



Australian Government

Community
Grants Hub
Improving your grant experience



National Landcare Program Smart Farms Small Grants Round 2017-18 (Tier 1 and Tier 2)

General Feedback for Applicants

1. Summary

The first call funding round under the National Landcare Program's; Smart Farms Small Grants received 800 applications, of which 752 were eligible. After assessment, 77 were selected for funding, totalling close to \$5 million. A list of successful projects can be found on the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources [webpage](#).

It was excellent to see the interest shown by stakeholders in the program, however, this made the first round highly competitive and successful applications were of a very high standard.

The selected applicants provided strong, well-written responses to all the assessment criteria. The proposed activities were eligible under the program and clearly demonstrated how they would contribute significantly to the program outcomes and represent value for money. Applicants also demonstrated their ability to deliver the project, that they have suitable governance structures in place and meet all eligibility requirements as outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

There are five more annual rounds planned under the program. Here we provide detailed feedback on how future applicants can strengthen their proposals. Unsuccessful applicants in round 1 are encouraged to consider how this feedback applies to their application and, should they wish to reapply in a subsequent round, review their unsuccessful proposal before resubmitting. Applicants preparing a new submission are also encouraged to use this information to maximise their chances of gaining funding.

All applicants in future rounds need to ensure they use the current application form for that round, as there may be changes from one round to another.

2. Program overview

National Landcare Program

The National Landcare Program is the Australian Government's natural resources management program. It aims to protect, conserve and provide for the productive use of Australia's water, soil, plants and animals and the ecosystems in which they live and interact, in partnership with governments, industry and communities. This program will assist Australia's primary industries to become more competitive in world trade, have greater resilience and be able to more effectively respond to changing climate, weather and market conditions.

Smart Farms Small Grants

Smart Farms Small Grants is a sustainable agriculture element of the National Landcare Program. It is an open, competitive grants opportunity offering up to \$50 million over six years (2017-18 to 2022-23) to fund short-term (up to two years) projects to support farming communities to increase awareness, knowledge, skills and capacity to adopt best management practices. It is expected that this initial 2017-18 round will be followed by five subsequent annual calls for applicants through to 2022-23.

The Smart Farms Small Grants initiative is administered by the Department of Social Services' Community Grants Hub (the Hub), on behalf of Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, under a Whole of Australian Government initiative to streamline grant processes across agencies.

3. Selection process for round 1

Projects were selected through an open competitive process.

All applications that passed the initial compliance and eligibility checks were assessed and moderated against the assessment criteria by the Hub to form a shortlist. An Expert Panel was convened to provide additional geographical insight and industry expertise. The Expert Panel was comprised of an independent Chair and eight members. They assessed the shortlisted applications, making final selections based on the strength of the applicants' responses to the assessment criteria and their demonstrated ability to meet the requirements of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines; the Panel also ensured a balance of projects across industry and location. Final approval of projects was made by the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, the Hon. David Littleproud MP.

4. Considerations for future funding rounds

This feedback aims to enable previous and new applicants to strengthen any future submissions. It is based on feedback provided by the Hub assessment team and Expert Panel during the first round, as well as experience from previous small grant funding rounds. Unsuccessful applicants are encouraged to consider how this applies to their own application before applying for round 2.

Writing and providing details

Applications should clearly and concisely address the selection criteria. It is difficult to assess poorly written and verbose applications, so careful editing is advised. The use of sub-headings and dot points can also assist to improve the readability of applications.

A number of applicants did not effectively utilise the word limits in their applications, providing too much background information but not enough detail on the proposed project. Low scoring applications often lacked sufficient detail to describe the:

- *project activities* – applications that provided limited or no details about the project activities generally did not score well. From what is written, assessors need to be able to determine what the project will do, how this will directly contribute towards the program outcomes, deliver public benefits and provide value for money. Higher scoring applications clearly articulated the project activities, what they would achieve and how this would contribute to program outcomes.
- *project risk* – applications that did not clearly identify or sufficiently mitigate significant project risks did not score well. Risk management plans that were based on a recognised Risk Management Process (e.g. AS/NZS ISO 31000) were generally well received by assessors.

Contribution towards program outcomes

To be awarded funding, an application needed to clearly demonstrate that the project would deliver the program objectives.

Smart Farms Small Grants are to support local on-ground projects across Australia that increase the knowledge and capacity of farmers and fishers, and facilitate the adoption of tools, technologies and improved land management practices, to effectively, sustainably and productively manage Australia's natural resources, and adapt to significant changes in climate, weather and markets.

In general, many unsuccessful applications did not sufficiently demonstrate how their project would contribute to program outcomes, with many projects seeming to have limited relevance to the program. In particular, in order to improve an application's alignment with the program, applicants should consider:

- checking the Grant Opportunity Guidelines to ensure that the proposed project is a good fit for the program
- ensuring that what is written in the application clearly demonstrates how the proposed project meets one or more of the program's outcomes and links project activities to the project outcomes
- demonstrating the need for the project to the target industry and/or geographic area
- justifying the delivery approach
- describing the mechanisms to extend information to farmers and stakeholders and contribute to the uptake of new practices.

Capacity to deliver

Unsuccessful applicants commonly did not strongly demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver the project. To rank highly applicants should:

- demonstrate their ability to deliver projects of this size and complexity
- ensure that appropriate governance structures are in place
- clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of different organisations involved in the project (including project partners or co-contributors)
- clearly articulate how the project will be delivered, including that it will take a scientifically rigorous and evidence-based approach
- include a strong focus on the monitoring and evaluation elements of a project.

Demonstration of public benefit

These Australian Government grants are funded by public money and suitable projects are selected on the basis that they will deliver a public benefit that is in the national interest. However, as projects are commonly undertaken on farm land, some degree of private gain can also be derived.

The two most common situations where project proposals would be expected to result in a material private gain is when the project is carried out on private land (e.g. a demonstration of a new practice) and/or when it involves the use of a specific commercial product or machine. In this case, or any other situation where it is anticipated that there will be a private benefit, the provision of funds for a project is guided by a set of principles for public and private benefit, this includes the need for applications to:

- clearly demonstrate the expected public benefits of project activities, if possible including quantitative measurements of:
 - expected community involvement, such as number of farmers, groups etc.
 - anticipated changes to natural resources (e.g. benefits to soil health, or area of land rehabilitated)
 - the value of the private benefit
- provide details about how private benefits resulting from the project would be counter balanced with a suitably sized cash or in-kind co-contributions
- include a clear extension pathway to promote the project outcomes to other landholders and the broader community (this could involve a local Landcare or farming systems group or similar)
- include a robust monitoring and evaluation component.

Many unsuccessful applications did not demonstrate this information clearly enough.

Including ineligible and /or business as usual activities and budget items

A number of applications included ineligible activities or budget items or activities that are business as usual. A full list of ineligible items and activities can be found at Section 5.4 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. In particular there were unsuccessful applications that included:

- capital items – such as large investments for fencing and machinery (e.g. excavators, seeding and mulching equipment etc.)
- subsidies for commercial operations, business start-ups or where primary activity is for commercial gain (e.g. commercialising a new piece of machinery)
- activities that are considered to be the landholder's normal responsibility as part of running a business (e.g. including the cost of lime and application on private land)
- extension programs for well-established management methods. This is considered as business as usual activity for the applicant (e.g. extension covering common district crop management practices)
- activities that are regarded as new research with limited application in the foreseeable future
- 'trials' for practices and /or technologies that are already well-established as best practice.

To score well, items and activities that are ineligible or 'business as usual' should not be included under the grant funding component of a project. This does not mean that private funding (as a project co-contribution) cannot be used for these items or activities as part of the project if the applicant considers that this will augment the project, but details of this are required in the budget justification.

5. Specific feedback – Tier 1

Please note that the selection criteria for round 2 may be slightly different from these round 1 selection criteria.

Criterion 1 - Explain how the development and implementation of the proposed grant activity is informed by evidence and will achieve the Smart Farms Small Grants outcome.

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated an understanding of how the proposed activity aligns with the Smart Farms Small Grants Outcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a detailed understanding of how the activity increases the knowledge and capacity of farmers and fishers and facilitates the adoption of tools, technologies to improve land management practices how the activity assists to effectively, sustainably and productively manage Australia’s natural resources and adapt to significant changes in climate, weather and markets.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provided justifications of the need for the activity, especially how this will deliver benefits to the broader community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from what is written, the need for the activity and how the project aligns with the Grant Opportunity Guidelines should be clear how the activity will deliver benefits to the broader community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explained how the activity is informed by evidence and contemporary best practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the activity aligns fully with best available knowledge, science, established research results, and best practice.
Areas for improvement	
<p>Generally, unsuccessful applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 1 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing further detail about how the proposed activity aligns with the program outcomes, providing clearer justifications and evidence of the need for the activity, providing more detailed information about how the activity delivers benefits to the broader farming community. 	



Criterion 2 - Demonstrate capability to develop, implement, manage and monitor grant activities to achieve positive outcomes for all stakeholders on time and within budget

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly outlined previous experience delivering natural resource management projects that achieved positive outcomes for all stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> details of the applicant’s previous experience demonstrated that they are well equipped to be able to deliver a project of this size and complexity to achieve a positive outcome evidence of a good track-record in delivering similar natural resource management projects.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated that the applicant has the capability to develop, implement, manage and monitor the proposed grant activity to achieve positive outcomes for all stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relevant evidence that the applicant has an appropriate process in place to ensure that the project will be well managed, timelines met, staff in place, finances monitored, outcomes achieved and project reported.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly outlined any risks associated with the grant activity, and explained how they will be managed and mitigated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> detailed information which demonstrated that the applicant identified and understood the project risks. (e.g. loss of key personnel from the project, seasonal variation, lack of landholder interest and engagement in project etc.) specific details of the processes that are in place to ensure that the risks will be managed and mitigated.
<p>Areas for improvement</p>	
<p>Generally, unsuccessful applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 2 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrating that they have the skills and experience required to deliver the project and achieve positive outcomes providing clear evidence that they could manage the project well providing more detailed information about risk management, including identifying and managing risk. 	

6. Specific feedback - Tier 2

Criterion 1 - Demonstrate the need for the grant activity in the chosen location.

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provided evidence of the need for the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognised evidence, such as Australian Government priorities, statistics, demographic information, research, reports, or empirical evidence, on why there is a need for the proposed activity in the specific location how the project aligned with the stated need.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined how the activity will address the identified need, especially how this will deliver benefits to the broader community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> detailed information on the project methodology how the activity will deliver benefits to the broader community, e.g. extension activities such as field days, workshops and articles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined how the activity aligns with the Smart Farms Small Grants outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the proposed project would contribute to increasing the knowledge and capacity of farmers and fishers; and/or facilitate the adoption of tools, technologies and improved land management practices how the project effectively assists farmers and landholders to sustainably and productively manage Australia’s natural resources and adapt to significant changes in climate, weather and markets.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explained how the activity will build on or complement (and not duplicate) existing services and/or support natural resource management investment at the site(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the activity is complementary or synergistic but not a duplication of a previous or current work how the activity will build on existing services and support natural resource management investment in the region.
Areas for improvement	
<p>Generally, unsuccessful applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 1 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing detailed information and evidence of the need for the activity outlining how the proposed project contributes to increasing the knowledge and capacity of farmers and fishers; and /or facilitates the adoption of tools, technologies and improved land management practices outlining how the activity assists farmers and landholders to effectively, sustainably and productively manage Australia’s natural resources and adapt to significant changes in climate, weather and markets demonstrating that the proposed activity builds on previous or current work. 	



Criterion 2 - Explain how the development and implementation of your organisation’s grant activity is informed by evidence and will achieve the grant program’s objectives

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explained how the development and implementation of the activity is informed by evidence and contemporary best practice (e.g. previous work and investments to address this, condition reports, expert assessments). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the evidence of applicant’s understanding that the activity aligns fully with best available knowledge, science, established research results, and recognised best practice detailed information on how the project will be aligned with the stated need of the location and region.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explained how the development and implementation of the activity will deliver positive, measurable outcomes that contribute to the program objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the project will deliver positive benefits and outcomes, and that there will be mechanisms in place to measure these benefits how the activity will contribute to protecting the condition of Australia’s natural resource base and biodiversity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly outline how the scale of the activity is appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the scale of the activity is appropriate to provide measurable benefits for the amounts of funding requested.
<p>Areas for improvement</p>	
<p>Generally, unsuccessful applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 2 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing detailed evidence that the activity aligns fully with best available knowledge, science, established research results, and recognised best practice providing detailed information how the project will be aligned with the need of the location explaining how the project will deliver positive benefits and how these will be measured demonstrating how the scale of the activity is appropriate to provide measurable benefits for the amounts of funding requested. 	



Criterion 3 - Demonstrate your capability to deliver the grant activity

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly outlined the applicant's previous management experience in delivering projects of a similar size and scope. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the applicant's previous experience demonstrated their ability deliver the project and that they have appropriate governance structures in place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explained the capability to develop, implement, manage and monitor this grant activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the applicant has the skills and appropriate processes are in place to ensure that the project will be well managed, time lines are met, staff in place, outcomes and finances monitored and project reported.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined any risks associated with the grant activity, and explain how they will be managed and mitigated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the applicant understood and identified the project risks evidence that processes are in place to ensure that the identified risks will be appropriately managed and mitigated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined the NRM expertise of the applicant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence that the applicant has the required technical expertise to deliver the proposed project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outline roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the grant activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the applicant knows who needs to do what and when to ensure the project is successful evidence that the applicant is able to manage a number of different parties into a well-coordinated activity.
Areas for improvement	
<p>Generally, unsuccessful applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 3 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrating previous experience that they are well equipped to deliver the project providing evidence they have the relevant skills and expertise to ensure that the project will be successfully delivered explaining that the applicant understood and identified risks; processes are in place to manage and mitigate the risks outlining how the roles and responsibilities will be distributed among the parties involved to make the project successful. 	

7. Individual feedback

Individual feedback is available to applicants by contacting the Community Grants Hub (1800 020 283) or by emailing support@communitygrants.gov.au within 30 (calendar) days of having received your outcome notification letter. Please include in the request your legal entity name, application ID and the project activity title. The Hub will endeavour to respond to your request within 60 (calendar) days.