



Environmental Research Grants Program guidelines 2026

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This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

© 2025 State of NSW and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

With the exception of photographs, the State of NSW and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) are pleased to allow this material to be reproduced in whole or in part for educational and non-commercial use, provided the meaning is unchanged and its source, publisher and authorship are acknowledged. Specific permission is required to reproduce photographs.

Learn more about our copyright and disclaimer at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/copyright

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs created the People and Community symbol.

Cover photo: Australian National University Researcher, Rod Peakall, preparing to operate a videoscope to study pollination in the underground orchid. Rod Peakall

Published by:

Environment and Heritage

Department of Climate Change,

Energy, the Environment and Water

Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Phone: 1300 361 967 (Environment and Heritage enquiries)

TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 1300 361 967

Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 1300 361 967

Email info@environment.nsw.gov.au

Website www.environment.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 978-1-76186-078-2

EH 2025/0416 February 2026

Find out more at:

environment.nsw.gov.au

Contents

Part 1: About the program	1
The NSW Environmental Trust	1
The Environmental Research Grants Program	1
Application process overview	2
Part 2: About this round	3
Important dates	3
Funding available	3
Application limits	3
Part 3: Eligibility	4
Applicant eligibility	4
Part 4: Funded research themes	8
2026 priority research themes	8
Types of research funded	9
Part 5: Eligible and ineligible project activities	10
Eligible activities	10
Ineligible activities	11
Budget requirements	13
Part 6: Application and assessment	15
Stage 1: Expression of interest	15
Stage 2: Full application (by invitation only)	17
Part 7: Program governance	20
Probity	20
Procurement	20
Statement of business ethics	20
Conflicts of interest	20
Recruitment	21
Third-party assistance	21
Privacy	22
Technical review committee	22

Part 8: Managing an environmental research grant	23
Starting work	23
Funding agreement	23
Workplan	24
During a project	24
Part 9: Resources	26

List of tables

Table 1	Funding available	3
Table 2	Priority themes	8
Table 3	Activities eligible for funding	10
Table 4	Activities not eligible for grant funding	11
Table 5	Timeline of EOI process	15
Table 6	Timeline of invited application process	17

Part 1: About the program

These guidelines provide information on the NSW Environmental Trust's (the Trust's) Environmental Research Grants Program.

The guidelines include descriptions of the types of organisations eligible for funding, program priorities and the types of activities the program funds.

They also set out how the Trust assesses expressions of interest (EOIs) and invited applications and what to expect if we award your project a grant.

The NSW Environmental Trust

The Trust is an independent statutory body set up by the NSW Government under the *Environmental Trust Act 1998* to fund projects that enhance and protect the state's environment. The Trust's main responsibility is to provide and oversee grant funding of projects that enhance and protect the state's environment.

The Trust is chaired by the NSW Minister for the Environment, and its members include representatives from Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department), an Aboriginal person appointed by the Minister, local government, the Nature Conservation Council and NSW Treasury. The Trust is administered by the department.

Implementing the Trust's strategic plan

The *NSW Environmental Trust strategic plan 2024 to 2029* centres on 3 strategic priorities:

1. Prioritise healthy Country and recognise and value Aboriginal peoples, their traditional knowledge and practices, and connection to Country.
2. Restore ecosystems and biodiversity.
3. Strengthen environmental management.

These priorities reflect critical environmental challenges identified by the Trust. They aim to drive meaningful environmental progress. They will serve as a framework to guide the Trust's grant funding decisions over the next 4 years.

For more information about the Trust's funding priorities, see Table 2 in 'Part 4: Funded research themes'.

The Environmental Research Grants Program

The Environmental Research Grants Program (the program) is a contestable grants program funded by the Trust. It provides funding to support applied research in priority themes to help address contemporary environmental problems in New South Wales.

Program objectives

The program is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- increase knowledge and advance techniques to solve priority environmental problems in New South Wales
- assess and test the application of innovative solutions to decrease environmental degradation in New South Wales
- discover new methods of operation for New South Wales industries that are less harmful to the environment.

Application process overview

Step 1: Review program guidelines

Download and read the program guidelines (this document).

The [Environmental Research Grants Program webpage](#) provides links to key resources to help develop and submit an expression of interest (EOI).

These include:

- How to design and plan your project 2026
- Grant Management System (GMS) link to register and submit an EOI
- previously funded projects
- sample workplan (for invited applicants).

Step 2: Confirm eligibility

- Check your organisation is eligible (refer to 'Part 3: Eligibility').
- Check your research project is suitable for this program (refer to 'Part 4: Funded research themes' and 'Part 5: Eligible and ineligible project activities').

Step 3: Complete and submit your expression of interest

- Access the GMS via the Environmental Research Grants Program webpage to register and submit an EOI.

For help, contact the NSW Environmental Trust

Telephone: 02 8837 6093

Email: info@environmentaltrust.nsw.gov.au

Part 2: About this round

Important dates

Stage 1

- Expression of Interest
- Opens 9 am, 9 February 2026
- Closes 11:59 pm 30 March 2026

Stage 2

- Full application (by invitation only)
- Open 9 am 27 July 2026
- Closes 11.59 pm 14 September 2026

Funding

- Successful grant projects announced January to February 2027
- Projects commence from May to June 2027

Funding available

The Environmental Research Grants Program offers a total of \$2 million in available funding.

Each project may receive between \$200,000 and \$350,000, with a project duration of 2 to 4 years.

Table 1 Funding available

Total funding available this round	Funding per project	Project duration
\$2,000,000	\$200,000 to \$350,000	2 to 4 years

Application limits

Organisations may lodge a maximum of 3 EOIs. Each lead organisation is responsible for conducting their own prioritisation process to determine which EOIs are submitted for assessment.

If your organisation submits more than 3 EOIs, we will ask you to decide which EOI(s) to withdraw.

Part 3: Eligibility

Applicant eligibility

Lead applicant

Each proposal requires a lead applicant. Lead organisations must be based in New South Wales or be able to demonstrate environmental benefits for New South Wales.

If successful in securing a grant, the lead applicant will be responsible for project delivery. This includes meeting administration and finance requirements and overseeing the performance of collaborators.

Organisations that are eligible to apply are:

- universities
- state government agencies and statutory committees
- community organisations or groups
- incorporated associations and non-profit organisations
- non-commercial cooperatives
- councils
- regional organisation of councils
- other local government-controlled organisations
- companies limited by guarantee
- local Aboriginal land councils
- registered Indigenous corporations (not for profit)

Applicants from non-research organisations **must apply in partnership with an academic researcher**. This will ensure your application has a rigorous scientific methodology. It also increases the chances that it will be competitive with applications from research organisations.

Australian Business Number

All lead applicants must have an active Australian Business Number (ABN) that establishes the organisation as an eligible entity.

Ineligible applicants

We will not fund:

- research-funding institutes
- individuals
- industry joint ventures
- for-profit organisations
- profit-distributing entities.

Options for ineligible organisations

If your organisation or group is not incorporated or needs assistance with the financial management of the project, you may nominate another organisation to manage the grant funds on your behalf. You can do this by appointing them as an external manager.

The external manager must meet one of the eligible criteria outlined above (for example, a university, NGO or government organisation).

Funding agreements will include the name of the external manager. The external manager will sign the funding agreement together with you.

You remain the lead decision maker and will control the project's activities and outcomes.

Grant payments are made to the external manager. The external manager will manage all financial transactions on your behalf. They will also prepare financial reports in line with the funding agreement.

There should be an agreement in place between you and the external manager. This will ensure a shared understanding of accountability for the project's management and reporting (refer to 'Tips on working with an external manager' in 'Part 9: Resources').

Past performance

When assessing applications from returning grantees, the technical review committee may consider past performance. If you have successfully delivered a Trust grant project or are currently delivering a Trust grant project effectively, this may be favourable to your application. Similarly, the risks of funding an applicant that has struggled to deliver projects in the past may be considered, and these risks may be addressed by including specific conditions in the funding agreement to support applicants looking to improve this time around.

Collaborators and end users

Your EOI or invited application must set out how end users will participate in the project and how the research findings will be used. If it does not, **the project will not be funded**.

Collaboration between researchers and end users is beneficial for applied research. Collaborators are external project partners who help deliver the project. They can leverage time, money, expertise, materials and resources. They can also reduce duplication of effort.

Successful collaboration relies on clear roles and responsibilities, and effective channels for open communication.

End users are important collaborators in applied research proposals. They are affected by, or involved in, the issue that the research aims to investigate. They can implement (or 'use') the research findings in a meaningful way.

End users include state government agencies, councils, non-government organisations, community groups, landholders, environmental groups and practitioners, or industry groups. Work with them in the development of your proposal and engage them in project activities.

Working with collaborators and end users will boost the use of research in the NSW Government's environmental management actions and increase collaboration with the community.

Attaching confirmation of collaborator commitments (such as letters of support) is optional at the EOI stage but mandatory at the invited application stage.

Applied research

Projects must involve applied research. This means:

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

Research integrity

You must identify any ethics clearances required and how they will be obtained before the project starts.

The Trust is committed to fostering the highest ethical standards in research. Projects approved for funding may not begin without appropriate ethics clearances.

Research uptake

You must ensure your findings will be promoted and accessible. Describe possible impediments or reasons that will prevent this, such as ethics approvals with specific conditions.

We seek to increase the visibility, accessibility and impact of funded research.

Your proposal should identify end users and how you will reach them. When relevant stakeholders, such as policymakers and practitioners can use your research, they can apply the insights generated.

Communicating outcomes

Successful proposals will include a communications strategy as part of the project.

The communications strategy should include engagement activities, such as information sharing and capacity building approaches for different target audiences (refer to the box below).

You must monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your communications strategy during the project and adapt where necessary.

Design your project with long-term sustainability in mind. This will ensure that the benefits continue even after funding ends.

Examples of communication types

Examples of **information sharing** include:

- publication in scientific journals
- exposure in relevant media
- conferences, networking events, presentations.

Examples of **capacity building** include:

- issue-specific working groups
- industry or community workshops
- collaborative development of procedures or work method statements
- assisting with integration of findings to policy or legislation updates.

We **encourage** all applicants to partner with Aboriginal organisations and stakeholders.

If your project will draw on Aboriginal knowledge or practices, or if your project targets theme 1 Prioritise healthy Country and recognise and value Aboriginal peoples, their traditional knowledge and practices, and connection to Country (see Table 2 in 'Part 4: Funded research themes'), it is **mandatory** to partner with relevant Aboriginal organisations and/or stakeholders. Your application needs to demonstrate this.

Part 4: Funded research themes

2026 priority research themes

Align your proposal with the priority themes in the *NSW Environmental Trust strategic plan 2024–29*. For a link to the plan, see ‘Part 9: Resources’.

Your application should show how you will help end users improve environmental outcomes in New South Wales in relation to the priority themes of the strategic plan.

There are 3 priority themes for 2026, with 4 opportunities under each theme. Your proposal may link to more than one theme or opportunity, but you must identify the one that your proposal most strongly aligns with. (There is also an option to identify a secondary theme.)

Table 2 Priority themes

1. Prioritise healthy Country and recognise and value Aboriginal peoples, their traditional knowledge and practices, and connection to Country			
Recognise and demonstrate the value of Aboriginal traditional knowledge and practices and the important role they play in creating healthy Country and supporting wellbeing.	Provide support, resources and opportunities to empower Aboriginal people to connect to and manage Country and enhance community wellbeing.	Create opportunities for Aboriginal people to effectively manage waterways, wetlands and groundwater on Country.	Recognise the value of culturally significant species and the role of Aboriginal peoples in their conservation.
2. Restore ecosystems and biodiversity			
Support native species adaptation, genetic diversity, and resilience to the impacts of climate change.	Mitigate the impacts of urbanisation on waterways and wetlands.	Improve the resilience of ecosystems to adapt to the impacts of climate change.	Support restoration of natural flow to improve ecological functions and riparian condition.
3. Strengthen environmental management			
Improve monitoring practices and data management for better environmental outcomes.	Improve cross-tenure connectivity to support holistic ecosystem restoration.	Increase land managers’ capacity to improve environmental outcomes and natural resource management practices.	Improve knowledge and understanding of plant and animal diseases to inform management actions.

Types of research funded

We provide grants for applied biophysical or social research relating to at least one of the above priority themes.

Biophysical research

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

Social research

The study of social phenomena: people, societies and their interrelationships. This 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.

To be eligible for funding, you must clearly demonstrate that social research is needed to deliver environmental outcomes related to the priority themes.

Part 5: Eligible and ineligible project activities

Eligible activities

Table 3 below provides activities that may be funded through the program.

Further guidance and examples to assist you with linking practical activities with the priority themes are available in the *How to design and develop your environmental research project 2026* (refer to 'Part 9: Resources').

Table 3 **Activities eligible for funding**

Item	Description
Administration and accounting	<p>Capped at 10% of the total grant amount. These administration expenses are office-related overheads specifically associated with the delivery of a project. Administration costs you can include are corporate support services and the costs for obtaining appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.</p> <p>You may include external licence fees needed for delivery of the project elsewhere in your budget. These do not need to be included in the 10% cap.</p>
Consultancies/contractors	<p>Appointment of external specialists. To effectively procure contractors or consultants, applicants should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring a competitive tendering process by inviting multiple consultants to submit proposals. This helps assess various skills and pricing options • evaluating the qualifications, experience, and track record of consultants in similar projects to ensure they meet project needs • clearly defining the scope of work, deliverables, and timelines in the contract to manage expectations and performance effectively.
Educational resources	<p>Materials and production costs to create project-specific resources. Note: Trust funding cannot be used for general organisational app and website development costs, including ongoing maintenance of these platforms.</p>
Employment of project staff (either in-house through salary plus on-costs or an externally appointed contractor)	<p>Staff may be employed with the use of grant funds either via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a merit-based recruitment process for a new staff member with the appropriate skills and capabilities • use existing staff members who have the capacity to contribute to project work. This option applies if the staff member now has the capacity to work on the project under a new contract or if they are part-time or casual employees being hired for additional hours to complete project work. Refer to 'Part 7: Program Governance, Recruitment'. <p>Alternatively, a contractor can be appointed to manage the project – refer to 'Consultancies/contractors' above.</p>

Item	Description
Facilities hire	Rental of appropriate spaces to facilitate project delivery to its target audiences. You may include new licences for digital platforms to deliver content.
Internal capacity building	Training and/or up-skilling of project staff in specialist areas required to successfully deliver project components.
On-ground activity	Items that deliver or demonstrate project activities and outcomes.
Promotion, media and community engagement	Costs associated with project promotion, events and uptake of research outcomes. You may seek funding for advertising, cost of producing fact sheets, training manuals and handbooks that support capacity building for end users and community education.
Transport and accommodation	Transport costs may cover reasonable expenses related to freight, transportation of materials and equipment, and travel costs directly associated with project activities. Eligible transport expenses include fuel, vehicle hire, and transport fares for project staff or contractors. We will fund the costs of overnight accommodation for fieldwork, attendance at conferences and for interstate experts participating in approved project activities. All transport costs must be essential to the project's delivery, cost-effective and supported by clear budget estimates. We will not fund international travel costs. To improve equity outcomes and better support research in remote locations, applicants are encouraged to include realistic travel costs for work in remote locations.

Ineligible activities

Table 4 sets out activities that cannot be funded through the program.

Table 4 Activities not eligible for grant funding

Item	Description
Administration costs that exceed 10% of the total grant, or are not project related	Organisational operating costs not directly related to the project. Project-related administration cannot exceed 10% of the total grant funds.
Capital expenditure	Grant funds cannot be used for infrastructure or capital purchases, which are defined as equipment or assets with a long-term useful life and substantial cost, typically retained beyond the duration of the project. This includes purchasing major equipment or assets that have value beyond the project period. However, small capital equipment

Item	Description
	purchases are allowed if it can be demonstrated purchasing the equipment is more cost-effective than leasing it for the life of the project. Generally, the cost of capital items should not exceed 20% of the total project budget. Essential project equipment may still be eligible for funding if leased or rented.
Commercialisation of existing technologies	Proposals seeking to use funds to commercialise existing technologies.
Core business	<p>Activities that are typically the core responsibility of local or state government authorities or educational institutions.</p> <p>The concept of ‘core business’ can vary between organisations but generally refers to the essential or legal responsibilities an organisation must fulfil.</p> <p>While we can fund projects that relate to your organisation’s core business, we will only support work that goes beyond the organisation’s usual duties or day-to-day operations.</p>
Cost recoupment	Funding cannot be used on any activities that have commenced before the grant is offered and accepted, and a funding agreement has been signed. This includes application development.
Cost shifting	Reimbursement of salaries of existing staff who will be supervising or working on the project unless it can be demonstrated that salaries have not already been budgeted for (refer to ‘Part 7: Program Governance, Recruitment’, and <i>How to design and develop your environmental research project 2026</i> in ‘Part 9: Resources’).
Data collection without application	Surveys to gather data or information on subject matter that is not used to develop or demonstrate research outcomes or deliver tangible environmental outcomes.
Devolved grants, stewardship and incentive programs	Devolved grants, stewardship or incentive programs administered by a third party are not eligible for funding. Subsidy or incentive payments, including monetary compensation to organisations or individuals for maintaining or improving the environmental values of their land are not eligible for funding. You or your approved external manager are fully responsible for managing and spending all grant funds.
Existing commitments	Ongoing research organisations have committed to as part of a previous grant or their core business operations.
Fundamental research	Proposals that do not involve applied research. Projects with no end user identified.
International travel	Overseas travel including flights and accommodation expenses.
Salary on-costs that exceed 26.5%	Salary on-costs that exceed 26.5% of the total grant funds sought for salaries. Salary on-costs include superannuation, leave loading, workers compensation and payroll tax.

Item	Description
Social research not directly related to the project	Social research must be directly related to the project.

Budget requirements

Budget structure

Funding for Milestone 1 must not exceed 70% of the total grant amount to ensure that sufficient funds are available in later milestones for monitoring and dissemination of research outcomes.

Goods and services tax

If you are registered for goods and services tax (GST), the dollar amounts in your application budget should **not** include GST. We will pay GST in addition to your grant if your organisation is registered for GST (except for government bodies).

If you are not registered for GST and are administering your own grant, the amount requested from the Trust should include any GST which may be payable.

Consumer price index

Budget items must account for estimated increases in the consumer price index for each project year.

Salaries

May be included for project management (for example, project officer).

On-costs

Salary on-costs for items such as leave loading, workers compensation, payroll tax and superannuation may be included in your project budget. We will fund a maximum of 26.5% of the total grant-funded salaries.

Project administration

Project-related administration cannot exceed 10% of the total grant funds.

Monitoring

You must demonstrate progress towards achievement of project outcomes. Your budget may include costs associated with monitoring activities (for example, photo monitoring, mapping, ecological surveys). Monitoring can be done by you or a qualified consultant.

In-kind contributions

Include all in-kind contributions in your budget against the relevant project activities.

Include details within the budget description for all in-kind contributions. This includes goods, use of services and facilities, volunteer time, professional services or expertise in

the form of staff time, provision of or access to equipment, and/or special materials or material contributions pledged by project partner organisations (including your own) toward the project.

Salaries for existing staff can be factored into the project as an 'in-kind' contribution.

End of project financial certification

Government and universities

For government organisations and universities, your final financial report must be certified by your chief financial officer or a delegate who has the authority to certify expenditure on behalf of the organisation. The final financial report does not need to be independently certified.

Non-government organisations

All non-government organisations must allocate funds for their project expenditure to be certified by an independent certifier at the completion of the project, to be submitted with the final report.

An Australian member of Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, CPA Australia or the Institute of Public Accountants must certify your financial report and submit a Report on Factual Findings in accordance with Australian Auditing Standard ASRS 4400 *Agreed-Upon Procedures Engagements to Report Factual Findings*.

The certifier should not be a member of your organisation.

The certifying accountant should also provide a Report on Factual Findings declaring:

- the financial report accurately reflects income and expenditure for the project
- all payments were supported by adequate documentation to show that expenditure was for bona fide goods and services related to the project
- competitive pricing was obtained for all individual items of expenditure of \$5,000 and over.

You should investigate the costs of financial certification at the end of their project and include them in your budget.

Part 6: Application and assessment

The program has a 2-stage application process.

Stage 1: Expression of interest

Submit an expression of interest (EOI) via the online Grant Management System (GMS), available on the program webpage:

Projects must aim to commence between 1 May 2027 and 30 June 2027.

Projects must end no later than 30 June 2031.

We recommend using the GMS's online environment to develop your EOIs (rather than downloading and working with it offline). The online system provides 'pop-up' guidance and embedded drop-down menus to assist you.

You can give editing rights to collaborators and project partners so they can provide input to your application. Refer to 'Section 4.2.6: Manage access to application' in the Grant Management System online portal user manual (see 'Part 9: Resources').

Timeline for the EOI process

Table 5 **Timeline of EOI process**

Step	Timeframe	Process
1	9 February to 30 March 2026	EOIs are submitted via the GMS.
2	April 2026 to June 2026	The technical review committee reviews each EOI using the assessment criteria and recommends a shortlist of proposals that best fit the assessment criteria to proceed to a full application.
3	27 July 2026 to 14 September 2026	If your EOI is successful, you will be invited to submit a full application via the GMS. We may ask invited applicants to address points of clarification requested by the technical review committee. Unsuccessful applicants will be advised at the same time. If your application is unsuccessful, you may request feedback to improve future EOIs.

Stage 1: EOI assessment criteria

Criterion 1: Significance for the NSW environment (scored out of 10 points)

- The need for the research is well defined, addresses important environmental issues and relates to one of the priority themes.
- The relevance and significance of potential long-term benefits for the NSW environment are clearly demonstrated.

Criterion 2: Merit of the research (scored out of 10 points)

- The research has clear hypotheses that address specific environmental issues, supported by appropriate design and methodology.
- The proposal's concepts and outcomes do not duplicate completed or current work, and they will provide practical solutions for end users.
- The research will fill a strategically significant gap in knowledge that directly relates to one of the priority themes.

Criterion 3: Collaboration and end user engagement (scored out of 10 points)

- Relevant collaborators (including researchers in related fields of study, policymakers, natural resource managers) have been involved in scoping the proposal, and the project demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach.
- Meaningful collaboration with end users of the research has been established, and the proposal considers their needs.

Criterion 4: Potential for success (scored out of 10 points)

- There is a high likelihood the project will achieve successful outcomes directly related to the priority themes.
- The proposal identifies key risks to achievement of project outcomes and successful project delivery.

Stage 2: Full application (by invitation only)

Timeline of invited application process

Table 6 **Timeline of invited application process**

Step	Timeframe	Process
1	27 July 2026	Invited applicants are given access to GMS to start working on a full application.
2	14 September 2026	Applications close.
3	September 2026 to December 2026	The technical review committee assess applications and recommend projects for funding to the Trust. The Trust considers the Committee's recommendations and determines which applicants will receive grants. Decisions by the Trust are final. There is no appeal process.
4	January 2027 to February 2027	We will notify successful applicants. Successful applicants may not receive the full amount requested. Funding may be subject to special conditions. A summary of each successful project will be published on our website. Unsuccessful applicants are advised of the outcome and encouraged to contact us for feedback on their application.
5	March 2027 to April 2027	Successful applicants work with us on project planning, including the review and refinement of the workplan. The workplan will guide project delivery and ongoing progress reporting. Once a workplan is approved, a funding agreement will be issued, and the first payment released.
6	May 2027 to June 2027	Projects commence.

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

Criterion 1: Significance for the NSW environment (scored out of 10 points)

- The need for the research is well defined, directly related to one of the priority themes, and the proposal clearly articulates important environmental benefits of the research.
- The research will fill a strategically significant gap in knowledge that is likely to improve environmental decision making in New South Wales.
- The research findings will support changes in policy and management practice, or support legislative responsibilities related to one of the priority themes.

Criterion 2: Approach and methodology (scored out of 10 points)

- The methodology (in terms of experimental design, hypothesis, statistics, allowance for variability, identification of uncertainty in data and responses) is clearly detailed, appropriate and sound.
- The proposal indicates best practice methods will be used to achieve project outcomes. The workplan clearly describes implementation of these methods, including how they will be monitored and evaluated.
- The proposal's concepts and outcomes do not duplicate completed or current work.

Criterion 3: Partnerships with collaborators and end-users (scored out of 10 points)

- The research demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach, including collaboration with end users of the research.
- Relevant collaborators including researchers in related fields of study, policy makers and natural resource managers have confirmed their participation in the project.
- The people conducting the research are appropriately qualified and experienced, and the project team can effectively manage all aspects of the project.

Criterion 4: Potential for success (scored out of 10 points)

- There is a high likelihood that the project will achieve successful outcomes directly related to the priority themes.
- The application clearly indicates how end users will adopt/apply the research findings. The workplan includes a high-quality communications strategy that will enable end users to apply or implement the research findings.
- The proposal identifies all key risks to achievement of project outcomes and successful project delivery, and it outlines sound management strategies to address them.

Criterion 5: Value for money (scored out of 10 points)

- The budget supports achievement of the proposed outcomes and delivery of activities, and it will ensure the viability of the project. The proposed budget uses funds in a cost-effective manner.

- The applicant has proposed a project budget that clearly describes project costs and demonstrates how funds will be spent. It also provides details about any funds from other sources where relevant and describes what in-kind contributions can be expected.
- The likely environmental benefit relative to grant funds sought is high.

Alignment of EOI and invited application

Ensure the invited application content builds on proposed activities in the EOI. Applications that are significantly different from the EOI are unlikely to be funded.

Part 7: Program governance

Probity

We require strong governance, transparency and integrity in our programs and projects.

You must comply with the legal and regulatory requirements outlined in the funding agreement. You must also adhere to recognised governance and project management standards.

To ensure this, we conduct annual performance reviews. This includes an evaluation of the project's compliance with the terms set out in the funding agreement.

Procurement

We prioritise delivering value for money in all projects. You must ensure major budget items, like material purchases and contractor engagements, are handled appropriately. Payments for goods and services should be made only after the goods or services have been successfully delivered. You may also be required to submit invoices for purchased materials and completed contract works to verify the achievement of project milestones. Expectations about procurement will be outlined in your grant funding agreement.

All contractors (including consultants) must be chosen based on merit and ability to effectively deliver the work. We encourage you to select contractors or consultants using a competitive process.

Statement of business ethics

All providers of goods and services, including project managers and partners, must adhere to the following principles when carrying out work on the funded project:

- help prevent unethical practices in business relationships
- declare actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

All contracted and subcontracted staff, or associated staff, must comply with the NSW Supplier Code of Conduct (refer to 'Part 9: Resources'). Subcontractors must be made aware of this code and we expect that they will abide by it.

Conflicts of interest

When authorising your application in the declaration section, you will be asked to declare any real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest. You should also outline how you will manage them. You should also consider any conflicts of interest that your project partners, contractors and subcontractors may have in relation to the project.

A conflict of interest may occur when personal, financial or professional interests influence, or appear to influence, an individual's impartiality in decision-making related to a funded project.

You must put systems in place to manage potential or actual conflicts of interest that may occur during delivery of the project.

Examples of conflict of interest are provided in the *How to design and develop your environmental research project 2026* (refer to 'Part 9: Resources').

Recruitment

We support the employment of new and existing staff to manage and implement projects in line with merit selection principles. We will fund salaries under the following conditions:

- additional hours or days for existing staff assigned to a new project are clearly justified
- funding is not used to cover salaries that are already accounted for in the organisation's budget or for tasks that fall under its core business (to avoid cost-shifting)
- consider conducting a competitive recruitment process for new positions funded by us to ensure that the recruitment process is transparent and accountable and is conducted in line with merit selection principles and relevant internal policies and procedures.

Staff recruitment should only take place after the funding agreement has been signed.

Inclusion of PhD/Masters students in project activities will be highly regarded to increase capacity of the NSW environmental research community. This supports the development of research capacity within the NSW environmental research community.

Third-party assistance

You are encouraged to work together with project partners when developing and carrying out a project.

You should carefully consider any commercial relationships formed. While you can get help from third parties to develop your projects and complete the application, we will not cover any costs for this assistance.

The NSW Government is dedicated to ensuring all government-funded opportunities are accessible fairly and transparently.

Third parties who help develop an application may bid for work funded by us if the grant is awarded. However, you must identify and manage any potential or perceived conflicts of interest when hiring third-party contractors. This means you apply the principles of transparency and ensure that you document clear justification for their selection.

It is important that no third party gains an unfair advantage through their involvement in planning the project.

Privacy

We use the information supplied by you to process and assess applications. While applications are not generally made public, they may be disclosed if required by the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (refer to 'Part 9: Resources') or another lawful requirement.

Additionally, we may share this information for the purpose of evaluating or auditing our grant programs. If strict confidentiality is required due to commercial sensitivity or personal privacy, you should clearly indicate this in your submission.

Technical review committee

Selection for the Environmental Research Grants Program is a statewide, merit-based process.

To evaluate grant applications, independent technical review committees specific to each grant program have been set up.

These committees comprise people with relevant knowledge and experience, including at least one representative of community groups and one representative of industry to provide a range of perspectives. All members of the Research technical review committee have significant scientific research qualifications, experience and expertise.

Members of the technical review committee must operate transparently and ethically, maintaining confidentiality and disclosing any potential conflicts of interest. This ensures that grant selections are fair, evidence-based and aligned with the Trust's conservation and cultural priorities for New South Wales.

The technical review committee's role is to assess applications against the assessment criteria outlined in Part 6: Application and assessment. While the committee makes recommendations, final funding decisions are made by the Trust Board.

Part 8: Managing an environmental research grant

Starting work

We will notify successful applicants by the end of February 2027.

If your application is successful, you will work with us from March 2027 to April 2027 to further develop your project workplan to guide delivery of the project. Once your workplan has been approved, we will send you a funding agreement.

Project activities should commence between May 2027 to June 2027.

Funding agreement

You (and your external manager if applicable) must sign a funding agreement that sets out the terms and conditions of the grant. The agreement also outlines a schedule of milestones, including reporting and funding instalments. We will provide a draft copy of a standard funding agreement when project planning commences.

We may also place additional conditions that are specific to the project. We will discuss these conditions with you.

The final version of the funding agreement will be issued on completion of project planning. This will be done after the workplan has been reviewed and approved.

Signing the funding agreement commits you to:

- complying with all conditions contained in the funding agreement
- holding appropriate insurance coverage throughout the project and providing evidence of current policies on request
- starting the project within a month of signing the funding agreement
- seeking prior approval for budget changes greater than 10% (noting that project administration costs should never be more than 10% of the project costs)
- seeking prior approval from us to alter proposed outputs, outcomes or timeframes
- providing milestone reports in accordance with our reporting guidelines and the payment and reporting schedule in the funding agreement
- acknowledging the Trust's support in any promotional materials or public statements about a project, including use of the NSW Government logo (refer to 'Part 9: Resources') in published materials
- preparing for all knowledge gained as part of the grant to be made publicly available, whether that be publishing of the final report or promoting the project via other avenues available to us
- knowing that we will not change the standard conditions of the funding agreement.

Workplan

You will submit a draft workplan defining project outcomes, activities, measures and budget, and if your application is funded, we will work with you to help you further develop it prior to signing a funding agreement. The workplan is a tool for providing:

- assistance in planning and delivery of your project by defining project outcomes, activities and timeframes
- a basis for annual reporting
- a shared understanding of whether projects are on track and have achieved their intended outcomes.

During a project

Reporting

You must submit milestone reports after each milestone (typically every 12 months), through the online GMS. The timeframe for reporting and payments will be agreed upon with us when the grant is awarded and will be included in the funding agreement.

Milestone reports allow you to review your progress and provide us with updates and evidence of the work completed. They also offer an opportunity for self-evaluation, helping you to see how the project is being implemented and adapt if needed.

Each milestone report is reviewed by an independent reviewer engaged by us with appropriate technical expertise.

If a report shows satisfactory progress, we will authorise the next grant instalment and provide feedback. If the project is not in line with the approved workplan or behind schedule, funding instalments may be withheld while we work with you to bring the project back on track.

The Trust understands that variations to projects are sometimes necessary, and these may be discussed with us at any point. Requests for variations can be submitted through the GMS.

Monitoring and evaluation

We require projects to be monitored effectively to ensure they are delivered on time and on budget. You must integrate monitoring techniques into the workplan to track progress and demonstrate project outcomes. Evaluation should take place regularly to assess the project's performance and identify areas where adjustments may be needed.

Invoicing

A tax invoice (subject to GST if applicable) is required for each milestone payment at the time the instalment is due.

Completing a project

When a project is complete, you must submit a final milestone report through the GMS to report on achievements. The final report will be reviewed by a suitable reviewer engaged by us.

We will provide feedback, and if the requirements of the funding agreement have been met, the grant will be acquitted.

Part 9: Resources

About the Trust:

- [Environmental Research Grants Program homepage](#)
- [How to design and develop your environmental research project 2026](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029](#)

Governance-related issues:

- [Government Information \(Public Access\) Act 2009](#)
- [Managing conflicts of interest in research projects \(by the University of South Australia\)](#)
- [NSW Environmental Trust financial reporting requirements](#)
- [NSW grants administration guide](#)
- [NSW Supplier Code of Conduct](#)
- [Tips on working with an external manager](#)

Other resources:

- [Grants Management System online portal user manual](#)
- [NSW Government logo](#)
- [Threatened species licencing legislation and framework](#)
- [2026 Environmental Research Sample Workplan.](#)