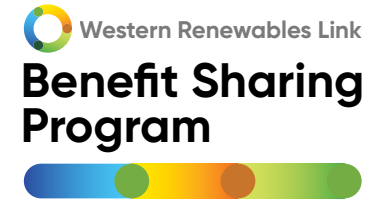




# Local Grants Fund



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# About the Western Renewables Link

The Western Renewables Link is a proposed new 190 kilometre overhead high-voltage electricity transmission line that will carry renewable energy from Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west.

As ageing coal-fired power stations are retired and become less reliable, the project will play a critical role in securing Victoria's energy future. By connecting new renewable generation through Renewable Energy Zones, WRL will deliver cleaner, more reliable energy to homes and businesses.

The Western Renewables Link is being delivered by AusNet, who currently operate over 6,600 kilometres of transmission lines across Victoria. AusNet will develop and, if approved, finance, build, own and operate the new infrastructure. For more information, visit the [WRL website](#).



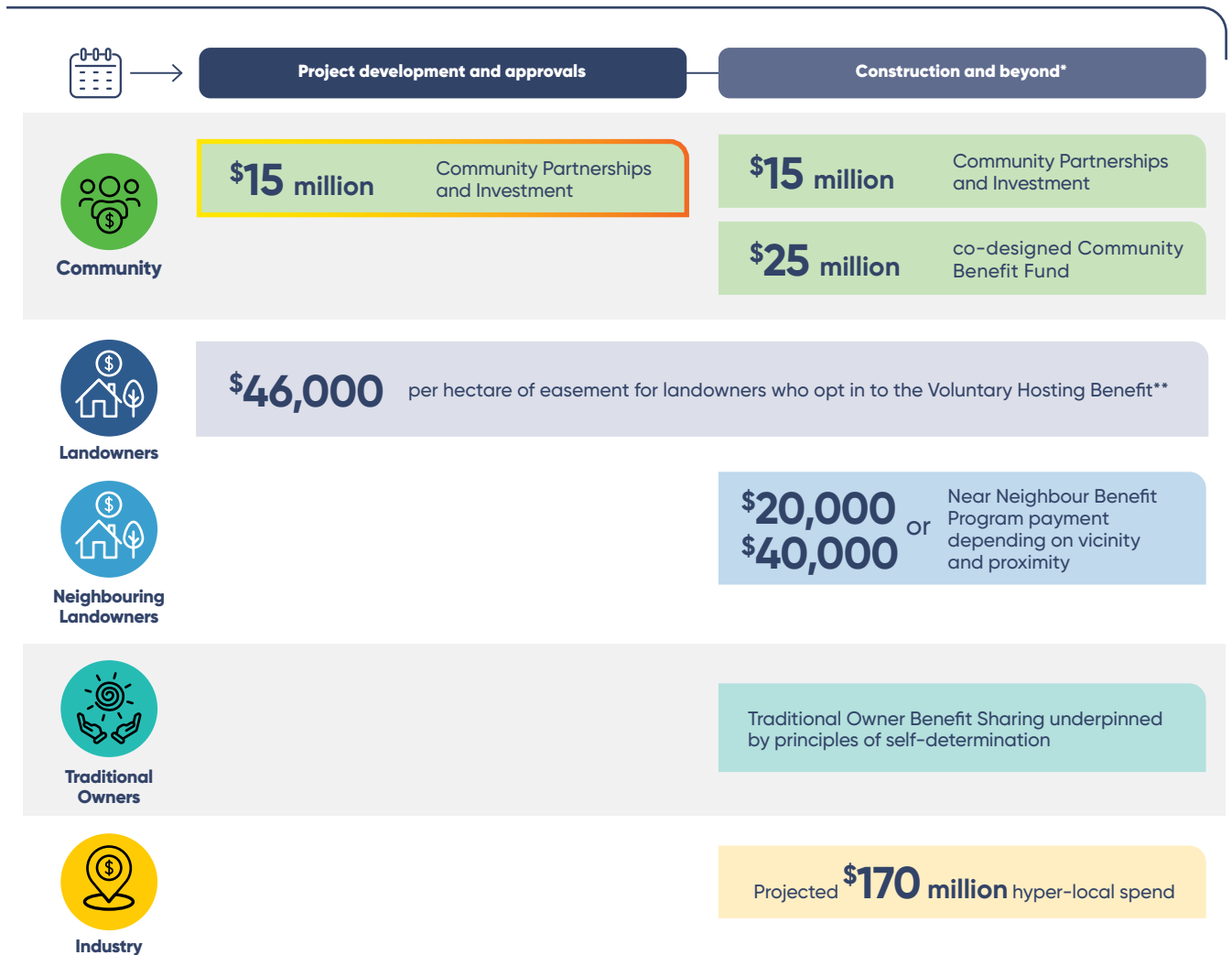
# The Western Renewables Link Benefit Sharing Program

The Western Renewables Link's Local Grants Fund is one of several initiatives delivered under the broader WRL Benefit Sharing Program - a multi-million-dollar commitment designed to make sure communities along the proposed route share in the social and economic value created by the project.

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program was developed through engagement with landowners, Traditional Owners, communities and key stakeholders and is designed to directly respond to the challenges of those most affected by the project. The program will support local initiatives, improve public infrastructure, recognise landowners and near neighbours and invest in Traditional Owner partnerships. It will focus on outcomes that are feasible and viable, delivering meaningful impact and a sustainable legacy.



The Local Grants Fund will provide \$4 million during WRL's development phase to support local initiatives that enhance public spaces, build community capacity and deliver benefits aligned with community priorities. Importantly, this early investment will be delivered regardless of whether the project proceeds to construction.



\*Benefits in this phase will be delivered if the project is approved and proceeds to construction

\*\*For those who sign a Land Access Consent and Option for Easement agreement early and voluntarily. The VHB is in addition to the \$8,000 per kilometre per year for 25 years (indexed to CPI) transmission line hosting payment announced by the Victorian Government in 2023

# About the Local Grants Fund

As part of the WRL Benefit Sharing Program, a \$4 million Local Grants Fund will support local communities to deliver the initiatives that matter to them most.

The fund is designed to provide immediate support for communities living along the proposed WRL route, regardless of whether the project is approved to proceed to construction and seeks to support ambitious initiatives that deliver broad benefits and create a lasting legacy.

Feedback received from local stakeholders highlighted a desire for locally led initiatives that deliver value, reflect community aspirations and create enduring impact.

Further insights from landholders directly shaped the funding priorities for the Local Grants Fund, which aims to support initiatives that reflect aspirations and respond to the challenges of those most affected by the project.



## Priority areas identified include:



**Community infrastructure**



**Environment**



**New energy initiatives**



**Community connection and participation**



**Emergency services**

The program will support community groups, incorporated associations, charities and other non-profit organisations located within the Local Government Areas (LGAs) proposed to host, or situated close to, the proposed WRL project. These LGAs include Melton, Moorabool, Hepburn, Ballarat, Pyrenees, Northern Grampians and Ararat.

There are no fixed funding allocations for specific towns, LGAs or regions. The Local Grants Fund will prioritise support for communities located closest to the proposed WRL project route.

To help successful applicants deliver their initiatives as quickly as possible, co-funding is not required. However, partnerships and larger projects that include or require additional funding are welcome to apply.

Further details about eligibility and how to apply can be found in the following sections.

The WRL Local Grants Fund is part of a \$15 million early investment in community benefits. It is not dependent on project approvals and will be available regardless of whether the project proceeds to construction. Participation in the program does not affect a community's right to oppose the project.

# Funding overview



The WRL Local Grants Fund has a total budget of \$4 million, available during the development phase and delivered regardless of whether the project is approved to proceed to construction.

**Maximum funding per initiative:** \$300,000

**Timeline:** The first funding round will open on Tuesday 31st of March 2026. If required, additional funding rounds may be scheduled until all funds are awarded. First round applications will close Tuesday 30th of June.

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The program offers two funding tiers to help guide applicants:

**Tier 1:** Grants up to \$50,000 for smaller-scale initiatives.

**Tier 2:** Grants between \$50,000 and \$300,000 suitable for larger scale legacy initiatives.

These tiers are intended as a guide to the scale of the initiatives we expect to support. There is no fixed allocation per tier, initiatives will be assessed on merit. We encourage applicants to request the amount they genuinely need to deliver a meaningful and lasting benefit to their community. More details about eligibility and application requirements are provided in the following sections.





## Funding categories and objectives

The WRL Local Grants Fund is designed to support a wide range of community groups, with a focus on volunteer-led and grassroots organisations.

**Five funding categories** have been established. Each category is supported by a number of objectives. Applicants only need to address one objective within their chosen category.



## Community infrastructure

Supporting places and spaces that contribute to more connected, resilient, healthy and inclusive communities.

This category seeks to provide support for **small infrastructure initiatives** with the objectives of:

- Improving community facilities that increase pride and functionality in existing assets.
- Increasing usage, usability or functionality of a place.
- Contributing to community preparedness for disaster resilience.
- Seeding the feasibility planning for major new community space initiatives.

In addition to **large infrastructure initiatives** with the objectives of:

- Improving or creating community spaces that increase activity, usage and vibrancy.
- Improving the functionality, useability, safety and beautification of public spaces, including streets, gathering and recreation spaces, cultural or historic areas or spaces and community facilities such as sporting facilities and community halls.

### For example:

Playgrounds, re-surfacing, upgrading or contributing to new sports facilities, community gardens, Avenue of Honour, drinking fountains in parks, water tanks at community halls or creating picnic areas or places for the community to gather.

*This funding does not support ongoing operations, maintenance and upkeep.*



### Working with your local council or relevant landowner

If your proposed initiative involves creating infrastructure or running programs on council-owned land or facilities, you'll need council support. This usually means providing a Letter of Support, Letter of Consent or Letter of Commitment with your application. The type of support required from them may vary.

If you are proposing to run a program or initiative within one of their facilities but that is not expected to have a cost to council, then a Letter of Support may be appropriate.

If an application for an initiative is on council, government or private land, then a requirement of the application will be to show evidence of consent from the council, building and/or landowner that they are supportive of the project and consent for it to occur on their site.

If the project or initiative you are proposing will create a need for ongoing operations, maintenance and upkeep from your council or another landowner, then their written knowledge and acceptance/commitment to the ongoing costs needs to be provided with your application. Initiatives on council land should also include an operations and maintenance plan and meet all relevant infrastructure criteria outlined in these guidelines.

Local councils can apply as the auspice for a community group's application, which means they support the application and manage the grant on the group's behalf.

Early engagement with your council is strongly recommended to make sure your proposal aligns with their requirements and community priorities.



## Environment

Supporting nature conservation activities.

This category seeks to provide support for **environmental initiatives** with the objectives of:

- Protecting biodiversity (diversity of native plant and animal species) through conservation initiatives and activities and enhancing habitats and water resources.
- Protecting or improving native vegetation, native fauna, wetlands and soils.
- Mitigating the effects of drought on natural systems.
- Efforts to eradicate weeds, revegetate areas, provide fencing and other forms of pest control.
- This program won't fund exotic plantings or the direct or indirect use of the following methods of animal pest control: Shooting, poisoning, trapping, explosives.
- This program won't fund the cost of native vegetation offsets.

### For example:

Tree planting, creating wildlife habitat or improving local wetlands and bushland.



**NOTE:** This category is not part of the WRL project-related Environmental Performance Requirements. Environmental management, remediation and offsets relating to the project are managed separately. Benefit sharing remains a key commitment for the WRL project nonetheless and the five priority categories the \$4 million Local Grants Fund will be allocated across will include community-led nature conservation activities.



## New energy initiatives

Providing energy-related support for community facilities and venues.

This category seeks to provide support for **energy initiatives** with the objectives of:

- Energy resilience, reliability and affordability endeavours to assist in carbon reduction or fulfillment of sustainability plans that enable funds to be redirected to service delivery from reduced energy cost; or
- The creation of community resilience centres (i.e. to enable power for the community to access energy for showers, refrigeration, communications in times of disaster).
- Upskilling and/or training community groups in energy resilience education within their local community.

### Definitions

Resilience: The ability to continue using electricity at the site when there is an extended power outage.

Reliability: Provide reliable energy during momentary outages and disruptions (such as when the lights are flickering), so you can experience more consistent, reliable energy.

### For example:

Solar and battery systems, electric vehicle charging, energy resilience education programs or a community space adding backup power to support locals during an emergency.



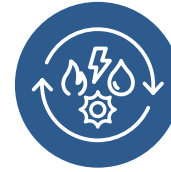


## Community connection and participation

Supporting locally based sporting, social and special interest groups, clubs and associations.

This category seeks to provide support for **community connection and participation initiatives** with the objectives of:

- Encouraging, increasing and diversifying participation in community-led activities, groups and associations. This may include programs that encourage new or targeted participation, such as for women, older people, or other underrepresented groups, or programs that support vulnerable community members to overcome social, financial, physical or health-related barriers to participation.
- Providing equipment or amenities that assist in running fundraising activities or that enable the community to gather.
- Creating meaningful ways to create connection and social cohesion within the community, including the creation of partnerships between or within associations and groups.



## Emergency services

Supporting local emergency services.

This category seeks to provide support for local **emergency services initiatives** with the objectives of:

- Encouraging new volunteers to be part of local service delivery through initiatives and activities.
- Providing additional or specific training for new and existing volunteers to enable them to participate in emergency service delivery to their highest skill level.
- Providing amenities or equipment that assist with on-the-ground service delivery.

The WRL project has also developed a specific grants program – the Community Brigades Support Initiative – for CFA brigades located within 10km of the WRL project alignment. Brigades that are eligible for the Community Brigades Support Initiative **are also eligible to apply for funds through the Local Grants Fund**, irrespective of whether they have received or acquitted any other funds from WRL via AusNet.

### For example:

Participation, inclusion and accessibility programs, materials for creative or cultural programs, or simple essentials like marquees and BBQs for community events or to support fundraising activities.



### For example:








Training, essential gear or equipment that helps volunteers respond to fires, floods, storms or droughts and the people, animals or infrastructure impacted by them.

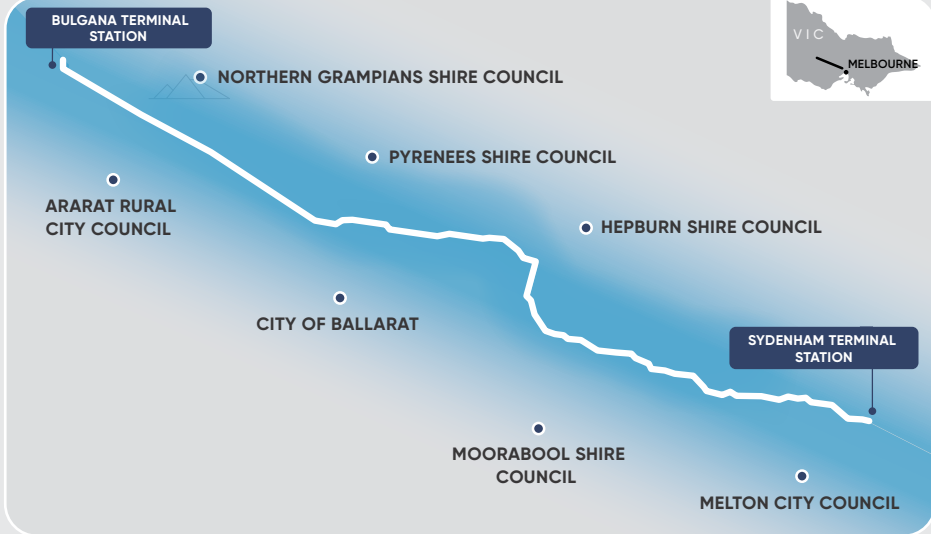


# Eligibility

## Eligible locations

The WRL Local Grants Fund supports initiatives and activities delivered within the Local Government Areas (LGAs) that are proposed to host or are situated very close to the WRL project. These are:

-  **Melton City Council**
-  **Moorabool Shire Council**
-  **Hepburn Shire Council**
-  **City of Ballarat**
-  **Pyrenees Shire Council**
-  **Ararat Rural City Council**
-  **Northern Grampians Shire Council**



The Local Grants Fund will prioritise support for communities located closest to the proposed WRL project route, where the shading is darkest on the map above. As part of the assessment process, we will aim to support a reasonable spread of grant activities along the proposed WRL route. However, there are no fixed funding allocations for specific towns, LGAs or regions. All applications will be assessed on merit against the selection criteria, which means that multiple successful initiatives may be located within the same area.

To situate your initiative in relation to the most current WRL route alignment please refer to the [WRL Interactive Map](#).



## Who can apply?

### To be eligible to apply for a grant, applicants must:

Have a valid Australian Business Number (ABN).

Unincorporated and community groups can apply through an incorporated organisation acting as their auspice. Evidence of the auspicing organisation's agreement to manage the funds will be required. Victorian local government, state and federal government entities can apply as the auspice (and project managers) with the main applicant listed as the community group. This acknowledges that many community facilities are owned by or on council or other government land but managed by a volunteer association who may not be able to receive funds. See more information on auspices on [page 13](#).

### And be one of the following types of organisations:

- Incorporated association
- Not-for-profits (Australian public companies limited by guarantee whose governing rules demonstrate a not-for-profit or charitable purpose / registered not-for-profit through the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission)
- Social enterprise
- Industry association or business chamber
- Crown land Committee of Management
- Cooperative, registered in Victoria under the Cooperatives National Law
- Incorporated Aboriginal entities, including Aboriginal not-for-profit organisations, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Traditional Owner groups and land trusts.

**This is a not an exhaustive list of eligible entities, if you have any queries or would like to check your eligibility for the program then please [contact us](#).**

Groups working together should nominate one organisation as the lead applicant. The application must name all partner organisations and include letters of support from each.

Applications that include co-funding or are submitted to multiple funding bodies are welcome and encouraged, provided the applicant meets the eligibility requirements and can deliver a version of the initiative that scales to the funding secured (including this grant alone or alongside other confirmed funding).

# Who's ineligible?

**The following entities are not eligible to receive funds under this grants program:**

- For-profit companies
- Sole traders
- Individuals or individual partners
- Joint ventures
- Australian Government agencies
- State Government agencies and statutory bodies or authorities
- Political parties, political organisations and lobbyists

**Applicants with outstanding reporting obligations from previous AusNet or WRL funding are not eligible to receive new grants unless:**

- The WRL project or AusNet (as the case may be), in its sole discretion, has provided a written agreement stating the applicant is still eligible. This may apply in cases where a previously funded initiative is close to completion, the WRL project or AusNet is satisfied that funds have been used appropriately and there are no outstanding risks or concerns from the initiative or stakeholders.
- They are an auspice organisation or acting as an auspice for multiple projects supported by the WRL project or AusNet i.e. a local council.
- Reporting requirements are met or in the process of being finalised or approved by the WRL project or AusNet.
- They are a CFA brigade that is eligible to receive funds from the [Community Brigades Support Initiative](#).



# Eligibility requirements

## General eligibility for all grants:

- Be an eligible organisation/entity.
- Be located within the eligible area for the program.
- Initiatives requesting less than \$50,000 must demonstrate that the initiative can be completed within 12 months of signing the funding agreement. Initiatives requesting between \$50,000 and \$300,000 must demonstrate that the initiative can be wholly or predominantly delivered within 18 months of signing the funding agreement.
- Be able to enter into a funding agreement with the WRL project via AusNet for the delivery of the initiatives, as per the information outlined in the application and receive the funds or alternatively provide details of an auspice organisation and confirmation that they have agreed to act as the auspice for the initiatives.
- Be able to provide evidence of relevant insurances for the type of initiative you are applying for support for at the time of signing a funding agreement with us.
- Have acquitted any outstanding funds received previously by WRL via AusNet or be exempt from this as per the Eligibility section on [page 12](#) (i.e. local councils auspicating multiple projects).
- Agree that we may request further information of the applicant or conduct our own due diligence checks on the applicant or the proposal.



## Applications that involve capital works must also include:

- A letter of consent or commitment from the relevant landowner, venue or facility owner – or from the local council if more appropriate. For example, a new playground on council land that will have ongoing maintenance costs must be supported by a letter of commitment and consent from that council and a solar installation on a building (that is not expected to have ongoing maintenance costs) must be supported by the facility owner by a letter of consent. For further information refer to the Supporting Documentation section of this guide on [page 17](#).



## Auspice arrangements

- An auspice organisation is a larger entity, such as a council or an incorporated entity, that manages grant funding on behalf of a smaller organisation or unincorporated group without an ABN. To be eligible, the auspice organisation must agree to the application and take responsibility for managing the funds. This agreement must be documented and submitted with the application.
- Auspice arrangements for grants are designed to assist not-for-profit community groups who are small or may not yet be incorporated. They cannot be used by for-profit organisations to apply for grants that benefit a commercial business.
- Grant funds will be paid directly to the auspice organisation and the funding agreement will be made jointly with both the applicant group and the auspice organisation. The auspice organisation is responsible for receiving, administering and acquitting the funds and making sure the project is completed on time.
- Evidence of the agreement between the two parties to undertake this auspice arrangement must be submitted with the grant application.
- It is reasonable for an auspice organisation to charge a management fee, which can be included in the project budget. This fee should be agreed upon by both parties and generally should not exceed 10% of the total project cost. If the auspice is also the project manager, such as with a local council, then additional funds can be allowed for the project management role.
- An auspice organisation may manage multiple funding agreements at once. However, it can only have one active agreement with us at a time for any specific group or initiative it is auspicating.



# What can and can't be funded



## What the funds can be used for

The following list of costs can be applied for within this Local Grants Fund. This is a non-exhaustive list to provide an example of the sorts of reasonable expenditure that may be included within an application. Expenditure requested should relate to the funding category applied for.

- Project specific costs, such as equipment purchases and hires, products and items needed to support the activity or infrastructure.
- Materials, consumables and supplies for creating or installing the initiative.
- Labour costs for suppliers to undertake the work.
- Wages and fees for contractors and suppliers.
- Health, safety and security costs.
- Training, education and upskilling costs if relevant to the proposal.
- Marketing, advertising and promotional materials.
- Project/event launch costs, including catering.
- Administration costs including any auspice fees and any necessary insurances, if the applicant does not have enough insurance coverage for the proposed initiative or activity already.
- Reasonable project management.
- Reporting or evaluation costs on initiative outcomes.
- Reasonable contingency allowance.

WRL supports the state government's Local Jobs First Policy and recommends the use of local suppliers and contractors where possible within project plans and budgets.



## What won't be funded

- Illegal, protest, religious, political or anti-social (i.e. gambling) activities.
- Activities where the primary purpose is opposition to AusNet, the WRL project or related government decision making.
- Costs not directly related to the funding requested for the initiative/activity.
- Overhead lease, rental, mortgage or interest payments.
- Activities required to be undertaken as part of an existing agreement or legislation.
- Costs for travel and research with no practical on-ground actions.
- Purchase of generators (for the new energy initiative grants category).
- Ongoing operations, maintenance and upkeep costs, or standard services that would be within the usual remit of an LGA to deliver.
- Initiatives that have already been funded in total and are committed to proceed already. Note, this program can contribute to the costs of an initiative that is planned but hasn't secured all of its budget or can be used to help leverage additional funds if this program is the first committed funding received for the initiative.
- Initiatives that don't respond to the categories and outcomes of support that this program intends to fund.
- Initiatives that are not delivered within the relevant Local Government Areas.
- Initiatives that cannot be wholly or partially delivered within 18 months from signing the funding agreement.
- Activities that have already been completed, including expenses incurred before notification of an application outcome.

# Application process

## Program timeline

Funding will be awarded on merit until expended. Future funding round dates will be released as required. The first funding round will open on Tuesday 31st of March 2026.

### Initial funding round timeline

Applications open:	Applications close:	Recipients notified:	Project completion:
<b>31 March 2026</b>	11.59pm Tuesday <b>30 June 2026</b>	Q4 2026	12–18 months after funding is awarded (timing will be agreed on a case-by-case basis and documented in the funding agreement).

Acquittal reporting: You will be required to submit a report on the outcomes of the project and a financial acquittal of the funds within three months of the completion of the project (refer to the Reporting section of these guidelines).

Future funding round dates will be released if and as required until all funding has been allocated.

# How to apply

You can apply for the WRL Local Grants Fund through the WRL SmartyGrants portal. A link to the portal is available on the [WRL website](#). SmartyGrants is a cloud based grants management system used by philanthropic, government and community organisations to streamline the full grants lifecycle, from application to assessment, reporting and acquittal.

<b>Before starting your application:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read the program guidelines carefully and check that you are eligible.</li><li>2. If you have questions, contact us on 1800 975 975 or at <a href="mailto:grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au">grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au</a></li></ol>
<b>To begin:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Create a SmartyGrants login if you don't already have one.</li><li>4. Your application will include written information, a budget and supporting documents such as letters of support or an auspice agreement.</li></ol>
<b>Tips for writing your application:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use plain language so that we can quickly and easily understand your initiative.</li><li>• Include your contact details so we can reach you if we need more information. For larger grants, we may request a meeting to discuss your proposal.</li><li>• If using a computer or providing written information is a barrier, please contact us – we can help with alternative arrangements. Call 1800 975 975 or email <a href="mailto:grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au">grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au</a></li></ul>
<b>Things to keep in mind:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Budgets should be exclusive of GST. GST will be added to the amount awarded if applicable.</li><li>• Each initiative requires its own application.</li><li>• Applications must be received by the due date. Once submitted, you'll receive an automatic confirmation email.</li><li>• Design initiatives to be scalable, in case only partial funding is available.</li><li>• Check your application carefully before submitting – you cannot make changes after submission.</li><li>• Save your draft regularly to avoid losing work.</li><li>• Make sure any uploaded files are saved before exiting or submitting.</li><li>• For technical issues, contact SmartyGrants on +61 3 9320 6888 during business hours.</li><li>• For questions about your application, contact WRL on 1800 975 975 or <a href="mailto:grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au">grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au</a></li></ul>

# Supporting documentation



It may be necessary for applicants to include supporting material with applications, which can be uploaded as a file attachment within SmartyGrants. Appropriate documentation or supporting material to provide with your application may include:

- Letters that evidence the community's support for your proposed initiative will be looked at favourably (but are not a mandatory requirement).
- Initiatives that are being auspiced are required to provide evidence of the auspice agreement. This could be in the form of a support letter, or a copy of an MOU or signed agreement between the applicant and auspice agency.
- Infrastructure or capital works projects must include a Letter of Commitment, or Letter of Consent, from the building and/or landowner (as relevant) stating that they support the application. The letter should be signed by the relevant and authorised person.
  - The Letter of Commitment should be used if there will be ongoing operations and maintenance costs that the landowner has agreed to cover i.e. a new playground in a council-run park initiative would need to provide a Letter of Commitment from the council stating their agreement to take on the ongoing costs of the infrastructure.
  - A Letter of Consent can be used if there are no expected ongoing costs to the building or landowner, but an infrastructure or capital works initiative is proposed on their land i.e. solar panels on the roof of a facility where the tenant is the applicant.
- If the applicant is a group affiliated to a larger organisation, such as a fire brigade within the CFA, then the applicant should provide a letter of support from the 'parent' organisation and follow any processes required of them to gain approval for the application prior to the submission.
  - CFA brigades should include a copy of the CFA Grant Funding Application Form that has been signed and approved by the CFA District/Region, to evidence that the applicant has followed the CFA's existing processes for applying for a grant, and that the CFA District/Region endorses the initiative, prior to submission to the Local Grants Fund.
- Initiatives that are partnerships or collaborations between groups or entities must provide confirmation from all parties that they agree to participate in the initiative, detailing their role within it. This can be provided as an attachment.
- If your initiative has secured additional funding outside of this WRL application, please include evidence of that support.
- Evidence of costs:
  - Material items: Evidence of cost is required for items over \$3,000. You can also include other quotes to help support your overall budget.
  - Professional service: Evidence of cost is required for any contract work (such as electrician, builder, architect etc.) over \$5,000. You can also include quotes to support any professional services budget item, regardless of cost.



# Budget requirements

Applications must include a detailed and accurate budget that reflects the scale of the proposed initiative. The budget should clearly outline the costs involved in delivering the initiative to help us assess whether the proposal is reasonable and achievable. The budget will form the basis of the funding agreement and will be used to acquit the initiative's finances once it is completed.



## Budget information to consider:

- Costs must be directly related to the proposed activity and cannot be used for any other purpose, including underwriting existing service delivery.
- Quotes are the most reliable way to demonstrate accurate costs for major items or services. All quotes must be attached to the application (see Support Material section).
- Please note that the full amount requested may not be awarded. Partial funding may be offered where ineligible expenses have been included, or where overall program funding capacity is limited.



## GST

All project costs included in the application should be **exclusive** of GST. If your grant application is successful you may invoice us for the agreed funding amount plus GST, if you are GST registered. GST will not be paid if the recipient organisation is not registered for GST.

SmartyGrants requires that you enter your budget line by line within the application form. You can choose to upload a separate, more detailed budget, such as one prepared in Excel or Word, as part of your supporting material. Including notes or annotations can help assessors understand how you calculated the funding amount you're applying for.



## Co-contributions

- Co-contributions from the applicant are not mandatory, however they are considered favourably. Contributions may include financial support or in-kind contributions (see In-kind Support section).
- Your project budget should clearly outline all other funding sources relevant to the initiative. Please make sure the following information is provided:
  - Unconfirmed external funding: If you have applied or intend to apply for additional funding from other sources, outline what funding will be sought and the expected timeframe for when these outcomes will be known.
  - Confirmed external funding: If any external funding has already been secured, clearly identify these confirmed contributions in the budget.



## In-kind support

An in-kind cost is a contribution of goods or a service other than money. This is often in the form of voluntary labour or services, or donated goods. If relevant the grant application budget can include in-kind contributions. These costs should be marked as in-kind and attributable, so we can assess that they are valid.

In-kind contributions are generally recorded at an estimated market value. As a guide, volunteer labour can usually be costed at \$20–\$35 per hour, while specialist services (such as architectural services) can usually be costed at \$50–\$80 per hour. What's important for the budget is that any in-kind contributions that form the initiative's income match the in-kind expense for acquiring the goods or service.

# Assessment process

WRL will take a rigorous, fair and transparent approach to assessing applications and carefully consider if there is strong alignment between the initiative's goals, the program's objectives and community need. Applications to the WRL Local Grants Fund will be assessed through a multi-stage process that includes review by an Independent Local Grants Review Panel that will include representatives from the community.

Further details about the Independent Local Grants Review Panel are provided on [page 22](#). The guidelines and details on how to register your interest in joining the Panel are available on the [WRL website](#).

All assessors are required to declare any conflicts of interest. Decisions for each funding round will be final and will not be reviewed. Unsuccessful applicants can request feedback and are able to re-apply in future funding rounds, should there be any, with an updated application.



# Assessment criteria

Applications to the WRL Local Grants Fund will be assessed via a merit-based process, against the proposed weighed criteria below.

Initiatives under \$50,000 will not have criteria 6 applied to their assessment.

Table 1: Assessment criteria

Criteria #	Criteria - detail	Weighting – For grants up to \$50,000	Weighting – For grants of \$50,000 to \$300,000
1	<p>The application clearly addresses and aligns to an objective listed within the category of support that is being applied for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community infrastructure</li> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• New energy initiatives</li> <li>• Community connection and participation</li> <li>• Emergency services</li> </ul>	20%	20%
2	Proximity of the proposed initiative to the alignment of WRL and the priority areas identified (see map on <a href="#">page 10</a> ).	15%	15%
3	<p>How clearly the application explains the initiative, its aims and expected outcomes, and demonstrates that it is viable.</p> <p>In addition, for capital works/infrastructure initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration for how the initiative will be maintained beyond funding terms.</li> <li>• Consideration for any required consents, approvals, permits, licences or certifications that will be required for the initiative and processes, cost and time have been factored into the project plan.</li> <li>• Evidence that the owner of the land or building/facility is comfortable with the proposal for the capital works/infrastructure initiative to proceed (if the applicant is not the owner of the land/facility).</li> </ul>	15%	15%

4	How well the application demonstrates the need for the initiative and the level of community support for it.	20%	10%
	This could include information about:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The issue, problem or gap the initiative addresses, with any relevant data or local insights (and how it aligns with local or regional priorities).</li> <li>Who will benefit, and why the initiative is needed now.</li> <li>Evidence of community and/or stakeholder support (for example, letters of support or a demonstrated history of local backing for the initiative).</li> </ul>		
5	How well the application explains the benefits the initiative will deliver for the community and demonstrates a strong connection between the applicant and the community that will benefit.	20%	10%
	This could include information about:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The community benefit the initiative will deliver and how the proposed activities will achieve that benefit for the intended beneficiaries.</li> <li>Why you/your group is well placed to deliver the initiative, including your local presence, relationships and understanding of the community.</li> <li>How the initiative has been shaped by the community (for example, community-led delivery or strong input from the people who will benefit).</li> </ul>		
6	The applicant's capacity to deliver the initiative, including:	N/A	10%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevant experience delivering initiatives/programs/activities.</li> <li>A clear structure and governance in place to successfully manage the activity.</li> <li>Key personnel and roles that will coordinate and carry out the work.</li> </ul>		
7	The extent that the application demonstrates thorough project planning for the initiative including:	10%	20%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consideration of risks and how they will be managed</li> <li>Planning for delivery</li> <li>Value for money</li> <li>Readiness to commence</li> </ul>		
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>



## Independent Local Grants Review Panel

The Independent Local Grants Review Panel brings local knowledge, lived experience and specialist insight to the assessment process.

The panel will review applications and consider initial assessments made by the internal WRL Grants Review Committee. The Independent Local Grants Review Panel will then make a recommendation to WRL on who should be awarded funding through the Local Grants Fund. WRL, via AusNet, will use this advice for awarding and contracting the funds.

The Independent Local Grants Review Panel is designed to include selected representatives from the community. 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.

Individuals from the community can nominate themselves or others for consideration for the Panel by completing an online form via the WRL website. Nominees may be asked to share details to help make sure there is broad representation from across the Fund's eligible Local Government Areas, demonstrate their connection with the community and the expertise they would bring to the role, for example past or current involvement with community sports, a background in emergency services, or knowledge about the environment.

Members who participate separate to their work will be paid an honorarium in acknowledgement of the time they spend reading and assessing applications. All Panel members will be required to sign conflict of interest declarations, in addition to an Assessor Agreement that will outline the obligations of the role (such as maintaining confidentiality).

To access the Independent Local Grants Review Panel guidelines and application form please visit the [WRL website](#).

**Table 2: Independent Local Grants Review Panel assessment process**

Stage of process	Detail
<p><b>Eligibility checks</b></p>	<p>Each application will be checked to make sure it meets eligibility requirements.</p> <p>If an application is found to be ineligible the applicant will be informed in writing.</p> <p>Eligible applications will progress to the next stage of assessment.</p>
<p><b>Initial assessment</b></p>	<p>A WRL Grants Review Committee, made up of specialist roles and expertise from across WRL, AusNet and VicGrid in areas such as construction, engineering, planning and environment, communications, project management, grant assessment, commercial and finance will consider all applications.</p> <p>The WRL Grants Review Committee will score applications, enabling the initiatives to be ranked in order, highest to lowest. They will then agree on the list of initiatives they recommend for funding. Committee recommendations will then be provided to the Independent Local Grants Review Panel.</p>
<p><b>Independent Local Grants Review Panel</b></p>	<p>The Independent Local Grants Review Panel will be an external body that includes a minimum of four representatives from the community, industry, state government, local councils or regional leaders.</p> <p>The panel will review the list of applications and either endorse the WRL Grants Review Committee's recommendations or make final recommendations, including funding amounts for Executive approval.</p>
<p><b>Final approvals</b></p>	<p>AusNet Executive management will be provided the final list of recommendations from the two-stage assessment process for endorsement prior to issuing notification letters to applicants.</p>



# Funding agreements and reporting

## Funding agreement requirements

If a funding application is successful, the organisation will enter into a funding agreement with WRL via AusNet.

The funding agreement will outline the details of the initiative that the applicant agrees to deliver. This will include information such as the proposed timelines and major activities/deliverables of the initiative. Successful applicants cannot access the funds to commence the initiative until the funding agreement has been signed and received by AusNet and AusNet has received all necessary information in order for us to process the payment. This may include registering to become a vendor on AusNet's payment system and providing us with a valid invoice for the agreed funding amount.

### Variations

We understand that circumstances can change and plans may need to adapt. This might mean funds are spent differently from what was outlined in your original application and funding agreement. If the funds are still used to achieve the same overall objective they were originally intended to support, you will not require prior approval from WRL.

If funds are spent in a way that does not align with the original project plans or the intended purpose outlined in the funding application, those expenses may be deducted from the final payment. If the amount spent is significantly more than the final payment, the applicant or organisation may be ineligible for future funding from AusNet and in some cases, may be asked to repay the funds.

Applicants should stay in touch with the WRL team via their nominated contact listed in the funding agreement. If you're unsure whether a change to your initiative or budget is appropriate, please check with us before committing to the expense. This helps avoid any risk of funds being withheld at the end of the initiative.

Any approval for funding variations agreed to by WRL via AusNet will be kept on file for reference when finalising project acquittals and processing final payments.

### Payment phasing



Table 3: Project tiers

Project tiers	Payment phasing
Initiatives up to \$50,000	Paid upfront
Initiatives between \$50,000 and \$100,000	80% paid upfront, remaining 20% paid upon completion of reporting with WRL via AusNet
Initiatives between \$100,000 and \$300,000	Payments will be tied to agreed milestones as appropriate for each initiative

### Example – The Lunch Club

Let's say The Lunch Club receives a \$10,000 grant to improve picnic amenities at their local park. In their application, they said the funds would be used for a new BBQ, picnic tables and signage.

After starting the initiative, they realise the existing picnic tables are in good condition and only need a fresh coat of paint. They decide to use the leftover funds to buy a new bin and add extra picnic benches around the park.

-  This change is acceptable because the funds are still being used to improve the park's picnic amenities – just in a slightly different way.
-  However, if The Lunch Club instead used the funds to buy sports equipment (like new balls for a local club that uses the park), this would not be considered in line with the original purpose of the grant.

If they believe there is a good reason to make that change, they should contact WRL and request written approval before proceeding.



## Reporting

All initiatives will be required to submit an acquittal report after completion, so that we can understand details of the activities that were delivered for the initiative and the impact that has resulted from its implementation.

A financial acquittal will also be required, so we can understand how the funds were spent. Accurate financial records must be maintained, including receipts and tax invoices, as these may be required for audit or review purposes.

We may collate and publish information on the outcomes and impact of the funding awarded through this program. Privacy will be protected in the analysis and information shared within reports on the program.

### Progress updates

For grants over \$50,000, we may request quarterly progress updates so we can check how your project is tracking.

Updates can be provided through a short phone call or meeting, or as a written update. What we request will depend on the complexity of the initiative and the level of support that would be helpful. If your application is successful, we will agree the reporting approach with you and include it in the funding agreement.



## Insurances and legal compliance

As part of the funding agreement, grant recipients may be required to provide evidence of appropriate insurance coverage, such as public liability or personal accident insurance, prior to the release of funds. Recipients must also agree to comply with all relevant laws, regulations and legislative requirements, including but not limited to the *Privacy Act* and the *Freedom of Information Act*.



## Acknowledgement of support

We will work with funding recipients collaboratively on a case-by-case basis to develop communication approaches that are appropriate for each initiative/ applicant.

As a minimum, to ensure transparency, funding recipients will have their initiative listed on the AusNet and/or WRL websites as part of a list of initiatives that have received funding through the Local Grants Fund. This list may be in database form, as text in a webpage form or shown on a map, aligned with the initiative's location.

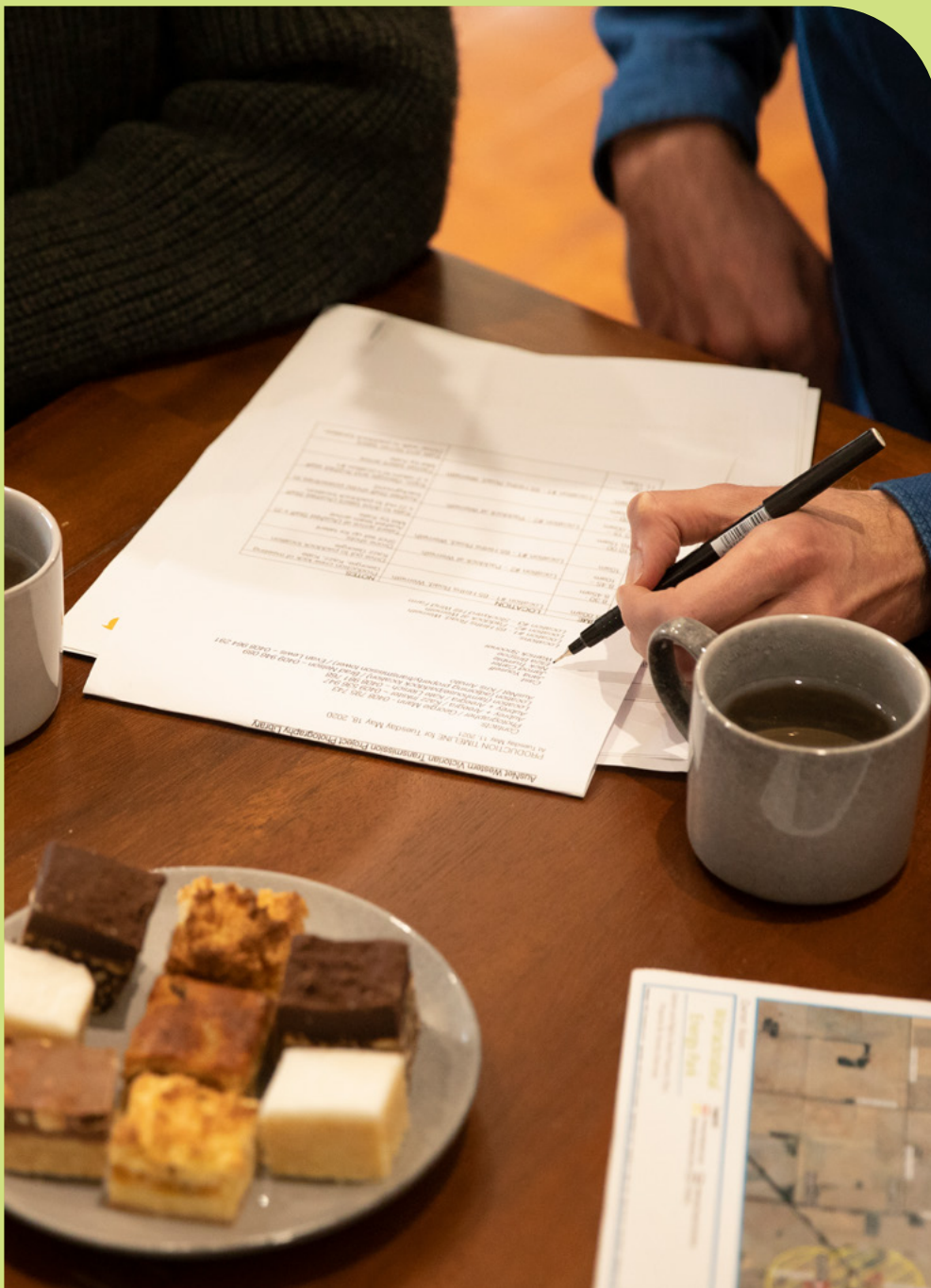
Any public announcement of the funding support that is made by AusNet/WRL will be first discussed and agreed to with the funding recipient.

Where required and appropriate, grant recipients will be provided with a logo, brand guidelines and instructions on how to acknowledge support. We may request to review any promotional materials that include this acknowledgement before they are published, to make sure they align with branding guidelines.



## Repayment of funds

Grant funds may be subject to repayment if they are not used for the purposes outlined in the funding agreement or the original application. Repayment may also be required if any information provided in the application is found to be false, misleading or inaccurate, or if the grant recipient fails to provide satisfactory evidence that the funded activity has occurred, such as through acquittal or audit processes, as required under the agreement. If the value of inappropriately spent funds exceeds the final payment, the recipient may be ineligible for future funding and in some cases, may be required to reimburse the full amount.



## Acquittal reporting process

An acquittal report will be due three months after the project is completed. Project completion dates will be scheduled to 12 months after a funding agreement is signed, except for large infrastructure initiatives which will be due 18 months after the funding agreement is signed, or as agreed between the applicant and the WRL project via AusNet and documented within the terms of the funding agreement.

The funding agreement will outline the acquittal requirements, but in general will include:

- When and how the initiative took place
- Evidence the initiative occurred (photos, videos, marketing materials, invitations or media coverage)
- Initiative outcomes and impact (what was achieved and how it made a difference)
- Who benefited from the initiative (including any unexpected or additional benefits)
- Any changes made from the original proposal
- How the grant funds were spent and any variations to the proposed budget
- Any learnings resulting from the project, or things that could have been done differently with the benefit of hindsight
- Feedback or evaluation of the WRL Local Grants Fund experience

The acquittal report will be sent to applicants prior to the acquittal due date and may also be submitted online via the SmartyGrants platform.



### Keeping us updated

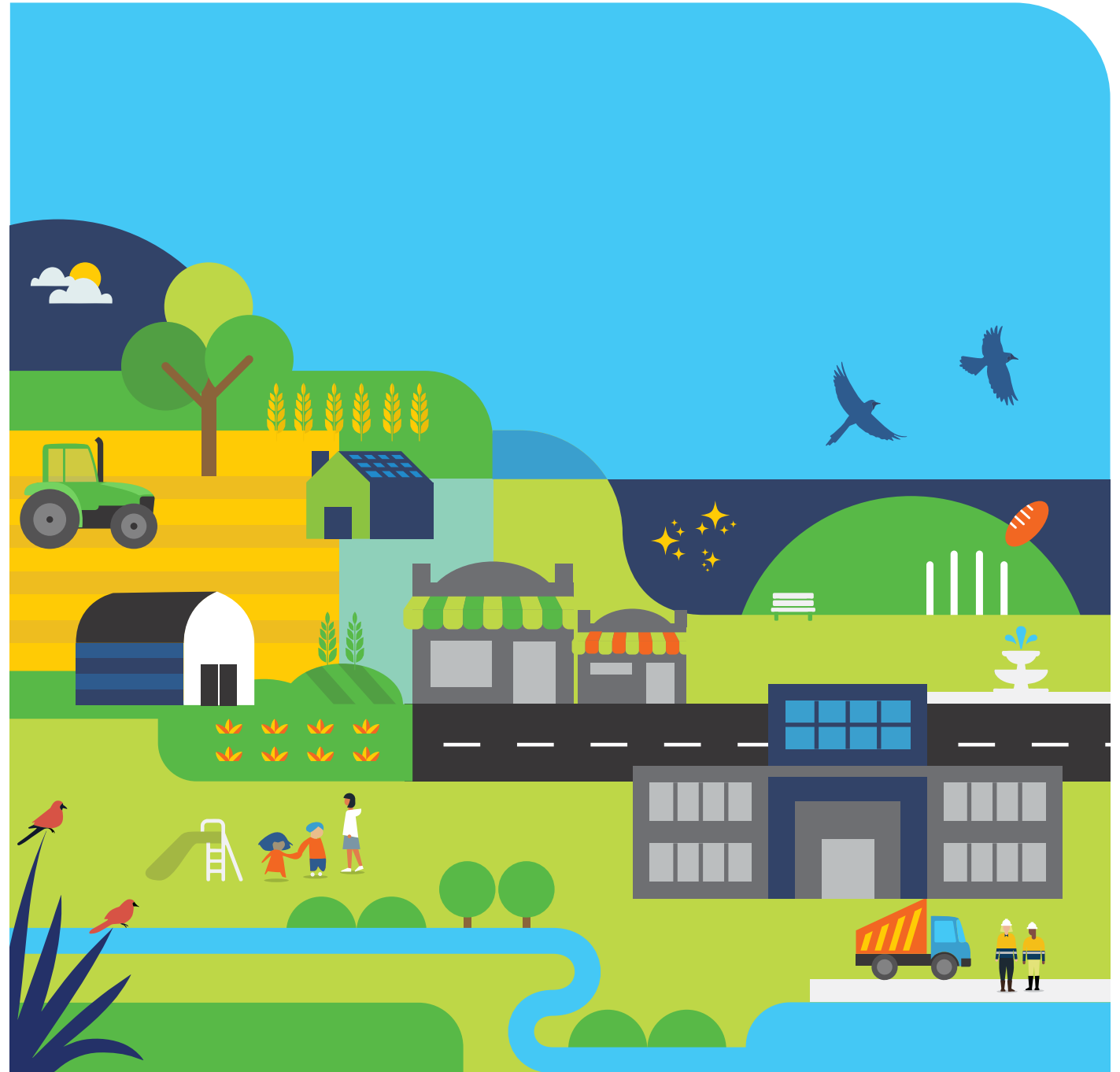
Successful applicants are requested to let us know if anything is likely to impact their ability to deliver the initiative as per the funding agreement, or if any changes happen to the organisation that limit their ability to complete the grant activities. If an applicant thinks they are, or may be, in breach of any of the terms of the funding agreement, then we request to be notified without delay.

Applicants should also keep us informed if their contact details change.

Finally, we will request to be kept informed of any public events, launches or openings for the initiative so we are aware in advance of any opportunities to attend if deemed appropriate to do so.

# Appendix

## Local Grants Fund Application Checklist



# Local Grants Fund Application Checklist

## Step 1 Confirm eligibility

- Check your organisation type is eligible (in the 'Who can apply?' on [page 11](#).)
- Confirm your initiative will be delivered within an eligible LGA.
- Make sure your initiative meets general eligibility requirements (timelines, insurance, previously obtained funding has been acquitted etc.).
- If your initiative involves council land or facilities, engage early and request a letter of support.
- If you need an auspice arrangement, confirm agreement and prepare documentation.

## Step 2 Prepare your project details

- Identify which priority area and objectives your initiative aligns with.
- Provide a clear, detailed outline of your proposed plan, including objectives, activities, timelines and expected outcomes.
- Consider the operations and maintenance aspects of your initiative.
- Gather evidence of community support (letters, endorsements, partnerships).

## Step 3 Prepare your budget

- Create a detailed, line-by-line budget (exclusive of GST).
- Include quotes for any item over \$3,000 and professional services over \$5,000.
- Identify any co-funding or in-kind contributions (optional but encouraged).
- Make sure costs are reasonable and directly related to the initiative.

## Step 4 Gather supporting documents

- Letter of support from landowner/council (for capital works).
- Auspice agreement (if applicable).
- Partnership confirmation letters (if collaborating).
- Evidence of additional funding (if applicable).

## Step 5 Complete your application

- Register or log in to SmartyGrants via the [WRL website](#).
- Fill in all required fields in the application form.
- Upload supporting documents and budget.
- Review your application carefully before submission.
- Submit by the closing date (check program timeline).

## Step 6 After submission

- Save confirmation email from SmartyGrants.
- Be available for follow-up questions.
- Keep copies of all documents for your records.

## Step 7 If successful

- Sign and return the funding agreement along with an invoice.
- Provide any additional information requested (e.g. insurance certificates).
- Meet reporting requirements and progress report deadlines.
- Deliver your initiative within agreed timelines.
- Keep receipts and records for acquittal reporting.
- Submit acquittal report within three months of project completion (or as per your agreement).
- Notify WRL of any changes or public events related to your initiative.

## Quick tips for a strong application

<b>Start early:</b>	Give yourself time to gather evidence of costs, letters and approvals.	<b>Provide evidence:</b>	Letters of support and quotes strengthen your application.
<b>Be clear and concise:</b>	Explain your initiative in plain language – what, why and how.	<b>Plan for delivery:</b>	Include realistic timelines and risk considerations.
<b>Show community benefit:</b>	Highlight who will benefit and how.	<b>Check everything twice:</b>	Incomplete or unclear applications may not progress.

Remember we are here to help, that there are free independently run grant writing workshops on offer through April and that we can be contacted any time at [grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto:grants@westernrenewableslink.com.au) or on 1800 975 975



### Western Renewables Link

🌐 [www.westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au)

☎ 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)

✉ [info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto:info@westernrenewableslink.com.au)

Ballarat PO Box  
PO Box 638, Ballarat VIC 3353

### Information straight to your inbox

Sign up for information straight to your inbox at the project website [www.westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au).

### Feedback

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

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