



Protecting Our Places program guidelines 2024–25

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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How to use these guidelines

These program guidelines give you an overview of the NSW Environmental Trust's (Trust) Protecting Our Places grants program. They cover who can apply, what the money can be used for, how applications are reviewed, and what happens if you get funding.

The Trust strongly encourages that you read these guidelines thoroughly, especially the part about the support available to those who receive grants in section '1. About the program'.

Important

If you plan to apply for a Protecting Our Places grant, it is important that you refer to the relevant questions in the *Protecting Our Places program application guide 2024* for additional guidance. The following resources will help you complete your application and are available on the Protecting Our Places grants program webpage:

- Protecting Our Places application form 2024
- Protecting Our Places application guide 2024
- Sample letter of support and tips (Protecting Our Places)
- Sample letter of endorsement and tips (Protecting Our Places).

The 'More information' section at the end of this guideline has links to the program webpage and all documents and webpages referred to in the guidelines.

Important dates

Opening date: 9 am Monday 19 February 2024

Closing date: 5 pm Tuesday 2 April 2024

Enquiries or questions

Contact the Trust before the closing date of **5 pm on Tuesday 2 April 2024**, if you have any questions.

NSW Environmental Trust

Telephone: 02 8837 6093

Email: info@environmentaltrust.nsw.gov.au

1. About the program

Who are we?

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) is an independent body set up by the NSW Government to give money to various groups for projects that make the environment in the state better. The Trust has a board with 5 members and their main job is to decide who gets the grants and to make sure the money is used properly. The board is supported by a Technical Review Committee that comprises majority Aboriginal membership, including an Aboriginal chairperson. The Trust is currently administered by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department).

The program is delivered by an Aboriginal staff member who works with the broader team to ensure the program is delivered in a culturally appropriate way.

What is the aim of the program?

The Protecting Our Places grants program is a competitive grant program where NSW Aboriginal community organisations and groups can apply for funding to make positive, long-lasting changes to the environment in New South Wales. This program is supported by the Trust, and it helps Aboriginal communities take care of and restore special places that are significant to them, like cultural landscapes and waterways.

The program gives Aboriginal communities a chance to work on their local environmental and cultural priorities. It also helps them get better at managing projects and encourages them to partner with other organisations, government agencies and community members in a positive way.

Program objectives

The program helps Aboriginal communities have more ownership over their projects, improve their ability to carry out these projects, and achieve good results for the environment and their culture. The program aims to achieve its goals through these key objectives:

- Promoting the sharing and safeguarding of cultural knowledge among Aboriginal groups, government agencies and the community. This helps Aboriginal people have a say in the care and management of environmental and cultural resources on their traditional lands.
- Increasing the amount of land that is culturally important to Aboriginal communities and making sure it is protected, restored, improved and managed by local Aboriginal groups, land managers and other stakeholders. This also strengthens the connection between Aboriginal people and their traditional lands.

- Making sure that the Protecting Our Places program is a suitable, effective and long-lasting way to put government policies, priorities and desired outcomes into action.

Funding available

- A total of \$500,000 is available for the 2024–25 round of the program.
- Grants of up to \$80,000 are awarded per project, divided into 2 stages: Stage 1 – Planning and Stage 2 – Implementation.
- **Important:** Projects are not automatically guaranteed to progress to Stage 2 – Implementation unless the Trust is satisfied that the full requirements of Stage 1 have been met.
- Each project must be planned over 2 stages, that is, Stage 1 – Planning, followed by Stage 2 – Implementation (where the plan prepared during Stage 1 is implemented).
- Specific time and funding limits are set for both stages of the project.
- \$1,000 of approved grant funds is quarantined and must be used for an independent financial audit at the end of the project.

Table 1 provides a summary of the available funds and timeframes for the 2024 projects.

Table 1 Available funds and timeframes for 2024 projects

	Maximum funding available	Duration of stage
Stage 1 – Planning	\$12,000	6–12 months
Stage 2 – Implementation	\$67,000	18–24 months
Financial audit	\$1,000	End of project
Total	\$80,000	24–36 months

Note:

- The \$1,000 for the financial audit is a mandatory budget item for each project. The funds are to be used to pay for a certified service provider to audit the project and prepare a factual findings declaration/statement and final financial report and must not be spent on anything else. (See link to *Financial reporting to the NSW Environmental Trust* webpage in the ‘More information’ section.)
- Funds for the mandatory project manager/coordinator (refer to section below) are capped at a maximum of 30% (salary and salary on-costs [maximum of 26.5%]) of the total project budget.
- Although not a requirement, co-contributions by applicants and any project partners will improve the chances of success. There are 2 types of co-contributions:
 - **Financial** – An actual cash contribution by the applicant or project partners towards the costs of delivering the project.
 - **In-kind** – A donation of goods or services, time or expertise. Includes goods; use of services and facilities; professional services or expertise in the form of staff time; provision of, or access to, equipment and/or special materials.

Important information for 2024

Assessment criteria

The Trust is committed to supporting the employment of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal-owned businesses through the Protecting Our Places program. Assessment criteria is applied to ensure that at least 80% of project funds will be used to:

- employ Aboriginal people in the project (preferably people from local communities)
- engage services from suitably experienced and qualified Aboriginal-owned businesses or the purchase of supplies, materials or products from them
- work with non-Aboriginal businesses/organisations that employ Aboriginal people.

Endorsement of project by applicant organisation

Applicant organisations overseen by either a management committee or a board need to confirm that the committee/board are aware of the application and provide endorsement of the project, including their commitment to support the proposed activities.

Implementation of the Trust's strategic plan 2020–24

Since 2020, the Trust has been implementing its strategic plan 2020–24 (see link in 'More information' section) with 3 identified overarching funding priorities:

- strengthen the NSW natural environment – a healthy natural environment is the foundation for our health and wellbeing
- support native species and their habitats – thriving native plants and animals rely on healthy habitats
- reduce human-induced impacts on the environment – human-induced impacts are one of the largest challenges facing our environment.

Project manager employment and involvement of community Elders

- Grantees must employ a suitably qualified and experienced project manager/coordinator across both stages of the project (refer to Employment of project staff in Table 2 of section '3. Eligible activities').
- Leaders (e.g. chief executive officer [CEO]) or board members of the grantee organisation **are ineligible** from being employed to perform the designated project manager role.
- Recruitment of a community Elder or leader to participate in and support project implementation across the life of the project is strongly recommended. Their role could be to potentially act as a project ambassador (advocate) and leader within the community, and to share cultural knowledge as a holder of cultural authority within the community.

The Elder or leader could be invited to participate in the capacity-building workshops and to support activity implementation across both stages of the project. It would be

expected that funds are allocated within the budget to compensate them for their role as the project ambassador.

Grantee support

A key component of the program is to help those who receive grants build the capacity of their organisation, staff and community members. This includes getting better at planning, managing and reporting on their projects.



Image 1 Capacity-building workshop in Dubbo, 2023. Photo: Shannon Whyte/DCCEEW

The Trust offers workshops to provide support. These workshops happen at the start of Stage 1 of the project, and the Trust continues to help and offer guidance throughout the project's life. These mandatory workshops are coordinated by Trust staff and led by experts who are Aboriginal, who understand Aboriginal culture and project management.

Capacity building

The Trust will provide the following capacity-building support to grantees:

- Delivery of the 2 mandatory 2-day face-to-face workshops, regionally located depending on the location of successful grantees, which will provide:
 - specifically developed project management training
 - practical activities, discussions and support relevant to the awarded project
 - understanding of the Trust's monitoring and reporting requirements

- assistance in navigating, developing and completing the Trust’s reporting tool (i.e. the project implementation plan)
 - an opportunity to meet Trust staff in person
 - Aboriginal-led mentoring and leadership training
 - where able, an opportunity to network with other successful Aboriginal grantees and community.
- Assistance with understanding the project needs for successful planning and delivery.

Details of capacity-building workshops

- Workshops will occur over 2 orbits, both 2 days in duration:
 - Orbit 1 is scheduled to take place in October 2024
 - Orbit 2 is scheduled to take place in November 2024.
- At least 2 people who will be directly involved in the project are required to attend. The Trust strongly recommends and welcomes other people who would like to share in and contribute to the project plan. You may bring people from your community or project partners such as Elders, community leaders, board members, Aboriginal rangers/Green Team members, Local Land Services or National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) staff or landowners.
- Successful grantees are strongly encouraged to invite a key community Elder or leader to participate in both Orbit workshops and act as a project ambassador during the life of the project.



Image 2 Capacity-building workshop in Dubbo, 2023. Photo: Shannon Whyte/DCCEEW

Ongoing Trust support

Ongoing support will be provided by our Trust staff over the life of the project, including:

- assistance to prepare project implementation plans, including the monitoring and evaluation and risk assessments
- periodic project management support and advice over the life of the project.

What we want to support you to achieve

The Protecting Our Places program seeks to work with Aboriginal organisations and communities to achieve the following:

- **Caring for Country**
 - Support Aboriginal communities to manage places of significance and intangible cultural values and resources on land and water.
 - Acknowledge the vital cultural and spiritual connection Aboriginal people have with their traditional lands and waters.
 - Provide greater opportunities for Aboriginal communities to take part in projects on Country that involve the protection and restoration of native flora and fauna.
- **Partnerships developed and maintained**
 - Aboriginal organisations develop partnerships and strengthen collaborations with other Aboriginal and/or non-Aboriginal organisations, land managers, local and state governments and local stakeholders.
 - These partnerships and collaborations seek to protect and restore Aboriginal cultural values and develop a mutually beneficial working relationship.
 - Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) are developed, where necessary, outlining terms and details, including each party's conditions and responsibilities.
- **Build capacity**
 - Enhance and support Aboriginal organisations and communities to conduct environmental activities that are ecologically sustainable and culturally appropriate.
 - Aboriginal communities develop skills and experience to engage and recruit members of their local and broader communities to participate in cultural land management activities on Country.
 - Improve the position of Aboriginal community organisations and/or groups to resource the continued management of environmental projects on Country.
- **Awareness raising**
 - Recognise, promote and raise awareness of cultural land and water management practices and the use of cultural knowledge resource.

- Community projects that practice contemporary and traditional land management styles that are carried out safely and in appropriate ways.
- Cultural connection pathways created between people, land/water and their practices are documented and shared appropriately.
- **Increased participation**
 - Private and public land managers work with Aboriginal people and their communities to improve cultural land management practices and protection of cultural values, resources and places of importance.
 - Targeted communities (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) are involved in management actions supported by the Protecting Our Places program to care and connect with Country.
- **Use of cultural knowledge**
 - Appropriate cultural land and waters management practices are applied to protect and restore environmental and cultural values and ensure sustainable management of Country to address present and future issues.
 - Cultural knowledge holders are engaged and consulted on all aspects of the project, and transfer of knowledge is passed on appropriately to community members.
- **Encourage and support employment of Aboriginal people and businesses**
 - At least 80% of project funds to be expended on the employment of Aboriginal people and engagement of suitably experienced and qualified Aboriginal-owned businesses to provide either services or supply of materials or products.

Important dates and timeframes

The program has a single-stage application process. Important dates for the program application process are set out below.

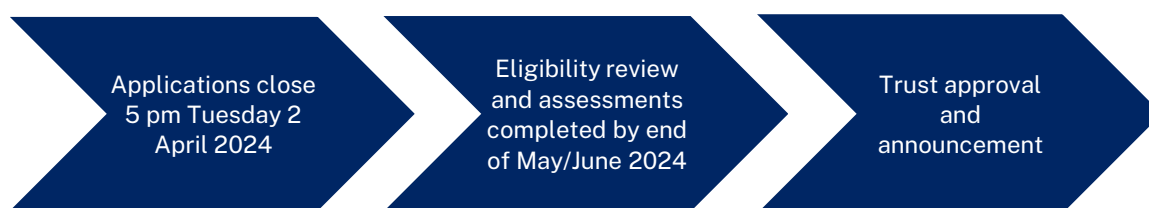


Figure 1 Projected timelines for Protecting Our Places application process

Funding agreements are anticipated to be signed with successful applicants in July 2024 before the first capacity-building workshops scheduled for October 2024.

2. Eligibility

Who can apply?

The following NSW Aboriginal community organisations are eligible to apply (see links in 'More information' section):

- NSW local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC)
- NSW Aboriginal Corporations registered under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (Cth)
- NSW Incorporated Associations registered under *Associations Incorporation Act 2009*
- Non-distributing NSW co-operatives registered under *Co-operatives (Adoption of National Law) Act 2012* and associated Acts
- NSW Registered Native Title Body Corporates
- Australian Public Company Limited by Guarantee operating as a registered charity under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

Other Aboriginal organisations and groups are eligible to apply, however, they will need the support of another organisation who will perform the role of **external manager** (see below).

Associations, co-operatives and charities

Associations and co-operatives will undergo additional eligibility checks to ensure they are not-for-profit/non-distributing and that the organisation's objectives and activities seek to provide benefits for and involve the participation of local Aboriginal people and communities.

Charities registered under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission must provide a copy of their constitution to prove that their primary objective is to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons and, where possible, a letter of support from either the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, their LALC or another registered Aboriginal organisation listed above.

Ineligible applicants

The Trust will not fund the following entities under the program:

- non-Aboriginal groups or organisations
- individuals, industry joint ventures and profit-distributing corporations or co-operatives (limited by shares).

If you are unsure whether your organisation is eligible, please contact the Trust on 02 8837 6093 or info@environmentaltrust.nsw.gov.au.

The role of the external manager

If your organisation or group is not incorporated or cannot manage the financial aspects of the project for other reasons, you may nominate another organisation – an external manager – to manage the grant funds on your behalf. The nominated external manager must be an incorporated or registered organisation (e.g. LALC, non-government organisation [NGO], local council).

Funding agreements will include the name of the external manager, who is required to sign the funding agreement together with the grantee. The grantee remains the lead decision-maker and will control the project's activities and direction.

Grant payments are made to the external manager, who is responsible for making all payments relating to the project on the grantee's behalf, as well as preparing all financial reports as required under the funding agreement. It is expected that there be an agreement in place between the grantee and the external manager, particularly regarding the project's management and submission of the progress/final reports. Refer to *Role of the external manager tips and information* (see link in 'More information' section).

An applicant's previous performance

When assessing eligibility, the Trust considers an applicant's previous performance, including poor performance on previous grant projects, revoked grants or any history of non-compliance with statutory or regulatory obligations. If appropriate, the Trust will apply a risk assessment process to determine any special conditions required to be placed on the funding agreement.

3. Eligible activities

Under each of the program's 2 separate stages, specific funding will be approved to implement different types of activities. For example, Stage 1 funds should be used to undertake planning and preparation activities only, such as obtaining permits or licences, developing the site plan, costs for stakeholder planning and engagement events/meetings. This funding should not be used to implement any on-ground activities such as weeding, revegetation or removal of waste.

Please note that:

- the Trust will only fund proposals that provide tangible benefits to the natural environment of New South Wales
- culturally based projects may be proposed, however, they must be directly linked towards achieving clear environmental outcomes.

Stage 1 – Planning

The focus of this stage is to provide grantees with the opportunity to create a strong foundation for their project, to plan and prepare for the on-ground activities in Stage 2 – Implementation. The main Stage 1 activities include:

- preparing a project implementation plan, also referred to as a work plan (see section '6. Other important program information – Project implementation plan')
- preparing site action plans (where applicable)
- finalising a detailed project budget
- developing a clear monitoring plan for Stage 2 activities
- obtaining agreements with partners, such as MOUs or committee terms of reference
- gathering and confirming community agreement and support of the proposed project plan
- obtaining any necessary permits/licences/approvals or evidence that the process to obtain these before Stage 2 are complete (or at least considerably advanced)
- key project personnel attending both 2-day mandatory capacity-building workshops.

Table 2 provides a summary of eligible project activities under Stage 1 – Planning.

Table 2 Eligible project activities for Stage 1 – Planning

Activity	Description
<p>Photo monitoring points Baseline (before works start)</p>	<p>The Trust requests that you establish your project’s baseline/benchmark data to clearly demonstrate the outcomes you have achieved during your project. That is, identify your baseline photo monitoring points and take the first images before on-ground works start. Refer to the Trust’s <i>Guide to monitoring ecological restoration projects</i> for further information (see link in ‘More information’ section).</p>
<p>Project management and activity coordination (applies to both Stages 1 and 2)</p>	<p>Costs associated with management and coordination of project activities are capped at 30% of the total grant value (including any salary and salary on-costs). Salary on-costs must not exceed 26.5% of the requested salary amount. These funds should be used to maintain a consistent and high standard of project management and to cover costs associated with coordination of project activities. This could also include funding to implement project monitoring activities. Grantees must employ a suitably qualified and experienced project manager (refer to ‘Employment of project staff’ below) to support their projects. Leaders (e.g. CEO) or board members of the grantee organisation are ineligible from being employed to perform the designated project manager role.</p> <p>This criterion intends to promote employment of more Aboriginal people from program funding and seeks to reduce performance pressure upon these key leaders who already carry a significant burden of responsibility and in most cases are time poor.</p>
<p>Employment of project staff (applies to both Stages 1 and 2)</p>	<p>Staff may be employed with the use of project funds. Employment may occur under either of the 2 processes outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 1: A merit-based, advertised recruitment process for a new staff member. • Option 2: Direct appointment of an existing staff member who has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ previously been appointed through a competitive and transparent recruitment process (i.e. merit-based and advertised) when first engaged with the organisation; or ○ completed a previous contract and now has the spare capacity to be redeployed to the project under a new contract. <p>Note: Leaders (e.g. CEO) or board members of the grantee organisation are ineligible from being employed to perform the designated project manager role.</p>
<p>Project planning</p>	<p>Development of a project plan. This includes identifying the key activities; the resources required, both human and capital, as well as any training requirements. It does not include the development of property plans (however, site management plans intended to be implemented as part of the project are eligible). Examples of project planning documents include project implementation plans and site</p>

Activity	Description
	action plans. Any project planning documents prepared should link to existing strategic and planning documents that apply to the land.
Site mapping	Development of a mapping resource (e.g. GIS, Google Maps) of the site that assists in project planning, management and monitoring activities. The Trust has prepared a <i>Guide to monitoring NSW Environmental Trust grants using mapping</i> (see link in 'More information' section).
Surveys	Survey actions (e.g. archaeological or ecological investigations or studies) may be eligible if they are essential to undertaking the project. The commissioning of these studies must be directly linked to the development of site action plans and delivery of on-ground project outcomes.
Aboriginal Heritage Information System (AHIMS) assessment	<p>The AHIMS web platform (see link in 'More information' section) is used for reporting and recording Aboriginal objects and features that are likely to be of significance to Aboriginal people.</p> <p>It is mandatory to undertake an AHIMS search before the commencement of on-ground works and activities to ensure that no accidental damage is done to identified Aboriginal sites.</p> <p>Grantees are also encouraged to record known Aboriginal sites on AHIMS that are relevant to their project during this planning phase. For more information, please see the link to the AHIMS webpage in the 'More information' section.</p>
Research/ documentation of knowledge	Research activities must have a specific and direct link to delivering on-ground outcomes for the project. Examples of research activities that may be relevant include collection of cultural knowledge on land management practices so that it may be applied in Stage 2, collecting oral knowledge of that site from community.
Capacity building (applies to both Stages 1 and 2)	Training and up-skilling and/or educating volunteers, community members and landowners in natural resource and cultural management techniques to improve the tangible environmental outcomes must be relevant to the project. Examples of relevant capacity building include finalising a training plan, contracting a training provider, delivery of training courses relevant to the project.
Partnership negotiation	Activities that facilitate consultation with community, project partners and stakeholders to develop cooperative agreements, develop inclusive project work plans. Examples include holding meetings, development of an MOU, development of site access agreements.
Activity preparation	Essential planning processes needed to ensure compliance with legislation must be completed. These include developing cultural burn plans, obtaining relevant licensing, permits and approvals (e.g. scientific licences, Aboriginal heritage impact permits, development applications). Identification of these requirements and preparation of

Activity	Description
	<p>official documentation must be done during Stage 1, as non-compliance may affect an approval to progress.</p> <p>Note: Appropriate licences must be obtained before commencing a project where works impact threatened species or occur within defined threatened ecological communities. Contact the department if you are unsure of which licences you will need, or visit the department’s <i>Licences for working or living with threatened species</i> webpage (see link in ‘More information’ section).</p>

Stage 2 – Implementation

The focus of this stage is to implement the activities outlined in the approved project implementation plan and any relevant site action plans. Eligible activities include a wide range of on-ground land and cultural management activities, including site protection, bush regeneration, restoration works and conservation-type activities.

Activities listed in Table 3 are eligible for funding under Stage 2 – Implementation.

Table 3 Eligible project activities in Stage 2 – Implementation

Activity	Description
Project management and activity coordination (applies to both Stages 1 and 2)	See Table 2.
Employment of project staff (applies to both Stages 1 and 2)	See Table 2.
Bush regeneration (Assisted natural regeneration)	<p>The practice of naturally restoring native plant communities and reinforcing an ecosystem’s ongoing natural regeneration process. This may include the employment of suitably qualified bush regenerators or supervisors.</p> <p>Many activities listed below also contribute to bush regeneration.</p>
Weed management	Control, containment or eradication of environmental weeds (agricultural weeds will not be funded) to facilitate the recovery of a native plant species or community or to preserve/protect cultural objects and resources, places of importance and lands of significance to Aboriginal people. Invasive native species control may also be considered, however, the Trust will not fund the control of weeds that are the legislative responsibility of the landowner under the <i>Noxious Weeds Act 1993</i> or the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> .

Activity	Description
	For more information on classification of weeds, please see the Department of Primary Industry's <i>WeedWise</i> webpage (see link in the 'More information' section).
Revegetation	Reintroduction of local native plant species through the planting of tubestock, direct seeding, brush matting or transplanting. Used typically only where a viable native seed bank does not already exist on a site.
Pest animal management	Strategic long-term control of feral pest animal species through physical intervention to facilitate the recovery of habitat, native animal and plant species; to protect cultural heritage sites; and to protect sites from further degradation. Plans should consider any activities and actions on neighbouring properties, to aim for a holistic approach to reduce pest animals. Local Land Services should be involved in this activity.
Preservation/protection of cultural assets	Activities that apply specialised methods and employ skilled professionals to conduct on-ground preservation and protection of cultural assets (i.e. places, objects and features). For example, rock art preservation, archaeological excavations and burial sites. Reminder: these types of activities should be implemented as part of the broader project context to achieve the principal environmental outcome, e.g. protection of a cultural asset during weed control activities.
Fencing	Installation of fencing and wildlife-friendly fencing to restrict access to restoration areas (including temporary protection of revegetation plots), cultural objects and resources, places of importance and lands of significance to Aboriginal people.
Erosion control	Works to prevent local water quality degradation and protect soil stability.
Habitat creation	Installation of natural and/or artificial structural habitats for wildlife protection and breeding.
Formalisation of tracks	Upgrading or rationalisation of existing tracks which are causing degradation on sites of high conservation value. Note: Upgrading of tracks or constructing new tracks for amenity or recreation purposes are not eligible.
Ecological/cultural burning	Strategic burning of an area for ecological reasons, e.g. control weeds, stimulate growth of fire-dependent species using culturally appropriate methods. Engagement with the relevant fire authority (i.e. Rural Fire Service and/or National Parks and Wildlife Service) is required if burning is proposed. Note: When designing projects that involve burning, applicants should identify known or potential post-fire risks and impacts (e.g. weed proliferation, erosion control). The Trust will expect to see

Activity	Description
	appropriately funded actions to manage these post-fire risk/impacts in applications (Questions B8 and B17).
Capacity building (applies to both Stages 1 and 2)	Training and up-skilling and/or educating volunteers, community members and landowners in natural resource and cultural management techniques to improve the tangible environmental outcomes of a project.
Signage and educational resources	Educational or interpretive signage and resources relating to the project outcomes that increase community awareness of the benefits associated with the project and influence positive behavioural change.
Management agreements	Engagement of project collaborators, landholders to enter into agreements that aim to preserve and protect natural resources and cultural assets. For example, agreements on land management, biodiversity conservation, site access and site co-management.
Protecting threatened species and ecological communities	On-ground works that provide direct benefits for threatened species and ecological communities, such as planting of feed/shelter trees, weed removal or the mitigation of known threats.
Sustainable management of Country	Implementation of business plans that seek to encourage sustainable use of natural resources through activities that place an economic value on effective management of natural resources available at the project location.
Waste management	Some waste management activities may be eligible for funding but should not be the only objective of your project. The clean-up of waste on Country should be a part of a broader project delivering strong environmental and cultural outcomes.

4. Ineligible activities

There are a range of activities that are **not eligible** for funding in either Stage 1 or Stage 2, as outlined below in Table 4. It is important to remember that cultural projects must show clear environmental benefits.

Table 4 Ineligible project activities

Activity	Description
Administration	Existing day-to-day administration or operational costs of organisations. Note: reasonable additional administrative costs resulting from the project may be included in the budget.
Aesthetics, amenity, recreation and cultural projects unrelated to an environmental benefit	The focus of all projects must be on delivering benefits for the environment. Projects primarily focussed on improving aesthetics (beauty or appeal), local amenity or recreational opportunities will not be funded.
Built environment	Construction, restoration or rehabilitation of buildings or facilities.
Core business	Activities where an existing organisation or individual is legally responsible for the task (e.g. a legislative duty under the Biosecurity Act to control certain weeds) or where funds obtained through a grant are used for cost-shifting purposes. This includes activities that are clearly the core business of local or state government authorities or the applicant organisation in the normal course of events.
Devolved grants	Offering funding to other organisations or individuals through a grant program.
Facilitating changes of land tenure	Expenses associated with any activity that will result in land transfer, either private or public, between landholders.
Equipment purchase	Capital equipment purchases, unless it is more cost-effective to purchase than lease equipment for the project's life.
Non-competitive employment	Salaries of project staff not covered under either Options 1 or 2 as defined in section '3. Eligible activities' Table 2 of these guidelines.
Maintenance	Ongoing maintenance of projects to which the organisation has previously committed. Routine property maintenance, such as lawn mowing and gardening, are also ineligible for funding.
Weed management (Biosecurity directions/undertakings)	Projects that seek to implement weed control activities under biosecurity directions or biosecurity undertakings (under the Biosecurity Act) will not be funded. These weeds are the core responsibility of landowners and are enforceable by local control authorities.

Activity	Description
	Control of weeds that seek to achieve an economic outcome (e.g. to address a problem/issue impacting primary production) are the core responsibility of the landowner and will not be funded.
Research	Projects that specifically focus on research and are not adequately linked to on-ground environmental outcomes.
Similar projects funded by another funding body	Projects funded by another funding body that seek to achieve the same or similar outcomes will not be funded.
Retrospective activities	Activities carried out or committed before accepting and signing the grant management agreement or outside their specified stage.

5. Assessing your application

The flow chart in Figure 2 explains what will happen after you have submitted your application.

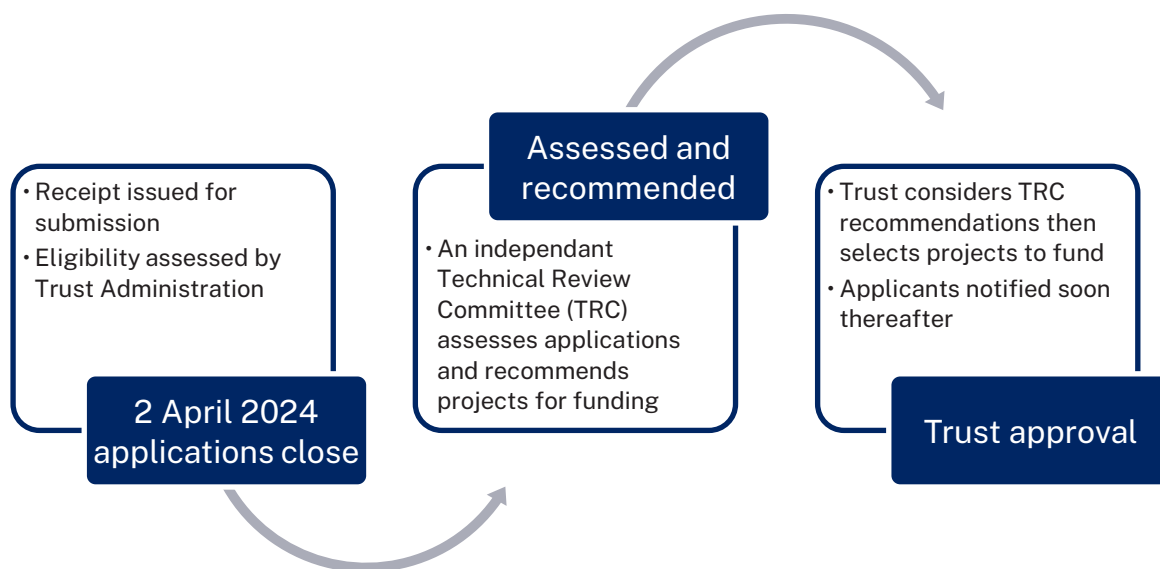


Figure 2 Application assessment process

The Trust has established an independent Technical Review Committee for each grant program. Committee members are people with knowledge and experience relevant to each grant program. They include at least one community and one industry representative. The Protecting Our Places program committee comprises majority Aboriginal membership, including an Aboriginal chairperson.

Successful grant applicants may be announced by the Minister for Environment and Heritage. A summary of the project is published on the Trust's *Protecting Our Places grants awarded and project summaries* webpage (see link in 'More information' section).

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by the Trust and are encouraged to seek feedback.

Assessment criteria

Application assessment criteria

Selection for Trust grants is a statewide, merit-based process. All projects will be assessed against specific program assessment criteria. The Technical Review Committee assess all applications against the assessment criteria set out in Table 5.

You should prepare your application with the following criteria in mind:

1. Tangible environmental outcome

- a. Clear explanation of the environmental issue to be addressed
- b. Demonstrated need for the project, and appropriateness of proposed actions
- c. The project will make a clear contribution toward the Protecting Our Places program objectives
- d. Demonstrates knowledge of key environmental and cultural elements associated with the project

2. Project activities and outcome

- a. Illustrates understanding of proposed activities that clearly target the expected outcomes
- b. Project demonstrates long-term benefits beyond the life of the grant
- c. Project demonstrates a strong desire to prioritise the employment of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal-owned businesses

3. Capacity to deliver

- a. Commitment to undertake the project
- b. Involvement of appropriate project partners
- c. Community involvement and understanding of how this will be achieved
- d. Past performance

4. Value for money

- a. The budget shows an understanding of the project activities and the viability of the project overall
- b. The likely environmental benefit of the proposal relative to the amount of grant funds
- c. The reasonableness of the budget items

Assessment criteria for successful applicants to advance from Stage 1 – Planning to Stage 2 – Implementation

Should you be successful in gaining a grant, the outcomes from your Stage 1 – Planning will be assessed by independent reviewers familiar with the Protecting Our Places program against separate criteria to determine suitability to progress to Stage 2 – Implementation. Projects are not guaranteed to progress to Stage 2 unless they satisfy the following requirements:

1. Tangible environmental outcome

- a. Clear explanation of the environmental issue to be addressed
- b. Demonstrated need for the project, and appropriateness of proposed actions
- c. The project will make a clear contribution toward the Protecting Our Places program objectives

2. Project activities and outcome

- a. Proposed activities are clearly targeted towards achieving the expected outcomes

- b. Project demonstrates long-term benefits beyond the life of the grant
- c. Efforts have been made by grantees and partners to:
 - i. employ Aboriginal people in the project (within local communities where possible)
 - ii. engage services from suitably experienced and qualified Aboriginal-owned businesses or purchase supplies/materials/products from them
 - iii. work with non-Aboriginal businesses/organisations that employ Aboriginal people.

3. Planning and method

- a. Attendance and participation in the program's grantee capacity-building support workshops (2 x 2 days)
- b. Completion of a detailed and comprehensive project implementation plan
- c. Any licences or permits either granted or well progressed
- d. Identified monitoring activities will demonstrate the success of the project upon completion
- e. Potential risks to the project identified and possible actions outlined appropriately
- f. Timeframe is realistic for achieving the proposed outcomes

4. Capacity to deliver

- a. Involvement of appropriate project partners
- b. Degree of community involvement and how this will be achieved
- c. Demonstrated knowledge, skills and expertise of the project team members
- d. Capacity of the project manager/organisation to complete the project activities as scheduled
- e. Capacity and commitment to complete and continue to support the project outcomes after grant finishes

5. Value for money

- a. How the budget supports the project goal, outcomes and the viability of the project overall
- b. The likely environmental benefit of the proposal relative to the amount of grant funds
- c. The reasonableness of the budget items, including appropriate mix of:
 - i. materials and other direct project costs
 - ii. professional expertise
 - iii. in-kind support (e.g. equipment, expertise, staff time) and/or case contributions
 - iv. voluntary expertise/labour

6. Other important program information

Partnerships

Each project **must** have an Aboriginal organisation as the grantee. If appropriate, applicants are encouraged to apply for a grant in partnership with other relevant stakeholders (i.e. local council, Local Land Service, the department) rather than as a single organisation. Careful consideration is advised when entering into any commercial agreements or arrangements. The Trust cannot become involved in disputes or issues that might arise during the project.

All project partners must have a demonstrated tangible role in the project delivery with roles and responsibilities identified and agreed to, preferably within an MOU or similar. This may be developed during the Stage 1 – Planning phase.

Applicants can seek assistance from other parties to develop and complete their application, however, any costs associated with this assistance cannot be reimbursed using Trust funding. In addition, the provider who assisted with the project application may not be eligible to tender for contracts for that project (due to unfair advantage) except under exceptional circumstances, for example, remote locations with limited available service providers, or expert knowledge not available or limited elsewhere. Should this be the case, strong justification and evidence of the recruitment process will need to be shown.

Program governance (probity)

The Trust places high importance on the integrity and transparency of program and project governance. All funded projects must be delivered in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements, as well as other accepted governance and project management standards. Value for money in project delivery is also a significant priority for the Trust.

Procurement

The Trust requires all grantees to comply with NSW Government's *Procurement policy framework* (see link in 'More information' section). This policy applies to any major budget items, such as the purchase of materials or the engagement of contractors or consultants. The framework ensures that you spend or commit to spend money fairly and efficiently. It also includes ensuring that goods and services are only paid for once they have been satisfactorily delivered.

The Trust's *Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects* provides guidance (see link in 'More information' section). This webpage outlines the minimum requirements as set out under the government's procurement policy that are relevant to the management of Trust grants. The 'Exemptions' tab includes information on procuring goods and services from Aboriginal-owned business.

The basic principles of procurement under the NSW Government's procurement policy require that you must:

- achieve value for money
- ensure fair and open competition for suppliers of goods and services
- consider economic development, social outcomes and sustainability.

Documentation relating to and demonstrating open competitive procurement must be retained by the grantee for audit purposes, and information will be required in milestone reports.

Staff recruitment

The Trust will not fund staff already employed by your organisation that will be supervising, project managing or working on the project as part of their usual duties. The Trust may, however, pay for staff employed specifically for your project, for example the project manager position, provided a formal recruitment process has been undertaken.

At a minimum, the following must be done:

- a job description must be prepared
- the job must be advertised (either internally or externally)
- candidates must be assessed on merit, with all candidates asked the same questions.

Documentation relating to and demonstrating the recruitment process used must be retained by the grantee and may be requested by the Trust at any time.

Recruitment of staff cannot occur until after you have been awarded a grant.

Project implementation plan

The Trust has developed a specific project management tool referred to as a **project implementation plan**. This tool is a type of work plan. The project implementation plan is a Word document and assists grantees to define and plan their project's activities, including:

- the outcomes to be achieved, that is, environmental and cultural
- the what, when and who for each activity to achieve the outcome
- how activities will be implemented, monitored and evaluated.

The project implementation plan is developed from your application, which broadly outlined the project outcomes and actions. The plan expands, refines and schedules all the project activities you will complete during both project phases, Stage 1 – Planning and Stage 2 – Implementation. Participation in the capacity-building workshops will assist grantees to develop and refine their project implementation plan.

At the end of Stage 1, the project implementation plan will be assessed against the Stage 2 criteria for approval of further funding and for permission to start your on-ground activities.

The project implementation plan will detail all necessary components to support the successful delivery of the project, including project outcomes, budget, monitoring and evaluation, risk assessments, and timeframes for submission of your progress and final reports.

Monitoring and evaluation

You will need to build a strong monitoring and evaluation framework into your project so that the environmental improvements can be effectively measured and demonstrated. Regular monitoring and evaluation of each activity will allow for adjustments to be made, if needed, to improve outcomes.

The project implementation plan allows for you to identify the measures and monitoring methods to be used to best show the improvements against each planned activity. The Trust's *Monitoring directory* can assist you with this process (see link in 'More information' section).

The project implementation plan can also be used to facilitate an evaluation of the project (i.e. the review of an activity implemented and the expected outcomes). This project evaluation can result in adjustments and refinements of activities to improve project outcomes (adaptive management). Figure 3 provides an overview of how this process operates.



Figure 3 Project planning, monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management

The Trust has minimum standards for monitoring projects, depending on the nature of the work, for example, progressive and fixed-point photographic monitoring and documentation throughout project (e.g. before and after planting, fencing, site protection, training, cultural burns), plot monitoring for regeneration activities and Aboriginal cultural heritage assessments. Baseline studies could be used to provide a benchmark to monitor the activity’s progress and effectiveness during implementation. A variety of monitoring activities may be suggested by grantees based on what they feel is the best way to monitor activities implemented within their projects.

Project evaluation should occur as part of your project’s annual review and reporting process. This may involve your organisation and project partners/stakeholders examining the implementation of your plan over the previous year, assessing strengths and weaknesses, then integrating improvements/changes to both activities and timing in the following year’s work plan. Relevant information generated during these sessions should be included in your annual report.

7. Managing your grant

If you are successful in receiving a Protecting Our Places grant, we anticipate that you will be notified in July 2024.

Getting started

The Trust will send you a funding agreement which you must review, sign and return within 30 working days. This will allow time for you to seek further advice, if necessary, review your capacity to deliver the project (as was outlined in your application) and ask any questions you may have on the agreement's content.

The agreement will also contain any special conditions that may apply along with the reporting and payment schedules for your project.

At this point, you must provide a tax invoice for Stage 1 – Planning, with GST if applicable.

Important things to note:

- You must not start Stage 1 – Planning activities until after the Trust has acknowledged receipt of your signed funding agreement and has received an invoice.
- You will need to identify at least 2 key project personnel who would be available to attend the capacity-building workshops from October 2024. You are asked to note who they may be in your application (see Question B9 of the application form). These people must be involved in the ongoing management of the project, must understand the project objectives and be comfortable using a computer.

During your project

At the end of the Stage 1 – Planning phase, grantees are required to submit their completed Stage 1 plan, that is, the project implementation plan and supporting documents, such as MOUs, licences and development applications. Approval by the Trust is required before you can progress to Stage 2 – Implementation and undertake any expenditure for these activities.

The project implementation plan contains the reports to be completed and submitted to the Trust by the due dates outlined in the funding agreement. Progress reports allow grantees to provide updates to the Trust on activities, achievements and expenditure, in line with approved project implementation plan, inclusive of the agreed measures. Each progress and final report is reviewed by an independent reviewer employed by the Trust with technical expertise relevant to your project's objectives.

If your progress report demonstrates that your project is progressing well, the next instalment of your grant will be authorised by the Trust, and you will be provided with feedback from the reviewer.

If it is considered that your project is underperforming, funding instalments may be withheld while you work with the Trust to identify and implement strategies to bring the project up to speed.

The Trust recognises that variations to your project are sometimes required and these may be negotiated with the Trust at any time throughout your project.

Completing your project

When your project is complete, grantees are required to submit a final report reflecting on achievements.

The final report should include other supporting documentation along with the project implementation plan as appropriate. You will also need to include the audited financial statement, for which \$1,000 of the grant has been quarantined.

The Trust will provide you with feedback on your project based on the reviewer's findings, and formally acquit your grant.

Privacy

We use the information supplied to us for processing and assessing your application. While we do not publicly release your application as a matter of policy, we may be required to do so under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (see link in 'More information' section) or other lawful requirement.

The Trust may also disclose information that you supply to us to evaluate our grant programs. If you require strict commercial and/or personal confidentiality, you should address this in your application.

The Trust understands Protecting Our Places projects often involve culturally sensitive knowledge and sites. The Trust does not ask or expect applicants or grantees to include culturally sensitive information in their submissions to the Trust.

More information

NSW Environmental Trust webpages and resources

- [Protecting Our Places program webpage](#)
 - [Protecting Our Places application form 2024](#)
 - [Protecting Our Places application guide 2024](#)
 - [Sample letter of support and tips \(Protecting Our Places 2024\)](#)
 - [Sample letter of endorsement and tips \(Protecting Our Places 2024\)](#)
- [Financial reporting to the NSW Environmental Trust – Final financial reporting](#)
- [Guide to monitoring NSW Environmental Trust grants using mapping \[PDF 3.4MB\]](#)
- [Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects](#)
- [Monitoring directory: for ecological restoration and social activities \[PDF 1.4MB\]](#)
- [Protecting Our Places grants awarded and project summaries](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust strategic plan 2020–24](#)
- [Role of the external manager tips and information](#)
- [Guide to monitoring ecological restoration projects \[PDF 1.2MB\]](#)

NSW Aboriginal community organisations

- [Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission](#) – to search for Australian Public Company Limited by Guarantee operating as a registered charity
- [Local Aboriginal land council areas](#)
- [Non-distributing NSW Co-operatives](#)
- [NSW Aboriginal Corporations](#)
- [NSW Incorporated Associations](#)
- [NSW Registered Native Title Body Corporates](#)

Other webpages

- Aboriginal heritage information system (AHIMS)
 - [Aboriginal heritage information management system webpage](#)
 - [AHIMS web platform](#)
- [Licences for working or living with threatened species – DCCEEW webpage](#)
- [Procurement policy framework – NSW Government webpage](#)
- [WeedWise webpage](#)

Legislation

- [Associations Incorporation Act 2009](#)

- [Biosecurity Act 2015](#)
- [Co-operatives \(Adoption of National Law\) Act 2012](#)
- [Corporations \(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander\) Act 2006 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Government Information \(Public Access\) Act 2009](#)

Remember

Closing date: 5 pm Tuesday 2 April 2024

If you have any questions, please contact the Trust:

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