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Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program:

Small Grants (Round 2)

Feedback for applicants

Overview

The objectives of the program are to support community-led, on-ground projects to improve the health and ecological condition of rivers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin, whilst also supporting economic development and jobs.

The grant opportunity application period opened on 25 August 2021 and closed on 6 October 2021.

The grant opportunity received 139 applications. Following the Decision Maker's decision, 63 applications were selected for funding, to a value of \$4,181,446.43 (GST excl.).

There was strong interest in the program and successful applications were of a high standard. Applications were assessed according to the procedure detailed in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines and outlined in the Selection Process below.

This feedback is provided to assist grant applicants to understand what generally comprised a strong application and the features of quality responses to the assessment criteria for this grant opportunity.

Selection process

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) used an Open Competitive selection process to select 63 applicants to deliver the Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program 2020–21 to 2021–22 Small Grants (Round 2) grants.

Applications were screened for eligibility and compliance against the requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Each application was assessed on merit, based on:

- how well it met the criteria
 - how it compared to other applications
 - whether it provided value with relevant money.
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Applicants were required to address the following selection criteria:

1. The extent to which the on-ground activities will improve health and ecological condition of rivers and wetlands in the Murray–Darling Basin which builds on water recovered through the Basin Plan.
2. Your capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project.

The panel identified preferred applicants based on the strength of their responses to the selection criteria and their demonstrated ability to meet the grant requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Selection results

63 applicants were selected to deliver the Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program 2020–21 to 2021–22 Small Grants (Round 2) grants.

The selected applicants provided strong responses to the selection criteria and demonstrated their ability to meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Some general feedback relevant to applicants is summarised below.

Writing and providing details

Applications needed to clearly address each selection criterion, as well as any sub-criteria.

Low scoring applications often lacked sufficient relevant detail to effectively describe what the project was and how the grant activity would meet the program objectives and selection criteria.

Higher scoring applications were able to clearly describe the activities to be funded and identify a clear and direct link between their project proposal and the program objectives.

Environmental benefits

Some applications did not adequately demonstrate how the proposed grant activities would deliver benefits to the ecological health and condition of waterways. This was sometimes because the proposal focused more on other outcomes, such as improved tourism or community education.

Strong applications demonstrated consideration of best-practice natural resource and land management in describing project activities. For example, undertaking pest plant species control in a staggered manner to ensure a large area of ground cover is not removed at once or using fencing with a wildlife-friendly design.

Linking project activities to relevant existing plans, strategies or objectives for environmental management, such as the Native Fish Recovery Strategy, provided confidence the project would improve river and wetland health.

Similarly, applications which identified protecting threatened fauna, flora or ecological communities, or migratory species listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 as objectives were viewed favourably in comparison to applications which would not achieve these aims.



Public benefit

Applicants were required to show how their project would benefit the public. This could include through protection of threatened species, improvements to water quality or erosion mitigation or control of pest species which threaten ecosystems.

Some applicants, in particular private landholders, did not adequately demonstrate how the project would benefit to the community as a whole, rather than only to the individual or organisation.

Ineligible or unsuitable activities

Further detail about what constituted a strong response to each criterion is provided below. A number of applications included ineligible activities. A list of ineligible activities is included at section 5.4 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Applications which did not sufficiently address the on-ground activity component of the program guidelines were deemed unsuitable to receive grant funding. For example, applications involving feasibility studies without a clear on-ground works component, or applications involving research and/or flora or fauna surveys were often not suitable for funding as they did not combine these with on-ground activities with tangible benefits for river and wetland health.

Further detail about what constituted a strong response to each criterion is provided below.



Criterion 1

Please describe the extent to which the on-ground activities will improve health and ecological condition of rivers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin.

When addressing the criterion applicants will:

- provide details about how the activity will directly improve the health of rivers, wetlands, and/or floodplains
- demonstrate relevant community support and show evidence of involving local communities during project delivery and/or following project completion. Key stakeholders may include, but are not limited to, relevant local governments, community stakeholders and Indigenous communities.

If you are able, you may also wish to indicate the extent to which the project is consistent with any existing plans and objectives. For example:

- your local catchment management plan
- local environment management plans
- the Commonwealth Environment Water Holder's water management plan
- state environmental watering plans
- the Native Fish Recovery Strategy
- recovery plans for threatened fauna, threatened flora and threatened ecological communities listed under the EPBC Act (if your activities are focussed on a specific species or community).

Strength	Example
Strong applications clearly demonstrated how the activity would directly improve the health of rivers, wetlands and/or floodplains.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ provided a clear and tangible link in their application as to how their activity would help to improve the health of rivers, wetlands and/or floodplains▪ demonstrated the use of best available science to inform their projects.
Strong applications clearly demonstrated relevant community support and evidence of involving local communities during project delivery and/or following completion.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ identified key stakeholders and a community engagement strategy▪ provided evidence of community support and the role of community members/organisations in the activity.
Strong applications clearly demonstrated the extent to which the project is consistent with any existing plans and objectives.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ provided a clear description and example of how their activity aligns with existing plans and objective, such as the Native Fish Recovery Strategy or local environment management plans.

Criterion 2

Your capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project.

When addressing the criterion applicants will:

- identify what approvals are necessary, the status of approvals (for example, whether approvals have been granted or can be granted in time to enable project completion within the grant period)
- describe your track record carrying out similar projects
- show your access to personnel with the right expertise and experience
- outline your plan for managing the project, including project risks such as delivery in the required time and work health and safety, where relevant
- how you will buy goods and services, where possible from local businesses, including Australian made goods
- describe how your project's outcomes will be maintained beyond the term of grant funding.

Strength	Example
Strong applications clearly identified what approvals are necessary and the status of approvals.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ identified any approvals required and any which had already been granted▪ provided timeframes for the approval process and were able to show the project would be able to be completed within the grant period.
Strong applications clearly demonstrated the applicant's track record carrying out similar projects.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ provided evidence to demonstrate previous project management experience in similar projects.
Strong applications clearly demonstrated access to personnel with the right expertise and experience.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ identified key personnel/organisations with relevant experience and expertise who will support the project, for example:▪ plans and qualifications for using hazardous substances (such as herbicides)▪ use of contractors experienced with mandatory and/or voluntary Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures for the management of pest animals.



Strength	Example
Strong applications clearly outlined the plan for managing the project, including project risks.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="804 510 1433 613">▪ identified a project management plan had been developed, including risk management strategies and consideration of work health and safety.
Strong applications described how they would buy goods and services, where possible from local businesses, including Australian made goods.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="804 701 1422 837">▪ identified they would work with Australian disability enterprises or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses in the delivery of the project, where possible<li data-bbox="804 864 1410 927">▪ identified local organisations/businesses where goods and services will be sought.
Strong applications clearly demonstrated how their project's outcomes would be maintained beyond the term of grant funding.	Strong responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="804 1014 1362 1077">▪ provided details on how plantings would be supported until fully established<li data-bbox="804 1104 1426 1279">▪ demonstrated ongoing commitment to maintaining the project beyond the term of grant funding, for example through identifying who would be responsible for on-going maintenance and how this would be funded.