



Australian Government

Community
Grants Hub
Improving your grant experience



National Landcare Program Smart Farming Partnerships – Round 1

General Feedback for Applicants

1. Summary

The first call funding round under the National Landcare Program's; Smart Farming Partnerships received 432 applications, of which 399 were eligible. After assessment, 15 were selected for funding, totalling just over \$27 million. A list of successful projects can be found [here](#)ⁱ.

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 that they meet all eligibility requirements as outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

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 future funding 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 for a future funding round need to ensure they use the current application form for that round, as there may be changes between funding rounds.

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 Farming Partnerships

Smart Farming Partnerships is a sustainable agriculture element of the National Landcare Program. It is an open, competitive grants opportunity offering up to \$60 million over six years (2017-18 to 2022-23) to fund projects for up to four years to support organisations working in partnership to develop, trial and implement innovative technologies and practices that protect natural resources and support sustainable production across primary industries.

The Smart Farming Partnerships 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 seven 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 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

Applications need to clearly demonstrate how the projects would deliver the program objectives.

Smart Farming Partnership projects are to develop, trial and implement new and innovative tools that support uptake of sustainable agriculture practices across our agricultural, fishing, aquaculture and farm forestry industries. These projects will allow new ideas and technologies to be shared and tested across industries and regions, which will subsequently benefit the nation.

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, 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 the application clearly demonstrates how the proposed project meets one or more of the program's outcomes and linking project activities to the 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
- how the project is innovative.

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.

Innovation

Many proposals under the Smart Farming Partnerships did not demonstrate how their project was innovative. For example, many proposals were primarily for general extension activities – i.e. support for field days, workshops, farm walks to build farmers general knowledge and awareness of soil health, pest control, weather forecasts etc. These types of activities alone are not considered innovative enough to be competitive in Smart Farming Partnerships. The program's focus on innovation includes:

- innovative practices and systems - new on-ground practices (or new combinations of practices), an improvement to existing practices, or the introduction of practices that are already being used successfully in other countries, regions or industries. This includes farming and fishing practices and systems, machinery, equipment and digital information systems
- innovation in capacity building – instigating new, or enhancing existing, information channels, communication systems and products that provide improved natural resources management knowledge, extension or services and/or build new networks including community level innovation
- institutional and market based approaches - approaches that involve new or improved supply chain management that leads to the adoption of sustainable land management practices and/or technology.

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-contribution
- 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 practice)
- activities that are regarded as basic research
- '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

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

Criterion 1 - Demonstrate how the development and implementation of your project will contribute to the Smart Farming Partnership outcomes.

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated an understanding of how the project will deliver clear and measurable achievements against the Smart Farming Partnerships outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the activity improves productivity, profitability and ability to adopt to significant changes in climate, weather and markets how the activity improves the capacity of Australian farmers to demonstrate the sustainability of their operations and the traceability of their products how the activity increases community awareness and understanding of the importance of managing Australia’s soil, water and vegetation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated how the project will contribute to identified natural resource management requirements, specifically how this will deliver benefits to the broader community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the activity contributes to protect the condition of Australia’s natural resource base and biodiversity how the activity improves on-farm soil, vegetation management and contributes to biodiversity protection how the activity delivers benefits to the broader community such as cleaner air and water, and better protected biodiversity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> described the type of activities to be funded to deliver the outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the type of activities and how these will deliver the program’s outcomes how the activity will be performed i.e. clearly outlined the project methodology.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explained in detail: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the appropriateness of the scale of the proposed activity how the project builds on current knowledge of what works best any related National Landcare Program investments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the scale and the budget is appropriate to provide the measurable benefits the degree to which the project activities will deliver the benefit the number or size of the communities that will benefit that the proposed activities are based on sound science, appropriate technology and previous successful work explained clearly if the project is related to other natural resource management investments.



Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described:
Areas for improvement	
<p>Generally, applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 1 by providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further detail about how the proposed activity delivers clear and measurable achievements against the Smart Farming Partnership outcomes • demonstrating clearly how the project will contribute to protect and/or improve the condition of Australia’s natural resource base and biodiversity • more detailed information about how the activity delivers benefits to the broader community • further details about the type of the activities, project methodology and how they will deliver the program’s outcomes. 	

Criterion 2 - Demonstrate how your project contributes to innovation in delivering against the Smart Farming Partnership outcomes

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly explained the underpinning scientific research and gave evidence of proof of concept for the project. They also outlined the suitability for adoption, technical feasibility of the innovation and demonstrated a pathway to adoption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how the project would contribute to innovation when delivering the Smart Farming Partnerships outcomes • suitability of the innovation for adoption by farmers, fishers, land managers and associated groups involved in natural resource management • the current level of adoption of the practice and/or technology and how the proposal expands or advances this adoption in an innovative way • likely level of adoption of the innovation in 5 to 10 years past the life of the project.
Areas for improvement	
<p>Generally, applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 2 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrating that the project is underpinned by scientific research and evidence; and demonstrating proof of concept for the project • providing clear evidence that the project contributes to innovation in delivering against the Smart Farming Partnerships outcomes • outlining the technical feasibility of the innovation and its suitability for adoption. 	



Criterion 3 - Demonstrate your capability to successfully deliver the grant project in the chosen location(s), on time and within budget

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined the organisation’s history in administering projects of this size including managing and reporting on grants funding gave examples of experience collaborating with appropriate partners to deliver the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the applicant has adequate relevant experiences to deliver the proposed project provided evidence that they can work collaboratively with the partners in their project demonstrated that the applicant is well-enough equipped to be able to deliver a project of the complexity proposed and achieve a positive outcome.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined their expertise, or access to the relevant expertise that is required to achieve the project outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> detailed that the applicant has the required technical knowledge, skills and systems in place to be able to deliver the proposed project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined the governance arrangements of the project, including the capacity for reporting and project management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the applicant has the relevant processes in place to ensure that the project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> will be well managed timelines will be met will be staffed with suitably skilled personnel finances will be monitored accurately will be reported properly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> detailed the way in which relevant partnerships will operate both administratively and practically, and demonstrated the role the partners will undertake in the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the role of each of the partners and which activities they would be responsible for and when that the project has suitable governance structures in place to ensure the partners and the activities are well coordinated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined any risks associated with delivering the grant activities, and explain how they will be managed and mitigated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the applicant understood and considered what the project risks are provided evidence that processes are in place to ensure that identified risks will be managed and mitigated.

Areas for improvement

Generally, applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 3 by:

- providing detailed information and evidence that the applicant has the required technical knowledge, skills and systems in place to be able to deliver the proposed project and achieve a positive outcome
- providing evidence that they can work collaboratively with partners in this project
- outlining that the applicant identified and understood risks and that processes are in place to manage and mitigate the identified risks.

Criterion 4 - Demonstrate how you will establish partnerships and engage with the community to achieve project outcomes

Quality applications:	Example – Quality responses clearly described:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> described how the applicant will incorporate appropriate and effective partnerships to effectively achieve the full, end-to-end delivery of the proposed project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the project will incorporate and provide benefit to a wide range of community and interest groups outside of the immediate project personnel and/or organisations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explained how they will identify and engage with relevant stakeholders and partners including Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the applicant will identify and engage with the relevant stakeholders including coordinate the interests, needs and valuable contribution of people from diverse or minority backgrounds to achieve project outcome.
Areas for improvement	
<p>Generally, applicants could have strengthened their responses to Criterion 4 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing detailed evidence that the proposed project will identify and engage with relevant stakeholders and incorporate and provide benefit to a wide range of community and interest groups outside of the immediate project personnel and/or organisations explaining how the applicant will coordinate the interests, needs and valuable contributions of all stakeholders, including people from diverse or minority backgrounds, to protect or improve natural resources. 	

6. Individual feedback

Individual feedback is available to applicants by contacting the Community Grants Hub (1800 020 083 or support@communitygrants.gov.au) within 60 (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.

ⁱ <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/natural-resources/landcare/national-landcare-program/australian-government-investment-in-landcare>