

# NSW Environmental Trust's 2018 Research Program

## Program Guidelines



### Closing dates:

|                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Expression of Interest          | 12 March 2018 (3pm) |
| Applications by invitation only | 12 June 2018 (3pm)  |

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Image source

Andrew Pavlidis, Macquarie University

2013 Research Program funded project: Engaging youth in 'inspiring the next generation' for nature

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ISBN 978 1 76039 986 3

OEH 2018/0021

January 2018

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## How to use this guide

This guide will give you an overview of the NSW Environmental Trust's Research grants program, including organisations that are eligible to apply, the types of research that we will fund and program priorities. They also outline how your expression of interest, and if invited, your application will be assessed and what to expect if you are awarded a grant.

If you decide to apply for a Research grant, you should also refer to the Guidelines for completing your Expression of Interest.

## Enquiries or questions

NSW Environmental Trust

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## Part 1: About the program

The Environmental Trust is an independent statutory body established by the NSW Government to fund a broad range of organisations to undertake projects that enhance the state's environment. The Trust's main responsibility is to make and supervise the expenditure of grants.

The Trust's Environmental Research Program is a contestable grants program. It provides funding to support applied research projects that help address contemporary environmental problems in NSW.

### Program objectives

The Environmental Research Program is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- generate new knowledge or information to facilitate local solutions to environmental problems
- discover new methods of operation for NSW industries that are less harmful to the environment and enhance public good
- provide knowledge and advance techniques to solve general environmental problems in NSW
- assess and evaluate application of innovative solutions to decrease environmental degradation in NSW.

| Total funding available | Minimum grant funding | Maximum grant funding | Duration of funding |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| \$1,000,000             | \$5,000               | \$150,000             | Up to 3 years       |

While grant funding from the Trust can cover the full costs of projects, proposals that can show additional funding leverage and/or are jointly funded will be far more competitive during the assessment process.

Competition for funding under the Environmental Research program is typically very high. In the 2017 round, the Trust received 146 Expressions of Interest, and invited 27 full applications to be submitted.

The Trust approved 9 grants totalling \$1,266,428. Additional funding was allocated above the available budget due to the high quality of submitted applications. Visit the [Environmental Research Grants webpage](#) for information on successful projects.

### Key information

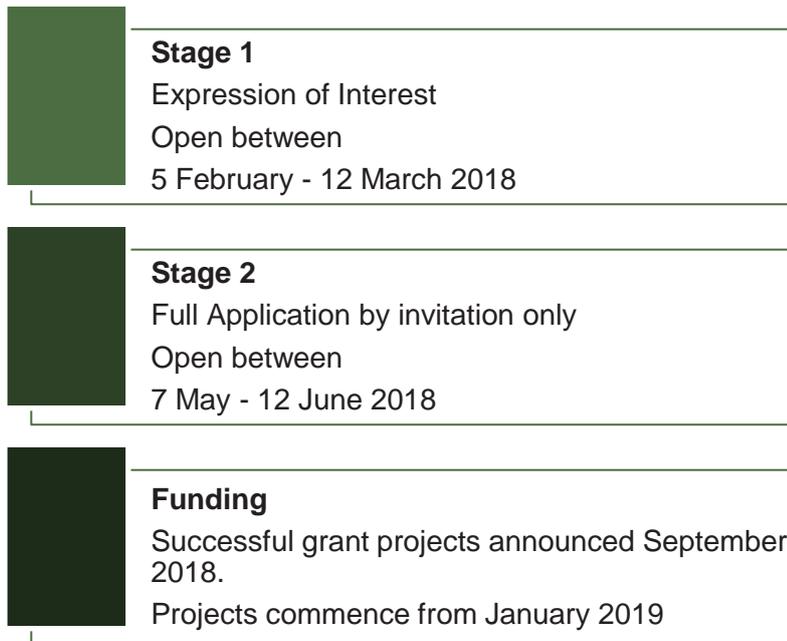
- Organisations may lodge a maximum of three EOIs for each program priority theme, and a maximum of twelve in total (see page 6, Program priorities).
- Projects should aim to commence between 1 January and 1 March 2019.
- Projects must show collaboration with an end user. EOIs must show a willingness to collaborate, whilst the full application will need to show an agreement to utilise the research outcomes. If you are not able to show this, your EOI and if invited, your application, **will not be assessed**.

## What is new for 2018?

See *Part 3: Program Priorities* for the four new priority research themes for the 2018 round of the Program.

## Important dates and milestones

The Program has a two-stage application process, as outlined below. For more information about the application and assessment processes, see pages 10 to 14.



## Part 2: Eligibility

### Who can apply?

#### Lead applicant

Each proposal requires a lead applicant. The lead applicant should be either the research body or an identified end-user of the research (see page 8).

If successful in securing a grant, the lead applicant will hold primary responsibility for the delivery of the project. This includes administration and finance requirements, and the performance of your collaborators.

The following organisations are eligible to apply as the lead applicant:

- Universities
- State government agencies and/or statutory committees
- Other local government controlled organisations
- Community organisations or groups
- Incorporated associations/non- profit organisations (must have an ABN)
- Non-commercial Cooperatives
- Councils
- Local Land Services
- Regional Organisations of Council
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

#### Collaborators

To be eligible, proposals (EOIs and invited applications) **must** demonstrate a collaborative approach. Your collaboration must:

- include and involve **end users**
- demonstrate the requisite capabilities and responsibility to undertake applied research projects.

For further information on collaboration (see page 8).

#### Ineligible applicants

The Trust **will not** fund:

- research funding institutes
- individuals
- industry joint ventures
- profit-distributing corporations.

## Conditions of eligibility

### Past performance

Please note that the Trust will take into consideration any record of past poor performance in respect of previous grants projects, or any history of non-compliance with statutory or regulatory obligations when assessing eligibility. If it is considered that negative past performance presents a substantial risk to the timely and effective performance of the project, an applicant may be asked to respond to the negative determination and this response will be taken into consideration alongside the overall merits of the EOI. Special conditions may be included in the funding agreement to address any issues of concern.

### Research data

The Trust seeks to collect data on its research grants to increase the visibility, accessibility and impact of funded research.

Future research projects funded under the NSW Environmental Trust Research Program will be required to publish and submit their data to a data repository that is supported by the Trust.

Lead applicants will be required to confirm their research data will be discoverable and available. They will also need to describe possible impediments or reasons that will prevent this, such as ethics approvals with specific conditions.

### Research integrity

The Trust is committed to fostering the highest ethical standards in research. Projects approved for funding by the Trust may not begin without appropriate ethical clearances from relevant committees and/or authorities.

Invited applicants will be required to outline any ethics clearances required and how they will be obtained prior to project commencement. Obtaining ethics approval may be challenging for some community organisations and should be discussed with the program administrator.

## Part 3: Program priorities

### Priority setting

In 2014, the NSW Natural Resources Commission developed a prioritisation framework for the Trust to implement for the Research Program. The framework is based on environmental research needs identified by research investors and end users that align with the program objectives (see page 1).

During 2016 the Environmental Trust engaged investors, researchers, end-users and the broader community to assist in setting the themes and priorities for future rounds of the Research Program. Identified needs were also mapped against the Office of Environment and Heritage's [Knowledge Strategy \(2013-17\)](#).

The Trust will continue to seek advice from our stakeholders on ways to improve the prioritisation and effectiveness of the program.

### Research priorities

Research priorities have been set for this round of the Program.

Grants are available for biophysical, social or economic research (see page 7 for definitions) relating to these priority areas.

The Trust recognises, however, that there may be research proposals tackling emerging issues not covered in the program priorities. Applications outside of the priorities set for each year will be considered **if strong justification** from the applicant is provided.

Organisations can submit a maximum of three EOIs under each of the four categories, and a maximum of twelve in total.

The research priorities for the 2018 round are:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Theme 1: Resource Management</b>   | <b>Theme 2: Wetlands and river systems</b>  |
| Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of biodiversity into sustainable agriculture</li> <li>• Impact of land use on water quality and ecosystem health</li> </ul>                                | Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wetlands in a changing climate</li> <li>• Allocation of environmental water</li> <li>• Ecological responses to changing flow regimes</li> </ul>              |
| <b>Theme 3: Landscape management</b>  | <b>Theme 4: Marine, coastal and estuarine ecosystems</b>  |
| Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil health and biodiversity</li> <li>• Biodiversity and resilience in rehabilitation and revegetation</li> <li>• New technologies for landscape management</li> </ul> | Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connectivity of ecological systems and habitats</li> <li>• New technologies for the restoration and protection of coastal and marine environments</li> </ul> |

Information on relevant NSW Government research priorities is also available at:

- Office of Environment and Heritage [Knowledge Strategy for 2013-17](#)
- Department of Primary Industries [research areas](#)

## Part 4: What research can be funded?

The Research Program seeks to fund *applied* research that demonstrates:

- Globally accepted standards of scientific rigour
- AND
- Effective collaboration and communication with stakeholders including end-users (see page 8).



**Figure 1 Research Program priorities 2018 and overarching requirements**

For the purpose of this Program ‘applied research’ can mean:

- Broadly, the systematic gathering of data, information and facts to advance knowledge and develop new techniques that can be practically applied; or
- Specifically, **scientific** research where hypotheses are formulated and empirically tested to guide application over reasonable and practical timeframes.

The above definition can apply to biophysical, social or economic research.

### **Biophysical Research**

Investigating physical, chemical and biological systems of the natural environment. It includes research on environments and systems modified by human activity, but does not include research on human (social or economic) systems.

### **Economic research**

Concerns improving understanding of how individuals, businesses and communities allocate scarce resources between competing uses (where ‘resources’ means time, labour, knowledge, capital and other natural resources), and how resources could be reallocated (e.g. by government policies) to improve the community’s economic welfare.

### **Social research**

The study of social phenomena: people, societies and their interrelationships. It is conducted in the social science disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, and history. Social research uses quantitative and qualitative approaches to gathering and analysing data.

## Collaboration

Collaboration is highly beneficial in applied research, particularly collaboration between researchers and end users. Collaborators are essentially project partners. They can help leverage time, expertise, material, resources and reduce duplication, enabling you to:

- identify knowledge gaps and develop informed and practical research (based on end user needs)
- spread ‘ownership’ of the project and share responsibility for the project outcomes
- maximise outreach of research, making it more portable and applicable to other areas and increase the likelihood of end-user take up.

## End users

End users are integral collaborators in applied research proposals. End users can be defined as those who are affected by or involved in the issue you are addressing through your research and can implement (or ‘use’) your research findings in some way.

Your end users may be any number of organisations or groups, such as: state government agencies, councils, non-government organisations, community groups, landholders, environment groups or industry groups.

You must identify and engage with end users at the scoping and planning phase of your proposal. This will enable end users to partake in generating ideas, and ensure the proposal seeks to achieve outputs sought by the end user. Alternatively, end users may initiate the research proposal. Failing to identify and engage with end users will result in your EOI, and if invited, your application, not being assessed.

## Communication

It is important to consider from the outset how you are going to engage with your collaborators and other relevant stakeholders to effectively implement and disseminate your research findings.

Engagement should encompass both information sharing and capacity building approaches (see examples below). Consideration should also be given to how you are going to know if your communication has been effective i.e. has/will behaviour change or environmental benefit occurred as a result of this research?

| Examples of information sharing             | Examples of capacity building                       |
|---|---|
| Publication in scientific journals          | Issue specific working groups                       |
| Exposure in relevant media                  | Industry or community workshops                     |
| Conferences/networking events/presentations | Development of procedures or work method statements |

Invited applicants will be required to outline a communications strategy as part of their full application.

## What the Environmental Trust will not fund

Please note that the following activities are **not** eligible for funding:

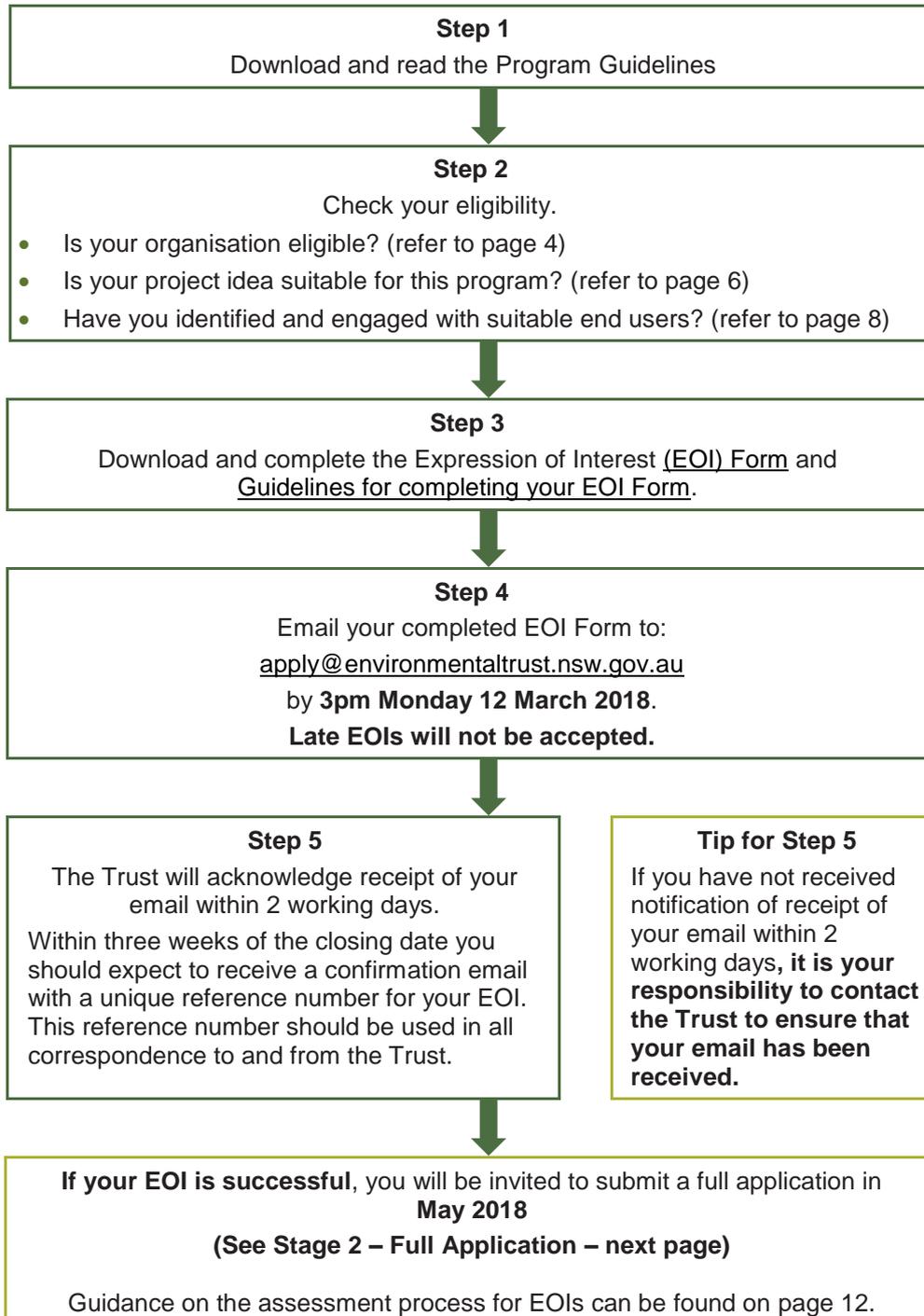
- Surveys to solely gather information regarding the status or condition of an area; projects must demonstrate progress towards tangible environmental outcomes.
- Continuing administration or operational costs of organisations.
- Capital equipment purchases, unless it is more cost effective to purchase than to lease capital equipment for the life of the project.
- Proposals seeking to use funds to commercialise existing technologies
- Ongoing monitoring or ongoing research.
- Ongoing maintenance of projects to which organisations have committed as part of a previous grant.
- Salaries of existing employees supervising or working on the project as part of their usual duties. However, the Trust will fund salaries of staff employed specifically to work on the project.
- Activities carried out or committed to before the grant is offered and accepted.
- Projects that, in the normal course of events, are clearly the core business of local or state government authorities or the applicant organisation.
- Projects that fund devolved grants (i.e. projects offering grants to other organisations).
- Proposals that involve pure research (i.e. are not applied research).

Examples of research projects funded in previous years are available on the [Trust's website](#)

## Part 5: Application process

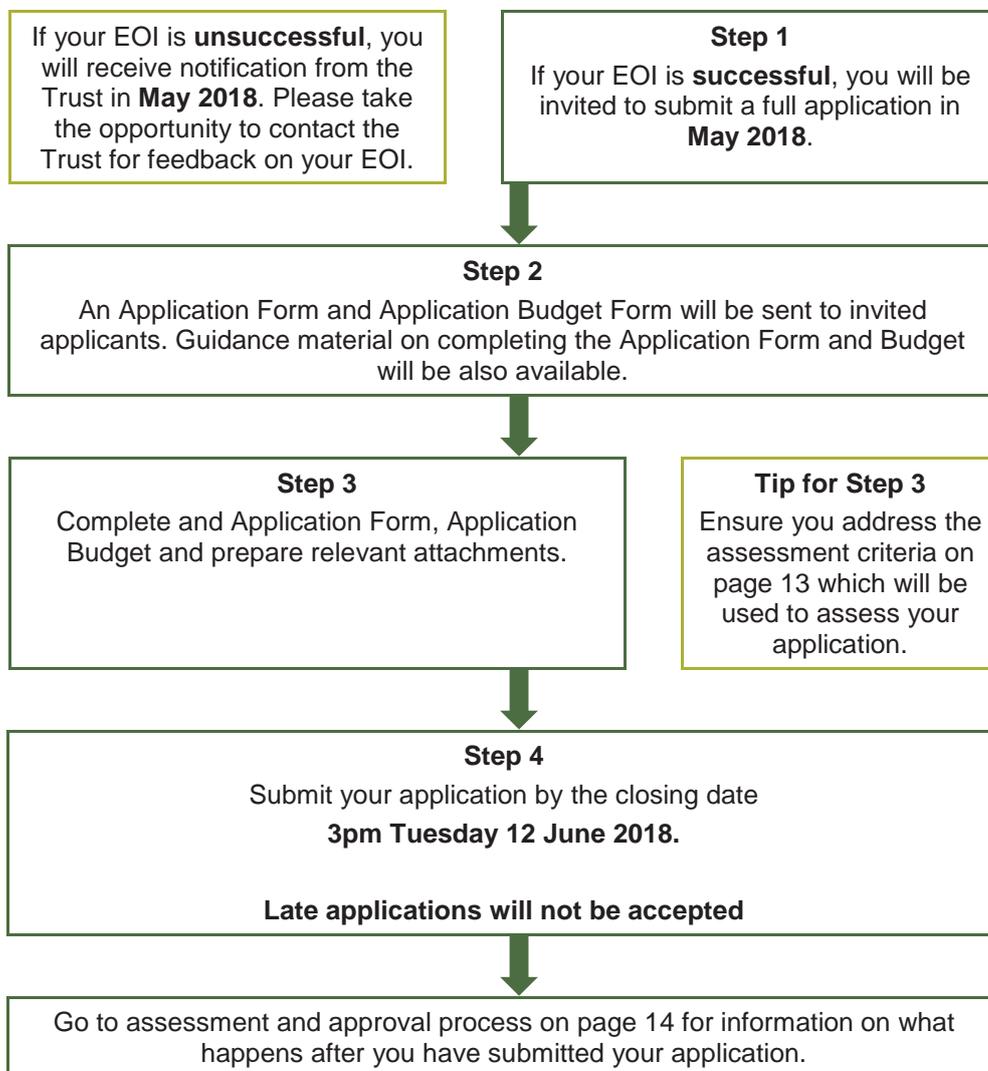
### How to apply – Stage 1 Expression of Interest

The following flow chart takes you through the steps of how to lodge an Expression of Interest in Stage 1 of the Research Program application process.



## How to apply – Stage 2 Full application (by invitation only)

The following flow chart takes you through the general steps of Stage 2 of the Research Program application process (Full Applications).



## Part 6: Assessment

### Who assesses EOIs and invited applications?

Eligible EOIs and invited applications will be assessed by a Technical Review Committee and peer reviewers, against the relevant assessment criteria.

#### Technical review committee

The Trust establishes an independent Technical Review Committee for each grant program. The committees are made up of people with knowledge and experience relevant to each grant program and include at least one representative of community groups and one representative of industry. All members of the Research Technical Review Committee have significant scientific research qualifications, experience and expertise.

#### Peer reviewers

The Trust also appoints peer reviewers for each EOI and invited application. Peer reviewers are experts who are responsible for assessing proposals within their field of research, or across a broader disciplinary area.

If your EOI is successful, you will have the opportunity to respond to peer review comments in your full application.

#### Assessment criteria

Selection for Environmental Trust grants is a state-wide, merit-based process.

There are separate assessment criteria for EOI (stage 1) and full application (stage 2). The full application assessment criteria, as you would expect, are more detailed.

#### Stage 1: EOI assessment criteria

##### Criterion 1 Significance for the NSW environment

- Is the research principally focussed upon one of the program priorities?
- Will this fill a strategically significant gap in knowledge that would otherwise be likely to impede environmental decision-making in NSW within the foreseeable future?

##### Criterion 2 Merit of the research

- Is the research well considered and will it employ sound methodology?

##### Criterion 3 Collaboration

- Have relevant collaborators been involved in scoping the proposal? Has meaningful collaboration with end users been established?

##### Criterion 4 Potential for success

- Based on assessment against the above criterion (1-3), estimated funding range and timeframe, what is the likelihood of success of the project?

Please refer to the [Guidelines for completing your Expression of Interest Form](#) for information on how questions in the EOI Form relate to the assessment criteria.

## Stage 2: Full application assessment criteria (by invitation only)

### Criterion 1 Significance for the NSW environment

- Does the research address an important problem?
- Will the anticipated outcomes advance the knowledge base?
- Are the proposal's objectives and concepts original? (I.e. is it new and not similar to, or a duplicate of, previous or existing work?)

### Criterion 2 Approach and methodology

- Is the method appropriate and sound? (e.g. in terms of hypothesis, statistics, monitoring/accounting for variability, identification of uncertainty in data and responses)
- Will the method enable the research to achieve its objectives?
- Are criteria for monitoring and evaluating progress/success appropriate?
- How appropriate is the proposed budget?

### Criterion 3 Communication and dissemination

- Is the communication strategy sound?
- Will the communication strategy enable meaningful application/implementation of research findings?
- Will dissemination activities build capacity of groups/organisations?
- Will implementation result in tangible environmental benefits for the environment of NSW?
- How appropriate is the proposed budget?

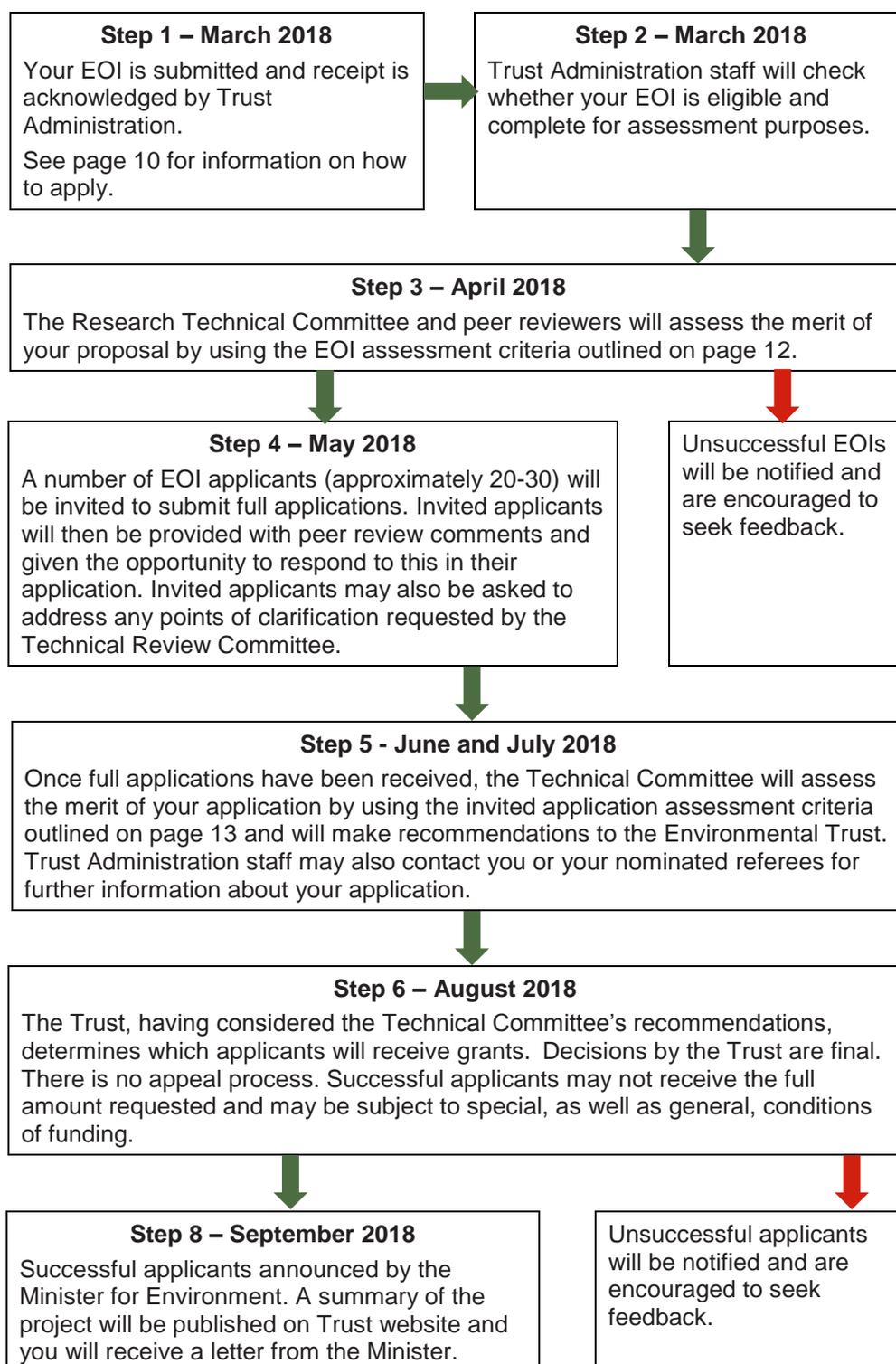
### Criterion 4 Lead applicants and collaborators

- Is there meaningful engagement with the end-user(s)?
- Will the collaboration be able to effectively manage all aspects of the project?
- Are the people delivering the research appropriately qualified and experienced?
- Are the people delivering in the communication strategy appropriately qualified and experienced?

If you are invited to submit a full application, there will be guidance available on which parts of the application relate to each assessment criteria.

## Assessment process

The following flow chart outlines the various assessment and approval steps throughout the Research Program application process.



## Part 7: Managing your grant

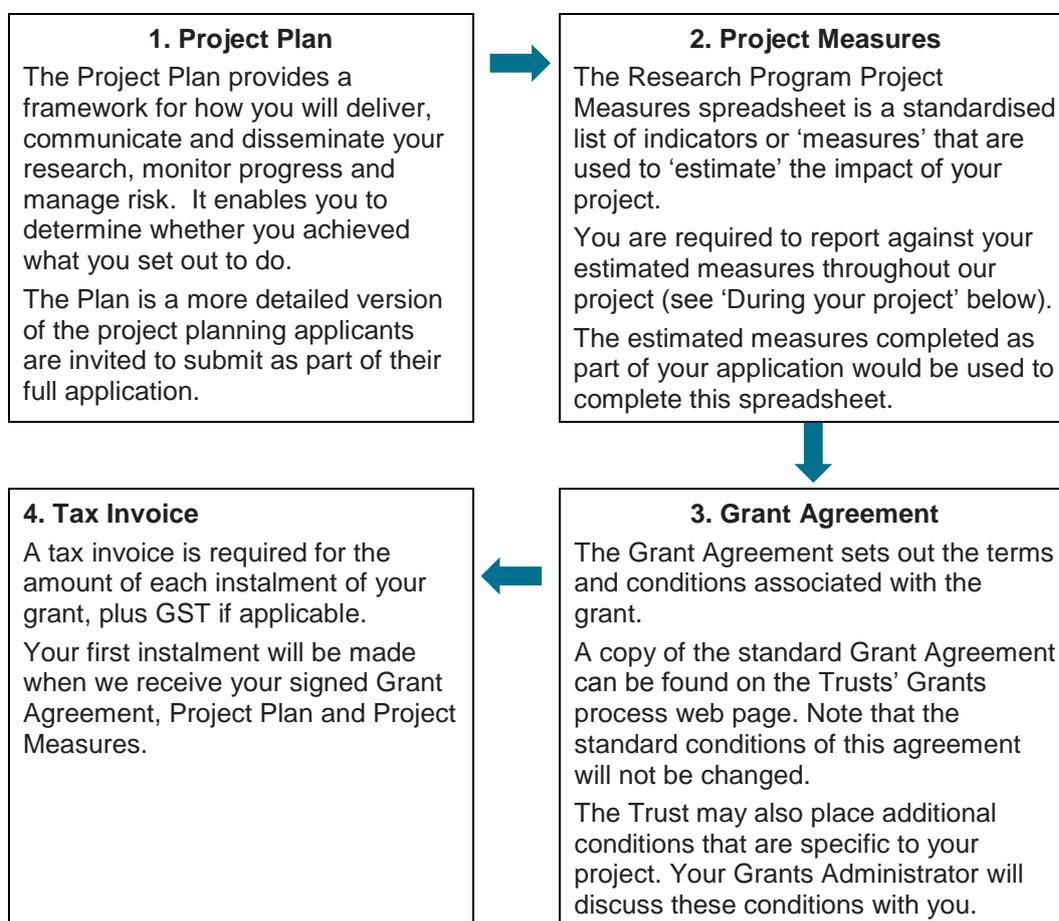
If you are successful in receiving a Research Program grant, you will be notified in September 2018. For the duration of your project you will work with Trust Administration to prepare reports and required documentation (outlined below).

### Tip

The Trust's Grants Administration team are on hand to answer questions and help you prepare and develop the required documentation.

## Getting started

If you are awarded a Research grant, you will be required to submit the following documents **before** starting your project.



## During your project

Grantees are required to prepare and submit progress reports periodically throughout their projects. The timeframe for reporting and payments will be agreed with your Grants Administrator when the grant is awarded, and outlined in your Grant Agreement. Generally speaking, progress reports are required every 12 months.

The Trust recognises, however, that variations to your project are sometimes inevitable and these can be negotiated with your Grants Administrator at any time throughout your project.

A reporting template is available on the Trust website.

Each report allows grantees to provide details on activities, achievements and expenditure. It also provides the opportunity to reflect on the implementation and application of the Project Plan and Project Measures.

Each report is reviewed by a representative of the Trust with the relevant technical expertise. If your report demonstrates that your project is progressing well, the next instalment of your grant will be authorised by the Trust and your Grant Administrator will provide you with feedback from the reviewer.

## Completing your project

When your project is complete, grantees are required to submit a final report reflecting on achievements against the project's objectives. A reporting template is available on the Trust website.

Like progress reports, a representative of the Trust will review your final report. An evaluation of grantee performance is made at this point and a risk rating applied. This rating will be used when assessing future applications.

Your Grants Administrator will provide you with feedback on your project, and formally acquit your grant.

## General obligations

Signing the Grant Agreement commits you to fulfilling the following obligations. The standard conditions of this Agreement will not be changed at the request of grantees. If your organisation is not willing to sign the agreement then you should not submit an EOI. Some key commitments are outlined below:

- Comply with all conditions contained in the grant agreement.
- Provide evidence of appropriate insurance coverage.
- Start your project within two months of receiving funding.
- Ensure that all procurement (purchasing) and employment is undertaken in line with your organisation's internal policies and guidelines.
- Seek prior approval for budget changes greater than 10 per cent (while being aware that project administration costs should never be more than 10 per cent of the direct project costs).
- Seek prior approval from the Trust to alter proposed outputs, objectives or timeframes.
- Provide progress and final reports in accordance with the Trust's reporting guidelines. This should also include a report on project measures.
- Include the relevant financial reporting with all progress and/or final reports.

- Acknowledge the Trust's support in all promotional material or any public statements about your project. Your acknowledgement must include the NSW Government's logo in written material.
- Be prepared for all knowledge gained as part of the grant to be made publicly available whether that be publishing the final report or promoting the project via other avenues available to the Trust.

## Privacy

- We use the information you supply to us for processing and assessing your application. While we do not publicly release your application as a matter of policy, we may be required to do so under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 or other lawful requirement.
- The Trust may also disclose information you supply to us for the purpose of evaluating and/or auditing its grant programs. If you require strict commercial and/or personal confidentiality, you should address this in your application.

More information on the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 is available on the website.