



How to design and develop your environmental research project 2025

Environmental Research Grants Program

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This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.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

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How to use this guide

Please read the *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025* before you proceed with this guide.

The program guidelines provide information on eligibility and priorities.

The **Environmental Trust Research webpage** provides links to resources you will need. These include:

- *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025*
- Grants Management System link to register and submit an expression of interest or invited application
- examples of previously funded projects
- a sample workplan (for invited applicants).

This guide complements the information in the online Grants Management System (GMS). It gives you additional guidance to complete and submit an expression of interest (EOI).

If your project proceeds to the invited application stage, it sets out the things you need to do to complete a full application to the Environmental Research Grants program (the program).

The guide has 3 sections:

- Section 1: Expressions of interest
- Section 2: Invited application
- Section 3: Resources.

Dates for the 2025 round

Stage 1: Expressions of interest

Opening date: 9 am, 17 February 2025

Closing date: 5 pm, 9 April 2025

Stage 2: Invited application

Opening date: 9 am, 28 July 2025

Closing date: 5 pm, 15 September 2025

Application structure

Submit applications for both stages of the program using the GMS.

If your EOI is selected to proceed to the invited application stage, you can revise the information you supplied at the EOI stage.

Refer to ‘Part 6: Application and assessment – alignment of EOI and invited application’ in the *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025* (refer to the ‘Section 3: Resources’).

The GMS has different sidebar menu items for the two stages. The table below shows the menu headings used to organise questions, and these will help you to navigate in the GMS.

This guide provides more information about the questions you will see under each menu heading.

Table 1 Menu headings in GMS

EOI stage	Invited application stage
<p>These are the menu headings you for the EOI stage. You can edit your answers if you proceed to the Invited Application stage</p>	<p>These are the menu headings for the Invited Application stage. There will be some new questions at the Invited application stage under the Project Rationale, Project Summary, Supporting Information, Risk Management, and Declaration menus. There are also new menu headings for your workplan They will also complete the three Workplan tabs.</p>
Information	Information
Eligibility	Eligibility
Project Summary	Project Summary
Applicant details	Applicant details
Collaborators	Collaborators
Project Location	Project Location
Project Rationale	Project Rationale
Risk Management	Workplan – outcomes and schedule
Supporting Information	Workplan – project measures
Declaration	Workplan – project budget
	Risk Management
	Supporting Information
	Feedback
	Declaration

For help, contact the NSW Environmental Trust

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Section 1: Expressions of interest

Project summary

Provide a concise overview of your project and its key details.

Describe the problem your project addresses.

State Provide clear information about what you will do during the project.

Outline the outcomes your project will achieve

Outline the purpose of your project.

For example:

- determine the extent and rate of spread of snow-gum dieback over a minimum 100-hectare study area and identify the most successful restoration interventions to improve tree health and reverse tree decline.

Consider what you can achieve within the maximum project timeframe of 3 years.

If you proceed to the invited application stage, you will need to define specific, measurable outcomes in your workplan (see 'Section 2: Invited application').

Set out the range of funding

The Environmental Research Grants Program offers a total of \$1 million in funding. Each project may receive between \$100,000 and \$200,000, with a project duration of 2 to 3 years.

Indicate the funding range you are seeking for the duration of the project (2 to 3 years).

You only need to provide high-level estimates at the EOI stage.

If your proposal proceeds to the invited application stage, you will need to develop a detailed workplan. This will include project timeframes and budget. Your budget must align with the funding range indicated in the EOI.

'Section 2: Invited application' provides more information about this stage.

If your organisation is registered for GST, please estimate the funding range excluding GST (GST will be added to payments if the project is approved).

If your organisation is not registered for GST, please include GST in your funding range estimate.

Project start and end dates

Estimate the start and end dates of your proposal.

Note that:

- projects should start between 1 May 2026 and 30 June 2026, and be completed no later than 30 June 2029
- you may adjust project timeframes as part of the process described in the *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025*, 'Part 8: Managing an environmental research grant'.

Collaborators

Your project team

Your project must include partnerships with stakeholders who will improve the delivery of your research and uptake of research outcomes.

You must identify at least one collaborator and provide a brief outline of the roles they will play in the project.

- Collaborators are external to your organisation. They will have different levels of involvement in your project. Ideally, some will also be on your project team, while others might make smaller contributions. Your EOI needs to clearly describe how external partners will support project delivery.
- Projects that are not based on a collaborative approach will not be funded.
- Letters of support from collaborators are not necessary at the EOI stage, but you may include them if you think it helps to strengthen your case for funding. See 'Section 2: Invited application' for more guidance and tips on submitting letters of support.

For more information on collaboration, refer to *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025*, 'Part 3: Eligibility – Collaborators and end users.'

End users

End users will take practical action or make decisions that are informed by the findings of your research. For example, they will change their land management practices.

End users may include environmental practitioners, government agencies, councils, non-government organisations, community groups, landholders, environment groups or industry groups.

Engaging with end users is a mandatory component of the application development process.

You must actively involve end users with the development of your proposal.

End users must agree to the practical application of the research outcomes. They must have opportunities to participate in project activities.

For more information on end users, see *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025*, 'Part 3: Eligibility – Collaborators and end users.'

Building sustainable practice into project design

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

This involves planning to maintain the project's outcomes. It also means thinking about how you can ensure the project's initiatives remain active and updated.

To demonstrate sustainability, consider:

- community engagement – foster local ownership and encourage continued support for the project by actively involving stakeholders in planning and implementation processes
- ongoing funding sources – identify ongoing funding sources, such as additional grants, sponsorships to sustain project activities
- partnerships – build partnerships to enhance support and resources, contributing to the project's long-term viability
- training and capacity building – provide training and capacity-building opportunities for stakeholders, empowering them to act based on the findings of your research
- communication plan – develop a clear communication plan to share successes and lessons learned, further engaging stakeholders and attracting future support.

Use these strategies to show your commitment to achieving sustainable outcomes that create positive benefits for both end users of the research and the environment.

Program priority themes

Please select the program priority theme that your proposal addresses. For more information, refer to '2025 research priority themes' under 'Part 4: Funded research themes' in *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025*.

Eligible organisations may submit up to 3 EOIs.

It is better to focus on one theme to ensure clear outcomes. However, the themes are broad and there is potential for overlap.

You may choose a secondary theme, but the Technical Review Committee will not assign additional weighting to applications that select multiple themes.

If your project delivers outcomes for Aboriginal communities and Country, you must include meaningful and direct engagement with Aboriginal people and communities in your project plan.

Supporting information

Attachments to your application help the Technical Review Committee determine the strength of your proposal.

Provide clear and concise attachments directly relevant to the project.

Please do not include copies of all relevant literature (for example, journal articles). Instead, provide a list of citations, if available.

Table 2 **Examples of supporting attachments**

Attachment type	Details
Letters of support, proof of collaboration (optional at EOI stage)	See ‘Collaborators’ under ‘Section 1: Expressions of interest’ as well as ‘Supporting information’ under ‘Section 1: Expressions of Interest’ and ‘Section 2: Invited application’ for more guidance and tips on submitting letters of support
CVs, quotes	Demonstrates the credentials of people you will invite to work on the project. This does not replace merit selection processes.
Excerpts of strategic plan (maximum of 3 pages)	Important sections from a relevant strategic plan or site assessment where research may be required to implement it.
Maps	Showing study locations or providing additional context for the Technical Review Committee relating to travel associated with the proposal.

Declaration

Conflicts of interest

The ‘Declaration’ section asks you to declare any real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

This may include non-monetary personal gain.

Your project needs a system to manage potential or actual conflicts of interest that may arise.

All staff and contractors must disclose any potential conflicts of interest.

All contracted and subcontracted staff, or associated staff, must comply with the ‘Statement of business ethics’ (refer to ‘Section 3: Resources’ for a link to the statement). Make sure they understand this and provide them with the statement.

Examples of perceived or actual conflicts of interest might include:

- a project manager employing themselves or their own business to carry out project-related work and using grant funds to pay for it
- using project activities to promote products or businesses in which members of the applicant's organisation have an interest
- grant funds being used to pay friends or family for project-related work without a merit selection process
- substantial benefits for a researcher arising from collaborations and relationships with industry in the licensing and marketing of research discoveries.

Refer to 'Conflicts of interest' under 'Part 7: Program governance' in *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025* and 'Managing conflicts of interest in research projects' in 'Section 3: Resources'.

Submitting your expression of interest

- Organisations may only submit 3 EOIs. To ensure your organisation can manage this requirement, we recommend that:
 - universities submit their EOIs via their research grants office
 - statewide organisations submit their applications via their Head Office/Chief Executive Officer.
- Submit your EOI by the closing date: **5 pm, Wednesday 9 April 2025**
- Late applications will not be accepted.

You can share your EOI and invited application with others via the GMS. Refer to the [Grants Management System online portal user manual](#).

Section 2: Invited application

This section provides additional information for invited applications.

If you are invited to submit a full application, we will ask you to provide additional details about your project via the GMS.

You will also be able to edit information submitted in your EOI if you need to.

Your proposal must not differ significantly in its intent between the EOI and invited application.

Overview of the workplan

The workplan is a framework for implementing your project. It will help you monitor and report on your progress.

The workplan has 3 components. Working through the 3 workplan side bar categories, you will create a workplan that identifies: identify:

- the outcomes your project will deliver, and the activities you will implement to achieve them
- project measures that define the scope of your project and provide indicators of success
- your project budget that identifies the resources you need for each milestone (stage of works).

The workplan should expand on the details provided in your EOI.

If your application is successful, you will submit milestone reports to demonstrate your progress in implementing the workplan.

Workplan – outcomes and schedule

Outcomes

Your outcomes should **describe what success will look like** by the end of your project.

We recommend identifying a maximum of 3 outcomes. You must have at least one outcome.

Ensure that outcomes relate to the 2025 research priority themes (refer to ‘Part 4: Funded research – 2025 research priority themes’).

Clearly define your outcomes using the SMART principles.

SMART outcomes are:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-bound (within the lifetime of the project).

You should incorporate a similar level of detail as these SMART examples:

- Test and evaluate the effects of 4 cultural burns on soil health by engaging Aboriginal communities living in different landscape types around New South Wales. Document the benefits and different cultural practices in their location, carry out soil sampling before and after each burn, and work with practitioners to integrate research findings into future practice. (This outcome aligns with themes under *Prioritise healthy Country and recognise and value Aboriginal peoples, their traditional knowledge and practices, and connection to Country.*)
- Determine the specific temperature requirements and tolerances for different life history stages (for example, spawning, germination, insect emergence) of key Australian fish, invertebrate and freshwater plant species to inform predictive models for climate change adaptation and future management action plans. Collect information on stream temperature at 6 sites across the climactic gradient, conduct laboratory tests on a range of macroinvertebrates to understand relationship with temperature and response to desiccation. (This outcome aligns with themes under *Restore ecosystems and biodiversity.*)
- Determine genomic, physiological and morphological responses of 3 common eucalyptus species in response to a climactic gradient, to inform future seed selection for landscape-scale revegetation efforts. Select 3 eucalyptus species with wide climactic distribution; identify 8 populations/provenances across the climactic gradient for each species. At each site, sample 12 mature, healthy trees for genomic analyses, and measure physiological and morphological traits related to climate change adaptation. (This outcome aligns with themes under *Strengthen environmental management.*)

These examples all contain **measures** that help to define the scope of the work.

Milestone timeframes

Applying SMART principles, plan your project into milestones (stages of work). Each milestone should be around 12 months in duration. You may need to adjust the overall timeframes you entered in the 'Project summary' tab in GMS to match.

Consider what you can reasonably expect to achieve within the 2- to 3-year timeframe of your project. You will need to submit a milestone report at the end of each milestone.

Payment and reporting schedule

The milestone start and end dates you enter in **Workplan – Outcomes and schedule** (and the budget for each milestone in **Workplan – Budget**) will determine the payment and reporting schedule in your funding agreement if your application is successful.

Milestone dates do not need to align with the end of financial year.

We provide payments at the beginning of each milestone. You submit reports at the completion of each milestone. Table 3 provides an example of a payment and reporting schedule.

Table 3 Example payment and reporting schedule

Milestone	Start	Finish	Grant funds requested for each milestone
Milestone 1	1 June 2026	30 May 2027	\$76,495
Milestone 2	1 June 2027	30 May 2028	\$67,177
Milestone 3	1 June 2028	30 May 2029	\$35,378
Total grant			\$179,050

Note: Funding for Milestone 1 must not exceed 70% of the total grant amount.

Activities

Provide enough detail to show how you will implement and monitor the progress of your project. This should include the evidence you will provide with your milestone reports.

Adding detail to your activity description also demonstrates how you will implement the methodology you described in the 'Project rationale' sidebar category in GMS.

Build a monitoring and evaluation framework into your project activities by describing how you will monitor progress. For example, this may include activities to seek stakeholder feedback.

Key things to include in your workplan

- Show how end users will participate in project activities.
- Describe the stakeholder engagement activities you will undertake. These should promote uptake and application of the research findings at the end of the project. A good communication identifies different stakeholders, key messages, how to reach them, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of your communication. See an example at the bottom of the Sample workplan. Include actions to implement your communications plan in your workplan.
- Integrate the information you provided in the 'Project rationale' tab of GMS into your workplan. Clearly describe how you will implement your methodology when you set out your workplan activities.

- Include strategies to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of your work. Outline the evidence you will gather to show your project is achieving its outcomes (for example, surveys, population counts).
- Provide details of the resources you need to carry out your activities in the budget section of your workplan.
- Refer to the **sample workplan** (see ‘Section 3: Resources’) for examples.

Workplan – measures

For each activity, select an activity type (from the drop-down menu). Each activity description will generate a different menu of measures. Choose the one that best fits your activity.

For research grants, there are some mandatory measures found under the following activity types:

- project management and delivery (include human resourcing for implementing methodology, collaboration)
- promoting the project and uptake of research outcomes.

Suggested measures include:

- building capacity and providing training
- engagement with Aboriginal communities
- laboratory and fieldwork.

Workplan – budget

The budget you outline will determine grant instalments if your application is successful (refer to ‘Workplan – Outcomes and schedule, payment and reporting schedule’).

Use the budget description text box to detail how grant funds have been calculated.

Your application is unlikely to be successful if you only include high-level budget descriptions that do not clearly describe project costs. Demonstrate how grant funds will be spent.

Refer to the **sample workplan** (see ‘Section 3: Resources’) for a model of how to present your budget.

Presenting a strong budget

You will need to provide detailed project costs and identify how they will be funded (either from grant funds or other sources).

Provide sufficient details for the Technical Review Committee to assess value for money in relation to project outcomes.

Refer to *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025*, 'Part 5: Eligible and ineligible activities' for more information on what the Trust will and will not fund.

If your application is successful, you will have an opportunity to make minor adjustments to your budget and workplan before you sign the funding agreement.

All costings in your budget needs to be detailed, reasonable and justifiable. This is especially important where individual items comprise a large proportion of the overall budget.

- Refer to the **sample workplan** (see 'Section 3: Resources') as a model for presenting your budget.
- Consider whether your proposed budget includes costs that would be considered reasonable expenditure of public funds. Will it withstand public scrutiny?
- Consider how well your budget aligns with eligible and ineligible activities. These are listed in the *Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025*, 'Part 5: Eligible and ineligible activities.'
- Provide enough detail to demonstrate what the Trust is being asked to fund. For example, include workings to show how costs have been calculated.

See Table 4 for comparison of a good quality budget with a poor-quality budget.

Table 4 Comparing a good-quality budget with a poor-quality budget

Good-quality budget

Budget description	Cost
Nest box installation and monitoring, 4 days at \$1,000 per day	\$4,000
Research Assistant \$45 per hour (including on-costs) x 14hrs/week x 20 weeks to assist with preparation of journal article	\$12,600
Tube-stock 10 species x 5,000 at \$3.00 each	\$15,000
PhD student for 5 field days to assist with guiding students conducting field work \$1,500 per day, plus \$500 per day travel and accommodation. Flights Sydney/Broken Hill return \$2,000.	\$12,000

Poor-quality budget

Budget description	Cost
Ecologist	\$4,000
Staff time	\$12,600
Plants	\$15,000
Speaker, travel	\$12,000

Equity

Applicants should consider selecting their project team for diversity, after accounting for strength and feasibility of the research.

Recruitment of contractors

You should choose all contractors on their merits and ability to effectively deliver the work and engage them in line with the Grantee guide to procurement for Environmental Trust projects (see 'Section 3: Resources').

Include hourly rates in your budget rather than lump sums. This helps you demonstrate that costs are in line with industry standards.

Staff salaries

The Technical Review Committee looks for clear descriptions of the positions to be funded by the Trust.

Develop a position description for any new position the project will employ. You can find example position descriptions in job advertisements for roles at the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (refer to the I Work for NSW website under 'Section 3: Resources').

Salaries for existing staff are usually reflected in your project budget as an in-kind contribution. However, you may seek funding for salaries for existing staff if you can demonstrate their salaries have not already been budgeted for.

You will need to provide clear justification for grant funding of any existing employees. This includes demonstrating how the grant-funded work is additional to any work they have already been engaged to undertake.

For example, casual staff employed to work on the project, or a part-time staff member (who has been recruited through a merit selection process), could work an additional day each week on the project, which could be paid for by the grant. You must demonstrate how you will separate their project-related work from their regular duties.

Salaries should be in line with industry standards. You need to show you have calculated amounts based on reasonable pay rates.

Staff working conditions must also be in accordance with all applicable laws. This includes meeting standard work health and safety requirements.

If you want to use grant funds to fund an employee or contractor, your workplan should include activities for undertaking a recruitment or tender process.

Administration and accounting costs

We recognise there is a cost for managing and administering projects. In most cases, grant recipients absorb these costs as an in-kind contribution to the project. However, grant funds may be used to pay these costs when justified.

Administration and accounting costs must be project specific and cannot exceed 10% of the grant.

Examples of administration costs you may include in your budget are itemised phone-call charges, recruitment and contractor advertising costs, office supplies purchased specifically for the project, et cetera. You must quantify these costs in your budget. Do not include any ongoing or regular administration costs of your organisation, such as an office lease.

The cost of compiling Trust reports or conducting monitoring and evaluation activities is not considered an administration cost. You may not claim this as salaries/contractor expenses.

We periodically audit projects. You must be able to demonstrate that all administration costs **directly relate to the project**.

Please note there are different final financial certification requirements for different grantees.

For community groups/non-government organisations:

- on completion of the project, you will need to have your final financial report independently certified by a suitably qualified accountant (this will be required by your funding agreement and details of the requirements are further explained on the Trust website (see 'Section 3: Resources'). You should allocate grant funds for the costs of obtaining this certification.

For government agencies and universities:

- you will need to have your final financial report certified by your chief financial officer or equivalent, regardless of the budget amount.

Cash contributions

Provide details for all committed (and pending) funding contributions pledged by project partner organisations (including your own) against your project activities.

If partnership funding has been committed at the time of applying for the grant, provide written evidence of partnership funding with your application.

If you have pending applications for funding at the time of applying to the Trust, you need to provide written evidence of partnership funding once it has been obtained.

However, please include information in your budget on all grant organisations you have applied to. This may include federal, state and local government departments, other trusts and foundations, and corporate sponsorship options.

In-kind contributions

Values for each item should be calculated using current market rates for goods or materials, hourly rates of pay for professional staff services and sensible volunteer valuation (that is, at a reduced rate proportionate to current award rates for professional contractors).

Hours estimated for volunteer contribution should also be realistic. These form part of the project measures that you will report on if your application is successful.

Refer to the **sample workplan** (see 'Section 3: Resources' for guidance on how to present in-kind contributions).

Supporting information

Letters of support from collaborators and end users are optional during the EOI stage. However, they are mandatory for the invited application stage.

You must submit letters of support from all major collaborators and end users.

Letters should describe the participation or contribution. For example, this may include labour costs, mapping, plant, volunteer hours or cash within the project timeframe. It may also include either the committed (such as cash) or estimated value (such as labour hours, materials, volunteer hours) of the contribution.

- Refer to the Letters of support: tips and sample (see 'Section 3: Resources').
- 'Section 1: Expressions of interest' includes guidance on submitting attachments such as CVs, maps and other files.

Risk management plan

Consider risks to successfully delivering your project on time and on budget. You should include options for reducing their likelihood and/or severity.

The 'Risk rating calculator' in GMS provides guidance on determining risk level.

Table 5 provides examples of risks to successful delivery of a project.

Table 5 Risk management plan example

Risk description	Likelihood	Severity	Risk level	Risk treatment action (How can you reduce the risk?)	Likelihood (Has the treatment action you identified reduced the potential likelihood?)	Severity (Has the treatment action you identified reduced the potential severity?)	Revised risk level
Failure to engage stakeholders in project activities	Remote	Moderate	Acceptable	Engage a range of stakeholder organisations and include publicity and engagement strategies such as field days, citizen science, cultural activities, etc.	Improbable	Moderate	Desirable
Pilot program for new techniques being researched produce poor quality outcomes	Occasional	Significant	Undesirable	Meet with property owners adjacent to experiment sites and discuss objectives of the project and strategies for alternative management.	Remote	Moderate	Acceptable
Catastrophic event (e.g. flood, fire, vandalism)	Probable	Catastrophic	Catastrophic	Consider alternative means of delivering education, e.g. via online workshops.	Improbable	Significant	Acceptable
Loss of project records and photographs	Remote	Significant	Undesirable	Ensure survey results are presented to the committee electronically and in hard copy and kept in 2 places.	Improbable	Low	Desirable

Risk description	Likelihood	Severity	Risk level	Risk treatment action (How can you reduce the risk?)	Likelihood (Has the treatment action you identified reduced the potential likelihood?)	Severity (Has the treatment action you identified reduced the potential severity?)	Revised risk level
Change of project manager	Occasional	Significant	Undesirable	Have more than one person familiar with/responsible for the project's aims and objectives who is kept up to date on progress. Project manager provides updates as monthly committee meetings.	Improbable	Low	Desirable
Failure to obtain permits/approvals	Possible	Significant	Catastrophic	Review of approvals processes will be a standing item on project team meeting agenda to ensure early intervention if required	Improbable	Moderate	Acceptable

Section 3: Resources

About the Trust:

- [Environmental Research Grants Program homepage](#)
- [Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2025](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029](#) (PDF 2.9 MB)
- [Sample workplan](#) (XLSX 31 KB)

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 Supplier Code of Conduct](#)

Other resources:

- [Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water knowledge strategy](#)
- [Grants Management System online portal user manual](#)
- [I Work for NSW](#) (find examples of position descriptions)
- [Letters of support: tips and sample](#) (DOCX 86K)
- [NSW Government logo](#)
- [Saving our Species Research Needs catalogue](#)
- [Saving Our Species science research strategy and the plan on a page](#) (PDF 81.2 KB)