

NOVA Cohort 2 Program Guidelines



Professional development for program managers.

Overview

NOVA is Innovation Victoria's professional development program for program managers, designed to lift the quality and consistency of entrepreneurship support across Victoria.

Following in-depth consultation with the Victorian Innovation Ecosystem, we have uncovered common challenges facing teams running entrepreneurship programs:

1. Limited opportunities for tailored professional development
2. A fragmented peer community, with few opportunities to connect with the ecosystem and engage them in your program
3. Inconsistent funding and changing priorities make it difficult to launch or sustain programs over the long term

NOVA seeks to address some of the challenges faced and is targeted at Program Managers in Universities, Medical Research Institutes (MRIs), and startup / founder support organisations, including Pre-Accelerators and Accelerators.

NOVA helps you build more effective, impactful entrepreneurship programs through practical tools, expert guidance, and a peer network to embed best practice and build capability. It covers key elements of entrepreneurship program delivery, including:

- Understanding of founder journey and experience
- Program vision and design principles
- Designing for inclusivity and founder support
- Measuring and communicating program outcomes
- Building a brand and recruitment
- Events and facilitation
- Partnerships and financial sustainability
- Stakeholder and mentor management
- Tools and streamlining operations
- Deep tech and spinout support



NOVA runs over seven months, beginning with a two-day offsite, followed by targeted masterclasses, workshops and coaching to support ongoing program development.

Valued at \$10,000 this fully-subsidised cohort will have 20 places for Program Managers from Universities, MRIs, and 'private' Pre-Accelerator and Accelerator programs.

If you are currently a Victorian Program Manager of an innovation program (e.g. startup pre-accelerator or accelerator) you are invited to submit your application to participate in NOVA.

About the name

The NOVA name comes from the Latin word for "new" and is also used in astronomy to describe a star that suddenly becomes extremely bright. It symbolises new beginnings, bursts of energy and rapid growth, a great metaphor for what the program is hoping to achieve.

What to Expect

The program has multiple streams of support to ensure that you are able to get access to all the knowledge and resources you need, while maintaining flexibility to launch or run your own program in parallel.

Program and coursework:

1. **Onboarding** via a short video call to answer any questions you have and set expectations.
2. **Intensive full-day workshops** to connect with the cohort, lay the foundations for quality program design, identify skillsets to focus on during NOVA, and set up / reflect on metrics for measuring program success (3 full days in the first month and 1 day to conclude NOVA)
3. **Masterclasses** to solidify and deepen expertise in specific content areas (running in months 2 through 7)
4. **Stakeholder event** to consolidate learnings from across the program, and bring key stakeholders on the journey (program owners, funders, colleagues, etc)
5. **Coaching and peer group check ins** throughout the program. Participants will have access to 1:1 mentoring, and a dedicated small peer group to test ideas and provide ongoing support.
6. **Asynchronous content and resources** including curated tools, case studies and readings you can access anytime to support learning between live sessions.

Promotion:

1. **Profiling:** At Innovation Victoria we believe we should celebrate our best programs to help them, and the founders they support, to thrive. We may leverage our own channels including media to profile participants and outcomes of the program.
2. **Networking:** Where possible Innovation Victoria will leverage its networks to support access to opportunities for your program.

Qualification:

1. **Certification:** Upon completion, NOVA graduates will be recognised as Innovation Victoria endorsed Program Leaders, a trusted signal of quality across Victoria's Innovation Ecosystem, backed by a verified digital badge.

Time Commitment

The Participant is required to attend key sessions in person, throughout the program, which runs across 7 months (Oct 2026 to April 2027).

Over this time period, each Program Manager (Participant) is expected to commit a total of approximately 47 hours (or 6 days), to attend the NOVA program as detailed in Table 1 and the “Timeline” section.

Participants may also join 3 further masterclasses, along with engaging in coaching and asynchronous content/activities, however these are not required for graduation.

Program activities;

- Onboarding and post-program support can be completed in the participant’s own time and are designed to be low intensity, or optional
- There are 4 intensive days, each running from approximately 10am to 4:30pm. Participants are required to attend all intensive days in order to graduate.
- Masterclasses will each be approximately 4hrs long and primarily in-person (some may be online). In total, there are 7 masterclasses available, however participants are only required to attend 4 to graduate (participants may self-select the most relevant masterclasses)

Table 1: Required program elements

Event/ Session	Date	Number of Hours
Participant onboarding at mutually agreed time	5 th - 14 th October 2026	1
Intensive 1 & 2	26 th & 27 th October 2026	13
Kick-off Event	26 th October 2026, 5.00pm	2
Intensive 3	11 th November 2026	6.5
Masterclasses – minimum requirement of 4; ~4hrs each	Every 2-3wks; 24 th November 2026 to 15 th April 2027	16
Intensive 4	4 th May 2027	6.5
Stakeholder event	4 th May 2027, 5.00pm	2

Total required: 47 hours

Table 2: Optional program elements

Event/ Session	Date	Number of Hours
Asynchronous content work throughout program	October 2026 to May 2027	16
Masterclasses – optional additional 3 above minimum requirement; ~4hrs each	Every 2-3wks; 24 th November 2026 to 15 th April 2027	12
Asynchronous mentoring and peer group check ins	October 2026 to May 2027	16

Total optional: 44 hours

Definitions

The below definitions apply to the application process:

- A **Program Manager** is a professional who designs and delivers programs that support founders, startups, scaleups or the commercialisation of research. These programs can include Pre-Accelerator, Accelerator or other cohort-based programs. They may operate within universities, research organisations, corporates, VC firms, or as standalone private programs, and play a key role in enabling founders and researchers to navigate innovation pathways.
- A **Pre-Accelerator** is a program targeted at entrepreneurs who have an innovative idea for a startup, innovative idea or commercialisation of research, and want to validate that idea and develop a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). The program runs for a designated period (generally a minimum of 6-weeks), and participants 'graduate' from the program having followed a set methodology to establish an innovative company. A Pre-Accelerator program can provide a pathway to an Accelerator program.
- An **Accelerator** is a program targeting established early-stage startups who want to scale their business. They are typically a competitive program with entry by way of an application process. Successful companies can expect to receive mentorship and/or education, and introductions to customers and early-stage investors including through a public pitch event or demo day. An Accelerator may be fixed-term and cohort-based, or a rolling entry program that offers the same support as a cohort-based Accelerator.
- The **Applicant** must be the Program Manager who will be attending the NOVA program.
- **Capacity** is a qualitative assessment of whether the applicant has the bandwidth to participate and implement ideas covered in the program. Over the program's duration, the Program Manager will need to attend events/sessions in person, based on the "Time Commitments" section mentioned above.

Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in this program, a Program Manager must meet each of these criteria.

1. **Victorian:** Program Manager has a primary residence in Victoria; *or* **Victorian-program:** Running or managing a program that is primarily for Victorian founders, startups, or research commercialisation, with >80% of accepted participants being Victorian-based (meaning the participant's company is founded or headquartered in Victoria); and
2. **Active program:** Actively running, or in the process of designing (with a confirmed launch date and secured funding) a program for founders, startups, scaleups or research commercialisation (which can include Pre-Accelerator, Accelerator or other cohort-based programs); and
3. **Executive or leadership support:** as NOVA requires both a commitment of time and focus during and post program to implement ideas, if requested participants must be able to demonstrate that they have the endorsement from their supervisor to attend.

If you are unsure whether you meet the eligibility criteria, feel free to reach out to the team at programs@innovationvictoria.com prior to applying.

Selection Criteria

Eligible Program Managers will be assessed through a selection process based on the following factors. Note: a small number of guaranteed places have been pre-allocated to recent grant recipients.

1. **Capacity to participate:** The Program Manager has the time and capacity to engage meaningfully with the program, by attending core activities (including in-person where required) and implementing ideas or activities between program days. Each Program Manager will provide written feedback in the application on their ability to commit to the program, including disclosing when their next cohort launch is, and other activities/programs they are responsible for. *This is a qualitative assessment based on written submission (weighted 15%);*
2. **Demonstrated need and Innovation Victoria assessment of support:** A qualitative assessment of whether the applicant is at a point in their program design and delivery where structured support, mentorship and collaboration with peers would be valuable. *This is evaluated based on the written submission and consideration of how well the NOVA program can support the program's current and future challenges. Priority will be given to individuals that Innovation Victoria is confident it can add value to within the next 12 months (weighted 25%);*
3. **Professional goals:** The NOVA program aligns with the applicant's past experience and future professional goals beyond the program they are running, including their responsibilities and longer-term aspirations in innovation, research commercialisation or startup support. *This is a qualitative assessment based on written submission (weighted 20%);*
4. **Commitment to peer learning:** The applicant is able to demonstrate a willingness to contribute to a peer-based learning environment and apply those insights in their own work or program. *This is a qualitative assessment based on written submission (weighted 20%);*
5. **Cohort mix:** The applicant brings a perspective, experience or context that will enrich group learning. *This is a qualitative assessment based on written submission, interviews and overall cohort view. Preference may be given to Program Managers from a particular background or organisation type to support overall cohort mix where required (weighted 20%).*

Note: applicants who are not accepted into Cohort 2 will be notified and may still be entitled to apply for any subsequent Cohorts, should they run.

Guaranteed Places

A small number of guaranteed places have been pre-allocated to recent grant recipients from University pre-accelerator and AI & DeepTech pre-accelerator grant rounds. Eligible recipients will be notified via email.

In order to access these guaranteed places, recipients must:

1. Submit an application by the deadline for our records, noting these applications will be used to tailor program experience/content and will not undergo a full assessment process
2. Meet the following minimum requirements:
 - a. Meet eligibility criteria as noted above; and
 - b. Be directly involved in the grant for which the guaranteed place was provided; and
 - c. Be adequately be able to influence program design.

Timeline (Cohort #2)

Unless otherwise stated, Participants are required for all Events and Program Days detailed below.

Application Process Timeline

Date	Process
4 th August 2026, 10am	Applications open
11 th August 2026, 11am	Information session
21 st August 2026, 1pm	Applications close
1st September 2026	Shortlisted Applicants invited for an interview
15 – 17 th September 2026	Shortlisted Applicants 15-minute interview
21 st September to 2 nd October 2026	Successful applicants notified and offered a place in the cohort

Program Timeline

Date	Event / Program Day	Format
5 th - 14 th October 2026 Asynchronous	Participant onboarding, 30 minutes, at a mutually agreed time online. - Asynchronous preparation work	Asynchronous online; required
Monday 26 th October 2026, 10:00 am to 4:30 pm	Program Day 1: Setting the foundations - Vision for world class programs - Defining personal program commitments	In-person; required
Monday 26 th October 2026, 4:30 pm to 6:30pm	Kick-off Event for cohort participants Opportunity to connect with fellow participants and reflect on day 1 learnings	In-person; required
Tuesday 27 th October 2026, 10:00 am to 4:30 pm	Program Day 2: Setting the foundations - Deep dive on founder journey and needs - Measuring and communicating program outcomes	In-person; required
Wednesday 11 th November 2026	Program Day 3: Putting programs in context of the broader ecosystem	In-person; required

Date	Event / Program Day	Format
10:00 am to 4:30 pm	- Building a sustainable program - Forming and maintaining community in programs	
Tuesday 24 th November 2026	Topics are likely to include:	Up to 4hrs each
Wednesday 9 th December 2026	1. Program Design & Learning Journeys	Primarily in-person (some may be online);
Tuesday 2 nd February 2027	2. Designing for Inclusivity & Accessibility	Participants are required to attend a minimum of 4 masterclasses to graduate (self-selected) however are welcome to attend more if desired
Wednesday 17 th February 2027	3. Supporting DeepTech & Spinouts	
Thursday 11 th March 2027	4. Measuring Impact and Outcomes	
Tuesday 23 rd March 2027	5. Building & Maintaining Community	
Thursday 15 th April 2027	6. Leveraging AI for Efficient Operations	
	7. Facilitation and Founder Coaching Skills	
	Order and specific detail of content subject to change and will be tailored to cohort needs	
Tuesday 4 th May 2027 10:00 am to 4:30 pm	Program Day 4: Reflect, integrate learning and plan for program iteration	In-person; required
Tuesday 4 th May 2027, 4:30 pm to 7:00pm	Stakeholder and Graduation Event Public event, participants are encouraged to invite their teams and key stakeholders along	In-person; required

Wherever possible dates are considered locked, however if program, event or masterclass dates change 3 a minimum of weeks notice will be provided.

Applications

To apply to participate in the NOVA program, please visit <http://www.innovationvictoria.com/pathways/programs/nova> from 4th August to 21st August 2026.

Questions?

If you have a question regarding the application form, eligibility, or anything to do with the NOVA program, please email programs@innovationvictoria.com. Relevant questions and answers will be posted on the Innovation Victoria website via the Frequently Asked Questions.

Change Register

Number	Section	Change description summary	Date change issued
1			