Blue Carbon Ecosystem Restoration Grants

Feedback for applicants

Overview

The Blue Carbon Ecosystem Restoration grants will run over 4 years from 2021–22 to 2024–25.

The grants are a core component of the Blue Carbon Conservation, Restoration and Accounting Program (the program).

The objective of the program is to build and support the enabling environment for scaling-up participation and funding for blue carbon ecosystem restoration. The program seeks to address barriers and information needs required for making funding, investment and management decisions, and for enabling on-ground project implementation.

The grants are to fund the on-ground implementation of at least 4 blue carbon ecosystem restoration projects in Australia. The projects will be chosen to represent a variety of blue carbon ecosystem types and socio-economic settings (for example, providing fishing, tourism, cultural or coastal protection benefits), and serve as demonstration of the outcomes achievable for climate, biodiversity and livelihoods.

The grant opportunity application period opened on 15 December 2021 and closed on 15 February 2022 at 9:00 pm AEDT.

The grant opportunity received 24 applications. Following the Decision Maker's decision, 5 applications were selected for funding, to a value of $9,478,961 (GST exclusive).

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

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

Selection Process

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment used a Demand Driven (eligibility-based) selection process to select 5 providers to deliver the Blue Carbon Ecosystem Restoration grant.

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

Applications were assessed on merit, based on:

- the score against the assessment criteria
- how it compared to other applications
- the overall objective/s to be achieved in providing the grant
- the relative value of the grant sought
- the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates that it will contribute to meeting the outcomes/objective of the program
- the extent to which the recommended projects collectively address the full suite of ecosystem benefits across all blue carbon ecosystem types.

Each applicant was required to address the following selection criteria:

- Criterion 1 – project need

    Demonstrated need for the project identified in your grant application.

- Criterion 2 – likelihood of success

    Demonstrated likelihood that the restoration project will be successful in the long-term.

- Criterion 3 – restoration approach

    Demonstrated suitability of the proposed restoration activities.

- Criterion 4 – ability to deliver

    Demonstrated ability to successfully deliver the project.

- Criterion 5 – ability to monitor

    Demonstrated ability to successfully monitor, evaluate and report project progress and Outcomes.

Preferred applicants were identified based on the strength of their responses to the selection criterion and their demonstrated ability to meet the grant requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Selection Results

5 organisations were selected to deliver the Blue Carbon Ecosystem Restoration Grants.

The selected organisations met the eligibility requirements under the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, and provided strong responses to the selection criteria.

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

Criterion 1

Project need

Demonstrated need for the project identified in your grant application.

This criterion should have been addressed by describing:

- the blue carbon ecosystem/s to be restored (including the ecosystem type, location, extent and condition/status, and any previous or current efforts to restore the site)
- the specific ecosystem services and benefits of this restoration project by climate mitigation, coastal protection, biodiversity protection, and the improvement of livelihoods of the local/regional community, such as the fishing and tourism industries (provide any relevant data/values).

Strength	Example
Strong applications described the blue carbon ecosystem/s to be restored, including the ecosystem type, location, extent and current condition, and any previous or current efforts to restore the project site.	Strong responses described: - the ecosystem type, the size of the area to be restored and current environmental status of the project site - a high magnitude of improvements in extent and/or condition of the ecosystem expected from undertaking the project.
Strong applications described the specific ecosystem services and benefits of the restoration project; these may have included service and/or benefits by climate mitigation, coastal protection, biodiversity protection, and the improvement of livelihoods of the local/regional community.	Strong responses described: - multiple and diverse ecosystem services and/or benefits of the proposed restoration activities.

Criterion 2

Likelihood of success

Demonstrated likelihood that the restoration project will be successful in the long-term.

This criterion should have been addressed by describing:

- how any barriers to restoration and underlying, pre-existing conditions (that is, established at least 2 years prior to the project application) that have contributed to the decline of the project area have been addressed (other than those to be addressed by the project), for example, a decline in water quality due to high sediment and/or pollutant levels

- how you have considered future projected climate conditions (for example, sea level rise, changes in temperature) on the success of the project.

Strength	Example
Strong applications described how any barriers to restoration and underlying, pre-existing conditions that contributed to the decline of the ecosystem in the project area have been addressed.	Strong responses demonstrated that: - barriers and/or causes of decline were no longer present, or, remaining barriers and/or causes of decline would be avoided or mitigated throughout and following implementation of the project - there was a very low likelihood that any barriers or pre-existing causes of ecosystem decline would cause the loss or degradation of coastal wetland ecosystems in the project area during or after project completion.
Strong applications described how future projected climate conditions had been considered (for example, sea level rise, changes in temperature) on the success of the project.	Strong responses described: - probable or possible projected impacts of climate change with respect to survival of the restored ecosystem - how any undesirable impacts were likely to be low, largely avoided, minimised or prevented through project design.

Criterion 3

Restoration approach

Demonstrated suitability of the proposed restoration activities.

This criterion should have been addressed by describing:

- your objective for the project and how it will contribute to the objectives of the program (objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound)

- how your project and proposed activities to restore the ecosystem are informed by evidence and consistent with best practice

- projected change (outcomes) of the project, and how the project and/or outcomes achieved will continue beyond the life of the grant (including if the relevant property changes use or ownership)

- complete the mandatory project activity plan template outlining the activities you will undertake (including a map of the project area showing where the activities will occur), project area location, your readiness to commence the project (with appropriate insurance and approvals), and delivery timeframes.

Strength	Example
Strong applications described the objective of the project and how it will contribute to the objectives of the program (objectives being specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound).	Strong responses described: - how the project clearly aligned with one or more of the program objectives - project objectives that were largely in the SMART format or could easily be amended to the SMART format.
Strong applications described how the project and proposed activities to restore the ecosystem were informed by evidence and consistent with best practice.	Strong responses described: - restoration activities that had previously been successfully implemented at a minimum of 2 sites in Australia - how the application of restoration methodologies is consistent with best practice by providing evidence such as journal reports and case studies.
Strong applications described projected change (outcomes) of the project, and how the project and/or outcomes achieved will continue beyond the life of the grant (including if the relevant property changes use or ownership).	Strong responses demonstrated: - a high likelihood that the restored site will be conserved into the future by considering land ownership and land-use change - evidence that demonstrated reliable and enduring tenure or protections for the restored site to be added to the land title was provided.

Strength	Example
Strong applications completed the mandatory project activity plan template outlining the activities to be undertaken (including a map of the project area showing where the activities will occur), project area location, readiness to commence the project (with appropriate insurance and approvals), and delivery timeframes.	Strong responses demonstrated: ▪ a high likelihood that the project would be completed by the end of the grant program ▪ provided clear and logical delivery timeframes ▪ identified and provided detailed information on status of all required approvals.

Criterion 4

Ability to deliver

Demonstrated ability to successfully deliver the project.

This criterion should have been addressed by describing:

- your organisation's track record in delivering similar projects and your access to personnel with the right skills and experience

- your project partners, if any, that will contribute to the project, including financial and in-kind contributions

- how you will engage key stakeholders and the local community, including Traditional Owners

- key project delivery risks and your plan for managing them (including potential adverse impacts to the environment and Work, Health and Safety risks)

- complete the mandatory budget template outlining your proposed budget.

Strength	Example
Strong applications described the organisation's track record in delivering similar projects and access to personnel with the right skills and experience.	Strong responses demonstrated: - a high level of experience delivering similar restoration activities to the submitted project - proven capability and expertise relevant to the program objectives.
Strong applications described project partners, if any, that will contribute to the project, including financial and in-kind contributions.	Strong responses demonstrated: - significant and secure financial and in-kind contributions from project partners - evidence of sound engagement and support from project partners and contributors.
Strong applications described how the organisation will engage key stakeholders and the local community, including Traditional Owners.	Strong responses demonstrated: - a high level of engagement with key stakeholders, Traditional Owners and local community - a high level of active participation by key stakeholders in the project - how this engagement would continue throughout project implementation and beyond.
Strong applications described key project delivery risks and a plan for managing them (including potential adverse impacts to the environment and Work, Health and Safety risks).	Strong responses demonstrated: - a thorough assessment of project delivery risks, including to people and the environment – leading to overall minimal risk rating - sound risk management and mitigation strategies.

Strength	Example
Strong applications described the proposed budget for the project, using the mandatory budget template.	Strong responses demonstrated: • a high proportion of grant funding directed towards on-ground restoration activities • consistency between budget template, information against other assessment criteria and the project activity template.

Criterion 5

Ability to monitor

Demonstrated ability to successfully monitor, evaluate and report project progress and outcomes.

This criterion should have been addressed by describing:

- your monitoring and evaluation framework, including the proposed measures of success/indicators and targets linked to the objectives and outcomes of the project and how this information will be used to assess, adapt and report progress

- proposed activities needed to establish reference and baseline conditions, or accepted standards that will be used to benchmark project progress

- the expertise, either in-house or to be procured, to undertake monitoring, evaluation and reporting

- anticipated expenditure for monitoring, evaluation and reporting and assessment.

Strength	Example
Strong applications described the monitoring and evaluation framework, including the proposed measures of success/indicators and targets linked to the objectives and outcomes of the project and how this information will be used to assess, adapt and report progress.	Strong responses demonstrated: - a well-developed monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework in place that relates the project's activities to the objectives, outputs and outcomes - targets and Indicators well described and relevant - processes including timing for evaluation and project adaptation are included and are well understood.
Strong applications described the proposed activities needed to establish reference and baseline conditions or accepted standards that will be used to benchmark project progress.	Strong responses demonstrated: - a well-developed assessment of project activities to reference and baseline conditions - relevant baseline or reference data collection within the project's activities, MER Framework and budget.
Strong applications described the expertise, either in-house or to be procured, to undertake monitoring, evaluation and reporting.	Strong responses demonstrated: - a high-level of expertise and extensive experience was accessible either in-house or via procurement.
Strong applications described the anticipated expenditure for monitoring, evaluation and reporting and assessment.	Strong responses demonstrated: - the expenditure for monitoring, evaluation and reporting and assessment was within or close to the 10% allowable budget limit.