability;
- In person workshops, digital modules, videos, case studies, podcasts, and other accessible formats; and
- Flexible entry points to support engagement at different career stages.

Deliverables and Outputs

Once program phases are confirmed, detailed deliverables will be packaged by workstream and may include:

- Sector specific Toolkits;
- Training artefacts (digital and physical);
- Facilitator guides and peer delivery resources;
- Evaluation, reinforcement, and change enablement materials.

Delivery Considerations

The program is designed to model disability inclusion in both content and delivery. Key considerations include:

- Peer led and co facilitated delivery;
- Accessibility and inclusive design (WCAG aligned and UDL informed);
- Cultural responsiveness across diverse sector contexts