# Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country Grant Information Recording: Video transcript

28 August 2025

## Introduction

This is the accessible text transcript of a video is designed to support First Nations businesses and organisations in applying for the Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country grant round.

## Transcript

* [Video begins]
* 55 Second Video at opening - Michael
* Mell:

Hi everyone, and welcome! Thanks for joining us today for this information session on the new First Nations grant funded by the Future Drought - Fund Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country. I’m Mell Atkinson from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and I’m here with Michael O’Keeffe.

* Michael:

Yura, Mob! Great to be here. We’re really excited to walk you through this important new initiative that’s part of the Australian Government’s commitment to building climate and drought resilience—in partnership with Mob.

* [Slide – Acknowledgment of Country]
* Michael:

Before we dive in, we’d like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the lands we’re joining from today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people.

*We would like to pay our respects to the traditional custodians on whose lands we gather today.*

*We would like to acknowledge their spiritual connection to their lands and waterways.*

*We extend this respect to Elders, past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. We thank you for your wisdom. May your ancestors watch over us, as we tread lightly on Country today.*

* [Slide - About the Future Drought Fund (FDF)]
* Mell:

Thank you. As Michael said, we are here to talk to you about the current grant opportunity funded by the Future Drought Fund, or FDF, for short. The FDF is a big part of the Australian Government’s plan to help rural, remote and regional communities prepare for dry times. It was set up in 2019 to support projects, like this grant we are going to talk about today, to build resilience to drought and the changing climate.

* Michael:

The FDF has been supporting agricultural communities and farmers for a few years now. But it’s not just about farming, it’s about Mob, our Country, and our culture. The FDF, as part of the First Nations Initiative are developing programs that help communities stay strong, protect Country, and keep our deep knowledge about the land and water ways flowing across generations.

* Mell:

And that’s where this Program comes in. The *Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country Program* is one of the FDF’s key initiatives. It’s designed to support First Nations communities to lead the way—designing and delivering projects that reflect their priorities, values, and their deep connection to Country.

* Michael:

This is the first time the FDF have run a First Nations targeted grant before. It’s great that the FDF recognises that Mob have been caring for Country for tens of thousands of years. And it’s reassuring to know, that Mob had a say in how this grant was put together.

Mell: Yeah, 100% Michael. That was central to the core design of this program. First Nations people are best placed to talk about First Nations priorities. We’ve been incredibly lucky to have the FDF First Nations Advisory Group shape and support this grant. They have played a central role in guiding the design of this Program.

Their collective experience and cultural knowledge have been instrumental in ensuring that the grant is not only effective—but also respectful, inclusive, and grounded in the priorities of First Nations people.

Michael, we are so fortunate you could join us, as a proud Quandamooka man living on Ngunnawal country, you are actually a member of our First Nations Advisory Group.

Michael: That’s right, Mell. Being apart of the Advisory Group meant we provided strategic advice that helped shape the design and implementation of this grant. We wanted to make sure that the unique needs, traditional practices, and deep connections to Country were front and centre in every aspect of the Program.

One of the key areas we contributed was the development of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. Our input meant this document—and the broader Program were considerate to cultural safety, inclusivity, and genuinely relevant to Mob.

Mell: Absolutely, the Group also guided myself and my Program team.

Looking ahead, the Advisory Group will continue to work closely with our Delivery Partners to co-design monitoring, evaluation, and learning—or MEL—alongside communities. This ensures that the Program remains responsive, accountable, and community-led every step of the way.

Michael: It’s a great example of what can happen when we listen, collaborate, and honour the knowledge that’s been carried for generations.

This program is about backing our knowledge and leadership—making sure our communities have the resources to respond to climate challenges, including dry times, in ways that are culturally grounded and community-led.

* [Slide - CtG]
* Mell:

It also supports the goals of the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap**, specifically **Priority Reform 2.**

Michael: Definitely. This is all about strengthening the community-controlled sector. Plus, it contributes to outcomes like economic development, maintaining our cultural and spiritual relationships with Country, and keeping our culture and language strong.

* Mell: And that’s what makes this program special. It was shaped by the perspectives of the First Nations Advisory Group, NIAA and DCCEEW, to ensure First Nations voices are heard, and that the program always circles back to the intent and how it aligns to CtG targets.
* [Slide - What’s this program all about?]
* Michael:

So, that’s the big picture. What about the details? Maybe I should let Mob know about the actual grant.

Well, this program will run from 2025 to 2028. There’s $12 million available to support Mob with place-based projects that build resilience to drought and climate impacts. The Grant is a targeted competitive round, meaning it’s open only to Mob.

* Mell:

So, it’s only open to First Nations organisations and businesses, and it’s also a devolved grant program. This means the FDF will fund First Nations Delivery Partners, who will then manage activities and funding directly with communities. So, it really is, as you say, Mob working with Mob. Delivery Partners working with their regions, their communities.

* [Slide - What do Delivery Partners do?]
* Michael:

There’s that word again. Delivery Partner. So, who are Delivery Partners, and what do delivery partners actually do?

* Mell:

Great question.

The FDF will fund up to six First Nations businesses or organisations to act as Delivery Partners, or a consortia as long as the lead applicant is First Nations.

Delivery Partners will work closely with regions and communities to co-design projects that reflect local priorities. They’ll then support their community to deliver those projects on the ground.

* Michael:

So really, Delivery Partners work with Mob to figure out what resilience activities they want to do and help them make it happen. So it’s all about First Nations leadership, community, and cultural safety. Delivery Partners won’t be doing the on-ground work themselves, but they’ll be the backbone—managing the funding, supporting co-design, and ensuring projects align with the program’s goals.

* [Slide – Seeing change on-ground ]

Mell: – Exactly. The hope is that through these activities, economic, social, environmental and cultural transformations will occur in the region.

How we know that these activities are strengthening Country will be through Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning or MEL.

First Nations peoples have cared for land, sea, and river systems for over 65,000 years. That’s an extraordinary legacy of resilience, adaptation, and deep ecological knowledge. Over that time, communities have developed sophisticated ways of living with and responding to climate change, including dry times and broader environmental shifts.

So, when we talk about MEL in this Program, we’re not starting from scratch. We’re building on that First Nations wisdom. It’s about honouring existing strengths: ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing—and making those pathways visible.

Rather than suggesting something needs to be changed, MEL in this context is about amplifying what’s already working. It’s a way to reflect, learn from experience, and adjust as needed—while staying true to cultural values and community priorities.

Ultimately, MEL isn’t just about measuring outcomes—it’s about storytelling, reflection, and growth. It’s about making space for First Nations voices to lead the way and ensuring that the Program evolves in partnership with community knowledge and leadership.

Michael, what can Delivery Partners expect from Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning?

Michael:

MEL is a critical part of this grant program—not just for accountability, but for learning and doing more good. We want to make sure that the work being done on Country is not only effective but also respectful and aligned with community priorities. And that shaping these processes are Cultural Safety, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and Data Sovereignty.

But let’s start with the basics. If a Delivery Partner is selected, they’d be expected to;

* [Slide - MEL]
* Collect and report data on activities, outcomes, and community engagement.
* Participate in regular check-ins with the program team.
* Contribute to shared learning sessions, whichare opportunities to reflect on what’s working and what’s not.
* Provide a combination of written or verbal progress reports every six months, and a final report at the end of the grant period.

Mell:
And we’re not just looking for numbers, right? We’re also interested in stories, reflections, and community feedback.

Michael:
Absolutely. We’re taking a mixed-methods approach—so quantitative data like participation numbers, but also qualitative insights like community narratives, photos, and even audio recordings, if that’s preferred.

Mell:
Now let’s talk about cultural safety. How are we embedding that into MEL?

* [Slide – MEL 2]

Michael:
This is a key priority. The FDF First Nations Advisory Group will work with the FDF MEL team to ensure that:

* MEL tools and methods are co-designed with communities.
* Data collection respects local protocols and knowledge systems.
* Communities have control over how their stories are shared, that it’s respectful to ICIP and Data Sovereignty Principles and
* Reporting formats are flexible—so if written reports aren’t the best fit, we can explore alternatives like video or oral storytelling.

Mell:
And we want to be clear that we’re making sure that Delivery Partners aren’t left to figure this out alone. There’ll be support and guidance throughout the grant period, including templates, training, and access to our team, if you have questions.

Michael:
Yes, and we’re encouraging Delivery Partners to build MEL capacity locally—whether that’s through training community members or partnering with local organisations who already have strong relationships and knowledge.

Mell:
So what’s one thing you’d want potential Delivery Partners to remember about MEL?

Michael:
That MEL isn’t just a reporting requirement, it’s a way to honour our work, amplify community voices, and strengthen resilience in a way that’s grounded in Country and culture.

Mell:
Beautifully said.

* Michael:

Ok, so we’ve covered the history of the program, how much is available, and we talked about MEL and how that applies to Delivery Partners. We know this program is for Mob, but what does that mean? How does a Delivery Partner show their eligibility?

* [Slide - Section 10.4 of the GoGs]
* Mell:

There’s a bit of flexibility here. You might be:
- An Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation (ACCO)
- A consortium led by a First Nations organisation
- A project management organisation listed on Supply Nation
- A land council registered with ORIC
- Or even a NACCHO (or AMS) delivering services in rural or remote areas

* Michael:

Is it just those sorts of organisations?

Mell:

No, those are examples. What matters is that the organisation meets the criteria outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

* Michael:

OK, so the key is that you’re a First Nations entity, connected to your region, and have the governance and capability to manage grants and support community-led projects.

* [Slide -What kinds of projects would delivery partners support?]

Mell:
That’s right.

Let’s talk about the kinds of projects Delivery Partners might support in their regions, what they could potentially list in their application. Michael, based on the program outcomes, what are we really looking for?

Michael:
Great question, Mell. The heart of this program is about strengthening resilience—social, cultural, economic, and environmental—through community-led, self-determined approaches. That means projects should be designed and delivered by Mob and reflect their local priorities and knowledge.

Mell:

So we’re talking about projects that are grounded in Country and culture. Can you give us some examples?

Michael:
Absolutely.

Let’s talk about wetlands—not just beautiful landscapes, but powerful allies in drought resilience. By restoring wetlands, we’re not only bringing back biodiversity, but also creating natural water and food sources. This helps communities bounce back faster from droughts and even opens up opportunities for eco-friendly farming, like growing native crops or fish for sale.

Mell:That’s great, Michael. Ever wondered about the roots of Australia’s wine industry? First Nations people have long contributed deep agricultural knowledge. Through education programs and industry events, we’re helping mainstream viticulture tap into this wisdom—especially when it comes to managing drought. Imagine developing new grape varieties that thrive in dry conditions, thanks to shared knowledge and collaboration.

And "Feeding livestock during drought can be tough and expensive. But here’s a smart solution: using native Indigenous plants as fodder. These plants need less water and fewer resources, cutting down costs and supporting sustainable farming. Plus, it empowers First Nations land managers to share their expertise in alternative feed options.

Michael:

Some great examples, Mell. But caring for Country isn’t just about land management—it’s about cultural continuity. Practices like Cultural Burning and hydrating Country are deeply rooted in ancestral law. They also play a vital role in building climate resilience. These traditions help future generations stay connected to culture while protecting the environment from drought and other climate risks."

Mell:

It sounds like there’s a lot of flexibility, as long as the project is community-led and aligns with the outcomes, that is to strengthen drought and climate resilience on Country.

Michael:
Exactly. Delivery Partners are there to support and enable—not direct. Their role is to walk alongside communities, help with coordination, and ensure projects are resourced and delivered in culturally safe ways.

And importantly, projects must be co-designed with the community. That means yarning with your community, getting mob involved, women, young people, and people with disability to shape solutions. Inclusion is a big part of this program.

* [Slide - Regions]

Mell: Exactily, it’s about making sure everyone can be involved. And part of that was to ensure these projects could take place across a broad geographic base.

Michael, maybe we should talk about where these projects can be delivered. In the application form we ask for which state or territory, however in the GoGs we use the word region, but what do we mean by that?

Michael: When you’re putting together your application, you can include activities that happen anywhere in Australia. You will need to say which State or Territory your region is in, which it crosses, however as this grant is for Mob, we didn’t want you to feel closed in by that. Your region is defined by you and your mob, in different places/ regions—as long as they’re all within Australia.

We know Mob is best placed to define our region. No one knows it like we do. We understand the local geography, culture, environment, economy, and Country better than anyone.

So, we’re not going to box you in—you get to decide what makes sense for your project.

What we’ll need from you is a clear idea of your region or regions you’re focusing on, and a bit of a story for defining it.

Just make sure you spell it out clearly in your application: where your project will happen, and why your region is the right fit. Time to tell us about you and your Mob. That helps us understand your thinking, where your roots are, your connection to that region and how the program can support your work in the best way possible.

Mell: There are some links to map examples in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, but as Michael said, no one knows your region better than you. The maps are just there as a guide only.

* [Slide - How does the funding work?]
* Mell:

Shall we talk about the money? The funding? We’ve mentioned it’s $12 million dollars, but how much is actually available to the Delivery Partner? Let’s share how that will be split and when the funding will be given so they can start designing their project.

* Michael:

The Program will provide up to $12 million (GST exclusive) over three financial years—from 2025–26 to 2027–28. Which essentially means, each financial year, a portion of the grant funding will be paid.

Mell:
And that funding is being delivered through a devolved grant model, right?

* [Slide – Devolved Model Diagram]

Michael:
Exactly. That means instead of the government funding individual projects directly, it will work through Delivery Partners who have those strong relationships and cultural capability in their region—who will manage and support the rollout of the activities in their communities.

Mell:
So what does that look like in practice for Delivery Partners?

* [Slide – Administrative and Project Funding]

Michael:
Each Delivery Partner can access up to $1 million (GST exclusive) per region. That’s made up of:

* Up to $1 million in administrative funding, which supports the Delivery Partner to design, manage, and coordinate the program.
* And up to $1 million in project funding, which is distributed to sub-grantees—local organisations, businesses, or groups—who will deliver the actual on-ground activities.

Mell:
You said, “up to”. So, if a Delivery Partner only wanted say $200,000 for admin funding and say $500,000 of project funding, that’d be ok?

Michael:

Definitely.

Mob, when you fill out the budget section in the application form, just make it clear what you want for Admin funding and Project funding.

Mell:

And don’t be shy about asking for the funds you need. If you’ve calculated, looked at your budget and you need $500,000, put that in the application form. Your application will be assessed holistically. Not specifically on the funding you are asking for. There is funding available for both admin and project funding. That’s a really important distinction. The administrative funding helps to ensure that Delivery Partners have the capacity to do this work well, so they can walk alongside communities and support them meaningfully.

Michael:
Absolutely. It recognises that good facilitation, cultural safety, and strong relationships take time and resources. And importantly, Delivery Partners aren’t limited to just one region. If you have the capacity and connections, you can roll out activities across multiple regions.

Mell:
So for example, if an organisation has strong ties in both the Pilbara and the Western Desert, or Eyre Region and the Far West Region or Cape York Region and the Barkly Region, they could potentially support projects in both areas?

Michael:
Exactly. As long as they can demonstrate capability to support sub-grantees, and uphold the principles of self-determination, cultural safety, and community leadership, they can apply across multiple regions. But they can also choose to focus on one region, neither approach is wrong.

Mell:
Thanks Michael. That really helps clarify how the funding works. If you’re considering applying as a Delivery Partner, think about where you have strong relationships, how you can support communities to lead, and how you’ll manage both the administrative and project sides of the funding.

Michael:

So, Mell, we know when and how the funding will be given, but what about the rules on spending it? There are certain things the Delivery Partner shouldn’t spend grant money on. We should outline that.

[Slide – Eligible Funding]

Mell:
That’s a really good idea, Michael. We want Mob to be creative and use the money in the way that best helps their community, but we should talk about the rules around that. We’ve talked a lot about what this program can support—but it’s just as important to be clear about what can’t be funded. Can you walk us through the key exclusions?

Michael:
Absolutely, Mell. This is really important for potential Delivery Partners and sub-grantees to understand the rules upfront. The grant is focused on building drought and climate resilience for Mob, so anything outside that scope won’t be eligible.

Mell:
So what are some of the main things that are excluded?

Michael:
Here’s a quick summary:

* You can’t use the funding for activities that are already the responsibility of government—like roads, schools, or health services.
* It must directly support First Nations organisations, businesses, or communities—so anything that benefits just one individual or private business without a broader community impact is out.
* You also can’t fund activities that have already happened, or where costs have already been incurred before the grant agreement is signed.

Mell:
That makes sense. What about infrastructure or equipment?

Michael:
Good question. You can’t use more than 20% of the grant on infrastructure, equipment, or assets. And you can’t use the grant to buy land or fund large infrastructure projects. The focus is on transformational change, not ongoing operational costs or maintenance.

Mell:
And I imagine anything commercial or profit-driven is also excluded?

Michael:
Exactly. The grant can’t be used to subsidise commercial operations, start-ups, or activities where the primary purpose is profit. We’re looking for projects that deliver public good—uplift communities, not just generating revenue.

Mell:
What about things like donations or overseas travel?

Michael:
Those are excluded too. No donations, gifts, sponsorships, or activities outside Australia. And importantly, the grant can’t be used for in-drought assistance—it’s about preparedness and resilience, not emergency relief.

Mell:
Thanks Michael. That’s a really helpful overview. So, for anyone applying, the key is to make sure your project is community-led, focused on resilience, and delivers lasting public benefit for First Nations peoples.

Michael:
Exactly. But if in doubt, reach out and ask—we want to support strong, eligible projects that make a real difference on Country.

* [Slide – How do you Apply?]
* Michael: Let’s chat about what applying might involve? How does an applicant apply?
* Mell: Alright, so let’s walk through how you actually apply for the grant opportunity. First things, head over to the GrantConnect website and look at the open grant rounds. You’ll find all the current opportunities listed there. You can do a search for Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country.

Now, before you can apply, you’ll need to register on GrantConnect, that’s the government’s central portal for grants. Once you’re registered, you’ll be able to access the application form and Grant Opportunity Guidelines and submit everything online.

When you’re ready to start your application, make sure you:

* Use the correct form,
* Answer all the assessment criteria clearly,
* Provide financial details,
* And confirm your organisation’s eligibility.

This is a targeted competitive grant round, open only to eligible First Nations entities. You’ll find all the details in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, especially Section 4.1 for eligibility and Section 12.4.

If you have any issues in lodging your form, please reach out for help. Because this grant opportunity closes on 16 December. Late applications won’t be accepted, unless under exceptional circumstances.

* [Slide – The assessment criteria]

Michael: Thanks, Mell. So now they know where to apply, let’s share how that application will be assessed.

When you apply, we’ll be looking at how well you respond to the criteria outlined in Section 6 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. The assessment process checks for eligibility, suitability, and compliance, so it’s important to make sure your application clearly addresses all the key points.

Your application will be reviewed by a team that may include Due Diligence officers, Assessors, Moderators (if needed) and a Selection Advisory Panel. Overall, they’ll be looking at how your proposal aligns with the intent of the program, and how well it meets the assessment criteria.

Mell: Each part of your application is weighted, so it’s not just about ticking boxes, it’s about telling a clear, compelling story. Specifically, we want to understand:

* How your project benefits First Nations peoples and communities, including diverse groups.
* How it will help build drought and climate resilience in your region.
* Whether your proposal is achievable—can it realistically be delivered within the timeframe?
* What financial controls and business systems you have in place to manage the funding.
* How you demonstrate good governance, including how you’ll ensure culturally safe business practices.
* And finally, how your proposal aligns with the funding principles in Section 6(3) of the Funding Plan.

The FDF is guided by a Funding Plan, which is updated every four years. The plan focuses on:

* Supporting local solutions,
* Building skills and knowledge,
* Trialling new tech and practices,
* Partnering with First Nations communities,
* And tracking progress.

It’s all about helping Australia become more drought-resilient over time.

So, when you're putting your application together, think about how you can clearly show these elements. It’s not just about what you plan to do—but how, why, and with what support systems.

* Michael:

Exactly. We want to hear about you and your community, and how you are going to work with them to care for Country and build drought resilience.

Have a read of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. These explain what the grant is for, who can apply, and what the assessors will be looking for, in deeper detail. It’s your roadmap for putting together a strong application.

So, if you’re thinking of applying, start building those partnerships now. Strong applications will show how you’ll be able to work with communities, manage funding, and deliver real outcomes. Your project management or grant management experience doesn’t need to be from an agricultural background. But it is important, when you’re filling out the application, you share with us your experience in running projects or grants with First Nations stakeholders, how those skills can transfer into managing drought and climate resilient projects with community.

If you have any questions you can contact the Community Grants Hub on 1800 020 283 (option 1) or email support@communitygrants.gov.au

Any questions you have will be added to the Questions and Answers section on the landing page so that you can see the response in writing.

* [Slide- Final thoughts. Contact details, dates]
* Mell:

This is a really exciting opportunity to support First Nations-led drought and climate resilience. If you’re a First Nations organisation with strong community ties and experience managing programs, we encourage you to apply. The Grant Opportunity Guidelines and Frequently asked Questions and Answers are available on the GrantConnect website, which goes into greater detail than we have today.

* Michael:

So if you still have questions, after looking that the GoGs and FAQ, reach out to the Community Grants Hub.

* Mell:

Thanks for joining us today. We’re looking forward to seeing your applications.

* Michael:

Take care, and we can’t wait to see your ideas!

[Video ends]

[End of transcript.]

**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia’s agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

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