



Future Drought Fund Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices Program Round 2

Feedback for applicants

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) has provided the following general feedback for applicants of the Future Drought Fund Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices Program Round 2 grant opportunity.

Assessment of applications was in accordance with the procedure detailed in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines (the guidelines) and outlined in the selection process below.

Overview

The application submission period opened on 24 September 2024 and closed on 19 November 2024.

The Future Drought Fund (FDF) is a long-term \$5 billion commitment that provides a secure and continuous funding for programs and projects that support Australian farmers and regional communities to build their drought and climate resilience.

Selection Process

The Community Grants Hub (the Hub) undertook the initial screening for organisation eligibility and compliance against the requirements outlined in the guidelines. This information was provided to the department's grant opportunity delegate for final decisions on whether an application met the eligibility and compliance criteria.

The department assessed and considered all eligible and compliant applications through an Open Competitive grant process.

The selection advisory panel (panel) established by the department, comprised of subject matter experts who reviewed and ranked applications and provided advice to inform the funding recommendations to the Financial Delegate.

The panel's consideration of assessed applications was, based on:

- review of the compliant and eligible applications
- panel members industry expertise to rank the top applications
- how well the responses met the assessment criteria
- SAP experience to review the innovativeness of applications
- whether the projects demonstrated value with relevant money
- how the proposed activities compared to other applications

- consideration of the capability of the project team to deliver
- identified risks and the proposed mitigation strategies for the department and the Commonwealth.

Selection Results

There was a strong interest in the grant opportunity and applications were of a high standard. The preferred applicants demonstrated their ability to meet the grant requirements outlined in the guidelines based on the strength of their responses to the assessment criteria.

The Hub notified applicants of the outcome in writing, where their applications did not meet the requirements outlined in the guidelines.

This feedback is provided to assist grant applicants to understand what comprised a strong application and what was quality responses to the assessment criteria.

Definitions used in feedback responses:

- **Partially** completed responses (Poor or limited) score between 20% to 59%
- **Fully** completed responses (Satisfactory, Good or Excellent) score between 60% to 100%.

Criterion 1

Project Description

Briefly describe your innovative approach to the Long-term Trials Program.

When addressing the criterion, applicants:

- Provided a project synopsis which described the critical questions that the long-term trial seeks to answer and the proposed scope and scale of the impact on drought and climate resilience.
- Highlighted the innovative nature of their proposal and its use of contemporary best practice methodologies attempting to demonstrate higher agricultural revenue and cash flow prior to, during and following drought, compared to other practices.
- Described the extent to which the project would contribute to an important gap in knowledge or significant problem in Australia, and outline the project's alignment to, not duplication of, other drought resilience activities.

Strong applications:

Strong applications provided a well-developed, succinct project synopsis including scope and scale of impact on drought resilience, identifying the innovative nature of their project and its value to the current suite of drought resilient knowledge and practices in Australia.

Overall, 74% of applications fully responded to Criterion 1 - Project Description, providing a clear and succinct description of their project.

- 83% of applications provided a satisfactory or above response for the project synopsis, with 50% providing good to excellent responses.
- 78% of applications fully addressed the innovative nature of their project.
- However, just under 30% of applications partially responded to how the project addressed a knowledge gap in drought and climate resilience.

Criterion 2

Project Design

Describe the specific elements of your project which contributes to drought resilience in Australian agriculture and the objectives of the Future Drought Fund.

When addressing the criterion, applicants:

- Outlined the scientific methodology, design, validation, and conduct of the trials. Ensured the described elements were efficient and robust to deliver effective outcomes for stakeholders.
- Outlined the key technologies and practices to be tested in comparison to other practices including evidence to justify claims of potential impact.
- Outlined their data management strategy including data standards, data management, stewardship arrangements, and interoperability of the data.
- Outlined their communication and extension activities that will foster collaboration and promote adoption of successful drought resilience activities.

Strong applications:

Strong applications articulated clear objectives, robust scientific methods and justification for the approach. Data management strategies that adhered to Australian best practice, for example using accepted FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable) data standards. Strong applications included clear details of communications and extension activities.

Overall, Criterion 2 - Project Design, was fully completed by 71% of applications with 25% providing good to excellent responses.

- Overall, 77% of applications fully addressed the project methodology/design criteria, and the key technologies and practices.
- 80% of applications fully described the communications and extension activities of the project, with 5% of applicants providing excellent responses.
- However, almost 30% of applications provided poor or limited responses to data management strategies.

Criterion 3

Project Management

Describe the capability, capacity and resources, including personnel and facilities, that will enable you to deliver the project activities.

When addressing the criterion applicants demonstrated examples of prior experience where applicable:

- The knowledge, skills and experience of all members of the project consortium. Include contributions such as access to facilities, equipment, technology, and other resources.
- Described the ability to manage and deliver long-term projects on time, within budget including experience in project management, governance arrangements, administration, budgeting, MEL, risk management and communications.
- Described their intellectual property (IP) strategy including any protection mechanisms that may be employed and any essential background IP they proposed to draw on.

Strong applications:

Strong applications provided detailed information on the expertise of the project team listing the key researchers and their responsibilities. Strong applications outlined their experience in managing large, high value agricultural research projects and provided well-articulated risk management and budget details. Engagement with farmers and farmer-led research groups was clearly outlined, along with additional collaborations to facilitate the delivery of the project.

Overall, Criterion 3 – Project Management, was most comprehensively addressed with 89% of applicants providing fully completed responses to this criterion, with 36% of these responses good to excellent.

- there was a very high calibre of knowledge, skills and experience included in applications, 94% of applications fully completed this criterion with 61% receiving good to excellent scores.
- capability, capacity and resources were very well addressed with 91% of all applications fully completing this criterion and 59% received good to excellent scores.
- However, IP (intellectual property) strategies were responded to with poor or limited answers in 27% of applications, while 38% of applications provided good to excellent responses.

Criterion 4

Value for Money

Describe how your proposed activities represent value for money in the use of public funding.

When addressing the criterion, applicants provided a budget, using the mandatory template, and demonstrated:

- How their project proposal was value for money including the public and private good benefits.
- Discussed co-investment to maximise program outcomes, including all co-contributions (cash and in-kind) where applicable.
- Outlined any leveraging of related government, private and philanthropic investments.
- Described the anticipated scale of impacts and benefits of the project relative to the funding sought.

Strong applications:

Strong applications demonstrated sound justification of the impacts and benefits relative to the funding sought. Strong applications provided details of how farmers will directly benefit from the project and included details for in-kind support and leveraging opportunities. Demonstration of excellent evidence of value for money, impact at scale and public rather than private benefit.

Overall, Criterion 4 – Value for Money, was not well addressed, with only 66% of applications providing fully completed responses.

- 75% of all applications provided fully completed responses to how the project was value for money, outlining private and public benefits.
- 72% of all applications fully addressed co-investment to maximise program outcomes, with 28% of applications partially addressing this criterion.
- 67% of applications fully addressed their leveraging capabilities, and 33% partially addressed this element of the criterion.

- 40% of applications provided a poor or limited description of the scale of impacts and benefits of their project relative to the funding sought.

Individual feedback

To request individual feedback please follow the instructions as set out in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines section 9.1:

Individual feedback will be available upon request. Applicants seeking individual feedback should submit requests to longtermtrials@aff.gov.au. Requests for individual feedback will only be accepted within 20 days of receipt of the outcome of your application. Feedback will be provided within 40 days of receipt of the request.