



Independent Local Grants Review Panel



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The Independent Local Grants Review Panel

Overview of the Local Grants Fund

The Local Grants Fund supports communities along the proposed WRL route to deliver projects that matter to them most. The program was shaped by feedback from landholders who want to see initiatives that reflect local aspirations and create lasting community benefit. These insights have directly shaped the program's five key focus areas:

Funding priorities:



Community infrastructure



Environment



New energy initiatives



Community connection and participation



Emergency services

The program is open to community groups, incorporated associations, charities, non-profit organisations and local councils within the Local Government Areas (LGAs) along the proposed WRL project route. These LGAs include Melton, Moorabool, Hepburn, Ballarat, Pyrenees, Northern Grampians and Ararat* Shires.

*Although the route does not pass directly through the Rural City of Ararat Local Government Area, it is positioned very close to its boundary, and there are communities within the Rural City of Ararat located very close to the proposed transmission line. Communities situated in this LGA that are close to the proposed route are therefore also eligible to apply.

Independent Local Grants Review Panel

The Independent Local Grants Review Panel provides public checks and balances for the Local Grants Fund. Its role is to bring local knowledge into the assessment process.

The panel draws on local knowledge to advise on applications and recommend projects that best reflect community priorities and program objectives. By bringing this insight into the process, the panel can highlight additional considerations and share contextual information that supports fair, informed evaluation and grant allocation, reflecting local aspirations and creating lasting community benefit.

The role of the Independent Local Grants Review Panel

The Independent Local Grants Review Panel reviews and considers eligible applications referred to it by the internal WRL Grants Review Committee.

The WRL Grants Review Committee is made up of representatives from different disciplines across AusNet and VicGrid (such as engineers, commercial specialists and planning experts). The committee is responsible for confirming the eligibility of each application and conducting a comprehensive review of the information provided by applicants. They evaluate each application against the selection criteria using a weighted assessment framework. Each application is scored out of 100, ranked in order of priority for funding, and supported by written commentary explaining the assessment.

Ahead of the assessment meeting, the Independent Local Grants Review Panel receives the eligible applications, along with supporting assessment information prepared by the WRL Grants Review Committee. This material is provided to enable panel members to review applications in advance and prepare for discussion.

The assessment meeting is facilitated by an independent third party. At this meeting panel members discuss their evaluations, consider the relative merit and priority of applications and agree to a set of collective funding recommendations.

The Panel will provide WRL with a prioritised list of recommended applications (including the proposed funding amount for each), which is then provided to AusNet Executive Management for final endorsement.



Decision making process



Decisions on priority order of grant funding are made by consensus between the group. If consensus can't be reached, then decisions will go to vote and will be made by super majority (80% and above).

Becoming a panel member

We are seeking representatives from across the community to provide a broad range of perspectives on the Independent Local Grants Review Panel.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Reside in one of the Local Government Areas it's proposed the WRL project will traverse through and provide evidence of residency if requested.



Melton City Council



Moorabool Shire Council



Hepburn Shire Council



City of Ballarat



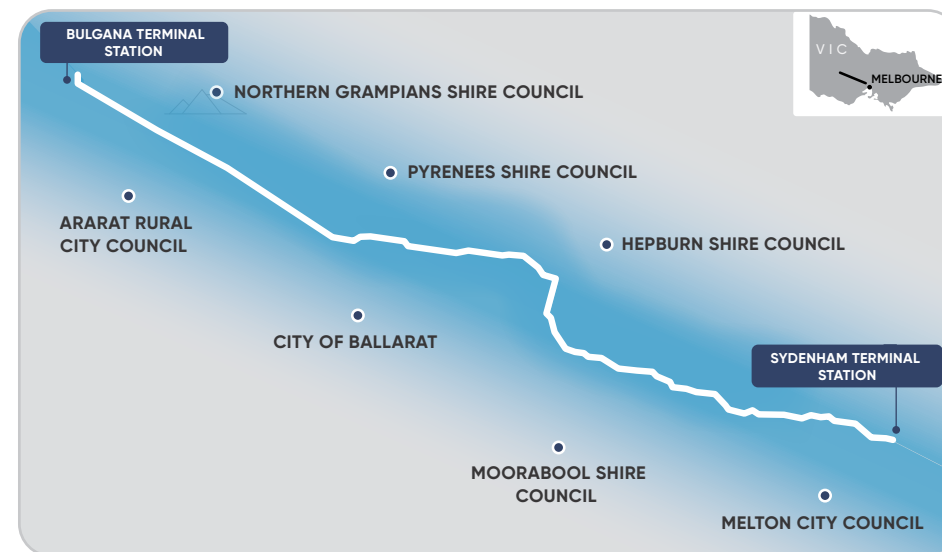
Pyrenees Shire Council



Ararat Rural City Council



Northern Grampians Shire Council



To check your address against the LGA please refer to the [WRL Interactive Map](#) and select the LGA layer from the left hand side.



Panel members will also be expected to:

- Attend meetings prepared, having reviewed all relevant grant applications in advance.
- Maintain confidentiality of all information accessed as part of the process.
- Engage openly and respectfully, contribute to discussions, provide fair and balanced feedback on applications, and respect the views of fellow panel members.
- Disclose any conflicts of interest before reviewing or providing advice on any grant application.

Selection process



We are seeking a minimum of four community representatives from the Local Government Areas that the proposed WRL route will traverse to join the Independent Local Grants Review Panel.

If the number of applications exceeds the available places, panel members will be selected based on the extent to which applicants demonstrate:

- Eligibility and a willingness to enter into an agreement with WRL, via AusNet, for the role. The terms of this agreement will reflect the information outlined in this document.
- Representation across the project footprint. Where a panel member has already been appointed from a particular Local Government Area, applications from other LGAs may be prioritised to support a broad spread of community representation.
- Diversity of experience and expertise that applicants can bring to the panel. For example, where an appointed member has significant experience in sport and recreation, priority may be given to applicants with expertise in other areas, such as environmental management or community engagement.
- A balanced panel composition, including consideration of gender.
- Availability to attend the proposed meeting(s) once dates are confirmed.

Final decisions on panel membership will be made by the WRL project.

In addition to community members who nominate to participate, WRL may invite regional leaders or external stakeholders to join the panel where specific or specialist expertise would add value. This may include representatives from external agencies who can offer particular perspectives, such as expertise relating to the emergency services sector.

If you are selected to be part of the Independent Local Grants Review Panel, we will contact you and provide an agreement outlining the terms of the role. While the selection process may take some time, all appointments will be finalised prior to the close of the first Local Grants Fund funding round.

If you are not selected in the initial round, your details will be retained in case a panel member resigns and additional community representation is required. Applicants who are not selected may request feedback on the outcome of their application.

All information supplied within the application will be stored securely and maintained in line with our [privacy policy](#).





Commitment requirements

At this stage, it is not possible to confirm how many funding rounds will be required to distribute the full \$4 million available through the Local Grants Fund. As funds are not being reserved for future rounds, applications will be assessed on merit and funding allocated accordingly. It is anticipated that the full amount will be awarded in 2026, potentially across one to three funding rounds.

Panel members will be appointed for the duration of the Local Grants Fund.

The time required to review and assess applications will vary depending on the number received in each round. It is anticipated that for each funding round panel members will need to commit approximately one to two days to review applications, followed by a panel meeting lasting a few hours.

If you require assistance accessing the application materials online, such as access to a computer or internet connection, the WRL project can provide support during the grant review period.



Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

Members of the Independent Local Grants Review Panel may have access to confidential information. As a condition of appointment, prospective panel members will be required to enter into a confidentiality agreement to enable information to be shared for the purposes of the assessment process.

All information relating to grant applicants and their submissions, application assessments, discussions between panel members, and recommendations regarding funding allocations must remain strictly confidential. This information must not be disclosed outside of formal panel meetings.

For transparency, the names of panel members and a brief descriptor (for example, 'community member') may be published on the WRL website. Photographs may also be taken during panel meetings for record-keeping and communication purposes. Consent will be sought from each individual before any photography takes place.

Panel members will also be required to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest during their participation in the Independent Local Grants Review Panel.



Honorarium

Community members appointed to the Independent Local Grants Review Panel will receive a reading fee of **\$259 per day** for reasonable time spent reviewing grant applications in preparation for the assessment meeting.

Panel members participating in the panel as part of their paid employment or as representatives of an agency are not eligible for the reading fee.

WRL will reimburse reasonable travel and accommodation expenses for all panel members, provided these expenses are approved in advance by WRL.



Termination

Either party may terminate membership of the Independent Local Grants Review Panel by providing 14 days' written notice. Notice can be submitted by email to grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au.

If a panel member resigns, previous applications may be used to identify the next most suitable applicant who meets the eligibility criteria outlined above. Where no suitable applicants are available from previous applications, WRL may, at its discretion, seek additional expressions of interest or appoint a suitable replacement.

Panel operations and responsibilities

Meeting facilitation

The WRL project will provide grant applications to the assessor via a direct and secure link to the WRL SmartyGrants platform. Assessment meetings of the Independent Local Grants Review Panel will be facilitated by an independent third party, with a project representative providing coordination and secretariat functions.

Assessment meetings may be online or in-person. If in-person attendance is required, then the WRL project will reimburse any necessary travel, so you are not out of pocket.



Responsibilities of panel members

Panel members are expected to:

- Review grant applications submitted to the Local Grants Fund
- Consider initial assessment notes prepared by AusNet and WRL project reviewers and take into account any relevant expertise they provide (for example, an engineer may offer technical insights on a battery and solar installation proposal)
- Contribute local, expert or contextual knowledge or advice that informs a thorough assessment of proposals
- Provide an individual assessment and ranking of proposals within a funding round in advance of a scheduled assessment meeting
- Attend grant assessment meeting/s and actively participate by sharing evaluations and reasoning to inform the decision-making process
- Collaboratively work with your fellow panel members to refine recommendations into a final priority order for funding. Recommendations should include the proposed funding amount for each project. The panel's recommendations will then be submitted to AusNet Executive for final approval and the issuing of funding agreements
- Offer feedback on the Local Grants Fund, the application and assessment process and the Independent Local Grants Review Panel and provide suggestions for improving systems, processes and/or communications.



Benefits of being involved

There are many benefits to being involved on the Independent Local Grants Review Panel.



Provide valuable advice to help identify projects that will deliver the greatest benefit and impact for the community.



Share your knowledge of local issues, history and community context, and contribute your insights to the assessment process.



Gain insight into initiatives and efforts aimed at strengthening local communities.



Connect with others who share a commitment to supporting and improving their communities.

Application process

If you would like to be involved, please complete the secure online form to register your interest. The form asks for basic demographic information, details about your connection to the community, and the insights you believe you could bring to the panel.

- The application form can be accessed via the [WRL website](#).
- Applications for the Independent Local Grants Review Panel will close at 11.59pm on 18 May 2026.
- If you have any questions or need assistance completing the form, please contact us at grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au or 1800 975 975.





Western Renewables Link

🌐 www.westernrenewableslink.com.au

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✉ info@westernrenewableslink.com.au

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Information straight to your inbox

Sign up for information straight to your inbox at the project website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Feedback

You can provide feedback on this document via our website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au or by calling 1800 WRL WRL (975 975) or by emailing info@westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Translation and interpretation services



If you need an interpreter, please call 13 14 50.



If you are deaf and/or find hearing or speaking with people on the phone difficult, please contact the National Relay Service on voice relay number 1300 555 727, TTY number 133 677 or SMS relay number 0423 677 767.

Western Renewables Link Benefit Sharing Program



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