



# Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025

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This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs created the People and Community symbol.

Cover photo: Researchers mapping plots on the University of Technology Sydney's research project 'Determining plant resilience to temperature stress in NSW alpine threatened ecological communities'. Jay Nicholson.

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# Part 1: About the program

These guidelines provide information on the NSW Environmental Trust's (the Trust's) Environmental Research Grants Program.

The guidelines include descriptions of the types of organisations eligible for funding, program priorities and the types of activities the program funds.

They also set out how the Trust assesses expressions of interest (EOIs) and invited applications and what to expect if we award your project a grant.

The Environmental Research Grants Program underwent an independent evaluation in December 2023. We have considered and included recommendations from that process in this funding round.

## The NSW Environmental Trust

The Trust is an independent statutory body set up by the NSW Government. It undertakes projects that enhance and protect the state's environment.

The Trust's main responsibility is to provide and oversee the expenditure of grant funding.

The Trust is chaired by the NSW Minister for the Environment, and its members include representatives from Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), local government, the Nature Conservation Council and NSW Treasury.

The Trust is administered by DCCEEW.

## Implementing the Trust's strategic plan

The *NSW Environmental Trust Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029* centres on 3 strategic priorities:

1. **Healthy Country** – enhancing Aboriginal peoples' role in environmental management by supporting traditional knowledge and practices.
2. **Ecosystem and biodiversity restoration** – focusing on species resilience, climate adaptation and ecosystem health.
3. **Enhanced environmental management** – strengthening data, connectivity and natural resource practices to improve holistic environmental outcomes.

These priorities reflect the most critical environmental challenges identified by the Trust. They aim to drive meaningful environmental progress.

They will serve as a framework to guide the Trust's grant-funding decisions over the next 4 years.

# The Environmental Research Grants Program

The Environmental Research Grants Program (the program) is a contestable grants program funded by the Trust. It provides funding to support applied research in priority themes to help address contemporary environmental problems in New South Wales.

## Program objectives

The program is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- increase knowledge and advance techniques to solve priority environmental problems in New South Wales
- assess and test the application of innovative solutions to decrease environmental degradation in New South Wales
- discover new methods of operation for New South Wales industries that are less harmful to the environment.

## Application process overview

### Step 1: Review program guidelines

Download and read the program guidelines (this document).

The **Environmental Research Grants Program webpage** provides links to key resources to help develop and submit an expression of interest (EOI).

These include:

- how to design and plan your project 2025
- Grants Management System (GMS) link to register and submit an EOI
- previously funded projects
- sample workplan (for invited applications).

### Step 2: Confirm eligibility

- Check your organisation is eligible (refer to 'Part 3: Eligibility').
- Check your research project is suitable for this program (refer to 'Part 4: Funded research themes' and 'Part 5: Eligible and ineligible project activities').

### Step 3: Complete and submit your expression of interest

Access the GMS via the Environmental Research Grants Program webpage to register and submit an EOI.

For help, contact the NSW Environmental Trust

Telephone: 02 8837 6093

Email: [info@environmentaltrust.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environmentaltrust.nsw.gov.au)

# Part 2: About this round

## Important dates

### Stage 1

- Expression of Interest
- Opens 9 am, 17 February 2025
- Closes 5 pm, 9 April 2025

### Stage 2

- Full application (by invitation only)
- Open 9 am, 28 July 2025
- Closes 5 pm, 15 September 2025

### Funding

- Successful grant projects announced January to February 2026
- Projects commence from May to June 2026

## Funding available

The Environmental Research Grants Program offers a total of \$1 million in available funding.

Each project may receive between \$100,000 and \$200,000, with a project duration of 2 to 3 years.

**Table 1** Funding available

Total funding available this round	Funding per project	Project duration
\$1,000,000	\$100,000 to \$200,000	2–3 years

## Application limits

Organisations may lodge a maximum of 3 EOIs. Each lead organisation is responsible for conducting their own prioritisation process to determine which EOIs are submitted for assessment.

If your organisation submits more than 3 EOIs, we will ask you to decide which EOI(s) to withdraw.



# Part 3: Eligibility

## Applicant eligibility

### Lead applicant

Each proposal requires a lead applicant. The lead applicant will be either a research body or an identified end-user of the research that is eligible for funding (see 'Part 4: Funded research themes').

Lead organisations must be based in New South Wales or be able to demonstrate environmental benefits for New South Wales.

If successful in securing a grant, the lead applicant will be responsible for project delivery. This includes meeting administration and finance requirements and overseeing the performance of collaborators.

Organisations that are eligible to apply are:

- universities
- state government agencies and statutory committees
- community organisations or groups with an ABN
- incorporated associations and non-profit organisations
- non-commercial cooperatives
- councils
- regional organisation of councils
- other local government-controlled organisations
- companies limited by guarantee
- local Aboriginal land councils.

Applicants from non-research organisations **must apply in partnership with an academic researcher**. This will ensure your application has a rigorous scientific methodology. It also increases the chances that it will be competitive with applications from research organisations.

### Australian Business Number

All lead applicants must have an active Australian Business Number (ABN) that establishes the organisation as an eligible entity.

### Ineligible applicants

The Trust will not fund:

- research-funding institutes

- individuals
- industry joint ventures
- for-profit organisations
- profit-distributing entities.

## Options for ineligible organisations

If your organisation or group is not incorporated or needs assistance with the financial management of the project, you may nominate another organisation to manage the grant funds on your behalf. You can do this by appointing them as an external manager.

The external manager must meet one of the eligible criteria outlined above (for example, a university, NGO or government organisation).

Funding agreements will include the name of the external manager. The external manager will sign the funding agreement together with the grantee.

The grantee remains the lead decision maker and will control the project's activities and outcomes.

Grant payments are made to the external manager. The external manager will manage all financial transactions on the grantee's behalf. They will also prepare financial reports in line with the funding agreement.

There should be an agreement in place between the grantee and the external manager. This will ensure a shared understanding of accountability for the project's management and reporting (refer to 'Tips on working with an external manager' in 'Part 9: Resources').

## Past performance

When assessing eligibility, the Trust will review applicants' past performance with previous grants and any history of non-compliance with legal or regulatory obligations.

If past performance suggests there may be risks to the project's success, you may be asked to respond to these concerns. Your response will be considered alongside the application.

Special conditions may be added to the funding agreement to address any issues.

## Project eligibility

### Collaborators and end users

Your EOI or invited application must set out how end users will participate in the project and how the research findings will be used. If it does not, **the project will not be funded**.

Collaboration between researchers and end users is beneficial for applied research. Collaborators are external project partners who help deliver the project. They can leverage time, money, expertise, materials and resources. They can also reduce duplication of effort.

Successful collaboration relies on clear roles and responsibilities, and effective channels for open communication.

End users are important collaborators in applied research proposals. They are affected by, or involved in, the issue that the research aims to investigate. They can implement (or 'use') the research findings in a meaningful way.

End users include state government agencies, councils, non-government organisations, community groups, landholders, environmental groups and practitioners, or industry groups. Work with them in the development of your proposal and engage them in project activities.

Working with collaborators and end users will boost the use of research in the NSW Government's environmental management actions and increase collaboration with the community.

Note: Attaching confirmation of collaborator commitments (such as letters of support) is optional at the EOI stage but mandatory at the invited application stage.

## Applied research

Projects must involve applied research. This means:

- broadly, the systematic gathering of data, information and facts to advance knowledge and develop new techniques that can be practically applied
- specifically, scientific research where hypotheses are formulated and empirically tested to guide application over reasonable and practical timeframes.

## Research integrity

Invited applicants must identify any ethics clearances required and how they will obtain them before the project starts.

The Trust is committed to fostering the highest ethical standards in research. Projects approved for funding may not begin without appropriate ethics clearances.

## Research uptake

Lead applicants must ensure their findings will be promoted and accessible. They also need to describe possible impediments or reasons that will prevent this, such as ethics approvals with specific conditions.

The Trust seeks to increase the visibility, accessibility and impact of funded research.

Your proposal should identify end users and how you will reach them. When relevant stakeholders, such as policymakers and practitioners can use your research, they can apply the insights generated.

## Communicating outcomes

Successful proposals will include a communications strategy as part of the project.

The communications strategy should include engagement activities, such as information sharing and capacity building approaches for different target audiences (refer to the box below).

Grantees must evaluate the effectiveness of their communications strategy at the project's conclusion.

Design your project with long-term sustainability in mind. This will ensure that the benefits continue even after funding ends.

### Examples of communication types

Examples of **information sharing** include:

- publication in scientific journals
- exposure in relevant media
- conferences, networking events, presentations.

Examples of **capacity building** include:

- issue-specific working groups
- industry or community workshops
- collaborative development of procedures or work method statements
- assisting with integration of findings to policy or legislation updates.

We **encourage** all applicants to partner with Aboriginal organisations and stakeholders.

If your project will draw on Aboriginal knowledge or practices, it is **mandatory** to partner with relevant Aboriginal organisations and/or stakeholders. Your application needs to demonstrate this.

# Part 4: Funded research themes

## 2025 priority research themes

Successful proposals will align with the priority themes in the *NSW Environmental Trust strategic plan 2024–29*.

Your application should show how your project will help end users improve environmental outcomes in New South Wales in relation to the priority themes of the strategic plan.

There are 3 priority themes for 2025. Your proposal may link to more than 1 theme, but you must identify the one that your proposal most strongly aligns with. (There is also an option to identify a secondary theme.)

**Table 2 Priority themes**

<b>1</b>			
<b>Prioritise healthy Country and recognise and value Aboriginal peoples, their traditional knowledge and practices, and connection to Country</b>			
Recognise and demonstrate the value of Aboriginal traditional knowledge and practices and the important role they play in creating healthy Country and supporting wellbeing.	Provide support, resources and opportunities to empower Aboriginal people to connect to and manage Country and enhance community wellbeing.	Create opportunities for Aboriginal people to effectively manage waterways, wetlands and groundwater on Country.	Recognise the value of culturally significant species and the role of Aboriginal peoples in their conservation.
<b>2</b>			
<b>Restore ecosystems and biodiversity</b>			
Support native species adaptation, genetic diversity, and resilience to the impacts of climate change.	Mitigate the impacts of urbanisation on waterways and wetlands.	Improve the resilience of ecosystems to adapt to the impacts of climate change.	Support restoration of natural flow to improve ecological functions and riparian condition.
<b>3</b>			
<b>Strengthen environmental management</b>			
Improve monitoring practices and data management for better environmental outcomes.	Improve cross-tenure connectivity to support holistic ecosystem restoration.	Increase land managers' capacity to improve environmental outcomes and natural resource management practices.	Improve knowledge and understanding of plant and animal diseases to inform management actions.

## Types of research funded

We provide grants for applied biophysical or social research relating to at least one of the above priority themes.

### Biophysical research

This includes investigating physical, chemical and biological systems of the natural environment. It encompasses research on environments and systems modified by human activity. It does not include research on human (social or economic) systems.

## Social research

The study of social phenomena: people, societies and their interrelationships. This is conducted in the social science disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science and history. Social research uses quantitative and qualitative approaches to gathering and analysing data. To be eligible for funding, applicants must clearly demonstrate that social research is needed to deliver environmental outcomes related to the priority themes for this round.

# Part 5: Eligible and ineligible project activities

## Eligible activities

Table 4 below provides examples of activities that may be funded through the program. Further guidance and examples to assist applicants with linking practical activities with either or both the immediate funding priorities are available in the *How to design and develop your environmental research project 2025* (refer to 'Part 9: Resources').

**Table 3** Examples of activities eligible for funding

Item	Description
Administration and accounting	Capped at 10% of the total grant amount. These administration expenses are office-related overheads specifically associated with the delivery of a project. Examples of administration costs you can include are corporate support services and the costs for obtaining appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards. You may include external licence fees needed for delivery of the project elsewhere in your budget. These do not need to be included in the 10% cap.
Consultancies/contractors	Appointment of external specialists (for example, laboratory services, website or app designers). When engaging these services, your project needs to comply with the 'Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects' (refer to 'Part 9: Resources').
Educational resources	Materials and production costs to create project specific resources (for example, booklets, signage, app and website development). Note: Trust funding cannot be used for general organisational app and website development costs, including ongoing maintenance of these platforms.
Employment of project staff (either in-house through salary plus on-costs or an externally appointed contractor)	<p>Staff may be employed with the use of project funds either via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a merit-based, advertised, recruitment process for a new staff member, or</li> <li>• direct appointment of an existing staff member who has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– previously been appointed through a competitive and transparent recruitment process (that is, merit based and advertised) when first engaged with the organisation, and who now has additional capacity to be appointed to the project under a new contract, or</li> <li>– is part-time and being employed for additional hours.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Alternatively, a contractor can be appointed to manage the project – refer to 'Consultancies/contractors' above.</p>
Facilities hire	Rental of appropriate spaces to facilitate project delivery to its target audiences. This may also include licensing for digital platforms to deliver content (for example, Microsoft Teams, Zoom).



Item	Description
Internal capacity building	Training and/or up-skilling of project staff in specialist areas required to successfully deliver project components (for example, costs related to short courses, seminars or training).
On-ground activity demonstrations	Production of demonstration materials associated with educational outcomes (for example, GPS trackers, cameras for monitoring wildlife). Where possible, the grantee is encouraged to hire or borrow these materials.
Promotion and media	Costs associated with promotion of a project, event or outcome (for example, advertising to promote participation in activities or up-take of research outcomes).
Transport and accommodation	Domestic travel and related logistics required for successful project delivery (for example, field work logistics, overnight accommodation for guest speakers at events). International travel costs are not eligible for funding.  To improve equity outcomes and better support research in remote locations, applicants are encouraged to include realistic travel costs for work in remote locations.

## Ineligible activities

Table 4 sets out examples of activities that cannot be funded through the program.

**Table 4** Examples of activities not eligible for grant funding

Item	Description
Administration costs that exceed 10% of the total grant, or are not project related	Organisational operating costs not directly related to the project. Project-related administration cannot exceed 10% of the total grant funds.
Capital expenditure	Infrastructure and large capital item purchases (for example, vehicles, construction, buildings, machinery, amenities). Small capital equipment purchases are allowed if you can demonstrate this is more cost effective than leasing the equipment for the life of the project. Costs for capital items should generally not exceed 20% of the total project budget.
Commercialisation of existing technologies	Proposals seeking to use funds to commercialise existing technologies.

Item	Description
Core business	<p>Activities that are typically the core responsibility of local or state government authorities or educational institutions. Projects that, in the normal course of events, are clearly the core business of local or state government authorities or educational institutions.</p> <p>The concept of 'core business' can vary between organisations but generally refers to the essential or legal responsibilities an organisation must fulfil.</p> <p>While the Trust can fund projects that relate to an organisation's core business, it will only support work that goes beyond the organisation's usual duties or day-to-day operations.</p>
Cost recoupment	<p>Funding cannot be used on any activities that have commenced before the grant is offered and accepted, and a funding agreement has been signed. This includes application development.</p>
Cost shifting	<p>Reimbursement of salaries of existing staff who will be supervising or working on the project unless it can be demonstrated that salaries have not already been budgeted for (refer to <i>How to design and develop your environmental research project 2025</i> in 'Part 9: Resources').</p>
Data collection without application	<p>Surveys to gather data or information on subject matter that is not used to develop research outcomes or tangible environmental outcomes.</p>
Devolved grants	<p>Projects that fund devolved grants (that is, projects offering grants to other organisations). The Trust's funds must be managed directly by the lead organisation and must not be managed by third parties. All financial transactions must be managed in line with the approved budget and the 'Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects' (refer to 'Part 9: Resources').</p>
Existing commitments	<p>Ongoing research to which organisations have committed to as part of a previous grant or their core business operations.</p>
Fundamental research	<p>Proposals that do not involve applied research. Projects with no end user identified.</p>
International travel	<p>Overseas travel including flights and accommodation expenses.</p>
Salary on-costs that exceed 26.5%	<p>Salary on-costs that exceed 26.5%. Salary on-costs include superannuation, leave loading, workers compensation and payroll tax.</p>
Social research not related to priority themes	<p>Social research must relate to the priority themes.</p>

## Budget requirements

### Budget structure

Funding for Milestone 1 must not exceed 70% of the total grant amount to ensure that sufficient funds are available in later milestones for monitoring and dissemination of research outcomes.

### Goods and services tax

If you are registered for goods and services tax (GST), the dollar amounts in your application budget should **not** include GST. We will pay GST in addition to your grant if your organisation is registered for GST (except for government bodies).

If you are not registered for GST and are administering your own grant, the amount requested from the Trust should include any GST which may be payable.

### Consumer price index

Budget items must account for estimated increases in the consumer price index for each project year.

### Salaries

May be included for project management (for example, project officer). Must not exceed 30% of the total grant amount.

### On-costs

Salary **on-costs may be included in salary costs**. These include leave loading, workers compensation, payroll tax and superannuation. This should not exceed 26.5% of the salary.

### Project administration

Project-related administration cannot exceed 10% of the total grant funds.

### Monitoring

Your project must demonstrate progress towards achievement of project outcomes. Your budget may include costs associated with monitoring activities (for example, photo monitoring, mapping, ecological surveys). Monitoring can be done by the grantee or a qualified consultant.

### In-kind contributions

Include all in-kind contributions in your budget against the relevant project activities.

Include details within the budget description for all in-kind contributions. This includes goods, use of services and facilities, volunteer time, professional services or expertise in the form of staff time, provision of or access to equipment, and/or special materials or

material contributions pledged by project partner organisations (including your own) toward the project.

Salaries for existing staff can be factored into the project as an 'in-kind' contribution.

## End of project financial certification

### Government and universities

Final financial reports must be certified by your chief financial officer or their delegate. The certifier must have authority to certify expenditure on behalf of your organisation.

### Non-government organisations

All non-government organisations must allocate funds for their project expenditure to be certified by an independent certifier at the completion of the project, to be submitted with the final report.

A member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Australian Society of Practising Accountants or the National Institute of Accountants must certify your financial report and submit a Report on Factual Findings in accordance with Australian Auditing Standard ASRS 4400.

The certifier should not be a member of your organisation.

The certifying accountant should also provide a Report on Factual Findings declaring that:

- the financial report accurately reflects income and expenditure for the project
- all payments were supported by adequate documentation to show that expenditure was for bona fide goods and services related to the project
- competitive pricing was obtained for all individual items of expenditure of \$5,000 and over.

You should investigate the costs of financial certification at the end of their project and include them in your budget.

# Part 6: Application and assessment

The program has a 2-stage application process.

## Stage 1: Expression of Interest

Submit an expression of interest (EOI) via the online Grants Management System (GMS), available on the program webpage:

Projects must aim to commence between 1 May 2026 and 30 June 2026.

Projects must end no later than 30 June 2029.

We recommend using the GMS's online environment to develop your EOIs (rather than downloading and working with it offline). The online system provides 'pop-up' guidance and embedded drop-down menus to assist you.

You can give editing rights to collaborators and project partners so they can provide input to your application. Refer to 'Section 4.2.6: Manage access to application' in the Grants Management System online portal user manual (see 'Part 9: Resources').

## Timeline for the EOI process

**Table 5**      **Timeline of EOI process**

Step	Timeframe	Process
1	17 February – 9 April 2025	EOIs are submitted via the GMS.
2	May 2025 – July 2025	The Technical Review Committee reviews each EOI using the assessment criteria and recommends a shortlist of proposals that best fit the assessment criteria to proceed to a full application.
3	28 July 2025 – 15 September 2025	If your EOI is successful, you will be invited to submit a full application via the GMS.  We may ask invited applicants to address points of clarification requested by the Technical Review Committee.  Unsuccessful applicants will be advised at the same time. If your application is unsuccessful, you may request feedback to improve future EOIs.

## Stage 1: EOI assessment criteria

### **Criterion 1: Significant for the NSW environment (scored out of 10 points)**

- The need for the research is well defined, addresses important environmental issues and relates to one of the priority themes.
- The relevance and significance of potential benefits for the NSW environment are clearly demonstrated.

### **Criterion 2: Merit of the research (scored out of 10 points)**

- The research has clear hypotheses that address specific environmental issues, supported by appropriate design and methodology.
- The proposal's concepts and outcomes do not duplicate completed or current work, and they will provide practical solutions for end users.
- The research will fill a strategically significant gap in knowledge that directly relates to one of the priority themes.

### **Criterion 3: Collaboration and end-user engagement (scored out of 10 points)**

- Relevant collaborators (including researchers in related fields of study, policymakers, natural resource managers) have been involved in scoping the proposal.
- Meaningful collaboration with end users of the research has been established, and the proposal considers their needs.
- The proposal demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach. Collaborators have participated in scoping the proposal.

### **Criterion 4: Potential for success (scored out of 10 points)**

- There is a high likelihood the project will achieve successful outcomes directly related to the priority themes.
- The proposal identifies key risks to achievement of project outcomes and successful project delivery.

## Stage 2: Full application (by invitation only)

### Timeline of invited application process

**Table 6**      **Timeline of invited application process**

Step	Timeframe	Process
1	28 July 2025	Invited applicants are given access to GMS to start working on a full application.
2	15 September 2025	Applications close.
3	September 2025 – December 2025	<p>The Technical Review Committee assess applications and recommend projects for funding to the Trust.</p> <p>The Trust considers the Committee’s recommendations and determines which applicants will receive grants. Decisions by the Trust are final. There is no appeal process.</p>
4	January 2026 – February 2026	<p>The Trust will notify successful applicants. Successful applicants may not receive the full amount requested. Funding may be subject to special conditions. A summary of each successful project will be published on the Trust’s website.</p> <p>Unsuccessful applicants are advised of the outcome and encouraged to contact the Trust for feedback on their application.</p>
5	March 2026 – April 2026	Successful applicants work with Trust staff on project planning, including review and refinement of the workplan. The workplan will support the delivery and subsequent reporting on project progress. Once a workplan is approved, a funding agreement will be issued, and first payment released.
6	May 2026 – June 2026	Projects commence.

## Stage 2: Full application assessment criteria (by invitation only)

### **Criterion 1: Significance for the NSW environment (scored out of 10 points)**

- The need for the research is well defined, directly related to one of the priority themes, and the proposal clearly articulates important environmental benefits of the research
- The research will fill a strategically significant gap in knowledge that is likely to improve environmental decision making in New South Wales.
- The research findings will support changes in policy and management practice, or support legislative responsibilities related to one of the priority themes.

### **Criterion 2: Approach and methodology (scored out of 10 points)**

- The methodology (in terms of experimental design, hypothesis, statistics, allowance for variability, identification of uncertainty in data and responses) is clearly detailed, appropriate and sound.
- The proposal indicates best practice methods will be used to achieve project outcomes. The workplan clearly describes implementation of these methods, including how they will be monitored and evaluated.
- The proposal's concepts and outcomes do not duplicate completed or current work.

### **Criterion 3: Lead applicants and collaborators (scored out of 10 points)**

- The research demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach, including collaboration with end users of the research.
- Relevant collaborators including researchers in related fields of study, policy makers and natural resource managers have confirmed their participation in the project.
- The people conducting the research are appropriately qualified and experienced, and the project team can effectively manage all aspects of the project.

### **Criterion 4: Potential for success (scored out of 10 points)**

- There is a high likelihood that the project will achieve successful outcomes directly related to the priority themes.
- The application clearly indicates how end users will adopt/apply the research findings. The workplan includes a high-quality communication strategy that will enable end users to apply or implement the research findings.
- The proposal identifies all key risks to achievement of project outcomes and successful project delivery, and it outlines sound management strategies to address them.

### **Criterion 5: Value for money (scored out of 10 points)**

- The budget supports achievement of the proposed outcomes and delivery of activities, and it will ensure the viability of the project. The proposed budget uses funds in a cost-effective manner.



- The applicant has proposed a project budget that clearly describes project costs and demonstrates how funds will be spent. It also provides details about any funds from other sources where relevant and describes what in-kind contributions can be expected.
- The proposed budget uses funds in a cost-effective manner, and the likely environmental benefit relative to the amount of grant funds is high.

### Alignment of EOI and invited application

Ensure the invited application content builds on proposed activities in the EOI.

Applications that significantly deviate from the EOI are unlikely to be approved for funding.

# Part 7: Program governance

## Probity

The Trust prioritises strong governance, transparency and integrity in both the program and individual projects.

All funded projects must comply with the legal and regulatory requirements outlined in the funding agreement. They must also adhere to recognised governance and project management standards.

To ensure this, the Trust conducts annual performance reviews. This includes an evaluation of the grantee's compliance with the terms set out in the funding agreement.

## Procurement

The Trust prioritises delivering value for money in all projects. To meet governance and probity standards, all grantees must comply with the 'Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects' (refer to 'Part 9: Resources'). This guide is based on the *NSW Government's procurement policy framework*.

This includes ensuring major budget items, like the purchase of materials or engagement of contractors, are handled appropriately. Goods and services should only be paid for once they have been successfully delivered.

All contractors (including consultants) must be chosen based on merit and ability to effectively deliver the work. Where appropriate, as outlined in the funding agreement, grantees will select contractors or consultants using a competitive process. Refer to the 'Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects' (see 'Part 9: Resources').

## Statement of business ethics

All providers of goods and services, including project managers and project partners, are required to observe the following principles when carrying out work on the funded project:

- help prevent unethical practices in business relationships
- declare actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

All contracted and subcontracted staff, or associated staff, must comply with the NSW Supplier Code of Conduct (refer to 'Part 9: Resources'). Subcontractors must be made aware of this statement and the Trust's expectation that they will abide by it.

## Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when personal, financial or professional interests may influence, or appear to influence, an individual's impartiality in decision-making related to a funded project. All grantees, project partners, contractors and subcontractors must

declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest, ensuring transparency and maintaining the integrity of the project.

Examples of conflict of interest are provided in the *How to design and develop your environmental research project 2025* (refer to 'Part 9: Resources').

## Recruitment

The Trust supports the employment of new and existing staff to manage and implement projects in line with merit selection principles. The Trust will fund salaries under the following conditions:

- additional hours or days for existing staff assigned to a new project are clearly justified
- funding is not used to cover salaries that are already accounted for in the organisation's budget or for tasks that fall under its core business (to avoid cost-shifting)
- a competitive recruitment process is conducted for new positions funded by the Trust
- the recruitment process is transparent and accountable.

Grantees must provide evidence of a transparent recruitment process. This includes documentation such as:

- advertisements, including position description and the selection criteria used to make appointments for the role (whether internal or external)
- the number of applicants interviewed and the date of the interview panel
- a copy of the internal document used to approve the employment decision at the end of the recruitment process.

Staff recruitment should only take place after the grant has been awarded.

Inclusion of PhD/Masters students in project activities will be highly regarded to increase capacity of the NSW environmental research community.

## Third-party assistance

Lead organisations are encouraged to work together with project partners when developing and carrying out a project.

However, they should carefully consider any commercial relationships they form. While organisations can get help from third parties to develop their projects and complete the application, the Trust will not cover any costs for this assistance.

The NSW Government is dedicated to ensuring all government-funded opportunities are accessible fairly and transparently.

Third parties who help develop an application may bid for Trust-funded work if the grant is awarded.

However, the lead organisation must show that they have avoided any potential or perceived conflicts of interest when hiring third-party contractors.

This means they must follow clear, transparent recruitment processes and provide reasons for their selection.

It is important that no third party gains an unfair advantage through their involvement in planning the project.

## Privacy

The Trust uses the information supplied by applicants to process and assess applications. While applications are not generally made public, they may be disclosed if required by the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (refer to 'Part 9: Resources') or another lawful requirement.

Additionally, the Trust may share this information for the purpose of evaluating or auditing its grant programs. If strict confidentiality is required due to commercial sensitivity or personal privacy, applicants should clearly indicate this in their submission.

## Technical Review Committee

Selection for Environmental Trust Environmental Research grants is a statewide, merit-based process.

To evaluate grant applications, the Trust sets up an independent Technical Review Committee specific to each grant program.

These committees comprise people with knowledge and experience relevant to each grant program. They include at least one representative of community groups and one representative of industry. All members of the Research Technical Review Committee have significant scientific research qualifications, experience and expertise.

Members of the Technical Review Committee must operate transparently and ethically, maintaining confidentiality and disclosing any potential conflicts of interest.

This ensures that grant selections are fair, evidence-based and aligned with the Trust's conservation priorities for New South Wales.

# Part 8: Managing an environmental research grant

## Starting work

Successful environmental research grant recipients (grantees) will be notified by the end of February 2026.

Grantees will then undertake a project planning process from March 2026 to May 2026 before signing a funding agreement.

Trust staff will work with grantees to further develop their project workplan to guide delivery of the project.

Project activities should commence between May 2026 to June 2026.

## Funding agreement

Grantees (and external managers, where nominated) must sign a funding agreement that sets out the terms and conditions of the grant. The agreement also outlines a schedule of milestones, including reporting and funding instalments. We will provide a draft copy of a standard funding agreement when project planning commences.

The Trust may also place additional conditions that are specific to the project. Trust staff will discuss these conditions with the grantee.

The final version of the funding agreement will be issued on completion of project planning. This will be done once the workplan has been reviewed and approved.

Signing the funding agreement commits the grantee to the following obligations:

- comply with all conditions contained in the funding agreement
- hold appropriate insurance coverage throughout the project and provide evidence of current policies on request
- start the project within a month of signing the funding agreement
- seek prior approval for budget changes greater than 10% (noting that project administration costs should never be more than 10% of the project costs)
- seek prior approval from the Trust to alter proposed outputs, outcomes or timeframes
- provide milestone reports in accordance with the Trust's reporting guidelines and the payment and reporting schedule in the funding agreement
- acknowledge the Trust's support in any promotional materials or public statements about a project, including use of the NSW Government logo (refer to 'Part 9: Resources') in published materials.

- prepare for all knowledge gained as part of the grant to be made publicly available, whether that be publishing of the final report or promoting the project via other avenues available to the Trust
- know that the standard conditions of the funding agreement will not be changed at the request of grantees.

## Workplan (full application only)

Invited applicants are required to submit a draft workplan defining project outcomes, activities, measures and budget as part of their full application. The workplan aims to:

- provide a tool to assist grantees plan and manage their projects over the duration of the grant by defining project outcomes and activities towards implementation
- provide a basis for annual reporting
- improve grantee and Trust understanding of whether projects are on track and have achieved their intended outcomes.

If a grant is awarded, workplans will be further developed between the grantee and Trust staff prior to signing a funding agreement.

## During a project

### Reporting

Grantees must submit milestone reports after each milestone (typically every 12 months), through the online GMS. The timeframe for reporting and payments will be agreed upon with Trust staff when the grant is awarded and will be included in the funding agreement.

Milestone reports allow the grantee to review their progress and provide the Trust with updates and evidence of the work completed.

Each milestone report is reviewed by an independent reviewer engaged by the Trust with appropriate technical expertise.

If a report shows satisfactory progress, the next grant instalment will be authorised, and feedback will be provided. If the project is not in line with the approved workplan or behind schedule, funding instalments may be withheld while the grantee works with Trust staff to bring the project back on track.

The Trust understands that variations to projects are sometimes necessary, and these may be discussed with Trust staff at any point. Requests for variations can be submitted through the GMS.

### Monitoring and evaluation

The Trust requires that projects be monitored effectively to ensure projects are delivered on time and on budget. Grantees must integrate monitoring techniques in their workplan to track progress and demonstrate project outcomes. Evaluation should take

place regularly to assess the project's performance and identify areas where adjustments may be needed.

## Invoicing

A tax invoice (subject to GST if applicable) is required for each milestone payment at the time the instalment is due.

## Completing a project

When a project is complete, grantees must submit a final milestone report through the GMS, which reports on achievements against the project's expected outcomes. The final report will be reviewed by a suitable reviewer engaged by the Trust.

Trust staff will provide feedback, and if the requirements of the funding agreement have been met, the grant will be acquitted.

# Part 9: Resources

## **About the Trust:**

- [Environmental Research Grants Program homepage](#)
- [How to design and develop your environmental research project 2025](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029](#)

## **Governance-related issues:**

- [Government Information \(Public Access\) Act 2009](#)
- [Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects](#)
- [Managing conflicts of interest in research projects \(by the University of South Australia\)](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust financial reporting requirements](#)
- [NSW Government procurement policy framework](#)
- [NSW grants administration guide](#)
- [NSW Supplier Code of Conduct](#)
- [Tips on working with an external manager](#)

## **Other resources:**

- [Grants Management System online portal user manual](#)
- [NSW Government logo](#)