# Introduction

An online information session was held on Wednesday 8 February 2023, to provide information on the Long-Term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices Grants Program.

Hosts: Candice Mohan and Luke Young

## Transcript

[Event begins]

Candice Mohan:  
Hello. My name is Candice Mohan and on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, I'd like to welcome you to this information session on the Future Drought Fund’s Long-Term Trials Drought Resilient Farming Practices grants opportunity. Before we start, I would like to begin with an acknowledgement of country. I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we're broadcasting from today. I'd like to pay my respects to their elders past and present. I would also like to pay my respects to the traditional custodians of all the lands on which you may be joining us from today and to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that may be joining us. In this information session we will provide you with information on the Future Drought Fund, the Long-Term Trials program itself, what types of projects we are looking for, the application process and assessment criteria, eligible and ineligible criteria, and some useful links to help you complete your application. I'd now like to introduce you to our programme manager Luke Young. Luke is the director of the Drought Resilience Innovation team and is responsible for administering this programme. Welcome Luke.

Luke Young:   
Thanks Candice and thanks to everyone who is joining us today. It's great to be here to provide you with some more information.

Candice Mohan:   
So, let’s get started. The Future Drought Fund’s got an important role in helping farmers and their communities get ready for drought. We know drought is a natural part of the Australian landscape and droughts are likely to become more frequent and severe with climate change. That's why the Australian government makes $100 million available each year through the Future Drought Fund for programmes to improve the drought preparedness of Australian agriculture. The fund represents a shift in drought policy from a reliance on in-drought support to investing more in drought preparedness. An independent consultative committee guides the fund's investment in the areas of better climate information, better planning, better practises, and better prepared communities. The Long-Term Trials of drought resilient farming practises programme sits within the FDF theme of better practises, and it's all about reducing the risk around drought resilient farming practises in a way that encourages uptake by farmers. This programme is a $40 million investment to support long term trials of innovative farming practises focused on drought resilience in a changing climate. It's also a unique funding opportunity in that the trials are long term. So, Luke, can you tell us a bit more about the program?

Luke Young:   
Yeah, sure thanks Candice. The program will fund projects that contribute to improve drought resilience through investigations that explore innovative approaches to farm productivity and natural capital. A limited number of grants will be available, each up to $8 million, for eligible organisations to work with farmers to deliver long term trials between now and 2028 with the eventual aim of adoption on farms. The grants will be provided following a competitive grant process through the community grants hub and the grant guidelines, as many of you will have seen, are available on their website. Applications close on the 15th of March 2023 at 9:00 PM AEDT.

Candice Mohan:   
Thanks Luke So, can you tell us a bit more about what kinds of projects you're looking to fund under this programme?

Luke Young:   
Sure. So, when completing their applications, applicants need to show how their project will trial practises that specifically focus on, and may prove, to be effective in increasing drought resilience and trial novel, experimental and/or transformational practises that do not currently have a sufficient scientific evidence base. The practises must also promote adoption by farmers. The applications should include at least one location where activities can be assessed in scientifically and statistically valid ways and could utilise trials, making a use of network of sites or trials that involve combinations of experimental plots, paddocks farms and consider technologies for scaling up. They need to deliver scientifically rigorous results and trial practises relative to drought resilience in the cropping, grazing and mixed farming sectors. We've chosen these sectors because they account for around 60% of all Australian farming businesses, and evidence suggests that they are particularly susceptible to productivity losses due to drought and climate change. Applicants must consider the input of farmers in the trial process. Consortium formed to apply for this programme must include at least a farmer member, or members, this is to ensure that projects being undertaken are relevant to Australian producers and their communities. Applicants will need to consider opportunities for extension activities to promote future adoption, and projects should deliver public benefits.

Candice Mohan:   
So what I'm hearing is that the projects that will be prioritised for this opportunity will have a strong and primary focus on drought resilience, trial innovative or experimental practises that need to build their scientific evidence base and use at least one location where activities can be assessed, but multiple trial sites are encouraged. Projects will be relevant to the cropping, grazing and all mixed farming sectors, and include farmer members in the consortium making the application. They must also consider extension activities to encourage adoption in the long term and be in the best interests of the public.

Luke Young:  
That's right Candice.

Candice Mohan:   
Let's unpack that a bit to help applicants understand it a little bit more and guide their applications. Most of our audience will be familiar with the concept of drought resilience. Can you explain to us what you mean by the term drought resilience in this programme?

Luke Young:   
So when we look at the definition of drought resilience, it is the ability to adapt, reorganise or transform in response to changing temperatures and increasing variability and scarcity of rainfall for improved economic, environmental, and social wellbeing. The drought resilience practises that applicants propose through this programme must target improved future drought resilience as its primary focus. That is, they must seek to support continued agricultural productivity and profitability during times of drought and support faster recovery of agricultural productivity and profitability. Following times of drought, applicants must clearly demonstrate how their project will deliver to future drought resilience, not just mention drought resilience. This is a crucial requirement if your project is to be successful. If you have an existing proposal, that’s looking for funding, please do not just add the words drought resilience and think that you'll be successful. We will only be funding projects that have drought resilience is their central focus and which clearly deliver to the programme objectives.

Candice Mohan:   
All right. What about the descriptions of the types of activities people might be looking to trial?

Luke Young:  
Yes, so you would have seen if you'd read the grant opportunity guidelines or some of the other information that's out there about the programme that business as usual practises will not be eligible for funding, we’re specifically looking for projects that will trial practises that may be, and you have seen us use these words, novel, experimental, innovative, or transformational. We're looking to see trials of practises that may currently have more anecdotal evidence than scientific backing, but that may prove to be effective in building drought resilience. The overarching aim is to build the scientific evidence-based practises that fit this description so that farmers can be more confident in their uptake of them over time.

Candice Mohan:  
Great. I’m expecting there's probably going to be some questions around public benefits as well. How can applicants show the public good behind their proposals?

Luke Young:  
So public good benefits are a key funding requirement of the Future Drought Fund Act. Public benefits include economic and productivity growth and environmental improvements that are valued by the government and by the community. Funded projects can involve private benefits, but these need to be more than offset by public benefits and/or co contributions from non-government sources.

Candice Mohan:  
This sounds like an exciting grant opportunity for different kinds of organisations to work together collaboratively on a long-term project and to build and support those relationships. But it's also a great opportunity for organisations to include farmers in the trial process, which will ensure that the practises being trialled are practical and fit for purpose. So how do applicants go about applying?

Luke Young:  
So to apply, you must complete the online application form via Grant Connect, make sure you provide all the information requested, address the eligibility and assessment criteria, include any attachments, and submit by 15 March 2023 before 9 PM (AEDT). No applications will be accepted after this day. All applicants should read the assessment criteria within the grand opportunity guidelines very carefully to ensure that they know exactly what we expect in their application. On screen now is a list of the criteria, and they're weighting. There are different word limits for each of the criterion, ranging between approximately 525 and 900 words. You must address all the criteria in its specific text box, but I might just highlight that criteria two and three have several distinct things to address in each, and they have a 40% and 30% weighting, respectively, in your application. So, these two criteria account for 70% of what we want to know about your project, what it is, why it matters, how it's going to be delivered and by who. Other criteria require that you describe the innovative approach you proposed to bring to the design of a long-term trial and how you're proposed activities represent value for money. So really make sure you understand what we're asking of you under each of these criteria.

Candice Mohan:   
Are there any additional documents that applicants need to provide with their applications?

Luke Young:   
Yes, there is, so there's optional project plan template to complete. There's a letter of support document that all members of the consortium must sign, and a trustee document, required if applying as a trustee on behalf of a trust. I'd just like to point out here that the letters of support from consortium members are not just a recommendation or a referee report. Each letter should provide details of how the member fits in the consortium's governance structure, how they will work with the lead applicant, the relevant experience and how they will continue to work on the project activities. The trust deeds need to verify that the trust exists and the individual applying on behalf of the trust has authority to do so. Your application will be considered non-compliant and will not proceed to the assessment if the online application is not completed correctly if the required attachments are not provided or if you don't use the mandatory templates. You can find more information on these under section 7.1 of the grant guidelines.

Candice Mohan:   
Thanks Luke. That's really good information to know. Are there things you suggest people do before they start their application?

Luke Young:   
Read and understand the grant guidelines, particularly the objective of the programme and the assessment criteria. This is the most important document for completing your application as it has all the details on everything we need and have discussed so far and more. I would suggest reading through the questions and answers document and looking at the sample Commonwealth Standard agreement so that you know what you're applying for. All these key documents are available in the community grants hub website. Most times you'll find the answer to the question you're looking for in these documents, otherwise, contact the community grants hub for help.

Candice Mohan:  
Can we talk a little bit now about who is eligible to apply for this grant?

Luke Young:  
So, for these grants we’re seeking applications from collaborative, multidisciplinary and multi-institution consortium, including farmers. We’re seeking applications from consortium only, and they must nominate a lead organisation that will be solely accountable to the department for the delivery of the activities. On the screen now is a list of entities that are eligible to apply as a lead entity.

Candice Mohan:   
And are there other eligibility criteria?

Luke Young:   
There are, and I will just mention two here. A trustee can apply on behalf of a trust if they meet the criteria for an eligible entity, and that lead organisations must have an Australian business number and account with Australian financial institution and be registered for GST. There are more details on who is eligible to apply in the grant opportunity guidelines. They're a great resource and they spell out all the eligibility requirements in detail, and the community grants hub, as said before is always available to help with interpretation.

Candice Mohan:   
I guess that if we've got eligibility criteria, it must mean we have ineligibility criteria as well. So, can you talk to us a little bit about who's not eligible?

Luke Young:   
Of course, so on screen now is a list of those not eligible to apply, which includes individuals, non-corporate and state and territory governments. I will note that there are some caveats around the eligibility criteria, so make sure you go over the information carefully. It's all in the grant opportunity guidelines.

Candice Mohan:   
So, as an example, does that mean individuals can’t apply for this grant?

Luke Young:   
Yeah, in a way it does. Ineligible entities like individuals, sole traders or international organisations can still be a part of a consortium though with eligible Australian entity as the lead. So, if you have a suitable project, we encourage you to partner with one of the eligible entities listed previously.

Candice Mohan:   
Given you are only seeking applications from consortia as we've just outlined, what other things should people consider here?

Luke Young:   
So you should consider if you're applying as the leader of a consortium that you must provide a mandatory letter of support from each of the consortium parties, an example that has been provided as part of the application form. You will also need to outline whether members of your consortium will make any cash or in-kind co-contributions. A budget document is also attached as part of the application form to do this. On that note, I should mention that while cash or in-kind co-contributions and not mandatory, applications that do include these will be considered favourably. There's more information on this in the guidelines.

Candice Mohan:   
So this programme has some significant requirements pertaining to consortia is what I'm hearing. Firstly, to apply, organisations must join together as a consortium to deliver the proposed project and they must appoint a lead organisation. Then the lead organisation must be an eligible entity as outlined in section 4.1, the grant opportunity guidelines and this lead entity must submit the application form and enter the grant agreement with the Commonwealth. If you're needing more information on the consortium requirements, it's in section 7.2 of the grant opportunity guidelines.

Luke Young:   
Yes, that’s right.

Candice Mohan:  
So what about the types of projects that people could get funding for? What types of eligible activities they should be proposing?

Luke Young:  
So to be eligible for the programme, projects must align with the objectives of the programme as outlined in section 2 of the guidelines and meet the requirement of an eligible agricultural industry that falls within the cropping, grazing or mixed farming sectors. So, as you'll see on the screen now, you could consider projects like rotational grazing techniques to conserve pasture, diversification of farming practises and systems, multi-species mixes for grazing and crop production purposes or technologies for supporting digital cropping and livestock management activities. Please bear in mind that this list on the screen is not exhaustive, it's just an example.

Candice Mohan:  
Okay, grantees will be able to spend the grant money in what ways? What types of eligible expenditure should they be proposing?

Luke Young:   
So, you'll see on the slide now, we have some examples of eligible expenditures. There are a range of items and services grant money can be spent on, and these can be found in section 5.3 of the guidelines. You must outline your proposed expenditures in the application form, including what you'll be spending the grant money on and what you or your consortium will spend any co-contributions on. Again, Applicants are not required to co-contribute funding to the delivery of their projects. However, the extent of any co-contributions offered will be considered when assessing your applications. Any in-kind expenditure must also be included. In-kind or non-cash expenditure can include labour contributions, facilities, equipment, and services provided by you or your project partners.

Candice Mohan:   
Okay, Luke. So, then what about ineligible expenditure?

Luke Young:   
So, on the screen again, you'll see a list of ineligible expenditures. This information can be found under section 5.4 of the grant opportunity guidelines. It is important to note you can only spend grant money on eligible expenditures that you have incurred on an agreed project as defined in your grant agreement. To be eligible, expenditures must be a direct cost of the project, be incurred by you for required project activities and be spent between the activity start and end dates. Look into the grant guidelines and the Q and A on the landing page for a more comprehensive list.

Candice Mohan:   
Okay, great. Thanks for that explanation. I feel like it's time for a recap, can you go over some of the key dates again for us?

Luke Young:   
So once again, the closing date and time for applications is 15 March 2023 before 9 PM (AEDT), applications can only be submitted through the community grants hub on the Grants Connect site. Commonly asked questions can be found on the community grants hub Q and A page, and if you can't find the answer you're looking for, you can submit a request through their website via email or over the phone. Please note the community grants hub will close their question period on the 7 March, so make sure you get any additional questions in before this date. Questions submitted after 7 March will not be answered. The FAQ document on the Grant Connect page will be updated regularly to include any new questions. So, make sure you keep checking this out to. Successful grantees are expected to be notified from late June with activities starting not too long after this.

Candice Mohan:  
Thanks, Luke. I think we've come to the end of the session. Just a reminder that we have received a number of questions and some of the Q and A’s that our team have been able to answer have been published on the community grants hub website and that will be updated over time, so make sure you keep an eye on that. Otherwise, thanks to Luke and the members of the future fund team for your time and participation in today's session.

Luke Young:   
Thank you very much, Candice, and good luck to everybody looking to apply.