



Evaluation management response

Administrative response to evaluation of the NSW Environmental Trust's Protecting Our Places program

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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Management response summary

The Protecting Our Places Program (the Program or POP) is funded by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust (the Trust). It is an annual contestable grants program delivered by the Trust, aligned with the objects of the *Environmental Trust Act 1998* (the Act).

The program encourages and empowers Aboriginal communities to protect, conserve and restore landscapes and waterways important to them. Grants are available to empower and provide opportunities for Aboriginal organisations to undertake projects that:

- contribute to ongoing sustainable management of significant Aboriginal cultural landscapes in New South Wales
- contribute to healthier environments and communities
- develop project management capabilities of Aboriginal groups
- encourage new collaborations and positive relationships with other organisations, government and stakeholders.

The Program was established in 2002 and in this time has funded over 240 First Nations community-led environmental projects in New South Wales.

Funding allocation

Grants of up to \$80,000 are available over 2 stages:

- Stage 1 Planning – up to \$12,000 for project planning.
- Stage 2 Implementation – up to \$67,000 to complete the project on-ground works, plus \$1,000 quarantined for the mandatory financial audit, totalling \$68,000.

A funding cap of up to 30% is allocated towards the employment of a project manager to manage and coordinate all project activities across both stages of the project.

The program has a strong focus on capacity building of grantees in project management to ensure funded organisations are provided with the skills and knowledge required to successfully deliver. The program coordinates and delivers face-to-face workshops for 2 key staff/participants in each project at the beginning of Stage 1. In addition, proposed grantees are strongly encouraged to invite an Elder to participate in these workshops to act as a community representative, knowledge holder and relevant cultural authority.

The workshops provide grantees with:

- support and guidance to develop a plan specific to your project
- mentoring, advice, and networking opportunities
- an understanding of the Trust's reporting requirements.

Scope and findings of the evaluation

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) engaged Murawin to evaluate the Program.

All the Trust's contestable grants programs are independently evaluated to assess their effectiveness and POP was the focus of an evaluation completed in June 2015.

In 2023 the Trust engaged Murawin to evaluate the Program's performance since the last evaluation in 2015. The final evaluation report was received by Trust administration in May 2024.

Broadly, the aims of the evaluation were to understand how the POP program empowers and provides opportunities that:

- contribute to ongoing sustainable management of significant First Nations cultural landscapes in New South Wales
- contribute to healthier environments and communities.
- develop project management capabilities of First Nations groups.
- encourage new collaborations and positive relationships with other organisations, government, and stakeholders.

NSW Grant Administration Guide

The evaluation also assessed the Program's compliance with the NSW Grant Administration Guide (the Guide), issued on 19 September 2022. Compliance with the Guide is a legislative requirement under clause 31 of Schedule 1 to the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018*. All grants undertaken on and from 19 September 2022, are required to implement practices and procedures consistent with the principles and mandatory requirements in the Guide.

Key evaluation questions

The Protecting Our Places Program evaluation plan has 5 key evaluation questions and 33 sub-questions. The 5 key evaluation questions are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1 **Evaluation focus areas**

Evaluation focus areas	Key evaluation questions
Appropriateness	How appropriately positioned and resourced is the Program?
Effectiveness	How effective is the program delivery and design?
Efficiency	How efficiently is the program being delivered?
Equity	How equitable is the program?
Legacy	How enduring are the program outcomes?

See Appendix 1 Evaluation framework for more information on the framework used to conduct this evaluation.

Key findings

The key findings of the evaluation are summarised below.

Funding amount should be increased

The current grant amount of \$80,000 is not considered sufficient to conduct meaningful work.

Overall program investment of \$500,000 per year has not increased in 22 years and the evaluation deemed a further increase is required for grantees to achieve better outcomes.

Application and reporting processes should be streamlined

The evaluation calls for the Trust to refine and simplify the application process.

Improvements to reporting systems may help organisations that are poorly resourced to meet funding agreement requirements.

Grant application communication

Better communication across all aspects of the program was identified as an important area to improve. Ensuring applicants are aware of eligibility and application processes is essential and contact with unsuccessful applicants should also be reviewed.

Building close relationships with grantees was identified as valuable to provide support to grantees during project implementation and to identify and manage challenges and issues early.

Better promotion of the program

Improving awareness of the program requires engagement tailored to the broader First Nations community including utilising social media and promoting the program at events that attract Aboriginal people.

The Trust should promote existing projects to showcase successful activities through case studies and stories. The evaluation found that current and future grantees may benefit from hearing about successful projects and sharing technical knowledge through organised events such as the capacity building workshops.

The capacity building workshops were found to be well received by grantees especially for their support in the early stages of project planning.

Summary of recommendations and Trust administration response

Thirty-six recommendations were made in the evaluation report, with 20 being accepted and 16 being partly accepted by Trust administration. The key recommendations for each focus area are summarised below.

Appropriateness

Improved communications including better promotion of the program to Aboriginal people was raised throughout the evaluation. The use of a variety of communication channels including social media was suggested as well as promotion at key events that have high attendance of Aboriginal people. Sensitive and respectful communications with unsuccessful applicants was also considered to be important to ensure these organisations returned to future rounds with an improved application.

Maintaining engagement with grantees throughout their project delivery timeframe is seen as critical to keep open lines of communication. Regular meetings are considered a good way of keeping in touch with project progress and identifying any challenges or issues early so they can be jointly managed.

Ensuring that Aboriginal staff are leading the program was seen as very important to ensure there is cultural competency in all aspects of the program and that the Aboriginal community has a point of contact with staff who they felt comfortable engaging with over the phone or during site visits on-Country.

The Technical Review Committee was acknowledged as having extensive knowledge and experience that could be used to benefit grantees. The workload of the TRC was also raised as the time and expertise required to review and rank applications can be considerable.

Effectiveness

The evaluation questioned whether the grant amounts available were appropriate to sufficiently address the challenges around creating healthier environments and cultural landscapes. The compounding effects of a changed climate exacerbates these challenges and it is recommended an increased amount be considered.

The capacity building workshop series is recognised as an essential part of the program however the benefit that repeat grantees who have attended previously was questioned. Better communication of expectations and targeting new and/or less experienced staff was suggested to maximise outcomes.

Efficiency

A review of First Nations grants programs across Australia found that Protecting Our Places should increase the grant amount to \$120,000 to be comparable to similar programs.

A tiered system of grant amounts was suggested to allow simplified administration and reporting requirements for lower value grants. This may attract new applicants who are deterred by the project management requirements.

Grantees who are implementing projects that are staged over multiple funding rounds could be supported to reapply by a streamlined application process for follow-up projects.

Regular meetings with grantees will identify issues or challenges early and negotiate project variations earlier in the project timeline.

Equity

Better communication with grantees includes face-to-face engagement through meetings and site visits. Trust staff being out on project sites will allow for promotional material to be developed such as photos and case studies. The Trust can also gain important insights into project delivery and acquire grantee feedback on how the program could be improved.

A key area for program improvement is in communication, advertising and promotion. The Trust should utilise Aboriginal networks within DCCEEW and other NSW Government departments to be promoting the program to the communities they work with.

Program promotion should be tailored to First Nations people through social media and avenues of advertising that are current, accessible, and relevant to First Nations communities. It is recommended that contact lists used for program promotion are reviewed and maintained regularly.

The evaluation recommends that communication relating to eligibility and suitability to apply for a grant be better communicated with appropriate measures to pre-screen potential applicants.

Modifications to the application process are recommended including simplifying the process, reducing the number of questions and allowing grantees to utilise existing policies and systems as part of their application. It is recommended that the application process should be clearly explained using easy to understand visuals such as a recorded video.

The evaluation found that reporting was a key area of concern for many grantees with challenges and frustration with the system and the detail expected. The use of regular meetings with grantees could increase understanding of the reporting requirements to ensure compliance. An online reporting system is recommended to replace the current spreadsheet model with reduced reporting criteria to reflect proportionality of grant amounts.

Project reporting systems should also be flexible to support grantees using videos and images to display project outcomes and achievements. Prompt acknowledgement and feedback on receipt of project reports is important.

Legacy

The importance of First Nations staff leading the program and being resourced and supported by the Trust to adapt and improve the program was highlighted in the evaluation. To facilitate the regular evaluation of the program, it was recommended that grantees be required to cooperate with future evaluations as part of their funding agreement.

Table 2 **Summary of recommendations and program team management response**

Recommendations	Accepted	Partly accepted	Not accepted
36	20	16	0

Trust administration response to evaluation findings

Table 3 Evaluation recommendations and response

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response	Timing
1. The Trust allocates resources to promote the grants to First Nations people. This could be through social media, a variety of new communications channels or community events that specifically attract First Nations people.	Accepted Trust administration accepts that new avenues need to be explored to boost both the number and the quality of applicants to the Protecting Our Places (POP) program. Key dates and events of significance to First Nations people have been identified to allow consideration of program timing such as launching the program during NAIDOC week to maximise promotion and program visibility. Trust administration will develop a communications and engagement plan that will review current communications channels and media platforms and identify opportunities to directly target messaging to the key stakeholders that are suitable for the program.	2025
2. The Trust implements a continuous improvement process for grantees to follow. This could include facilitating a Community of Practice or Community Forums.	Partly accepted Trust administration will consider options for ongoing capacity building of grantees in addition to the planning and program management workshops currently provided through the program for all new grantees.	2025
3. The Trust implements regular online meetings with grantees to manage progress, potentially at 6-month intervals.	Accept A greater emphasis on meetings and site visits with current grantees is being enacted to create better relationships, and Trust administration recognises the unique value of face-to-face and real time communication with project teams from the POP program. This is anticipated to strengthen the relationship and trust between grantees and Trust administration staff. Proactive communication with grantees also means the Aboriginal Programs Officer can engage in problem-solving with grantees earlier rather than later to manage risks to project delivery e.g. weather, natural disaster, site access, etc.	2024

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response	Timing
4. The Trust provides more authentic cultural resources by increasing the number of First Nations staff employed and they are supported to have more on-the-ground engagement.	Partly accept The new Trust Strategic Plan (2024-2029) identifies priorities for enhanced First Nations involvement in Trust programs. The delivery of the Strategic Plan may influence resourcing for additional identified Aboriginal positions. On-ground engagement with grantees is a component of current program delivery however the state-wide scale of the POP program and associated travel logistics affects the ability of Trust staff to undertake site visits to all grantees.	N/A
5. The Trust should utilise the TRC's technical knowledge for the benefit of all grantees. There is potential to share the knowledge through a Community of Practice.	Partly accept The TRC provides a high standard of expertise, advice and cultural knowledge to assess and recommend projects for funding. Trust administration is exploring if this role could be expanded to include TRC members as technical reviewers of progress and final reports. Trust administration will engage with the TRC to seek their interest in broader involvement in the program and participation in events. Additional involvement from TRC members needs to be balanced against probity obligations to ensure they can continue to impartially and fairly undertake their core role in assessing projects for funding.	2025
6. Provide the TRC with additional time to review applications. The amount of time should be worked out in collaboration between the Trust and the TRC.	Partly accept Trust administration will consult with the TRC and consider the review time needed based on the number of applications received in the next round. A review and refinement of the application process will be undertaken which may assist in reducing the TRC review time.	2025
7. The Trust should provide applicants with culturally competent communication regarding their application not being approved. Ensure there is acknowledgment and respect in the messaging.	Accept The Trust will review processes to ensure this is happening. The Trust's Aboriginal Programs Officer prepares communications to unsuccessful applicants using language and tone that provides understanding, support and encouragement to consider reapplying in future rounds. The primary goal of Trust administration staff when delivering feedback to unsuccessful applicants is to highlight ways the project could improve to boost their chances of being successfully funded in	2024

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response	Timing
	the next round. The Aboriginal Programs Officer is available directly to provide further information that is requested. Trust administration will ensure that any communications and engagement plans relating to POP will incorporate culturally competent communication. To ensure this, Trust administration will encourage the Aboriginal Programs Officer to seek advice from other Aboriginal teams and colleagues within DCCEEW.	
8. NSW Government to consider the scale of their approach to addressing climate change through these grants and alter the grant offering accordingly.	Partly accept Trust administration cannot influence the 'whole of government' approach to climate change however the establishment of DCCEEW early in 2024 reflects the major focus of the NSW Government on progression towards climate targets. Mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change also features in the new Trust Strategic Plan (2024-2029) and Trust administration will be actively engaged in achieving the priorities of the new Strategic Plan. Trust administration will align the core objectives of the POP program with the new Strategic Plan where it is logical to do so.	N/A
9. The Trust to provide grantees with clear guidelines and sets expectations prior to the capacity-building workshops.	Accept Trust administration, in collaboration with the workshop facilitators, will review existing workshop documentation and promotional collateral to ensure clarity for attendees on the purpose, objectives and outcomes of the workshops. The Trust's Aboriginal Programs Officer is already collaborating with the First Nations consultant engaged as part of the workshop facilitation team for 2024 to give effect to this recommendation.	2024
10. The Trust should continue to offer capacity-building workshops to grantees, specifically targeting new staff who require upskilling. Additionally, the Trust should broadly	Accept Trust administration will explore ways to promote further training and capacity building opportunities that may build on the learnings from the program workshops. These may be provided by government or non-government partners in themes relevant to project delivery such	2025

Murawin recommendation		Trust administration response	Timing
communicate any additional training opportunities to all grantees.		as project management, best practice for on-ground works, monitoring and evaluation and/or community engagement.	
11. The Trust to evaluate the benefit of repeat attendance of administration partners who provide secretariat services and who have already completed the training.	Accept	Trust administration will assess the required attendance of repeat grantees on a case-by-case basis. Trust administration acknowledges that some grantees who have shown a high standard of performance in adherence with funding agreement requirements may not benefit as much from the workshops. However, in these instances, Trust administration encourages repeat grantees to send other staff, community members or Elders to the workshops to extend the skills to other members of their project team. Also, workshops are a great opportunity for all types of grantees to interact with one another and share insights.	2025
12. Increase the grant total to \$120,000 to be comparable to many other grant programs	Accept	Trust administration supports an increase to the maximum grant amount to ensure project management costs are adequately covered. It is also an important way to ensure the same standard of project outcomes are achieved under the POP program despite the increased cost of doing business for grantees. Feedback from grantees and the TRC indicates there are some organisations who are reluctant to apply due to the insufficient funding available.	2025
13. Implement a tiered system which includes reducing the administration requirements for lower value grants making it a more viable opportunity for new applicants.	Partly accept	Trust administration will evaluate the merit of a tiered system of funding amounts to cater for projects of differing size and complexity. Under a tiered system, the proportionality principle from the NSW Grants Administration Guide may allow for simpler reporting requirements for smaller projects. Trust administration will balance this against the findings which inform the previous recommendation (number 12) that demonstrate a higher amount of project funding is required to achieve project outcomes.	N/A

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response		Timing
14. If projects are to be staged over multiple funding rounds, this requires a streamlined application process that is concise, efficient and succinct.	Partly accept	Trust administration will consider how staged projects can be best managed and supported to reapply. While a streamlined process for repeat applicants would be helpful, every application, especially in a contestable grants program, needs to provide enough detail to give the TRC confidence in what they are recommending for funding.	N/A
15. The Trust should utilise regular meetings to identify the need for project variations earlier in the timeline.	Accept	This recommendation relates directly to Recommendation number 3 and the same response from Trust administration applies here.	2024
16. The Trust invest in face-to-face engagement with grantees and the communities they work in. This relationship building can assist in building a portfolio of promotional tools such as photos, testimonials or case studies.	Accept	This recommendation is similar to Recommendation number 3 and the same response from Trust administration applies here. Further, Trust administration agrees that an important component of site visits is using the opportunity to work with grantees to capture information and footage from the project sites that can be used in stories and case studies to promote the project and the overarching POP program.	2024
17. The Trust allocates an annual budget to conduct 2 site visits per annum to grantees.	Accept	Trust administration already conducts at least two site visits per annum to a selection of POP grantees. Trust administration recognises the importance of face-to-face interaction on Country with grantees (refer to response to Recommendation number 3) and existing budget allocations support these site visits.	2024
18. The POP grant staff utilise these site visits to explore the community needs and gain an understanding of how the POP grant could be better utilised.	Accept	Trust administration will continue to use site visits to view how grant funds are translating to on-ground outcomes. Trust staff also receive feedback and gauge trends regarding grantee and community views on the program that can inform improvements.	2024
19. Trust staff to engage with other NSW Government departments in regional areas to introduce the POP program.	Accept	Trust administration will review sectors of DCCEEW and other NSW Government agencies with a frontline connection to Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal Program Officer will continue to build	2025

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response		Timing
		relationships with key stakeholders who are appropriate to share funding opportunities with and/or might be able to promote the program at events.	
20. The Trust allocate resources to utilise social media and community events that specifically attract First Nations people.	Accept	This recommendation relates to Recommendation number 1 and the same response from Trust administration applies here.	2025
21. The Trust to improve and strengthen their avenues of advertising to ensure they are current, accessible, and relevant to First Nations communities and applicants.	Accept	This recommendation relates to Recommendation 1 and the same response from Trust administration applies here.	2025
22. The Trust is to review their mailing list and update to reflect new organisations, grantees and applicants. This should be reviewed biannually.	Accept	As part of refreshing how the Program is promoted, Trust administration will specifically ensure the current POP program mailing list is updated as new stakeholders are engaged.	2025
23. The Trust to implement a pre-screening process with applicants to ensure their suitability as an applicant for the Grant.	Partly accept	Trust administration will consider how to improve communications with potential applicants to ensure eligibility requirements are clearly understood prior to time being spent on writing an application. The current webinar approach will be reviewed to ensure it is achieving the need for clear awareness of eligibility requirements. The use of alternative application platforms, including the GMS, will be considered.	2025
24. The Trust to ensure that the pre-screening process is flexible, culturally safe and conducted by First Nations staff.	Accept	Should pre-screening processes be introduced in response to Recommendation number 23, Trust administration will ensure such processes will be led by the Aboriginal Programs Officer.	N/A
25. The Trust must simplify the grant application by reducing questions.	Partly accept	Trust administration accepts that the application process needs to be simplified and aligned with templates for reporting and technical review. This may not necessarily involve reducing the questions, but	2025

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response		Timing
		they may be modified to achieve alignment across applying, reporting and reviewing.	
26. Modify the application process to allow applicants to append their current policies and systems in place.	Partly accepted	While Trust administration will continue to encourage grantees to upload any attachments they deem relevant to their application, these attachments cannot replace answering all required questions in the application form. It is essential for transparency and fair assessment of applications that the TRC have directly comparable project proposals in templates with the same questions.	N/A
27. The Trust should provide visuals (online or recorded video) to assist with the application process, clearly explaining the eligibility and the process.	Accept	Trust administration will consider how to improve communications with potential applicants to ensure the application process is clearly understood. The current webinar approach will be reviewed to ensure it is achieving the need for clear awareness of the application process and eligibility requirements.	2025
28. The Trust to introduce an online reporting system that is a more succinct process in lieu of excel spreadsheets.	Partly accept	Trust administration will liaise with the Strategic Projects Team to assess the merit of using the Grant Management System (GMS) for partial or whole administration of the program. If GMS is not the best solution, Trust administration will at least review the excel spreadsheets currently being used to simplify them where possible.	2025
29. The Trust to utilise the regular meetings to ensure new staff are informed of the reporting practice and expectation.	Accept	Trust administration understands that staff turnover within grantee organisations is common, and it is crucial to detect these changes early and engage with new grantee staff to ensure understanding of the project, funding agreement and reporting requirements.	2024
30. Reduce the reporting criteria and simplify grants on the lower scale (\$80,000).	Partly accept	Trust administration will evaluate options to make the application, reporting and evaluation processes more efficient. Liaison with the Strategic Projects Team will explore options for using the GMS platform for POP applications, administration and reporting instead of the current use of PDF and other document formats.	2025

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response		Timing
31. The Trust is to be flexible with its report submissions, for example include videos, photographs, site visits and visual aids.	Partly accept	Trust administration will continue to encourage grantees to attach material relevant to progress and final reporting in various formats including images, videos and other media. To allow for efficient reporting, there is a need to retain core uniform components of the milestone reporting to ensure technical reviewers are clearly able to assess progress against proposed activities and outputs. Regarding site visits, please refer to the Trust administration response to Recommendation number 17.	2025
32. The Trust to provide acknowledgement and feedback on receipt of the report.	Accept	Trust administration usually engage external technical reviewers to assess milestone and final reports. This process usually involves providing feedback to the grantee on their project and can include requests for additional reporting information if required. There can be a period between receiving a report and responding with feedback to the grantee. Trust administration will review its procedures to ensure there is immediate acknowledgement on receiving a report and clear information about the next steps and timeframes.	2024
33. The Trust should empower the First Nations staff to lead the grant program and be provided with agency and resources to implement changes.	Accept	Trust administration will collaborate with the Aboriginal Programs Officer to ensure they have the support and resourcing required to deliver the program, identify areas for improvement and instigate changes that will enhance the impact of the program on Aboriginal communities.	2024
34. The Trust maintain a calendar of community events to attend with the aim of promoting the program.	Partly accept	Trust administration will identify appropriate events where the program could be promoted. Attendance will be balanced against the need for staff to attend on-site workshops and site visits. Where possible, Trust administration accepts that it should leverage existing DCCEEW presence at relevant community events e.g. the Koori Knockout, Yabun Festival, NAIDOC week and more.	2025

Murawin recommendation	Trust administration response	Timing
35. The Trust is to broaden the scope of communication and incorporate other critical environmental issues, such as climate change. The Trust should provide communities with additional knowledge and funding opportunities to enhance the quality of life in the areas they inhabit.	Partly accept Trust administration will reflect on how we can connect our grantee and applicant cohort to other opportunities that may be relevant to them, including other grant programs offered by the Environmental Trust. All applicants, successful and unsuccessful, are encouraged to explore NSW Government funding opportunities through the Grants and Funding portal. With regards to climate change, please refer to the Trust administration response to Recommendation number 8.	N/A
36. The Trust to place contract requirements on grantees to fully cooperate with Departmental funded evaluations.	Partly accept Regular evaluations of the POP program are essential to maintaining a relevant and effective grant program. Feedback from past and current grantees is an essential part of this. Trust administration will incorporate an expectation that grantees participate in the evaluation process into the Program Guidelines. Trust administration will consider whether this could be incorporated into Funding Agreements.	2025

Alignment of the Protecting Our Places Program with the NSW Grants Administration Guide

Findings

The terms of reference for this evaluation included an assessment of the program administration against the NSW Grants Administration Guide (the Guide).

This included assessing how the current program guidelines align with the overarching principles of the Guide. The Guide outlines the 7 core, high-level principles that should inform all NSW Government grants. They are:

1. robust planning and design
2. collaboration and partnership
3. proportionality
4. outcomes orientation
5. achieving value for money
6. governance and accountability
7. probity and transparency

Throughout the evaluation, Murawin considered how the Protecting Our Places program heeds these principles. Overall, it was found that the principles are incorporated into the Program, however there could be more flexibility and adjustment to enhance the benefit to First Nations communities and their environment.

Table 4 Evaluation findings and response

Principles	Evaluation
Robust planning and design	The capacity-building workshops assist grantees with the planning and design. The Trust can improve its engagement and communication with grantees to assist with risk identification and management.
Collaboration and partnership	Better collaboration is needed with grantees and stakeholders. It was commonly stated that improved communication and relationship building would address challenges and assist in promoting successes. This works towards reducing administration costs for the Trust trying to engage with grantees at a late stage when the project may be limping.
Proportionality	Protecting Our Places grants do not currently vary in scale however there is opportunity for Trust administration to reduce the burden of reporting requirements with an improved streamlined reporting system.

Principles	Evaluation
Outcomes orientation	Protecting Our Places grants are designed and implemented to achieve outcomes in line with Program Guidelines.
Achieving value for money	Many Protecting Our Places grants demonstrate cost-effectiveness for the Trust. However, this comes at the expense of grantees who contribute both in-kind and financial support. It's important to note that the long-term benefits of these projects are not uniformly reflected across all initiatives.
Governance and accountability	The existing policies, guidelines, and procedures are currently operational. However, they may not align well with the needs and context of grantees' organisations.
Probity and transparency	There could be improved promotion of the Program to ensure that the whole state is informed and provided with equal funding opportunities.

Appendix 1: Evaluation framework

The Environmental Trust undertakes independent evaluations for each of its contestable grant programs, in accordance with NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines. Evaluations assess the effectiveness of each program and assist the Trust to inform future iterations of its projects, including objectives, value, and scope of future funding rounds, as well as improvements to process and administration.

This section provides an overview of the methods, approach, and activities use to complete evaluations. The Murawin report uses a mixed methodology with both quantitative and qualitative data collected.

Methodology

Key steps in the methodology included:

- The quantitative data was triangulated with the findings from interviews to corroborate both positive and negative findings.
- Comprehensive consultation of stakeholders, with specialised consultation tools for each group.
- Ensuring a cultural safe approach is embedded into the language and style of communication.
- Murawin spoke with staff from the Trust to understand the operating context and the way the grant process currently operates and gained an understanding of how the program has evolved.
- Online quantitative surveys of both successful and unsuccessful grantees.

This mixed-methods approach ensures a balanced and inclusive understanding of the program's impact and operational effectiveness. Murawin accommodated diverse perspectives and fostered an environment of inclusivity. The integration of specialised consultation tools and culturally sensitive practices such as 'Yarning' underscores the commitment to meaningful and respectful stakeholder engagement.

Project stages

Stage 1 Planning & Design (Collect & Review Documentation → Preliminary Meetings → Project Plan)

Stage 2 Implementation (Analysis of Documentation → Stakeholder Consultation → Data Collection & Analysis)

Stage 3 Reporting (Synthesis of Findings → Findings Workshop → Final Report)

Data collection summary

Invitations were extended to all grantees and applicants of the POP grant program, to participate in the evaluation.

Primary data collection involved:

- 1:1 interviews
- online survey

Secondary data collection involved:

- Administrative reports
- Grantee acquittals and reports
- Data from the Department
- Desktop review

Qualitative engagement

All engagement for the evaluation was voluntary and confidential, every participant had the right to not participate and could withdraw their information at any time prior to the final report. For this evaluation there was no monetary incentive provided. A few organisations declined to participate. Mostly this was due to staff changes and the current staff not being aware of the POP program.