



Major Projects: Grantee Guidelines

NSW Environmental Trust

Department of Planning and Environment



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About these guidelines

These guidelines provide an overview of what to expect if you are awarded a grant from the Environmental Trust Major Projects program.

Grant processes align with the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide (2022).

These guidelines are current as of November 2022 and will be updated periodically.

If you would like further information, please contact Trust administration at info@environment.nsw.gov.au

NSW Environmental Trust

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) is an independent statutory body that supports projects that enhance the environment of New South Wales. The Trust's main function is to award grants and supervise the expenditure of money granted.

The Trust was established under the *Environmental Trust Act 1998* and administers grants across a diverse range of programs, including contestable grants, major projects, and various NSW Government initiatives.

The Trust is chaired by the NSW Minister for Environment and Heritage. Its members include representatives from the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE); Local Government NSW; the Nature Conservation Council; and NSW Treasury. The Trust's grant programs are administered by the Grants Branch of the Department of Planning and Environment. Further information about the Trust and its grant programs can be found on our website.

About the Major Projects program

Projects funded under the Environmental Trust's Major Projects program are designed to tackle large-scale and/or complex environmental issues. The Trust identifies and co-designs these projects through consultation with key stakeholders. The goal is to maximise environmental outcomes in New South Wales by investing in projects that are high priority, cost-effective, collaborative, and designed in consultation with subject matter experts.

Roles and responsibilities

Environmental Trust board

The NSW Environmental Trust board (Trust board) approves grants for funding. Trust administration provides an update of all major projects to the Trust board annually, including highlighting any risks. Grantees may be asked to present their project at any stage of its lifecycle to the Trust board at a Trust meeting.

Trust administration

The Major Projects team administers the grants and sits within the Grants Branch of the Department of Planning and Environment – Environment and Heritage Group.

Trust administration oversees all grants awarded and monitors their progress. You will be allocated a project officer within the Major Projects team, who will oversee your project and be your contact at the Trust. We aim to contact each of our grantees via phone or email every 6–8 weeks. This is a chance to discuss any concerns and identify changes that might need to be made or potential variations. Grantees can also contact their project officer as needed.

Technical Review Committees

Technical Review Committees (TRCs) are established by the Trust under Section 9 of the *Environmental Trust Act 1998*. TRCs provide advice and recommendations to the Trust on the practicability and worthiness of grant applications (business plans).

Each TRC is made up of between 3–5 members, with at least one representative from the community and one from industry. The remaining members are subject matter experts.

TRCs currently established are:

- Biodiversity
- Invasive species
- Community and sustainability
- Clean technology
- Nature based tourism
- Contaminated land management.

TRC responsibilities also include monitoring and reviewing the progress of funded projects, where relevant, and providing process improvement feedback to the Trust. TRCs do not have a role in either awarding grants or approving grants expenditure. The Trust or its delegates award grants and approve expenditure during the life of the grant.

Grantees present their project's progress to the relevant TRC throughout the grant delivery.

Note, grantees are not permitted to directly contact TRC members to discuss their project. If required, additional clarification on TRC feedback can be sought via Trust administration.

Grant lifecycle

The graphic below outlines the grant lifecycle that each project will go through, from business plan to acquittal.



Business plan and budget approval

Your project business plan and budget, approved by the Trust board, helps you to manage the grant by outlining key milestones, activities, outcomes, outputs, schedule and budget.

Your business plan is your licence to operate; any work undertaken, or expenditure incurred should be consistent with the approved business plan and approved budget.

If something is in your business plan, it is your responsibility to complete and deliver it. If something has been excluded from your business plan, you are not permitted to undertake that work unless you have submitted a variation to Trust administration and have received written approval of your variation request. If this occurs, you will be required to update your business plan accordingly.

See **Variation section** for further information.

When you receive the grant offer

Following the approval of your business plan by the Trust board, you will be provided a funding agreement. Please ensure you read it carefully. The funding agreement must be signed and returned within 30 days of receipt, with a tax invoice for the first payment (invoice not required for department grantees).

The funding agreement sets out the terms and conditions of the grant, including reporting requirements and when payments are made.

The Trust board may also place additional conditions specific to your project, which will be included as special conditions in the funding agreement in schedule A.

You must not commence your project until the funding agreement has been signed and returned, as the Trust will not fund any activities undertaken prior to the execution of the funding agreement.

Inception meeting

Following the execution of the grant agreement, Trust administration will arrange an inception meeting between Trust administration staff and the grantee. This should include the project manager and supervisor/sponsor of the project.

The purpose of this meeting is to provide an overview of the Trust, the Environmental Trust Act, role of Trust administration, as well as going through the expectations of the Trust in delivering the grant and confirming all key dates and deliverables listed in the signed funding agreement.

The inception meeting can be repeated if there is a change in project manager throughout the project delivery.

Payments and reporting

Payments

Your payment and reporting schedule is outlined in your funding agreement. The first grant instalment is generally paid upon receipt of the returned signed funding agreement, although this can vary between grants. At least one payment per year will generally correspond to the submission of a satisfactory milestone report (usually the annual report) and/or key milestones and is linked to the annual budget allocated in your project budget.

If key milestones in the reporting and payment schedule are not completed on time, the next payment may be delayed.

A tax invoice (subject to GST if applicable) is required for each payment at the time the instalment is due (not applicable for department grantees).

Note unspent funds cannot be returned to the Trust until the project is completed. Any underspends each year must be managed by the grantee through their own internal processes, e.g. the use of a carry forward to move unspent funds to the next financial year.

Milestone reports

Grantees are required to prepare and submit milestone reports regularly throughout their projects, these are a 6 monthly report and an annual report. Milestone reports provide each grantee with the opportunity to review project progress and provide the Trust with updates and supporting evidence on delivery of activities, achievements, and expenditure. They also provide an opportunity to reflect on the implementation of the business plan and identify opportunities for adaptive management as required.

Two milestone reports, along with corresponding financial reports, are required each year.

Name	Period	Due date
6-monthly report	1 July – 31 December	31 January each year
Annual report	1 July – 30 June	31 July each year

Your assigned project officer will provide you with a template to complete for each report. Financial reports, outlining expenditure for the period, are to be provided with each of the milestone reports. The financial report is due 31 July of each year and must be certified by a Chief Financial Officer or equivalent, as outlined in the funding agreement.

The reports are reviewed by your project officer and checked against the approved business plan. You may be asked to provide further detail or information before they are approved.

Six-monthly progress reports are approved by Trust administration, and the annual reports reviewed by the relevant TRC prior to Trust administration approval.

Once your report has been accepted as satisfactory, you will receive the corresponding payment, according to the funding agreement.

If you do not report on time, or if the reporting is unsatisfactory, your payment may be withheld until a satisfactory report has been reviewed and approved by Trust administration.

If a milestone report will be delayed by **up to 4 weeks**, you must notify your project officer via email. If a report will be delayed by **more than 4 weeks**, you must submit a variation request for consideration by Trust administration prior to the expected due date.

Annual Implementation Plans (for relevant projects only)

If, at the time of submitting your business plan, there were components of your project that had not been completely finalised, you will need to submit an Annual Implementation Plan (AIP). This requirement is detailed in your funding agreement.

AIPs outline the proposed activities and budget for the following financial year and must be reviewed by the relevant TRC and approved by Trust administration before you commence those activities.

A template will be provided to you by Trust administration. AIPs are due 31 March each year and are reviewed by the relevant TRC prior to Trust administration approval before 30 June, in order for work to commence from 1 July.

Technical Review Committee meetings

All business plans and annual reports are independently reviewed by a Technical Review Committee (TRC), established by the Trust. Trust administration will determine the most appropriate TRC to oversee your project or will establish a new TRC if additional expertise is required.

TRCs meet 1–3 times per year as needed via an online meeting to review business plans, annual reports, annual implementation plans, or other documentation identified in project business plans.

All grantees give a short 5–10 minute presentation of their relevant plan/report to members, after which members may ask questions. This is to ensure that the project is meeting its objectives and progressing well. Your project officer will advise you of the timing of the TRC meeting several weeks in advance. The project manager or a representative of the project is expected to attend.

Your project officer will provide details on what to include in your presentation. Usually, it will include key milestones, risks or challenges.

Note, grantees are not permitted to directly contact TRC members to discuss their project. If required, additional clarification on TRC feedback can be sought via Trust administration.

Variations

You will determine your relevant timelines and activities through the development of your business plan. You will also need to determine the risks and appropriate mitigation and management strategies before you start your project. Trust administration recognises, however, that variations to your project are sometimes inevitable, and these can be discussed with your project officer as the project progresses.

Please discuss all proposed variations with your project officer and seek approval before you implement them, as retrospective variations may not be approved and are considered as part of your overall grant performance record.

If a variation is required, you must submit a variation request to your project officer prior to implementing the change. Your project officer will provide you with a form to complete.

Depending on the nature of the variation (budget, methodology, scope or timeline), the request will be submitted to the appropriate delegated officer for consideration, or if a significant change, to the Trust board for consideration. Any requests required to go to the Trust board may also go to the TRC. Please note that this process may take some time.

Types of variations

Timeline

If you require an extension to the funding term (as noted in the funding agreement), you must submit a timeline extension request outlining the reason for the delay and project progress to date. This should be submitted at least 2 weeks before the originally approved due date to allow time for processing. Adequate justification must be provided to support an extension of time in which to complete the project (e.g., delays caused by factors largely beyond the grantee's control, such as unfavourable weather conditions).

A revised payment and reporting schedule will be provided by Trust administration outlining the new due dates, including any additional milestone reports or changes to payment distribution required as a result of a timeline extension.

Budget

If you need to vary the budget, you must submit a budget variation form with supporting justification. It is important to note that budget variations are considered via line items, e.g., salaries, materials, publicity. You should be able to demonstrate:

- improved outcomes or efficiencies
- confirm the item is being sufficiently funded elsewhere
- that the variation will continue to provide the Government with good outcomes for its investment
- there is no net loss of outcomes due to the reallocation of funds between items.

In accordance with the funding agreement, Trust administration approval is required for budget variations (increases or decreases) with a total value of over \$50,000 per line item over the life of the grant.

Variation amount	Level of approval
More than \$50,000 variation for line item	Trust administration
Less than \$50,000 variation for line item	No approval needed

Note that administration costs cannot exceed 10% of the total direct project costs, and salary oncosts must be below 26.5%

In addition, there can be no increase to the total amount awarded by the Trust.

Methodology

If you are proposing a change to project methodology (e.g., a change to how an activity is delivered), you must submit a variation form with supporting justification. The justification must include how the revised details are broadly consistent with the outcomes and objectives of the original business plan and will deliver comparable or improved results.

Scope

If you are proposing a change to the project scope (e.g., what is being delivered), you must submit a variation form with supporting justification. The justification must include how the revised details are broadly consistent with the outcomes and objectives of the original business plan and will deliver comparable or improved results.

If the change in scope is significant, it may need to be considered by the Trust board. Your project officer can provide advice around this requirement according to the change requested.

You must seek and receive approval of variations before the requested change is implemented.

Media and acknowledging government funding

You are required to acknowledge Trust funding in any public statement or written material in relation to the project, including media releases, publications, promotional material or signage, as outlined in the funding agreement, by using the NSW Government logo and the following acknowledgement statement:

'This project has been proudly supported by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust.'

The NSW Government logo can be downloaded from the Trust website.

There may be media opportunities for key project milestones or achievements that may warrant a Ministerial or departmental media release, or Ministerial or departmental attendance at a launch or event. Please discuss potential media opportunities with your project officer, who will liaise with the Department's Public Affairs team. Note a lead time of 6–8 weeks is usually required for media opportunities.

Submitting your final report

You must submit your final report on the due date specified in your funding agreement. If your final report will be delayed by **up to one week**, you must notify your project officer. If your final report will be delayed by **more than one week**, you must submit an extension request via email outlining the reason for the delay and a proposed due date.

You should not submit a final report if there are works outstanding. In this case, you should submit a timeline variation request to allow for the remaining works to be completed.

Your final report outlines the overall achievements of the project, confirms all required works as outlined in the business plan have been completed and includes a financial report certified by your financial controller.

Your final report enables the Trust to report to government on the outcomes that have been achieved by the program and through government investment.

Submission of a final report does not mean that the grant has been completed. Your grant is considered active until you receive written notification of acquittal from Trust administration.

As with all milestone reports, the final report will be reviewed by the relevant TRC and includes a presentation of project outcomes by the grantee at a TRC meeting, before approval by the Trust administration.

At the end of the project, any unspent funds must be returned to the Trust within 30 days. A tax invoice will be provided.

Evaluation

Funds are allocated to evaluation in the project budget. While these are included in the total grant awarded, these funds are retained by the Trust, who will commission an independent consultant to complete the work. Evaluations usually occur at project completion; however, they may also be undertaken throughout project implementation, particularly for those projects that are over 5 years in length.

The evaluation is used to assess how well the project is achieving or has achieved the intended outcomes, guided by the evaluation questions contained within the business plan. Grantees and project stakeholders are required to provide input to the evaluation, as requested by the evaluator, and will also have an opportunity to respond to the final evaluation report.

Evaluation reports, Trust administration and grantee responses are published on the Trust website.

Project acquittal

Your grant is complete once you are notified of the project acquittal outcome in writing. This takes place once the final report has been independently reviewed by the TRC and approved by Trust administration. This may also occur after the independent evaluation is commissioned and completed.

More information

- [NSW Environmental Trust](#)