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National Landcare Program Smart Farms Small Grants: Soil Extension Activities

General feedback for applicants

Overview

The objective of the final round of Smart Farms Small Grants: Soil Extension Activities is to deliver outcomes under the National Soil Strategy which are consistent with the National Landcare Program. This includes supporting farmers and land managers to participate and benefit from the National Soil Monitoring and Incentives Pilot Program. Extension activities will take action to improve soil health with evidence-based interventions. This will assist the farming industry, working with farmers to improve soil management, leading to increased productivity and profitability, reduced off site impacts and help industry to reach the Ag2030 goal to grow agriculture to \$100 billion by 2030.

Organisations were encouraged to apply for funding to deliver extension activities which promote improved soil management, including via soil sampling and soil testing. Extension activities will support land managers and farmers improve their understanding of the benefits of soil testing and management. This will include working with farmers to participate in the National Soil Monitoring and Incentives Pilot Program, assist them to interpret results and to take action to improve soil health as a result.

The program purpose will be achieved by supporting soil extension activities – such as educational material, field days et cetera, which contribute to supporting farmers and land managers to participate in soil testing activities and interpretation of results – these activities will achieve the program outcomes detailed in section 2.1 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. Grantees will be expected to work collaboratively with regional and national networks. Performance against program outcomes will be measured through regular reporting as well as monitoring and evaluation plans.

The grant opportunity application period opened on 7 September 2021 and closed on 9:00 pm AEDT on 12 October 2021.

The grant opportunity received 272 applications. Following the decision maker's decision, 32 applications, containing over 200 activities, were selected for funding, to a value of \$13,804,403.97 (GST excluded). A list of successful activities can be found [here](#).

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 each of the assessment criteria for this grant opportunity.



Selection process

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment used an open competitive selection process to select 32 providers to deliver the National Landcare Program: Smart Farms Small Grants: Soil Extension Activities grant round.

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

Applications were assessed on merit, based on:

- the overall objective/s to be achieved as outlined in the application
- the relative value and value for money of the funding sought
- extent to which the geographic location of the application matches identified priorities across the country, and contributes to relevant industry sectors
- the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates its contribution to meeting the program outcomes/objectives and addresses all the selection criteria
- how the grant activities would target groups or individuals.

Each applicant was required to address the following selection criteria:

- Criterion 1 – How well do the proposed extension objectives deliver the program purpose and outcomes?
- Criterion 2 – How well do the proposed extension activities contribute to overcoming barriers to adoption?
- Criterion 3 – How well does the proposed extension activities address public funding and value for money?
- Criterion 4 – Applicant suitability.
- Criterion 5 – How well do the proposed extension activities utilise latest technologies and research?

Selection results

32 providers were selected to deliver the National Landcare Program: Smart Farms Small Grants: Soil Extension Activities grant round.

The selected providers offered strong responses to all of the selection criteria and demonstrated their ability to meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. Further detail about what constituted a strong response to each criterion is provided below.



Criterion 1

How well do the proposed extension objectives deliver the program purpose and outcomes?

When addressing the criterion applicants were required to:

- describe the proposed extension activities and objectives
 - What do you want to achieve with your extension activities?
 - Why is it important and worthwhile?
 - What will happen if you do not carry out your extension activity project?
- describe the proposed geographic area and/or farming systems you will target (including GPS coordinates)
- describe how the proposed extension activities contribute to the improvement of the collection of national soils data.



| Strength | Example |
|---|--|
| <p>Strong applications clearly demonstrated what the proposed extension activity/ies would achieve.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly demonstrated/described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ how the activity/ies is appropriate to achieving the proposed program objectives▪ the impact if the proposed activity/ies did not go ahead, for example, the negative impact on farming practices and profitability, the wider community, natural resources and the environment. |
| <p>Strong applications clearly demonstrated good understanding of the proposed geographic area which the activity/ies would target</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the importance and need for the proposed activity/ies with concise information and clear justification▪ how the proposed activity/ies would deliver benefits to farmers and land managers in the area and the broader community▪ a strong understanding of the region and the broader community. |
| <p>Strong applications clearly demonstrated how well the proposed extension activity/ies match and deliver the purpose and outcomes of the Smart Farms Small Grants: Soil Extension Activities program.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ how the proposed activity/ies would promote improved soil management, including via soil sampling and soil testing▪ how the proposed activity/ies would support land managers and farmers understand the benefits of soil testing and soil management▪ how the proposed extension activities would collect and publicly share soils data. |



Criterion 2

How well do the proposed extension activities contribute to overcoming barriers to adoption?

When addressing this criterion, applicants were required to describe how the proposed extension activities will overcome barriers to adoption:

- in your target area, what are the barriers to:
 - soil testing and interpreting the results
 - uptake of land management practices to improve soil health
 - understanding soil health and its contribution to productive and profitable farming businesses
 - participating in climate change initiatives such as the Emissions Reduction Fund
- how will each proposed extension activity contribute to overcoming barriers to adoption?

| Strength | Example |
|---|--|
| Strong applications clearly identified, and explained, the barriers to overcoming adoption | Strong responses clearly described: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the barriers to adoption of initiatives outlined in the criterion in the area/s and industry sectors which activity/ies would be undertaken in▪ a good understanding of the causes of these barriers and how to address them. |
| Strong applications clearly demonstrated how each proposed extension activity/ies would overcome the barriers to adoption | Strong responses clearly described: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ how effective the proposed activity/ies would be at increasing land managers' awareness, knowledge and skills to sustainably manage soils and eligible natural resources and/or improve the capacity of farmers and land managers▪ how the proposed activity/ies will contribute to climate change initiatives, such as the Emissions Reduction Fund. |

Criterion 3

How well do the proposed extension activities address public funding and value for money?

When addressing the criterion applicants were required to:

- explain how the grant amount requested is appropriate to the outcomes that your extension activity will achieve
- describe the public benefits that will occur because of the proposed extension activity
- What will be the benefit to the community from achieving your objective?
- What value will your proposed extension activity add that would not occur without the project?
- if the proposed extension activity will have private benefits, describe the benefits and the beneficiaries
- Who will benefit from your proposed extension activity? What benefits will flow to each beneficiary?
- How is the private benefit proportional to the private contributions to the cost of the proposed extension activity?



| Strength | Example |
|--|---|
| <p>Strong applications clearly explained how the grant amount requested for the proposed activity/ies was appropriate.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ how the requested grant money is appropriate considering the scale of the activity/ies and the outcomes to be achieved▪ who would co-contribute to the cost of the project and what is the extent of their contribution (cash and in-kind co-contributions) and how well do these co-contributions offset private benefit accruing from the project▪ who would benefit from the activity/ies and to what extent. |
| <p>Strong applications clearly demonstrated the public benefits of the proposed activity/ies.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the public benefits of the proposed activity/ies;▪ a high level quantification of those benefits▪ how the public benefits of the activity/activities are additional to those which would otherwise be achieved in the absence of the project. |
| <p>Strong applications clearly outlined any private benefits generated by the activity/ies</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the private benefits resulting from the activity/ies▪ what the private benefits would be▪ how these benefits have been valued▪ who the beneficiaries would be▪ who will co-contribute to the cost of the proposed activity/ies and the extent of their contribution to offset private benefits accrued. |



Criterion 4

Applicant suitability.

When addressing the criterion applicants were required to:

- describe your experience with projects of comparable outcomes, scope and budget. Explain how you are capable of implementing, monitoring and reporting on your proposed extension activity
- describe how you will engage with relevant stakeholders including, where relevant, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse groups and communities in proposed extension activities
- describe how you will promote project outcomes to land managers and the broader community. How will you maintain proposed extension activity outcomes into the future?
- state the qualifications of any suitably qualified people involved in the proposal. Evidence may be requested later.



| Strength | Example |
|--|---|
| <p>Strong applications clearly described the applicant's previous management experience in delivering projects/activities of a similar outcomes, scope and budget.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the applicant's capabilities to implement the activity/ies, and the appropriate governance structures which would be in place▪ the skills and appropriate processes in place to ensure the activity/ies will be well managed; timelines are met; qualified staff are in place, outcomes and finances monitored and reporting▪ the applicant's previous experience demonstrated their ability to deliver a project/activity of similar outcomes, scope and budget▪ the applicant identified and understood the activity risks and detailed what processes will be in place to ensure the identified risks will be appropriately managed and mitigated. |
| <p>Strong applications clearly demonstrated the applicant's capability to engage with relevant stakeholders and communities involved in the proposed activity/ies.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the applicant has the appropriate skills and experience to engage with relevant stakeholders and communities to implement the proposed activity/ies▪ the applicant is able to manage a number of different parties into a well-coordinated activity▪ the applicant knows who needs to do what and when to ensure the activities are successful. |
| <p>Strong applications clearly demonstrated mechanisms to promote the project's outcomes to land managers, farmers and the broader community, and to be able to maintain these outcomes into the future.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the applicant has a clear plan of what will be done and how they would successfully promote the project outcomes to land managers and the broader community – both during the project and into the future. |
| <p>Strong applications clearly stated the qualifications of suitably qualified persons.</p> | <p>Strong responses clearly described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the relevant qualifications/experience of any qualified persons involved in the proposed activities▪ an intent to hire a suitably qualified and experienced person. |



Criterion 5

How well do the proposed extension activities utilise latest technologies and research?

The proposal will use the latest technologies, research and industry methodologies to help land managers and farmers deliver improved land management, productivity, profitability and sustainably outcomes as well as inform soil testing to national standards and soil test results interpretation. It will demonstrate how regional and national networks will be utilised to enhance the delivery of extension activities.

- Your application will demonstrate your commitment to work collaboratively with regional and national networks.
- Your extension activity will demonstrate your commitment to utilise latest technologies, research and industry methodologies and explain how this will be achieved.

If you are applying from a region impacted from a COVID-19 lockdown you may provide details on proposed mitigation measures. Your circumstances will be taken into account in any future grant agreement negotiations and the department can grant variations in emergency circumstances.

| Strength | Example |
|--|--|
| Strong applications clearly demonstrated the use of the latest technologies, research and industry methodologies. | Strong responses clearly described: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ how the proposed activity/ies would use the latest technologies, research and industry methodologies to enhance the delivery of the project and extension activity/ies▪ an example of an innovative technology or methodology and how it specifically applied to the proposed extension activity/ies. |
| Strong applications clearly demonstrated how the proposed activity/ies would work with regional and national networks. | Strong responses clearly described: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ how the proposed extension activity/ies would meaningfully collaborate with regional and national networks, how the proposed activity/ies would benefit, and how the networks would be used to extend project outcomes. |