



Future Drought Fund Resilient Landscapes opportunity webinar: program overview transcript

(Duration 25 mins 24 secs)

9 October 2024

Introduction

This is the transcript of a pre-recorded information session, presented by Tim Sides of the Future Drought Fund Innovations & Adoption Branch of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The grant funding round of the *Resilient Landscapes Program* is now open for applications. This information session aims to assist potential applicants to understand the requirements and objectives of this program through this visual and audio method to complement the written Grant Opportunity Guidelines and Question and Answers documents.

Transcript

[Webinar begins]

Hello, my name is Tim Sides. I am the acting Principal Director of the Future Drought Fund Innovations & Adoption Branch, at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

I'd like to welcome you to this information session on the Future Drought Fund's *Resilient Landscapes Program* Grant opportunity.

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 respect 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, and to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that may be watching.

In this information session I will be providing information on:

- the Future Drought Fund
- the Resilient Landscapes program
- what types of projects we are looking for
- the application process and assessment criteria
- eligibility criteria, and
- some other useful information to help you complete your application

Even though this session is pre-recorded, once you have read the questions and answers document, if you cannot find an answer, please forward any questions to the email address support@communitygrants.gov.au and the answers will be provided in the updated Q&A Document through the Grant Connect website.

Thanks for joining me for this session, it's great to have this opportunity to provide you with information about the program.

So, let's get started.

We often say drought is not a case of if, but when. That's why being prepared for when conditions start to dry is so important.

The Future Drought Fund is the Australian Government's major investment in drought preparedness and was established in 2019 with a \$5 billion dollar commitment. It provides secure and continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives as \$100 million from the Fund is made available each year to support drought resilience activities.

We know that farmers who have a business mindset towards their farm are more prepared for drought. As such, the FDF is about putting in place preparedness measures and foundations that farmers and communities can draw upon throughout the drought cycle.

We have a deliberate triple bottom line approach to deliver economic, social and environmental outcomes, which our stakeholders have told us is critical to drive impact.

This emphasises the important interconnectedness of these aspects of resilience working together as part of a complex system.

There are many programs available from the FDF that target these separate but related areas. Together these programs help farmers and regional communities to be supported and ready for when the next drought comes. Building resilience will help drive:

- a more innovative and profitable agricultural sector,
- sustainable and well-functioning farming landscapes, and
- resourceful and adaptable farming communities.

In this year's Budget, the Government committed \$519.1 million from the FDF over the next 8 years.

This next stage of the Future Drought Fund will provide on-ground programs, with a much stronger focus on broader climate resilience, greater public benefit through wider sharing of what works, support for longer-term trials, and a new program to assist First Nations communities deal with drought.

These programs will provide:

- Better tools for farmers to help mitigate the impact of drought on their farms; and
- Strategies for local communities to prepare for and manage risks through drought.

We have categorised our programs into 4 themes:

- Partnering for Local Solutions, including First Nations initiatives
- Building Knowledge, Skills, and Capability
- Innovating for Transformation; and
- Measuring Progress and Knowledge Sharing

The Resilient Landscapes Program sits within the FDF theme of Innovating for Transformation which focuses on building the agriculture sector, landscapes and communities' long-term resilience to drought and climate risks through transformational change.

The Resilient Landscapes program is a \$40 million dollar investment over 6 years to support projects to demonstrate how practices, technologies and approaches to manage natural resources contribute to building drought and climate resilience at scale, targeting opportunities for long-term transformational change.

The Resilient Landscapes program will also support projects that identify and manage natural capital tipping points or thresholds which build drought and climate resilience through improving landscape function and ecosystem services.

A limited number of grants will be available – each from \$2 million and up to \$6 million. Activities are to be undertaken between June 2025 and June 2030.

The grants will be awarded following a competitive grant process. The application forms and Grant Opportunity Guidelines are accessed through the Community Grants Hub website.

Applications close **on 19 November 2024 at 9pm Australian Eastern Daylight Savings Time.**

When completing your applications, applicants need to show how their project will:

- target integrated economic, environmental, and social drought and climate resilience for public good
- focus on achieving and measuring transformational change and impact at landscape scale by identifying natural capital tipping points, or thresholds in landscapes to improve or maintain the drought and climate resilience of social-ecological systems.
- enable farmers to be prepared for, and have the capacity and diversity of options to prepare, respond, and recover from drought
- promote learning and capacity building by communicating with landholders about the results of practices, technologies or approaches through demonstrations, field days and case studies
- be co-designed and delivered by a consortium of partners, which includes farmer representation in the consortium

For further context 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”.*

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

We are looking for projects that *primarily* address drought resilience. Applicants must clearly demonstrate how their project aims to deliver future drought and climate resilience, not just mention drought and climate resilience. This is a **crucial requirement** if your project is to be successful.

If you have an existing project proposal looking for funding, please do not just add in the words 'drought resilience' and think that you'll be successful. We will only be funding projects that have drought resilience as their central focus, and which clearly deliver to the program objectives.

A significant focus of the FDF is on public good benefits which are a key funding requirement of the *Future Drought Fund Act*.

Public benefits include delivering on the 3 strategic objectives of the FDF, which are to;

- build on economic resilience for a more innovative and profitable agricultural sector,
- increase environmental resilience for sustainable and improved functioning of farming landscapes, and to
- enhance social resilience for resourceful and adaptable farming communities.

Funded projects *can* involve private benefits. However these need to be more than offset by public benefits and/or co-contributions from non-government sources.

This is 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.

To apply you must complete the online application form via GrantConnect.

Make sure you provide all the information requested, address the eligibility and assessment criteria, include the mandatory attachments, and submit by **19 November 2024 before 9pm Australian Eastern Daylight Savings Time**. No applications will be accepted after this date. You can find more information on this under 7.3 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

All applicants should read the assessment criteria within the Grant Opportunity Guidelines very carefully, to ensure they know exactly what we expect in their application.

The assessment criteria are listed in section 6 of the Grant Opportunities Guidelines.

You must address all of the assessment criteria in the application.

On screen now is a list of the criteria and their weighting. There are different word limits for each of the criterion, ranging between approximately 450 and 900 words.

You must address all the criteria in its specific text box, but I might just highlight that Criteria 2 and 4 have a 30 and 40% weighting, respectively, in your application.

So, these two criteria account for 70% of what we want to know about your project – what it is, how it will be designed, how it is going to be delivered, and by who.

Other criteria require that you describe the project in detail and how your proposed activities represent value for money.

All criteria have a number of distinct things to address.

When reading the Grant Opportunity Guidelines you should also make sure you are aware of the responsibilities for grantees to report on project progress and monitoring, evaluation and learning, MEL, responsibilities which are outlined in section 12. We are committed to ensuring MEL is undertaken so as to ensure project and program outcomes and objectives are being achieved.

So really make sure you understand what we are asking of you under each of these criteria.

There are mandatory project budget and theory of change templates to complete, and each consortium partner must provide a signed 'letter of support', and if applying as a Trustee on behalf of a Trust also a 'Trust Deed' document is required. The Trust Deed needs to verify that the Trust exists and that the individual applying on behalf of the Trust has authority to do so.

I'd like to just point out here, that the Letters of Support from consortium members are not just a recommendation or reference report. Each signed letter should provide details of how the member fits into the consortium's governance structure, how they will work with the lead applicant, their relevant experience, and how they will contribute to the project activities.

Your application will be considered non-compliant and will not proceed to assessment if the online application is not completed correctly, if the required attachments are not provided, and/or if you modify or don't use the mandatory templates.

You can find more information on these under 7.1 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

I'd like to emphasise that before starting an application, it is important to read and understand the Grant Opportunity Guidelines – particularly the objectives of the program and the assessment criteria. This is the most important document for completing your application and has details on everything we have discussed so far and more.

You may be asking 'What is a Theory of Change'?

A Theory of Change is a description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. Mapping the Theory of Change helps to identify the "missing middle". It's the 'why' and 'how' between what a project does, its activities or interventions, and achieving the desired goals and change.

All applicants must complete the mandatory Theory of Change template provided. The template steps applicants through the process of developing a Theory of Change.

I also recommend reading through the Questions and Answers document and looking at a sample Commonwealth Standard Grant Agreement—so you know what you're applying for. All these key documents are available on the Community Grants Hub website once you register.

Most times you'll find the answer you're looking for in these documents. Otherwise, contact Community Grants Hub for help.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Next, I'll discuss who is eligible to apply for this grant. More detail on eligibility criteria is found in section 4 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

To be eligible, you must be an Australian-based organisation, capable of entering into a legally binding and enforceable agreement with the Commonwealth

In terms of eligibility, projects **must** include a consortium arrangement, which is considered to be 2 or more entities working together to develop and deliver an eligible project.

Each consortium arrangement must nominate a lead organisation as the 'applicant' who will be solely accountable to the department for the delivery of the activities, reporting, and other contractual requirements. In addition, a consortium arrangement must include farmer representation, this may include partnerships with individuals or with farmer owned research organisations such as farming systems groups. I will talk more about consortium arrangements in a couple of slides time.

Additionally,

- A Trustee can apply on behalf of a Trust—if they meet the criteria for an eligible entity, and
- Lead organisations must have an Australian Business Number and an account with an Australian financial institution.

There are more details about who's eligible to apply in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. These are a great resource and spell out all the eligibility requirements in detail. Community Grants Hub is always available to help with their interpretation.

Organisations that are not eligible to apply, which includes international entities and individuals, is clearly explained in section 4.3 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines

Ineligible entities, like individuals, sole traders and international organisations can still be part of a consortium, with an eligible Australian entity as the lead. So, if you have a suitable project, we encourage you to partner with an eligible entity.

This grants program has some significant requirements in relation to consortiums.

As I have already mentioned, to apply, organisations *must* join together as a consortium to deliver the proposed project, and they *must* appoint a 'lead organisation' as applicant.

The lead organisation must be an eligible entity as outlined in section 4.1 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, and this lead entity must submit the application form and enter into the grant agreement with the Commonwealth. As mentioned earlier, the consortium arrangement *must* include farmers or farmer owned research organisations such as farming systems groups.

If you are applying as the lead of a consortium, you must provide a mandatory signed letter of support from each of the consortium parties. Details required in each letter is outlined in section 7.2 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

You will also need to outline whether members of your consortium will make any cash or in-kind co-contributions. A project budget template, which must be submitted with the application, is also included as part of the application form.

On that note, I should mention that while cash or in-kind co-contributions are not mandatory, applications that include these will be considered favourably.

There's more information on the consortia requirements in section 7.2 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

To be eligible for this program, projects must align with the objectives of the program as outlined in section 2 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

There are some examples of eligible grant activities in section 5.1 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. You could consider projects that:

- increase participation and outcomes for a diverse range of people, businesses and landscapes involved in the agricultural sector and rural, regional, and remote communities, including First Nations led initiatives which encompass any eligible grant activities
- management of groundcover through alternative grazing and/or cropping practices, technologies or approaches
- enhancement of biodiversity on farm, by planting shelterbelts and biodiversity blocks, revegetating gullies and other erosion-prone areas, or protecting remnant trees
- management of farm dams and riparian areas, for stock and domestic water and biodiversity purposes through soil conservation techniques, landscape rehydration, farm dam rehabilitation
- When identifying Natural Capital tipping points or thresholds, these can be environmental (such as, soil nutrient concentrations, soil moisture content and water table depth, groundcover, or woody vegetation), social (such as, wellbeing, personal values, community cohesion) or economic (such as, revenue, cash flow, profit, and debt ratio, prior to, during and following drought).

Please remember this is an example list and is not exhaustive.

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 Grant Opportunity Guidelines. Likewise, there are also some activities that grant money cannot be used for, these are outlined in section 5.4 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines

You must outline your proposed expenditures in the application form, including what you will be spending the grant money on and what you or your consortium will spend any co-contributions on.

Applicants are not required to co-contribute funding or in-kind contributions to the delivery of their projects, however, the extent of any co-contributions offered will be taken into account when assessing your applications. Financial or in-kind contributions will be highly regarded and positively contribute to the assessment of "value for money" offered by your project.

All co-contributions, cash or in-kind, must be included in your proposal and budget.

It is important to note that:

You can only spend the 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, and
- be incurred by you for required project activities; and
- be spent between the activity start and end dates.

Ineligible expenditure includes:

- Activities that are funded by other government programs. However, projects can leverage and/or incorporate activities funded from other sources where:
 - o it can be demonstrated that public funds are not being used for the same activity, and the funding will add additional value to already funded activities
 - o an objective of the project is to build connections between activities across a landscape.
- You cannot use the grant for project activities or costs that have been, are being, or will be funded by other Commonwealth programs or state, territory, local government bodies.

You may have noticed that the FDF is running another program round at the moment, the *Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices Program Round 2*. There are **some key differences between these programs, so you will need to determine the best avenue for your proposal if you are considering both programs.**

- As I've explained the Resilient Landscapes program aims to demonstrate how implementing and scaling of known practices, technologies or approaches that improve the management of natural resources, and identify tipping points of natural capital, contribute to fostering transformational change which builds drought and climate resilience by improving landscape function and ecosystem services.
- Whereas the Long-term Trials program is about investigating and trialling innovative farming practices, technologies and/or approaches through evidence-based trials with the goal of informing farmers, driving adoption to build drought and climate resilience.

Both programs run for up to 6 years and both programs must form consortia and involve farmers.

Make sure you read the Question and Answers, as well as the Grant Opportunity Guidelines and other documents available through Grant Connect. If you still have a question, send it to support@communitygrants.gov.au and the answers will be provided in the updated Q&A Document on Grant Connect.

To recap on some of the key points:

- The closing date and time for applications is on **19 November 2024, before 9pm (Australian Eastern Daylight Savings Time)**.
- Applications can only be submitted through the Community Grants Hub GrantConnect website.
- Commonly asked questions can be found in the Grant Opportunity Documents on Grant Connect. If you can't find the answer you are after, you can send it to support@communitygrants.gov.au.
- Please note the Community Grants Hub will close their question period on the **12th of November**, so make sure you get any additional questions in before this date. Questions submitted after 12th of November will not be able to be answered.
- The Q&A webpage will be updated regularly to include answers to any new questions. You will be notified by CGH when updates to the Q& A document have been made.
- Successful grantees are expected to be notified from late May 2025, with activities starting after this.

Just a final summary before I sign off:

- Read the Grant Opportunity Guidelines and Question and Answer (Q&A) document on the Grant Connect website.
- Make sure your application clearly addresses drought resilience and all the selection criteria.
- Make sure you complete the entire application form, including all mandatory documentation, which includes the budget template, theory of change and signed letters of support from all consortium members; and
- Please pass this information session recording on to any other parties you feel may be interested.
- Applications close **19 November 2024 at 9pm, Australian Eastern Daylight Savings Time**.

Unfortunately, we will not be accepting any late applications, other than through exceptional circumstances, so I encourage you to submit your application prior to the closing time.

This recording will be available on the Department's website, so you'll be able to revisit and share all the information we've covered off today.

Thank you for listening, and all the best to those looking to apply.

[Webinar ends]

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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