

## Media Release

# Organisations invited to help young people build real world connections

15 January 2026

Eligible not-for-profits are invited to help young people across the state build healthy relationships offline, strengthen their sense of belonging, and become more resilient through an innovative grants program. the \$2 million Connect IRL Grants Program, cofunded by the NSW Premier's Department and the Office for Youth, allows eligible not-for-profit organisations to apply for grants between \$10,000 and \$250,000 to deliver projects which break down the barriers to social connectedness and promote positive youth development.

With applications closing January 20, eligible organisations are urged to submit their ideas to help young people across NSW.

Applicants are encouraged to co-design the projects with young people.

The NSW Government has taken a nation leading role in advocating for reform to better support young people, including jointly hosting the world first Social Media Summit in partnership with South Australia last year.

Since 10 December, new nationwide social media age restrictions have applied to children under 16 to protect them from online harms. While these restrictions aim to keep children safe online, it's vital to proactively create opportunities for young people, who may lose their online communities, to connect in person.

The Connect IRL Grants Program will be administered by the Premier's Department, co-funded by the NSW Office for Youth and designed in partnership with The Cabinet Office and NSW Police. Applications are open until 20 January 2026, with successful projects expected to be announced in April 2026.

For more information on the grant guidelines or to submit an application please visit <https://premiers.smartygrants.com.au/ConnectIRL>

### Quotes attributable to the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People Katherine McKernan:

"Young people have made it clear that they want safe, welcoming places where they can belong and be themselves."

"We should be creating spaces and opportunities that young people have told us they want, such as youth hubs, to connect with their peers outside of school and in their local communities."

“This grants program creates more opportunities to connect, build meaningful relationships, and participate in their communities offline, in ways that protect the safety and strengthen the wellbeing of young people.”

“Young people have shared thoughtful, creative ideas about what helps them feel safe and supported, and I look forward to seeing innovative projects that helps bring these ideas to life in the new year.”

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