



Australian Government

Community
Grants Hub
Improving your grant experience



Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program

2020–21 to 2021–22

Small Grants (Round 1)

General feedback for applicants

Overview

As part of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's (the department) commitment to sharing information, and as an acknowledgement of the time and effort applicants have put into developing applications, the department is pleased to share this feedback for the Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program Small Grants (Round 1) (the program).

Round 1 of the program opened on 3 March 2021 and closed on 31 March 2021, 9:00 pm AEDT.

In total, 93 applications were received which included 2 applications from ineligible organisations and one application which was withdrawn.

On 29 July 2021, 73 applications were announced for funding to a value of \$3,089,835.30 (GST inclusive). A list of the successful projects can be found on the department's [website](#).

This feedback is provided to assist applicants to understand what generally comprised a strong application and the features of stronger responses to the assessment criteria.

Unsuccessful applicants are encouraged to consider how this feedback applies to their application and, should they wish to apply for grant funding in the future, are encouraged to use this information to increase their chances of gaining funding in subsequent rounds and other programs.

Program background

The Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program is a \$20 million program which is funding community-led, practical, on-ground projects to improve the ecological health and condition of rivers and wetlands in the Basin. This program forms part of the \$269.6 million Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package, which seeks to re-engage communities in the work to restore the ecological health of the Murray-Darling Basin whilst supporting economic development and jobs.

The package was announced by the Hon Keith Pitt MP, Minister for Resources and Water on 4 September 2020.

A total of \$20 million GST exclusive over 2 years is available for the Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program. Under the small grants stream, up to \$10 million GST exclusive is available over 2 separate rounds.

The application period opened on 3 March 2021 and closed on 31 March 2021. Applicants could apply for up to \$50,000 in funding over the funding period.

Round 2 of the small grants stream and the large grants stream will commence in 2021–22.

Selection process

An open, competitive selection process was used, allowing a range of organisations who met the eligibility criteria to apply.

Applications were first screened for eligibility and compliance against the requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

All eligible and compliant applications were then assessed against 2 equally weighted assessment criteria:

1. Describe the extent to which the on-ground activities will improve the health and ecological condition of rivers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin.
2. Your capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project.

Information on what made a strong response to each criteria is provided here.

Following assessment by the Community Grants Hub, a Selection Advisory Panel (the panel) made recommendations on successful and unsuccessful applications to the program decision-maker. The panel comprised a chair and 5 panel members.

The panel recommended applicants based on the strength of their responses to the selection criteria and their ability to meet the grant requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. Specifically, the panel recommended applicants who best:

- demonstrated community engagement and support
- demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring the project met its intended objectives as identified in the proposal
- outlined how the proposal would contribute to meeting the outcomes/objectives of the Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program
- provided detailed information of how the activity would be achieved within set timeframes.

The panel provided their recommendations to Minister Pitt for decision.

General feedback for applicants

Details about what made a strong response to each selection criterion is provided in the section below.

Writing and providing details

Applications needed to clearly address the selection criteria; this includes addressing sub-criteria.

Low scoring applications often lacked sufficient relevant detail to effectively describe what the project was and how the grant activity would meet the program objectives and the selection criteria.

Higher scoring applications were able to clearly describe the activities to be funded, and identify a clear and direct link between their project proposal and the program objectives.

Applications should be proof-read for quality assurance prior to submission.

Undertaking activities in an ecologically sound manner

Stronger applications also showed consideration of best-practice natural resource and land management when describing activities to be undertaken with grant funding. For example:

- activities to support native species, including threatened species where possible, and aligning these activities with relevant threatened species recovery plans
- removal of pest plant species being undertaken in a staggered manner to ensure ground cover is not removed over a large area at once
- fencing having wildlife-friendly design
- installation of fish screens on any new pumps purchased with funding under the program
- activities to improve water quality and landscapes more broadly, such as altering grazing patterns or installing cattle exclusion fences along waterways to reduce run-off.

Budgets

Budgets often lacked detail, with large amounts of funding against a small number of items. Stronger applications provided a finer level of detail, and demonstrated a sound basis for the costing provided (for example, by reference to a quote).

Ineligible activities

Several applications included ineligible activities. A list of ineligible activities is at section 5.4 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Applications who did not sufficiently address the on-ground activity component of the program guidelines were deemed unsuitable to receive grant funding. In particular, applications involving research and flora and/or fauna surveys were often problematic as they did not sufficiently link this to funded on-ground activities, such as assessing the benefit of their on-ground activities after completion.

Criteria specific feedback

Criterion 1

Please describe the extent to which the on-ground activities will improve health and ecological condition of rivers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Sub-criterion	Strong responses:
demonstrated how the activity will directly improve the health of rivers, wetlands, and/or floodplains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">provided a clear and tangible link in their application as to how their activity will help to improve the health of rivers, wetlands and/or floodplainsdemonstrated the use of best available science to inform their projects.
demonstrated relevant community support and showed evidence of involving local communities during project delivery and/or following project completion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">identified key stakeholders and a community engagement strategyprovided evidence of community support and role of community members/organisations in the activity.
demonstrated the extent to which the project is consistent with any existing plans and objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">provided a clear description and example of how their activity aligns with existing plans and objectives, such as the Native Fish Recovery Strategy or local environment management plans.



Criterion 2

Your capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project.

Sub-criterion	Strong responses:
<p>identified what approvals are necessary and the status of approvals (for example, whether approvals have been granted or can be granted in time to enable project completion within the grant period).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identified what approvals were required ▪ provided evidence of granted approvals ▪ provided timeframes for the approval process and were able to show the project would be able to be completed within the grant period.
<p>demonstrated their track record carrying out similar projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ provided evidence to demonstrate previous project management experience in similar projects.
<p>demonstrated access to personnel with the right expertise and experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identified key personnel/organisations with relevant experience and expertise who will support the project, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – plans and qualifications for using hazardous substances (such as herbicides) – use of contractors experienced with voluntary and/or mandatory Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures for the management of pest animals.
<p>demonstrated their plan for managing the project, including project risks such as work health and safety, where relevant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identified a project management plan had been developed, including risk management strategies.
<p>demonstrated how they will buy goods and services, where possible from local businesses, including Australian made goods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identified they would work with Australian disability enterprises or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses in the delivery of the project, where possible ▪ identified local organisations/businesses where goods and services will be sought.
<p>demonstrated how their project's outcomes will be maintained beyond the term of grant funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ provided details on how plantings would be supported until fully established ▪ demonstrated ongoing commitment to maintaining the project beyond the term of grant funding, for example through identifying who would be responsible for on-going maintenance and how this would be funded.