

MURRAY–DARLING BASIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ROUND 3

WEBINAR 1 TRANSCRIPT

10:00 – 11:00 am AEDT, THURSDAY 11 MARCH 2021

David Pembroke:

Well, hello, ladies and gentlemen, and on behalf of the Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, I'd like to welcome you all to this information session, on Round 3 of the Murray–Darling Basin Economic Development Program grant opportunity. I'd like to begin today's information session by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal people. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and region. I extend that recognition to the traditional custodians of all other lands on which participants are gathered today, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples attending today's event.

The Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia, the Honourable Keith Pitt MP, announced Round 3 of the program on September the fourth last year, as part of the Murray–Darling Communities Investment Package. The objective of the program is to assist eligible communities to undertake economic development projects, to respond to the impact of water recovery activities undertaken as part of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan. The intended outcomes of the program are to increase the capacity of eligible communities, to diversify and strengthen local economies, to enhance the resilience of these communities to manage current and future economic challenges and changes, and to increase the opportunities for employment within these communities.

The third round of the program is open to 38 eligible communities, many of whom are attending today's session and, once again, a very warm welcome to you all. Round 3 opened for application on Wednesday the third of March, and it closes on Monday the 12th of April. Joining us for today's information session from the Economic Development section of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment are Kelly Noonan and Fiona Martin, who will provide you the background information about the grant opportunity. But, most importantly, will be available to answer your questions.

Now, it's important to point out that today's information session is about Round 3 of the Murray–Darling Basin Economic Development Program grant opportunity. We won't be addressing or discussing any other elements of the Basin Plan, but we'll be specifically focused on the details of Round 3. As previously mentioned, I'm joined by Kelly Noonan and Fiona Martin from the department and Kelly, if I might start with you, this is the third round of the program. Are there any changes since Rounds 1 and 2?

Kelly Noonan:

Yes, there are a few changes, David. Thank you for having us today.

David Pembroke:

Very good.

Kelly Noonan:

And I just like to also say welcome to everybody that's joined us for the webinar today. We appreciate you taking the time, we know it's very busy out there in communities, and that you've taken the time today to listen to us here and to ask some questions about your projects is very important.

So this is a very successful program. It's run out under Rounds 1 and 2. We've been able to fund \$74 million worth of projects out in communities. And Round 3 really builds on what was done in Round 1 and 2. We don't want to change the model too much, but there are a couple of significant differences between this round and previous rounds. One, there's more funding available. \$34 million is available in this round alone. So Round 1 and Round 2 combined were about \$40 million, and we funded about \$38 million worth of projects on the ground. So we're hitting almost the same amount again.

There's a larger number of communities eligible under this round as well, as you mentioned before, 38 communities eligible. Another key difference that people might notice is that those communities are now based on local government areas. Previously they were uniquely identified according to the impacts of water recovery and now those communities have been expanded up to the boundaries of the LGAs. They're still based on negative impacts of water recovery in the Basin, so, that hasn't changed. But we did want to acknowledge that some of those impacts have secondary and tertiary consequences, and we also wanted to acknowledge the interrelationships within LGAs between towns, so the impacts can't be as well defined now as they used to be able to.

We're also focusing on disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. That was an important point raised through the Sefton report. One other difference is the length of time that proponents have to roll their projects out. So previously we had three years, and this round is intended as sort of like a rapid fire round, where we're trying to get economic development opportunities onto the ground as quickly as possible, and so there's one year for funding for the projects. That's a significant point that applicants need to take into consideration.

Another point - communities eligible under Rounds 1 and 2, also eligible under Round 3. So previously, it was only a certain set of communities for Round 1 that was most impacted, Round 2 were largely those that were moderately impacted, Round 3 includes most, moderately and some smaller impacts. But, again, they're all defined by negative impacts of water recovery under the Basin Plan. We've added a few more on that basis.

Last point that I'll make here is that the funding amounts are also slightly different. So we have a minimum threshold of \$50,000 per project, and we won't be looking at applications below that threshold. We found that that's not practical for this program. Now, the notional maximum threshold is \$1 million, and that is slightly different to the previous rounds in that notional allocations used to be based on communities, now they're based on the project. So the project itself can be from \$50,000, to roughly \$1 million. We will take into account projects that are over one million, but they have to demonstrate the value for money equation for economic impacts for a higher value of funds. Especially considering projects may go across LGAs, that may lead to a higher sort of funding request there. So, that is possible. So, I'd say they're the key changes and I'll probably make a couple of other points of where we're at in this round.

We ran a Have Your Say survey at the end of last year, we ran it from December the 18th until January the 22nd. And I just like to mention that here because one, I want to say thank you to those people, we

didn't get a huge number of responses, but thank you to those that did respond. We have taken your responses into consideration and into account. People were giving us feedback on the guidelines, the Round 3 guidelines themselves so we managed some things in the selection criteria and around the edges of the guidelines. We also did some work on the application forms. Fiona is going to talk about that a little bit later, so I won't say anything more. But the contributions that we did receive were very useful. And even though they weren't a lot, they reiterated things that we were hearing from stakeholders anyway.

David Pembroke:

Could you perhaps showcase a couple of examples from Rounds 1 and 2, that people may get some sort of inspiration from some of those successful projects that we're on Round 1 and 2?

Kelly Noonan:

Sure, sure. People are aware in terms of eligibility requirements for the projects, we do fund a very wide range of projects. This program is about listening to communities and about hearing what they say is going to make a difference to them for their economic development. So, we don't prescribe – we don't say we're going to fund halls, we're going to fund this, that or the other. We say what will make a difference to your community? What will diversify the economy? What will strengthen the economy? What will create jobs? And what will lead to community resilience? And so that leads to a wide range of activities. So therefore, we fund things like indigenous recording studios, digital connectivity programs, where we basically were installing towers to give our wider internet access to larger parts of the region, we build wharves, we do museum upgrades, we do food distribution kitchens, we do early childhood learning centres that are attached to aged care centres, we do cycling and walking trails, park upgrades. I mean, the list goes on and on.

We fund a very wide range of projects. They don't have to be water related, so anybody that thinks “when they hear the words, that the project should address the impacts of water recovery”, they should not feel compelled to do a water-based project. It can be water based if they want to do something on the river. We do some lovely park upgrades and a steamer renovation project under Round 2. So, it can be water related, but it doesn't have to return water to the environment, and it doesn't have to have any other links with water. It has to be economic development based.

Things that we don't fund, I might touch on a couple of those kind of things. One, we don't fund anything that happens before we sign the grant agreement. So, anything prior to that period of time, we can't fund that. We don't fund business as usual. So regular operating costs of organisations is not what we're looking for. We don't fund costs of the project after it ends. So, any ongoing staffing, maintenance, et cetera costs, we don't fund any of that. We don't fund things for which other government entities have responsibility.

So generally speaking, we don't build roads, we don't provide education, we don't supply water. We might have a little access road in a project or we might be contributing to an education program if it has economic development benefits. So we tinker around the edges. But if other government authorities have responsibility for that, we generally don't do it. But otherwise, everything else, we're open to. If it provides economic development, we're interested. We will cover the costs of the project for the life of the project. So your staffing costs, your project management costs, any of those kinds of costs, even your finance costs, so audit costs and things like that, for the life of the project, we cover that.

David Pembroke:

Alright. Okay. Well, we do have some questions already coming in. And I think perhaps we might even jump to the questions straight away, because very grateful for those questions, and a very good morning to all of you wherever you may be in Australia. But the first question is from Nicole Amara, and Nicole asks, "Is there any co-investment requirement or are the projects fully funded by the department?"

Kelly Noonan:

Yes, the projects can be fully funded by the department. So, there's no requirement. So there are some other programs that require a co-investment, and sometimes that stipulated. It has to be 20%, 50% whatever. We have no requirement of that at all. We accept that there are some communities that don't have the startup fees and costs and things, they don't have the financial backing to then co-invest with us. We bridge that gap. We also leverage other program funding.

For instance, if there is another program that requires you to invest a certain amount or have funds provided elsewhere, we can provide that funding. That other program may have requirements for where that can come from. So there are some other Commonwealth funded programs that, depending on your location, will not allow you to use our funding as your contribution to a larger project. You have to check their guidelines because there's a very wide range of things there. But for our point of view, we will fund 100% of the cost of the project if that's what you need.

David Pembroke:

Okay. Nicole asks a second question, "Do projects need to be shovel ready, design, approvals completed and on this year's CapEx."

Kelly Noonan:

They do need to be as ready as possible because we want to go as soon as possible. It depends on the project. The bottom line is that we have to have these projects completed by the middle of 2022. If your project is a short project, that's only going to take two months, and you're not 100% ready to go in July this year, then you still have scope, you still have ability to be able to work on that and develop it. If your project is going to go for 12 months and you're not ready to go in July this year, that's going to be an issue because we won't be able to finish it on time. It's a different answer for different projects there. And we are very willing and able to work with you and help you too cross the line to get it to its final stages of being able to be implemented. But you do need to be aware that we have to finish in the middle of 2022.

David Pembroke:

I think those program timeframes are important, so if you could just specifically call those out, what are those timeframes for the program?

Kelly Noonan:

So, here we're in the opening process, okay. We opened on the third of March, we're closing on the 12th of April, that's pretty definite. It has to be definite because we have to then have an assessment period. That assessment period is going to take a fair few weeks. Then we're going to be negotiating contracts. That will take a couple of weeks and that will probably be towards the end of this financial year. So, in June, largely, that's when we're wanting to get grant agreements out the door, and up and running, especially for those projects that are going to take 12 months. Okay. So then we'll have through

June, we'll negotiate the agreement, sign off on the agreements, and then they'll be up and running. Those projects that don't need 12 months can probably wait just a little bit longer. Those that need 12 months need to go straight away. And then they run from effectively from the end of June, or whenever they start, to the end of June 2022.

We asked them to be finished a little bit earlier than that, that's what's in the guidelines, because we need time to wrap them up at the end of the financial year. And to make sure that we get all the money out the door. But effectively, they've gotten till the end of the 21–22 financial year.

David Pembroke:

Okay. But those details are in the guidelines—

Kelly Noonan:

They're in the guidelines.

David Pembroke:

... so people have a look at those guidelines.

Kelly Noonan:

They're all in the guidelines, yes.

David Pembroke:

So make sure that you do take advantage of getting a hold of those guidelines to get that more detailed information as you are putting it together. And we do have another question. This time from David Leveque, and David, asks "What about intangible deliverables of a proposed project such as a cohesive set of strategies that would guide future economic development and employment opportunities?" We'll invite Fiona—

Kelly Noonan:

Do you want to answer that one or I keep going?

Fiona Martin:

You can keep going.

Kelly Noonan:

I can keep going. Alright.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Kelly Noonan:

Yes, we do. We fund those.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Kelly Noonan:

Yes. What we're looking for, the key points that you have to continually come back to, are what are the assessment criteria? Okay. So in doing that kind of thing, if you're going to put forward a plan or a strategy or something like that, my question would be, "Where are the jobs? Where is the diversification? Where's the strengthening? Where's the resilience?" So in economic development terms, that's the kind of thing we're looking at. If it's a plan for plan's sake, that has not got as strong an argument as a plan that leads to something that is going to be delivered as well. Okay. So, if you're just doing strategic planning, you really have to demonstrate to us how you're meeting the selection criteria. So that's the key thing, but we do fund it. We will fund it. We are interested, you've just got to really demonstrate how you're delivering jobs through that.

Fiona Martin:

And bearing in mind, I guess that this is a competitive process. I guess those projects in your area that may be delivering a stronger economic development opportunity may be more competitive in the process than a strategic plan.

Kelly Noonan:

That's right. That's right. And we don't know that until we get all the applications in.

David Pembroke:

Okay. So we've covered the eligible communities, eligibility requirements, eligible activities, project funding amounts. Some examples there, which I thought was very useful, and now that specific program, and we also have answered a couple of questions. But Fiona, if I might ask a question of you., There are some differences between the first two rounds in this third round. Has this resulted in a change to the application process?

Fiona Martin:

Fundamentally, no. I guess the application process itself is not different. But what we have done is taken on board feedback through the Have Your Say process, as Kelly mentioned. Through that, participants let us know that they were seeking a sort of a streamlined process, a simplified process, in what we were asking, and we looked at doing that in the application process.

So the key messages that were provided through the Have Your Say consultation were that it was a more complicated process than it needs to be and the application was repetitive in places, and that the application could be strengthened in terms of how community support was evidenced in an application.

So the application form and the attachments that we are seeking in this round have been amended to take on board that process. So the application process is relatively streamlined. It is online through the Have Your Say, I mean, through the Community Grant Hub website. So where you find the the guidelines, right down the bottom of that page is a button for you to start your application process. Applications can be progressively filled. So upon starting your application, the link to your individual application will be emailed to your address and you can access at a later point. And you can make

changes to your application right through until you hit submit, at which point you cannot make any further changes.

The first section of the application form will simply ask you for information about your organisation. If you have been an applicant through the Community Grants Hub previously, you will have an organisation ID and to be able to prepopulate your form. If you enter that, that ID that will occur for you. If you don't remember your organisation ID or if you're not sure whether your organisation has applied previously for a grant through the Community Grants Hub, I would recommend that you give the Community Grants Hub a call and the numbers should be there or the contact points should be there on the screen for you to see.

The second part of the application is all about your project. So, we'd ask that you give us a short and snappy title for your project. And then provide a description about your project and how it aligns with the objective for the program and the three outcomes. So, it maybe that you're looking to restore a disused cheese factory, for example, to turn it into a museum with a cafe and some boutique accommodation. The purpose of that would be to expand tourism offerings in your region, and that would strengthen the local economy and build upon existing agritourism offerings in the area and provide up to five job opportunities. So it's that kind of level of detail we'd be looking for as a project description.

You'll be asked to identify the communities that you're applying for, and how funding will be split across those communities for the financial years. You will need to address each of the criteria and, again, based on the feedback that we received through the Have Your Say consultation process, we have reduced the number of questions in relation to the selection criteria from six to four, and that should streamline things for you there. We've also given greater clarity in terms of how you would address the second criteria in relation to and differentiate, I guess, the community support for the project as opposed to the community benefit for the project. And Kelly will talk a little bit more on addressing criteria and evidencing claims a little later.

To support your criteria or your responses, you would upload two attachments as a mandatory and minimum requirement. The first is a project plan and the inclusion of the project plan is mandatory, however, using the template provided on the Community Grants website is not. We would recommend that you use it as it does provide guidance on what information is being sought as part of your application. For people who have applied previously, you will notice that the template looks a little different. We have included more instructional material on how to complete that and worked in the budget that was previously a separate attachment.

It is also mandatory that you provide evidence of community support for your project. Now this can be in the form of community letters from the community, or it could be in the form of detailing what consultation you may have taken with the community and what has resulted as part of that. There is a second attachment. You can provide two attachments in relation to community support. The second is optional, so if you provide letters of support, you may at this point attach the evidence for consulting with the community and the outcomes of that, or vice versa. But don't attach the same version twice. And we've got all the points.

Yes. That's right. And so yeah, I would emphasise at that point there that we would be looking for recent community support and grass level community support as well.

David Pembroke:

Fiona we do have another question, and indeed audience thank you very much for the questions and if you could keep them coming in. But the question goes to the actual application process. Must it be made, the application, online or can the application be made in hard copy?

Fiona Martin:

The application is an online process.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Fiona Martin:

Unfortunately.

David Pembroke:

There is no room to send in a hard copy version?

Fiona Martin:

No, there is not. If you are having technical difficulties, I would suggest you give the Community Grants Hub a call to see if they might be able to assist you through that process.

Kelly Noonan:

It's part of the Community Grants Hub is a whole of Commonwealth government entity, that is supposed to be the interface for all grants activities with the community, and so they have a uniform procedure for submitting applications. That allows them to efficiently manage all of the applications that come in and address all probity concerns. So no applications go astray, no applications get lost. They all go through exactly the same process in being submitted.

David Pembroke:

Okay, well, that is pretty clear. So no hard copies, it must be using the Community Grants Hub process online. So we've got that as well. And again, I suppose there is quite a deal of information that is available in the guidelines, and we would encourage everybody to go online, download the guidelines, have a very good close look at those guidelines. We do have another question. And the question is, "We intend on applying for a project that will span across 10 eligible communities. If we can only provide five letters of support, how do we evidence that we've got support across all?"

Kelly Noonan:

Is this in reference to me saying don't send 10 letters?

David Pembroke:

Yes.

Kelly Noonan:

Okay. The point is what we've tried to do with the evidence that's being supplied for that second criteria, is provide you with the opportunities to demonstrate community support in a variety of ways. So letters are one way that you would demonstrate community support, but there are other ways as well. So you could be looking at - strategies, you can supply communication stakeholder strategies, you can give us information about stakeholder consultations and meetings that have been held, you can give us largely anything that will evidence the support across those communities. If you have to give us 10 letters - one letter for each community, okay, okay, I'll bend to that, but there's a variety of ways that you can do it. And I'd encourage you to think of the best demonstration of community support that you can come up with.

And that's really down to the applicant as to the best methodology that they'll use. It's not that we won't accept 10 letters, it would be a good argument if you can demonstrate a variety of different ways in which the project is supported. And I would encourage, if you've got a project that spans that many communities, that's good, that's fine.

David Pembroke:

What about video? Could someone attach a video to the application, so there could be a visual representation of community support?

Kelly Noonan:

That'd be a great idea. There's a limit, there is a size limit, so a two megabyte limit. And I think most videos would probably blow that out of the water. Even a transcribed version of a video, you'd have to compress it. You'd have to compress it. Look, the thing is this is a pretty big process, and the selection advisory panel that's going to be looking at all of these applications, will only have a certain capacity to be able to look at things. So that's why we have the application form in a certain format, we have the project plan in a certain format, the budget and the milestone schedule within the project plan in a certain format and a limited number of attachments as well, because we don't really know how many applications we're going to be getting through this process.

The selection advisory panel has to provide due consideration to each and every one. That's one reason why we say, sometimes people include a link to further documents and the selection advisory panel will assess what they've been provided. If they could, they might look elsewhere, because the guidelines and our assessment plan give us the ability to look at other sources of information. But that is really up to a time and capacity issue for the panel, really.

David Pembroke:

Okay. That's fair enough. We do have another question. This time from Peter McCabe, and Peter asks, "Our planned project would require the assistance of civil construction and water recycling consultants. Are their fees able to be included with the grant amount?"

Kelly Noonan:

If they happened after the execution of the grant agreement. If they're already doing that work, we can't pay for it.

David Pembroke:

No. Yeah, okay, no, that's pretty clear.

Kelly Noonan:

If this is existing work that they've done prior to the execution of that grant agreement, we can't cover it, whatever it is.

David Pembroke:

But it can be built into the project plan, and it does say here, our planned project would require the assistance.

Kelly Noonan:

So, once we execute that agreement, if this is part of the budget that you need to get that project up and running, and specialists' fees are part of that, yes, we cover that. For that project period, from when we execute it to when the project closes we will pay for that. Anything before or after, we don't pay for.

David Pembroke:

Okay. That's nice and clear. And Peter, I'm sure that you're happy with that answer, if indeed your planned project is yet to come online. A very clear direction there from Kelly. To the rest of the audience, please if you do have questions, please type them in. As you can see questions are being answered and this is your opportunity to ask those questions now around the grant opportunity. Kelly, if I might throw to you. Fiona noted that you'd give us perhaps a little bit more information on the assessment criteria because I think, that again, would be of real interest to the audience, that they really want to know that assessment criteria. What advice could you give to the participants today, the people online about how to get the best possible application in front of you?

Kelly Noonan:

Fiona was very clear, went through the different elements of the application very well. We have the main body of the application, which is where you're going to put in the details about your organisation, you're going to give a brief introduction to the project, you're going to then answer questions that address the assessment criteria. So the three criteria. One is economic benefits, the second is community support and benefits and the third is organisational capability. In the main body of the application, you're really going to be focusing a lot on the economic benefits, and the community support and benefits elements, with a bit on the organisational capability side.

Economic benefits. My best advice - we have three fact sheets. We have excellent fact sheets that were prepared by our team. My best advice is to please read those.

David Pembroke:

And just where are those again? Just so they can follow.

Kelly Noonan:

On the Community Grants Hub website, with the range of documents that you have available there. You have the guidelines, you have questions and answer sheets, you have the project plan template and you have the fact sheets as well. So the three fact sheets on each of the selection criteria are there. So for economic benefits, the things that we've mentioned before we want to know, where is the project? How much benefit is the project delivering? How much economic benefit is the project delivering to the communities that it's focused on?

So, earlier in the application, you actually listed where the communities were, the eligible communities that you were targeting. This section here is talking more about the kind of economic benefit to each of those communities. Is the whole LGA going to benefit? [Are] multiple LGAs going to benefit? Is only part of the LGA going to benefit? So we want to talk about that. We want to talk about jobs. How many jobs are going to be created? And we're really interested in measurables. How many direct jobs or indirect jobs? How many jobs are going to be created now? How many jobs is this going to create into the future? And where are these jobs? So, what are the industries? What are the locations? Where are the jobs going to be?

We want to know, is it going to diversify the local economy, the economy of the LGA. So for instance, if you've had a heavily agricultural dependent economy in that LGA and you're looking to expand into tourist operations. I mean, tourism is a big and obvious one, but consider some other things. What about indigenous cultural benefits there? Looking at, what about educational tourism? What about aviation? We've had applications to expand aviation interests in communities. Really, we're interested in your ideas, and all of those ideas that you've been batting around the communities for years, this is the opportunity to develop them and make them shine. So that kind of diversification, what's going to help your community going forward?

We're also interested in strengthening. So, if you do have an economy that already has a fair bit of tourism in it, maybe what you're doing, the kind of offerings that you're going to build upon, are going to strengthen that element of the local economy. And finally, the resilience. How is this project going to help your community be more resilient to the challenges and changes that are here now and that are coming? I mean, the last year has been an excellent example. COVID-19, coming in, has thrown a cat amongst the chickens, in that respect, and it's caused everybody to think differently about the way that we do things, the opportunities that are available and so on.

What kind of things can you do in your community that say, "All right, we're going to be able to make our community much more resilient in the future so that when things like that come along, whether it be drought, pandemics," who ever would have thought we'd have said that a year ago or two years ago, technically now, isn't it? So droughts, pandemics, increased mechanisation, changing demographics, any of those other factors, reduced water availability, for various reasons. Whatever the reason is, what's going to help your community? So, that is what we're talking about with economic benefits there. Otherwise, I think you should probably just read the rest of the fact sheet there.

Community support and benefits. It was very important to hear in the Have Your Say feedback, and through other sources, that communities were very concerned that the projects that have been put forward are actually supported by the communities. So we've actually strengthened this in this process. We are very interested, as I said before, to hear about what the community thinks about your project. How do they support it? We're interested in hearing [that]. In the fact sheet, we talk about quantitative evidence and qualitative evidence. So do you know how many groups or how many people support your project? What proportion of the community supports it? Or what proportion of the community is going to be supported by it as well?

Qualitative evidence is more about the stories of benefit and support. How well the project is supported. How other communities doing this kind of project may have found that they were supported. These are the kinds of community support and benefits that we're talking about there. As we mentioned before, there's the ability to put attachments on there to evidence this one.

Economic benefits has a weighting of 40%. The other two criteria have a weighting of 30%. The economic benefits, you do answer that a little bit in the project plan. But the main body of the application is where you've really got to hit that hard. So, that's where we want you to focus on your answers to that. You can provide additional information in the project plan if you run out of space, because there are word limits, but make sure it's focused, okay. Then, as we've said, community benefit, is in the application form, but also the documentation that you're providing.

The third one, the organisational capability. In the application form, we want you to tell us the story about why your organisation has the capacity to be able to do this. Why the federal government will give *your organisation* probably large sums of money to be responsible for, to roll this project out. We want to hear about your governance. We want to hear about your financial systems. We want to hear about how you're going to project manage. We want to hear about the skills and abilities of your staff and the people that are involved with this project, and hear about how they're going to take responsibility for these funds, and deliver these benefits to the community. We want to know how they're going to do that efficiently and effectively on budget, on time.

So tell us a little story in the application form, and then show us how you're going to do it with the project plan. The project plan is your demonstration of how you can do these things. Let me make it clear that we don't need only project managers to apply for these opportunities. We have projects right now in Rounds 1 and 2 that are being run brilliantly by local business people, community groups, indigenous organisations, all different kinds of organisations and people. And we know that there's capability for organisations to do this. So don't be scared, if you read that project plan and you see there that an example might be "demonstrate your project management system".

David Pembroke:

P3M3.

Kelly Noonan:

Yes, exactly. Exactly. And you say "I don't even know what that is". That's okay, because you can still tell us the story and demonstrate by just going through that project plan and answering all the different sections. You can still demonstrate that you've got this, that you can run this project and you can deliver and be responsible for these funds delivering benefits.

David Pembroke:

That's very encouraging, I imagine to people out there but, again, there are limits out there on characters, and how people do tell those stories. So I imagine the advice to people, is to be very clear. Waffle is not going to be your friend.

Kelly Noonan:

This is another point. People are sometimes concerned that this is an essay writing competition. It's not at all. We care more about the content of what you're writing in there than whether or not you're going to win a literature prize. That is not the basis on which it is assessed. We're looking at addressing those criteria, and we're looking at you demonstrating through your attachments, through a good solid budget, good milestone schedule, good community support that you can do it. If you have to put things in dot points to keep it clear, if that's the best way for you to do it, then that is what you need to do. Okay. So, don't worry if you're not the best writer. I'd encourage you to try and get support from

somebody else in the community to try to make sure that your ideas get across, to make sure that you're communicating the wondrousness of your project with us. So I'd encourage that. But look, bottom line is, it's not an essay writing competition.

David Pembroke:

All right, very good advice. Now listen, before we come to the actual what happens to the process after the applications have gone in, and I'll come to Fiona, if I may, to ask that question. We do have another question that has come in. And the question is, "My organisation was granted funding under a previous round. Am I still eligible to apply?"

Kelly Noonan:

Yes.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. I think we answered that a little bit earlier.

Kelly Noonan:

Yes. We won't fund the same thing again.

David Pembroke:

No.

Kelly Noonan:

What we will do is, we do fund stages of things. You are eligible to apply, your organisation is eligible to apply. And the projects that you put forward, sometimes they are staged. Sometimes we funded stage one and two in an earlier round, and you've got stages three and four ready to go. We won't fund stage one and two again, but we will fund stage three in full.

David Pembroke:

I do think you gave this answer, to this question a bit earlier, was how much funding is available under this round? What is the minimum? What's the maximum? So, Fiona I think you did mention that.

Kelly Noonan:

Yeah. There's a total of \$34 million of grant funds available for this round. We're looking to get that all out the door pretty quickly. We have a minimum of \$50,000 for the projects, and we will not consider applications less than that. There's very little benefit in this scope. Other programs fund lesser amounts, it's not a problem. But for us, we're finding that, that's really the lower end of our threshold. And then, as we say, we've got a notional maximum of one million per project, but we will consider higher value if they have an excellent demonstration of value for money at that funding request.

So, if you've got a project across, we had an example before of 10 communities. If you ask us for \$10 million, that's sort of going to blow things out of the water a bit. But you would have to have excellent, excellent, excellent evidence as to why that's better than every other project that we could possibly fund with that. And we will get a lot of projects and it's very competitive. The process in each round gets more competitive, and we get a larger number, and higher quality of applications each time.

David Pembroke:

How many did you get in Round 1, and how many did you get in Round 2?

Kelly Noonan:

Well, we usually get between 70 and 80 applications per round. Round 1 was very limited. We only had 15 communities. And Round 2 we had more communities - 31 communities - but there were lesser amounts. We've got 34 million [for this round].-

David Pembroke:

More communities and more money.

Kelly Noonan:

... More communities, more money and more people know about it as well. And finding that we're addressing and targeting what they need in their communities. So I can't deny it's going to be competitive. So you've really got to put your best foot forward, and not assume anything.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. And again, I think really the key advice is after today's session to really go to the eligibility requirements, and really familiarise yourself with those so that you take the guidance, and this video will be posted, and a transcript of this video will also be posted. So there'll be an opportunity to listen once again to the advice that's been given today as you go through that application. But yes, understanding the guidelines which are there and the fact sheets that are there for your benefit, please, you are encouraged to do so. And again, the advice around competitiveness, it will be competitive, so you really do have to put your best foot forward.

But, I imagine a lot of people are encouraged, we've had a number of great questions today, a number of people online. So Fiona, perhaps, can you quickly let people know what happens once the application period closes, and they've made their application?

Fiona Martin:

Yep, sure. Applications as you know close on the 12th of April. And we have every intention of finalising agreements for those projects, as many of those as possible by June. Once applications close, there are three checks that will take place. The first is eligibility to make sure that the organisation applying ticks off the eligibility criteria detailed in the guidelines. They will also do a compliance check to make sure that the attachments have been included as required. So that is a project plan and evidence of community support.

And then a third process is overlaid with that to make sure that every application that is received is unique. So if you do lodge more than one application for the same project, just be aware that it is only the last application submitted that will be considered. The others will be discarded. And that was sort of an issue, I guess a word of warning there that if you have two or more project ideas that are similar in nature, that you make sure that they are sufficiently unique in their project title for that to be picked up during that process.

So the eligible compliance and unique applications will be forwarded to a selection advisory panel for assessment. They will assess each application on its own merits, and I guess how well each application

meets the criteria that Kelly, has sort of provided more detail on earlier. And then each application is assessed competitively against the others, and compared to the other applications that are received, and that's that value for money equation that occurs there.

So based on the assessment by the panel, the panel will make a recommendation to the Minister for his decision, and the process is guided by probity principles of fairness, transparency, and equity. So an independent probity adviser sits over the process. They ensure that the assessment plan that the panel will follow is aligned with the guidelines and the process that is detailed in there for you as an applicant.

What else do I need to touch on there? The probity advisor will also provide advice as required on any queries that come up through the process, and will review the panel report to ensure that the panel has followed the process as intended. Following the decision from the Minister, all applicants will be notified of their outcome. So the Economic Development Section team will make contact with those applicants that are successful to negotiate, agree and execute agreements with you for your projects. Those applicants that are unsuccessful in this particular process can receive feedback on their application through requesting that by the Grants hub, again through those details on the screen there.

David Pembroke:

That's good to know, because I think that's very useful for perhaps even future opportunities where people can get some feedback around their application so they can then improve.

Kelly Noonan:

A couple of points I'd pick up there. Two things in the submitting versions of an application, just we have had instances in the past where a group thought they were submitting three applications, they were named similarly, and they overwrote their second application with their third application, and only ended up submitting two. So be very careful when you're submitting them that they each have an independent identifier, and that if you think you're submitting three applications, that you are submitting three distinct applications, and you're not replicating.

Fiona Martin:

That's right. Actually when you do submit your application, you're able to download it at the time, and so I'd recommend you do that and check each of individual application to make sure they are [right].

Kelly Noonan:

Because that's not a happy surprise, when you think that you've lodged three, and you discover actually you've only lodged two. The other point that you've made about the feedback, I would strongly encourage [you to obtain feedback]. We provide good feedback sessions. So what we do at the end of the process is, we put up a generic feedback for the round on the Community Grants Hub website and, then, applicants are able to request individual feedback on their projects from the panel. We're very happy to talk to people at that point in time about why. And don't be scared of it either, because we're very friendly, and we only want to help.

David Pembroke:

Indeed. I would again, like to remind you that all the program documentation can be found on the main grants page of the Community Grants Hub website, which is www.communitygrants.gov.au/grants. This will include access to the transcript and the video of today's session, which will go up within a few days

and just open the economic development program link on the main grants page and scroll down a little, it's not that far down, and you will see it from there.

Any questions you asked today, but we didn't answer, but we did get to all of the questions today. So thanks again to Fiona and Kelly, for answering those questions, no required, we don't have to go back and put those questions up. Just a reminder that a second webinar on this grant opportunity will be held next Wednesday the 17th of March at 10:00 am. So that's next Wednesday the 17th of March at 10:00 am. So if you would like to let your friends and colleagues know that there is another opportunity to get information, again, the department is very keen to promote this particular grant opportunity and hoping that as many people as possible will take up the opportunity for the application for a grant.

The information presented will be the same, but questions, they may differ. So if you would like any further clarification on what was discussed today, you or perhaps some of your work colleagues are welcome to register and attend that event as well. So, I think that brings us to the end of today's session. Fiona, thank you to you and Kelly, thank you to you, and to you, the audience, thank you for coming along today. I do hope you did find it very useful and we look forward to joining you again next Wednesday as we speak again about the Community Grant opportunity. But for the moment, it's bye for now.