MURRAY–DARLING BASIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ROUND 3

WEBINAR 2 TRANSCRIPT
10:00 – 11:00 am AEDT, WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH 2021

David Pembroke:

Hello ladies and gentlemen, and on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, can I welcome you to today's information session on Round 3 of the Murray–Darling Basin Economic Development Program grant opportunity. My name's David Pembroke. And thanks for joining me. I'd like to begin today's information session by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, 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 as part of the Murray–Darling Communities Investment Package back on the 4th of September last year.

The objective of the program is to assist eligible communities to undertake economic development projects, to respond to the impact of water recovery activities under 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. This third round of the program is open to 38 eligible communities impacted by water recovery activities under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan. Many of whom are attending today and welcome to you all.

Round 3 opened for applications on Wednesday the 3rd of March and will close on Monday the 12th of April. Joining us today from the department are Kelly Noonan and Fiona Martin, who will provide some information on the grant opportunity and they will also be answering questions that you may wish to submit. So again, thanks for joining us today. And I'd now like to throw to Kelly. Kelly, probably the first question. This is the third round. So what changes have there been from the first and second round to the third round?

Kelly Noonan:

Hi David, how are you this morning?

David Pembroke:

Really good, thanks.

Kelly Noonan:

Glad to be here again. And thanks for that. You said you weren't going to answer any questions that we were going to answer questions, but I think you've now done this enough times. You might be able to start to answer some of these questions too, I think. Anyway, thank you. Changes between Rounds 1

and 2 and this round. So to start with, this round is a $34 million funding round. So there's a larger amount of funding available for grants under this round than previous rounds. Round 1, we ended up funding just under $25 million worth of projects. And Round 2, we funded just under $15 million worth of projects. So this almost provides the same amount of funding again. One of the other key differences is that this round is offering grant funding to a large number of communities. As you mentioned before, 38 communities are eligible right across the Basin in the four states, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

And another factor about those communities is that communities that were eligible under Round 1 and Round 2 are again eligible under Round 3. So, whereas grants in Round 1 focused on the communities that were most impacted by water recovery activities under the Basin Plan and Round 2 focused primarily on those moderately impacted, Round 3 now captures most, moderately and any other negative impact communities. So, we have 38 communities across the Basin that are eligible to apply. Those communities are now based, as well, on LGAs. Previous rounds, they were more uniquely identified based on the impacts of water recovery. But we have recognised that those impacts don't stay in the one place, that they actually have a ripple out effect to secondary and tertiary industries and areas. And also we accept that the linkages between communities within LGAs makes a difference.

We've expanded the actual area of the eligible communities to be LGAs. We also recognise the practical nature of funding within LGAs, and the administrative burdens that can be lifted and the complications that are no longer there. So that is a change. One other change is the length of time available for projects to be implemented. There was a longer timeframe under Rounds 1 and 2. That timeframe is shorter under Round 3. Projects will have a maximum of 12 months to be implemented. The intent of this round is that it's a rapid-fire investment in communities at a time when they're facing a lot of challenges and changes, including those brought on by COVID-19. So this is really to get the money on the ground and helping communities as quickly as possible.

The final change that I'd note here are the funding amounts available. So previously we had notional allocations based on communities. That's no longer the case. The notional allocation amounts that we have are based on projects. They start at a minimum of $50,000 for projects. So I need to be clear, I think, that we won't be looking at projects that come in - any applications that come in - for less than $50,000. That will make them technically ineligible. Please make the project - if it's $49,950, make it $50,000. So bottom line will be $50,000. Now the upper notional threshold is $1 million per project, but we have written in the guidelines, and I would encourage people to go and have a look at the guidelines carefully, because we do note that we will fund projects over $1 million if they provide an excellent value for money equation.

So, if they're across multiple communities or if they are a large-scale project in whatever other shape or form, we will consider them in that context of value for money. The one thing I would say is if you are going to do a large project, please consider the timeline. Once again, I'll go back and mention that it does have to be done by the end of the 21–22 financial year. So the guidelines have the 31st of May, that project should be wrapping up. So we're looking at running those out over 12 months. I think that summarises all the main changes.

David Pembroke:

Okay. So they're the main changes which is great. And it's pretty clear that $50,000. So people can make it over $50,000. I think that's a pretty good clear message. But can you just give us a couple of examples perhaps, some showcase examples, from Rounds 1 and 2 so people can get their head around exactly what types of activities are eligible and were funded in the first couple of rounds. Because I think that helps.

Kelly Noonan:

Yeah. So if you look at the guidelines, you will see that we actually aren't restrictive on the kind of projects that we fund. If it gives economic development benefits to communities, we're interested in hearing about it. If it increases employment opportunities, if it diversifies economies, if it strengthens economies, and if it adds resilience to communities. So if it helps communities deal with challenges and changes in their economic horizon, we're interested in hearing about that. That can come in a wide range of forms. I don't know if it's exactly unique to our program, but we would be one of the only programs that does it. We don't say we will fund halls, we will fund infrastructure projects, we will fund these things specifically. We ask communities to tell us what they need to make an economic difference to their community. We're listening to what communities have to say.

Some of the projects that we fund, for example, we fund cycle and bike paths. They have resilience benefits for communities. They have tourism benefits. Some cycle paths are parts of larger projects that you're going to be able to cycle from one end of the state to the other by the time the cycle paths are finished. And stopping and camping, and staying in places along the way, buying your lunch contributing to the economy of the area. We fund an Indigenous recording studio and program which helps to capture and maintain Indigenous languages and provides materials to schools and to the public, to demonstrate the cultural benefits of language, dance and other performance, etc., for tourists and for locals alike. We fund digital connectivity programs. We fund programs for digital literacy.

So in one particular suite of projects, we funded towers to allow people to get better access to the internet. We helped to fund a centre where community members can go to access internet if they don't have those facilities at home. And then we fund digital literacy for members of the community where they might not understand how to use the internet, or how to benefit from use of the internet, how to build a business on the internet, and how to maximise any other kind of social and economic benefits from use there.

David Pembroke:

So broad is the answer?

Kelly Noonan:

Broad is the answer. Early childhood centres-etc.

David Pembroke:

The guidelines also, that's another key point. You've raised this a couple of times now. That referencing the guidelines, obviously you'd encourage everybody to really go and have a very good, long, hard read of the guidelines and that will help them to understand.

Kelly Noonan:

Yes. There you'll see a list of suggestions but it's not exhaustive. So we say these are the kind of things we fund. They're suggestions, people should go have a look at those, consider whether or not they can come up with a project that's within those scopes. The kind of things that we don't fund, I would probably mention those. One is more 'business as usual' kind of activities. Activities that are the responsibility of other entities. So, for instance, we don't generally fund things like - we don't build roads, we don't supply water, we don't provide education. We do fund economic development projects that might have those elements in them. The purpose of our funding is for economic development. So if there's a little bit of road building that's required or access roads or things like that as a part of the bigger project, then that's a consideration. But a project to fund a road, the be all and end all, that's not our responsibility. That's a state government responsibility.

Same kind of thing with water, same kind of thing with education. For instance, we're very interested in hearing about educational tourism and any other kind of economic development benefits that can be brought through the education sphere, but we're not an education provider as such. So they would be the limits there. The other kinds of things that we don't fund. We won't fund anything that's currently underway. So we will fund a lot of activities within the period of time of the grant agreement, from when we signed the grant agreement and the project commences, to when the project concludes at the end of the grant agreement, the activities within that particular period are what we fund. We don't fund anything that's already underway, and we don't fund anything that comes after that. So any kind of maintenance activities, any ongoing staff costs, anything that comes afterwards for the project is not within the realms of our funding.

David Pembroke:

Okay. But again, I would encourage people to go to the guidelines because that's where the detail is. So make sure that you do that. Now, we do have our first question. Jenny Fleming asks, "can a community submit more than one application up to the value of the notional share or just one application?" So can you do a couple of applications to get up to $50,000 or has it got to be one project of $50,000 minimum?

Kelly Noonan:

Okay. So the specifications are per project.

David Pembroke:

Per project.

Kelly Noonan:

So if we receive an application that is one project for $25,000 and a second project for $25,000, that would be ineligible. If you add those two together and make that one project with two stages for $50,000, that is then eligible. So basically per project, a minimum of $50,000. And then on the other end of the scale, if you're looking at - that's a decision that the applicant would have to make - if they have a suite of projects that are worth, say, five million just for argument's sake, and they wish to split those up into stages and submit five projects worth one million, that's their choice. Or whether they decide to submit one project worth five million, that is also their choice.

Each project will be assessed individually, and there will be no guarantees that if out of those five, the first three are ranked highly and the last two are not. There's no guarantee that the last two will get funded just because they're part of a staged process. You have to demonstrate in each application the value for money and address the selection criteria in every single application for every single project.

David Pembroke:

Okay. The next question that has come in is, is this a competitive process?

Kelly Noonan:

Yes, it is. It is a competitive process. It's an open grants round, a competitive process. So it is competitive across all applications. So, to be clear, it's not within a community. You're not just competing against the other applications in your community. You're competing against applications across all 38 communities.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Kelly Noonan:

Okay. Now, again with the guidelines. I know, I know, again with the guidelines.

David Pembroke:

But it's good advice to people to really go and have a very close look at the guidelines. It's all there.

Kelly Noonan:

Yeah. Hopefully, we've put everything in there. But anyway, so we do outline the phases. The first phase of assessment is about assessing the merit of all the projects that come in. And the third stage is where we start to even out. We start to take into consideration disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, and we start to look at a spread. And we start to look at amounts of funding and addressing the impacts of water recovery. So how much those communities were impacted by water recovery efforts. So the first stage is a merit ranking of all of those projects. So that's all of them, across all 38 communities.

David Pembroke:

Okay. Now, another question's come in. "Can my organisation submit more than one application?"

Kelly Noonan:

Yes, you can. There's no limit to the number of applications that you submit. You really need to put your best foot forward. I would not suggest just submitting any old thing that you might have in the bottom drawer. As we've just discussed, it is a competitive process. So when you do - if you are looking at putting in a reasonably large number of applications - make sure that you've put the appropriate time and attention and detail into each one you put in - but there is no limit.

David Pembroke:

Okay, well, that's encouraging.

Fiona Martin:

Sorry. Can I also just add onto that?

David Pembroke:

Sure, Fiona.

Fiona Martin:

You should, if you are submitting more than one application, that you should make sure that each one is readily identifiable as an individual project, because there is a process that is undertaken later after all applications are submitted to make sure that there are no duplicative applications. So if one is deemed to be-

David Pembroke:

So clearly labelled?

Fiona Martin:

Yeah.

Kelly Noonan:

Mm-hmm.

David Pembroke:

No limit, but make sure that people can see, or the committee can see that it is an application in its own right.

Fiona Martin:

That's right.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Kelly Noonan:

And there's also the details of how they need to... There's an ID number, don't they get an ID number? And they also should be naming them clearly so that they are aware of what applications that they've submitted, because there's the overwriting issue.

Fiona Martin:

That's right.

Kelly Noonan:

So sometimes if you're submitting … we had one instance where an organisation believed they were submitting three applications, but they overwrote their second application with their third. So they only ended up submitting two.

David Pembroke:

Right.

Kelly Noonan:

And they were not aware of that until too late.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Kelly Noonan:

So be careful.

David Pembroke:

Be careful, and again, I do emphasise it's in the guidelines. We have all of these details in the guidelines. So Fiona, Kelly has outlined pretty clearly there, that there are differences between the first two rounds and the third round. Has this changed the application process in any way?

Fiona Martin:

Well, the application process itself is effectively the same. So you do need to lodge your application online. All applicants need to lodge an application online. That is done through the link at the bottom of the Community Grants Hub website, which says to apply here and that will take you through to the online application form. So that is relatively the same. What we have made different this time is simplified some stages. So, back in December through to January there was a survey open on the guidelines and the application process for the program. And the feedback through that process told us that applicants found the application process to be a little bit complicated, a little bit repetitive in places, and that it could be also strengthened in other areas.

So we did make some minor adjustments to the guidelines to improve the clarity. And we have also provided further written guidance to assist in the application process. So in terms of lodging your application, as I said done through online, and you can progressively fill your application. You will be provided with a link when you start your application and you can access that at any point up until you submit it. In completing the application form, you will just need to... Sorry, the first stage will require you to provide information on your organisation. If you've applied through the Community Grants Hub previously, you will already have an organisation ID. If you have not, or if you can't remember what your organisation ID is, or if you're unsure if you've previously applied through the Community Grants Hub, you should contact them at the details on your screen and they will identify that number for you.

So the second section is really what we're interested in, which is all about your project. We ask that you give us a short title for your project and a description. Again, as we said, make sure that is readily differentiated between any separate applications. So if you're lodging more than one, make sure that information is very clear. You'll be asked to identify the communities. The application form lists those as the service areas, and this is effectively one of the 38 local government areas. You can select more than one at that point in time. In addressing the selection criteria, there are character limits within the form and these are detailed. These are reasonably sufficient, but if you find that that is not enough, you can provide further information in the attachments that we require.

There are two mandatory attachments. The first is a project plan. We do provide a template for that. And while it's not mandatory to use the template, we would recommend that you do. It provides guidance on the information that's sought. It provides those instructions in there as was identified through the Have Your Say feedback. And it also incorporates the budget, which was previously a separate attachment in Rounds 1 and 2 but is used to help us develop the agreement with you should your set project be successful. The second mandatory attachment is evidencing community endorsement for your project. And this can be one of two forms.

So the Have Your Say survey suggested that we need to provide more options for evidencing community support. So this still can be in form of letters as was the case with Round[s] 1 and 2, or it may be that you can provide information on community consultation and what the outcomes of that were. And there is the option to provide another attachment in relation to community support, which would be the opposite of what you've previously attached. So either you attached that as a support or you can attach the community consultation. And then at the end, when you do hit submit, we would highly recommend that you download a copy of the application for your records.

David Pembroke:

Okay. Very good. And very comprehensive. We do have a couple of questions. Actually, one question and a comment. You made the point earlier, online application, so no written applications. So that's pretty clear. No, it's got to be done through the Community Grants Hub.

Fiona Martin:

That's right. And that makes it a transparent, open process.

David Pembroke:

Okay. Character limits was another one, strict character limits. And obviously it's clear. The guidelines are there, the process is there, but making sure that people really do have to stick to those character limits?

Fiona Martin:

They do. So if you go over those character limits, effectively you won't be able to enter any more information.

David Pembroke:

So the system won't even take any more information on that?

Fiona Martin:

No, it won't. So it's limited. I think 6,000 in response to the first criteria. Sorry, that's 6,000 characters. And 3,500 characters for the remaining three.

David Pembroke:

Okay. The project plan template, you're pretty strong on that by the sounds of things. Really encouraging people to use that particular template. Not mandatory but encouraged, is really what I'm hearing.

Fiona Martin:

That's right, yes, just as I said. It provides an indication of what information is being sought and enables the selection advisory panel to assess an application thoroughly.

David Pembroke:

The next question comes from Peter Thornton. And the question is: "is there a preferred amount required as in-kind contribution or dollar contributions from other supporting organisations?" So is there a balance or a preference for in kind as opposed to dollar and how would they be weighted differently, I'm probably suggesting? You're nodding.

Kelly Noonan:

No, there's no obligation for any contribution at all. This program will supply a 100% of the funds needed for a project if that's what's required. We're also happy to leverage other sources of funding to contribute towards a larger project effectively. But there's no requirement for that. And there's no requirement for it to be in-kind or in cash. When we prepare our budgets, our budgets are cash budgets. So, when we do the grant agreement, our budget is a cash budget. We do want to hear about how the whole project is going to be put together. So in your application - we don't want you to leave out major sections of contribution from other sources or from the community or that your organisation itself is putting forward. We would like to know about those things within your application. But, when it comes to the assessment, we do not say you must come up with 25, 50, any kind of percentage of contribution at all.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Fiona Martin:

Well, I could just add to that actually. If a project does have in-kind support or community financial contribution, it is also another way of evidencing community support for the project. That's right.

David Pembroke:

And we'll come to that question in a minute in terms of assessment criteria, Kelly, if I might. But Fiona, just before we get onto that. You mentioned ways of demonstrating community support and there was some feedback in [Have] Your Say. Where did that sit in terms of what people were asking for in terms of being able to demonstrate community support?

Fiona Martin:

Effectively, they were just wanting to have the forms of evidence linked to community support strengthened and broadened. So under Rounds 1 and Rounds 2, really all we sought were letters of support from community members. On this occasion we've extended that. So, an organisation can hold consultation forums with broad sections of the community-

David Pembroke:

So to provide some data of some sort, to be able to demonstrate a need or a project, or a value from a particular community. Any other sort of suggestions that you might put out there or leave it up to the people?

Kelly Noonan:

Any kind of stakeholder engagement that they're undertaking. So, sometimes there's existing processes of community consultation for a range of council actions or a range of other development actions within the community. So sometimes they have quarterly meetings each year, that they discuss a range of projects and that these projects may have been discussed in that. That's interesting for us to hear. What kind of support the project that they're submitting has generated. They might conduct surveys and polls of community members. They may have conducted fundraising activities which demonstrate a strong commitment of the community towards that particular project. There may be campaigns to get a certain project up and running. There may be some media activities. There could be all kinds of things that the community has put into place through stakeholder engagement methods: focus groups, meetings, any kind of thing that demonstrates that this project is supported by the community and is going to benefit the community.

So it's not just a matter of writing letters or having standardised letters. Letters can be important. Letters can demonstrate real, good community support from key elements of the community but they're not the only measure of community support. So we're really opening the doors to communities to say, "Well, we might not have letters, but look what we've done. This is what we've done." So we accept that too.

David Pembroke:

Okay. Great. Well, again, very good and clear advice. An encouragement there to use the resources that, in fact, people may have. The next question, which is more of a comment it says, from Emma Bradbury, "You guys sound amazing. If the presenters of Insiders or the Project ever fall over, you three could step in in a heartbeat. Great webinar. Valuable information and content. Cheers!" From Emma.

Kelly Noonan:

Bless you.

David Pembroke:

And Emma is not related to any of us, I don't think.

Kelly Noonan:

No.

David Pembroke:

No. Okay.

Kelly Noonan:

No conflicts of interest here.

David Pembroke:

Thanks, Emma. We'll take that... Okay, back to business. Peter asks, "How many rounds are there going to be additional to this round?" So is there going to be a fourth round of the grant opportunity? Don't know.

Kelly Noonan:

We don't know. We've been lucky enough to have two very successful rounds so far and a strong commitment for an additional round to get up and running now. The program has been generally well accepted across the Basin, and we think and we believe we're doing some good work out there.

David Pembroke:

Some of those examples you gave earlier – clearly, creating great community benefit.

Kelly Noonan:

Yeah, but that's an unknown factor. At this point in time, this is $34 million on the table for immediate investment in these communities, and this is the opportunity that's here now. So I think that this is really what we should focus on right now and see what comes in the future.

David Pembroke:

Who knows? Okay. Now, Kelly, Fiona noted that you'd give us a bit more information, a bit of guidance around that assessment criteria. So, what advice perhaps, could you share with the participants today, around that assessment criteria to make sure that their applications are really robust and effective?

Kelly Noonan:

Yes. So, we've already touched on a couple of the elements here. Fiona's talked about the application process and the different elements of the application itself. In the main body of the application, there's a need for you to be addressing each of the criteria. So there's an economic benefits criterion. There's a community support and benefits criteria and there's an organisational capability criteria. You have a certain, as we've discussed, a certain word limit within the application form to talk about those things. So you really have to maximise that opportunity. That's a key part of the application. There's the project plan as well. We'll come to that in a second, but in the application itself, what you really need to do, let's say for the economic benefits one. You really need to talk about how this project is going to diversify and/or strengthen and/or provide resilience for the community.

We need to talk about the employment opportunities. What kind of direct and indirect jobs are going to be provided? Are they going to be for a short period of time? Are they going to be ongoing? So is this providing an immediate investment and bang for the buck? And we're going to get a certain number of jobs from a project, say, construction projects often lend themselves to this where a lot of the benefit comes in building and making and creating there. But then, depending on what you're building and creating, you might have ongoing benefits. For instance, we funded a skate park in Warren. So there were the construction benefits that were accruing to that, but then there's improved attendance in the community. So people that are driving through with teenagers, they might hear, "Ooh, there's a fantastic skate park in Warren. We'll stay there a bit longer, we'll spend a bit more money in that community."

So those economic benefits we're interested in hearing about. You don't need to talk about water recovery and the impacts of water recovery on your community. We know that these communities have been impacted. And when we say impacted, we do mean negatively impacted by water recovery under the Basin Plan. That is why you're eligible. So don't waste your precious word limit in talking about that unless there's a key element of that that adds to your economic argument, then consider it. But generally speaking, you've only got a certain number of words to use there so focus on that. This criteria is weighted 40%, it's higher than the other two. So you can see where our emphasis is.

We are an economic development program. So we are interested in these kind of things. We've got a little bit in our fact sheet, that's on the Community Grants Hub website. We've got three fact sheets for each of the criteria. So I'd encourage people to have a good look at that. Be as specific as you can. Be as measurable as you can. If you can provide numbers as to how many jobs and length of employment and things like that. There's a little bit of a guide there into how you calculate the increasing job numbers, and it talks as well about new and additional jobs. We are interested in hearing that, but if there are no net increases to jobs and the project is actually going to maintain jobs in that community, we do want to hear about that too. Don't exclude that. We're not only interested in brand new jobs that have come completely, innovatively through this process.

So, that would be the economic come benefits criteria. Community support and benefits. Fiona's already talked a little bit about that and we've talked about the kind of evidence that can be provided. So what we need in the selection criteria answer is description of how the project supports and benefits the community, description of the community support, and explanation of the linkages that the project has to relevant local economic development strategies. So, for instance, if the kind of project that you're doing contributes to a state strategy on improving a certain element of the local economy, for instance. If it's a health and wellbeing contribution to tourism, for instance, that the state government might have a new strategy that says, "Improved recreation facilities contribute to increased tourism in the following ways," then we encourage those kinds of projects. We're interested in hearing about that too, and how this project aligns with those kind of things.

I don't know that we can say much more on that. We've already talked about the kinds of evidence. The third criteria would be the organisational capability. So this is where in the application form, we want you to tell us why your organisation is going to do a good job with this project. To explain to us how you have the governance structures, the financial ability, the skill sets or the experience to run this project. Also, we want to hear in this section about how you intend to get that. So you might be in a community where you don't have a great deal of project management capability right there now. Use this section to tell us how you're going to get that to deliver this project.

Because we will fund that. We accept that there's a huge range of capabilities across these skillsets and across the Basin. So we will fund, we will help you to do what you need to do to get this project up and running but you have to tell us how you're going to do that. You have to have a plan, not just say, "We'll just do it."

David Pembroke:

But people could demonstrate the capability. They don't necessarily have to have a certificate in project management as such, do they?

Kelly Noonan:

That's exactly right. So in the range of projects that we fund so far, we fund a huge range of organisations. Grassroots organisations, large councils, large organisations that span multiple communities. We're interested in hearing from them all and, quite frankly, some of our grassroots go-getters, they're legends. They're doing a really good job for their communities. They have excellent skills. Sometimes people, just in the community, in business, in schools, in other community organisations, they've got what it takes to be able to do this. So in this part of the application, when you're talking about your organisation and your ability to do that, put a bit into that selection criteria in the application, but then obviously the main vehicle for this criteria is the project plan. Because that's where you show us how you do it.

That's where you really demonstrate to us that you've got what it takes to be able to run this project efficiently, effectively, on time, on budget. Now that project plan, as we've said, it's not mandatory but please, at least look at it for guidance. If you're going to use your own project plan, make sure that your project plan covers off on all the kinds of areas that we've dealt with in the template. The other point that Fiona made, about the elements of it -and Fiona will probably talk about this in a second - but we have a very tight timeframe to get these grant agreements out the door. So the process that we go through is going to be very…. tight. Let's just call it tight.

So what we've done is in this project plan template, we've actually put a milestone schedule in there that looks like the milestone schedule that we're going to use for the grant agreement. We've put a budget in there that looks like the budget we're going to use for the grant agreement. Pretty much, we're going to try and take a version of that out and put it in the grant agreement to get those grant agreements up and running as fast as possible. Having said that, we will slim them down for the grant agreement but what we want to see and, especially for any organisations that have worked with us before, what we want to see in your application is the full detail of the project. Sometimes we have very abbreviated forms in our grant agreements. For the panel to be able to adequately assess your application and the benefits of your project, you are going to need to put in whatever detail is necessary in that milestone schedule.

If it's a bit fat, so be it. If the budget has more line items in more detail, so be it. That lets the panel make a good assessment of the project, and we can refine it later on. If you're successful, if your project gets up, we can refine it later on, but put in all the detail that you need into those documents. So that is, for organisational capability, tell us a story in the application, show us how you're going to do it in the project plan.

David Pembroke:

In the project plan. Okay. You've been referencing those fact sheets as well, and they are also a resource that's online that people can go … again, we would encourage you not only to look at the guidelines, but to look at those fact sheets as well. Lovingly prepared I imagine, over a long period of time.

Kelly Noonan:

Lovingly, yes.

David Pembroke:

Well, again, that's the thing. You want to try to give people the best possible opportunity. So take the wisdom that is there and available.

Kelly Noonan:

That's right, and one of the things we might say too, so on that Community Grants Hub website, we did have a question in about somebody trying to click on the name of the documents and it didn't open any links. So they were asking how they open the documents. You need to scroll down. Basically, they are there but there is a large list down the bottom. Scroll down and you'll find everything you need. The guidelines, the example of the grant agreement that we're going to enter into, the fact sheets, the apply button for the application form, everything's there. Fiona?

Fiona Martin:

That's right, and commonly asked questions with their answers as well, which is quite a useful resource.

Kelly Noonan:

So everything you should need is there. If somehow, you still find that there's something else that you need, then contact the Community Grants Hub. They have a hotline, they're ready and willing and able to answer any of your questions and any questions that they can't answer, they forward on through to us and we answer them. We have a 24-hour turnaround for our team, so you will get your answer back pretty quickly.

David Pembroke:

Good. We do have a couple more questions. "Is the grant available to individual land holders? And what about for-profit businesses?"

Kelly Noonan:

This is a community grants program, and the eligibility requirements, as you've mentioned, are for not-for-profit organisations that are also either an Indigenous corporation, local government, a cooperative, an incorporated association or a company. So I know a company sounds like it might be - it's a bit counter-intuitive - but some entity statuses are charities but companies, but they're also not-for-profit. The intent of this program is to fund communities. It is not exclusive in that we encourage everybody in the community to participate in projects and to contribute to projects. Private businesses - we fund chambers of commerce full of private businesses. We fund other organisations that are built of sub-organisations. So basically, we encourage anyone that's interested to work together with an eligible entity to be able to put forward an application under the program. So it really is open to anyone, but it is for community benefit and funded through those eligible organisations.

David Pembroke:

Okay, excellent. Again, thank you audience. We have some more questions in, and I will come to the next question. It's a longer question: "If we have a project application as part of a collective of up to 10 individual councils, can we put in for a maximum of $250,000 each council, which would be in total overall more than a million dollars, or will this be considered ineligible as it is significantly larger than the indicated maximum $1 million in total?"

Kelly Noonan:

We will accept something over $1 million. Yes.

David Pembroke:

Okay. So just confirming, it will be accepted over $1 million. So indeed, that could be 10 councils putting in half a million dollars each?

Kelly Noonan:

Yes. Exactly how you do that, that will be up to you. Whether you're a group of councils, you're another kind of coalition of other organisations, then it doesn't really matter what sort of form you have. We will accept the application from a lead applicant. In the application form, you have to note who the lead applicant is. So if you're a group of councils, you're going to have to come to an agreement as to who's going to be the lead applicant, and that lead applicant is the party that the Commonwealth will enter into the grant agreement with. But, just say, you're not councils. Just say, you have a partnership agreement with a university to provide some elements. You have a partnership agreement with some other organisation, an RDA or whatever. We still need a lead applicant that is eligible under the process, who we will enter into a grant agreement with.

So, everybody else should work with that lead applicant. We often ask for - we don't need it upfront - a demonstration of your partnership arrangement. Before we enter into the grant agreement, we do ask for that. So that might come in the form of a memorandum of understanding. It might come in the form of letters of partnership. It might come in some other agreed written form that you actually do have a formal arrangement in place with these partners to take this project forward.

David Pembroke:

All right. Great. We do have another question. "From a local government perspective, and to conduct significant research and employing suitable professionals, from an economic point of view, we believe having an extended timeframe of at least two years would maximise any potential benefit for the grant to be used effectively. Is there any scope for extension beyond May 2022 for project completion?"

Kelly Noonan:

At this point in time, the end date of this round is 31st of May 2022. So the end of the 21–22 financial year. As I mentioned before, the intent of this round is for a rapid investment into communities to get as many projects up and running in this year as possible. We do understand that some projects might be better suited to longer periods, but that's not what this funding round is for. This funding round is for the projects that can be completed within that period of time. If you do have a longer project, I would encourage you to look at what you can do within the boundaries of this round.

David Pembroke:

So stage. It could be stage one, for example.

Kelly Noonan:

You might be able to stage it. You might be able to just carve it up in some way. Each of those stages would still have to deliver their economic development benefit, and it might not be the same as the total all together, but we're interested in what can be accomplished in this period of time for these funds available. For the funds that you're requesting here.

David Pembroke:

Okay, the next question. "Can the funding pay for salaries?"

Kelly Noonan:

During the period of the project, yes. So once again, we will pay for things that are related to the project. So not the general salaries of people within a business or an organisation or the council or whoever, but their project-based salaries. So if you're bringing somebody on to do project management or do administration related to this project for the period of this project, yes, we will pick up those costs.

David Pembroke:

Okay. A question from Barb Cowey says, "Is it possible for the organisation applying for the grant to be based outside of a region to deliver in a region" or do they have to come from that region where the actual project would be delivered?

Kelly Noonan:

So we look at that in a holistic kind of way. When those applications come in, it's not something that excludes a project. It's possible, and sometimes to get that project up and running in that eligible community, if the skillset or the expertise or some other element of getting that project up and running is not available within that community and you have to get it from outside of that community, then that's what you have to do. So, for instance, where we've constructed some portable buildings that have been placed in communities, the nature of those buildings and the technical requirements of those buildings, the skills and expertise to do that have not been available within that community. They had to go outside and get that and bring it back, but they still argued the benefits are the ongoing economic development benefits from that project being in that community.

So, that is the answer. We have to look at the whole picture. If it can all be delivered by an organisation from within that community, for that community and 100% of the benefit is being delivered within the community, then that's great. But, if you just don't have the resources or the skills or the capability or the expertise to do it within that community, and you want to build that within your community and you have to go outside to get it, that's a valid argument. We ask for a majority of benefit to be delivered within the community, accepting that some of that benefit sometimes lands elsewhere. It can be just outside the boundary, or it might be somewhere else. We prefer it not to be offshore. Please - Australia to benefit.

David Pembroke:

Listen, we're coming up to time, but Fiona, quickly, what happens when the application period closes? So once the applications are in and closed, what happens then?

Fiona Martin:

Okay, so once applications close, we undertake a process to ensure that the applications received are eligible. So from an organisation that is one of the entity types that Kelly identified earlier. That it is compliant in that it has all the attachments that are mandatory included with the application and make sure that there is no duplicative applications, as discussed earlier. The assessment process is guided by probity principles for fairness, transparency, and equity, and an independent property advisor oversees our process. So they make sure that the assessment plan that the panel follows adheres to the process as described in the guidelines. So there's a line of sight there.

So the panel then assesses all applications that are unique, eligible and compliant, and they do that on its own merits, which Kelly touched on earlier. So effectively, how well is it supported by the community? What benefits will it bring to the community? And how will it provide economic development opportunities? Each application is then also assessed competitively on how it compares to other applications and this feeds into the value with relevant money considerations.

The assessment panel ranks applications individually and then looks at, as Kelly noted earlier, the process to make sure there is a distribution across communities. Projects are then recommended to the Minister for decision. Once the Minister's made his decision, all applicants are notified of their outcome. If they are successful, the department will be in contact to agree, negotiate and execute an agreement for the project. Should you not be successful in your application, then you can seek feedback on that process. So the letter will identify how we can do that. We do provide also generic feedback on the application processes as a whole, but it's very valuable to get some feedback from us on how your application went. Yes.

Kelly Noonan:

And we're happy to do that.

Fiona Martin:

And we are doing this all within relatively compressed timeframe. So applications close on the 12th of April.

David Pembroke:

12th of April?

Fiona Martin:

That's right.

Kelly Noonan:

12th of April, yeah.

David Pembroke:

12th of April.

Fiona Martin:

Yes, we'll be looking to have as many agreements in place by the end of June.

Kelly Noonan:

One other point maybe we should note. Previously, I think applications closed at 11:00 PM in previous rounds and the Grants Hub have actually brought it forward to 9:00 PM now, haven't they?

Fiona Martin:

Yes.

Kelly Noonan:

So, yeah, that's-

David Pembroke:

All the information is in the guidelines.

Kelly Noonan:

It's in the guidelines, but I'd encourage, if they didn't know that and they were going to press send at 10:45 that for this round, that would be too late. 9:00 PM, 12th of April.

David Pembroke:

Okay. Very good. Well, listen, thank you very much to both Kelly and Fiona for a very detailed information session today where we've covered a lot of ground and I think the advice around the guidelines, the advice around accessing the project plan and the templates and really using the resources that the team have worked so hard to put together to enable you to build the strongest possible case for your particular community. So certainly would encourage you to be able to use and take advantage of those resources. Before we wrap up, just again, another reminder that all of the documentation can be found on the main grants page of the Community Grants Hub website, which is www.communitygrants.gov.au\grants and Fiona?

Kelly Noonan:

Kelly. But I was going to say-

David Pembroke:

Oh! Kelly, sorry. Fiona, Kelly.

Kelly Noonan:

I was just going saying that we do update those as well. So people might've thought, "Oh, I've already seen that," but there are updated documents. For instance, we're looking at putting up some contact details for our state government colleagues that people can contact them about how they might link in with state government strategic plans and things like that. Also, we'll have all of these documents, questions and answers, and things like that are updated as we go along. So please continue to check on that Community Grants Hub website for updated documents.

David Pembroke:

Now there are a couple of questions that we weren't able to get to because of time today, but any questions that you have asked today that we didn't get to, the answers will be put forward on the Community Grants Hub website. For any questions that you would like to ask about this third round of the program or the application process that wasn't answered today, please contact the Community Grants Hub on support@communitygrants.gov.au. That's the email address or the phone number, 1800 020 283. That's 1800 020 283. The contact details are on the screen now. So that brings us to the end of the information session today. I'd like to thank you all for your participation and certainly a big thanks to Kelly and to Fiona for their contribution today. We wish you all the best, and just a final reminder, I think, we might give about those dates. So Kelly, just give us the dates one more time because we don't want anyone to send something in too late.

Kelly Noonan:

That's right. So 9:00 PM Monday the 12th of April is when it closes.

David Pembroke:

Okay. So best of luck to you all. I know the Department look forward to the seeing as many applications as possible. Thank you very much on behalf of the department today for attending this information session. Bye for now.