



Local Land Services
Northern Tablelands



Small Community Grants



Northern Tablelands LLS

Assessment Plan

Project Name:

IRIS event number:

Chair of the Assessment Panel:

Name and position:

Mobile:

Email:



Australian Government

National
Landcare
Programme

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APPROVAL

Document No	A2899408	Version No	2.1
Issued by	Manager, Land Services Northern Tablelands LLS	Authorised date	15 th August 2015
Authorised by	General Manager, Northern Tablelands LLS	Effective date	15 th August 2015

1. Introduction

Under the National Landcare Programme, the Northern Tablelands Local Land Services are coordinating a Small Community Grants Program during 2015-2017 to support a range of different projects within the region.

Applications are being sought from eligible applicants for delivery of community partnership projects. Three classifications of grants are available:

- Awareness raising events, workshops and field days (\$500 to \$1,500)
- Mentoring, leadership, training, conference and associated small on-ground works (max \$5,000)
- Aboriginal cultural heritage protection, leadership, training and knowledge projects (max \$10,000)

Activities (including small on-ground works projects) that improve people's capacity to:

- Manage groundcover, soil organic carbon, litter, pasture biomass and native vegetation cover
- Protect existing native vegetation
- Establish new native vegetation
- Manage threatened species
- Preserve and Protect Aboriginal culture and heritage
- Improve riparian stability, on farm wetlands and in stream aquatic habitat

2. Scope of this document

The purpose of this document is to detail the methodology that will be used to assess Applications for the Northern Tablelands LLS Small Community Grants Program, including;

- Management arrangements which will apply to the assessment of Applications received;
- Processes to be used to assess applications and to determine recommended applicants;
- Processes to be applied to the execution of management or service agreements, and;
- Timing and sequence of the assessment tasks.

3. Objectives

The primary objective of the plan is to provide a workable framework within which the Assessment Panel may determine and recommend for approval Small Community Grants projects that align with the Northern Tablelands Investment Plan 2025.

The objectives of the assessment are to:

- Select proposals which satisfy eligibility and standard assessment criteria, and;
- Prioritise and rank proposals in a rational, repeatable and logical manner which is fair to all applicants.

4. Timetable for the application process

Event	Target Completion Date
Applications invited, advertising	1 st July 2015
Applications close	14 th August 2015
Assessment of applications against eligibility criteria and standard assessment criteria	7-10 th Sept 2015
Completion of assessment panel report	14 th Sept 2015
Applicants notified of success	21 st Sept 2015
Management or Service Agreements negotiations with applicants	21 st Sept – 9 th Oct 2015
Agreements commence	9 th Oct 2015
Projects completed	April 2017

5. Roles and responsibilities

Assessment Panel

The Assessment Panel will be responsible for reviewing the applications and applying the assessment methodology and evaluation criteria. The Panel will comprise of up to five members including at least community members or independent persons not employed by Northern Tablelands LLS.

The Assessment Panel will:

- i. Endorse the Assessment Plan, including weightings given to the assessment criteria listed in this document;
- ii. Conduct a detailed analysis of Applications in accordance with this plan;
- iii. Consider rejection of any seriously non-conforming Applications or acceptance in extenuating circumstances if appropriate;
- iv. Arrange for further technical appraisal, when necessary;
- v. Consider any other matters relevant to project selection, and;
- vi. Prepare a formal recommendation for project acceptance, documenting the basis for its recommendations.

Each member of the Assessment Panel is required to endorse this Assessment Plan before they receive copies of the Applications and commence the evaluation process.

A minimum of three members will be present during the assessment of a project.

No member of the Assessment Panel is permitted to contact an applicant directly. All requests for clarification are to be made through and by the Assessment Panel Chair.

Chair

The Chair, or their nominee, will have the following responsibilities:

- i. Ensure full distribution of Applications to all Assessment Panel members;
- ii. Review and approve the completeness and accuracy of evaluations;
- iii. Schedule meetings of the Assessment Panel, distribute agenda and relevant material beforehand and prepare minutes, and;
- iv. Prepare the Assessment Panel final recommendations for consideration and endorsement.

6. Probity and Ethical Conduct

Northern Tablelands LLS has a Probity Policy in place which is designed to ensure members of the public can have confidence in the integrity of the selection and assessment processes for distribution of State and Federal investment funds.

This Probity Policy applies to all the Northern Tablelands LLS staff and any external consultants or advisers connected with the selection and evaluation process. It has been developed to promote awareness of probity principles and issues and to assist in the application of those principles, the management of any probity issues which may arise and the method in which these issues are resolved and documented.

This Probity Policy guides the Northern Tablelands Local Land Services in selecting a proponent in accordance with agreed evaluation criteria that offer best value for money; and undertaking all communication and negotiations in a manner that is consistent with probity principles and is in line with relevant government policies and procedures.

All Assessment Panel members and advisors for the purpose of evaluating funding applications must respect and adhere to the following fundamental principles of ethical conduct:

- i. they shall not engage in financial transactions using non-public information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest;
- ii. they shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any proponent;
- iii. they are required to act lawfully, fairly, honestly and in the best interests of the LLS;
- iv. they must not accept gifts or gratuities from proponents during the assessment process without declaration;
- v. they must not disclose proprietary or evaluation information to any proponent or to any other person who is not authorised to receive such information; and
- vi. they must not knowingly solicit or accept future employment or business opportunities with any proponents during the evaluation process.

The purpose of the Policy is to assist and support staff in the evaluation of proposals for the provision of incentive funding and establishes processes and procedures that reduce the probity risks associated with the selection of a preferred proponent.

7. Conflicts of Interest

Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Undertaking

A Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Undertaking is to be signed by any person who has access to confidential information. Anyone involved with the selection and evaluation processes should sign a copy of the Undertaking. A register of persons who have signed an Undertaking is to be maintained by the Business Administration section.

The nominated Project Manager will be responsible for ensuring all participants in the selection and evaluation processes, including advisers sign a "Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Undertaking" prior to evaluating any confidential information or offering comments or views.

Conflicts of interest arise when persons are influenced, or appear to be influenced by personal interest when doing their job. Conflicts of interest of persons involved in the evaluation or decision-making process fail to maintain the integrity of the evaluation process.

If a Conflict of interest is declared by a Panel member regarding a particular project or applicant, that member will remove themselves from the Assessment Panel for any consideration and deliberation regarding that particular project.

All those involved in the selection and evaluation processes in any capacity are required to make a full declaration of their pecuniary interest or any other interest, either real or perceived which may impinge on their capacity to conduct their duties in relation to selection and evaluation processes. The application of any Code of Conduct to any Northern Tablelands LLS employee, adviser or consultant should not deviate from their requirements to adopt and follow the principles for managing conflicts of interests as set out in the Probity Policy.

If a conflict of interest is identified but classified as manageable by the General Manager, this should be recorded by the nominated Project Manager with detail of any management action required.

8. Assessment process

In broad terms, the assessment process involves:

- i. An assessment of project eligibility;
- ii. An assessment of the project application against standard assessment criteria;
- iii. Ranking of applications for allocation of funding, and;
- iv. Recommendation for funding allocation.

This process will culminate in the selection of preferred partners with whom a Management or Services Agreement for project delivery may be negotiated.

9. Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria, and the criteria weightings to apply, are shown at Attachment A. The methodology for scoring Applications against the assessment criteria is shown at Attachment B.

10. Assessment method

The assessment of Applications shall be conducted in the stages outlined below.

Stage 1: Initial review

Eligibility

An initial review will be conducted by the Assessment Panel to identify ineligible Applications. Applications that fail to meet the following eligibility criteria will be eliminated from further consideration.

- i. The applicant must be a Landcare (or "care") group, "friends of" group, community environmental group, farmer or producer group, indigenous community or organisation;
- ii. The applicant must be, or be sponsored by, an incorporated organisation;
- iii. The project must be delivered within the Northern Tablelands Region;
- iv. The application must not be directly funded from other sources, however, activities designed to complement other projects will be considered;
- v. The application must be completed, and;
- vi. The application must be lodged by the closing date.

Further considerations

Applications that fail to meet any of the following criteria may not be considered for further evaluation:

- vii. Project funding sought must be under the maximum funding amounts described in the Guidance Notes, regardless of total project budget;
- viii. The applicant must contribute to the overall budget through cost sharing arrangements in accordance with the ratios described in the Guidance Notes, and;
- ix. If applicant is a previous recipient of grants from a CMA and or Northern Tablelands LLS, all previous grants due to be completed must have been fully acquitted.

Applications that progress through this stage will be short-listed and go on to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Detailed Assessment of Remaining Applications

Applications remaining from Stage 1 will undergo evaluation by the Assessment Panel. Each of these short-listed Applications will be scored against the standard assessment criteria using the weightings shown at Attachment A.

The Assessment Panel shall take into account the applicant's ability to fully satisfy each criterion, using the scoring methodology shown at Attachment B.

Each Assessment Panel member should independently record their preliminary scores for each of the short-listed Applications. The Assessment Panel shall then agree on a single score for each criterion for each project. A single score for each project, against each criterion, will be reached using a collaborative, consensus-reaching approach amongst the Assessment Panel members. Scores may not represent an average of each team member's individual score.

Shortlisted applicants may also be subject to a check of any outstanding financial obligations with the LLS.

Stage 3: Ranking Applications

The purpose of this phase is to rank all short-listed Applications and allocate funding. The score will be used to indicate the value of the project for receipt of investment funding.

Applications will be separated into categories based on available funding and ranked using the score. Projects will then be ranked from highest to lowest score.

Projects with the highest rank will receive first preference for funding. All subsequent projects will be offered funding until the total pool of available funds is allocated.

Stage 4: Project value cut off score

If deemed necessary, a cut off score can be established by the Assessment Panel below which projects will become ineligible.

The intent is to ensure that projects that pass through the assessment process and are offered investment funding are of sufficient quality. The same cut off score would apply to all projects.

11. Recommendation and acceptance

Following completion of Stage 3, the Assessment Panel will prepare an Assessment Report, recommending projects to receive specified funding.

The Assessment Panel must be satisfied that:

- i. The recommended Applications meets eligibility criteria;
- ii. The recommended Applications are those highest ranking when detailed consideration of all standard assessment criteria has been undertaken, and;
- iii. The projects must be of a high standard based on best available evidence.

In making its recommendations the Assessment Panel shall ensure that justification is provided for decision making during the assessment process.

Following completion of the assessment process, the Chair of the Assessment Panel will prepare the Assessment Report for the Assessment Panel's signature.

The Assessment Panel must sign the Assessment Report, with recommendations submitted to the Manager, Land Services for approval and acceptance of the recommended Applications.

12. Other Administrative Matters

Notification and management or services agreement negotiations

Northern Tablelands LLS will notify all applicants of the outcome of the assessment process once negotiations have been completed with the recommended applicants for the arrangement of a management or services agreement.

Notification of unsuccessful project proposals will be provided in writing.

Unsuccessful applicants may seek a debriefing, to discuss the evaluation of their Project Proposal. Such debriefings can be arranged through the Project Officer or formally through the Chair of the Assessment Panel.

No Assessment Panel member will provide comment to any successful or unsuccessful applicant outside the formal debriefing sessions.

Disclosure of successful Projects

Within 45 calendar days, it is the Assessment Panel Chair's responsibility to ensure that information about the funded projects is forwarded to the Northern Tablelands LLS Communications Officer for disclosure.

Information about the project; the title, a short description and the successful applicants name will be listed on the Northern Tablelands LLS website @ <http://northerntablelands.lls.nsw.gov.au/our-region/grants-and-funding> .

No disclosure concerning successful or unsuccessful submissions is to be made by Assessment Panel members, other than by the Chair of the Assessment Panel.

TO BE COMPLETED BY ASSESSMENT PANEL PRIOR TO ASSESSMENT

Endorsement of the Assessment Plan

The Assessment Panel endorses this Assessment Plan for use, including relative weightings given to the assessment criteria.

Assessment Panel Member	Member signature (Note - all signatures required before applications are assessed).

Approval

Name:

Position:

Date: _____

Attachment A – Assessment Criteria and Weightings

Assessment Criteria	Weighting
Alignment with Northern Tablelands Investment Plan 2025 targets. Clear link between project activities and targets. Investment targets may be given variable weightings dependant on available source funding and priorities for alignment with Investment Targets.	16
Results and outcomes. Clearly link capacity building activities with on ground change. Demonstrate on ground outcomes achieved through project activities.	10
Capacity of the applicant to manage the project. Demonstrated experience in the delivery of similar projects. Demonstrated financial ability and human resources available to complete the project.	8
Target audience. Relevance of target audience to Northern Tablelands LLS business.	5
Schedule feasibility. Realistic timeframe of project delivery.	5
Budget. Value for money (cost per unit outcome). Alignment with Northern Tablelands LLS standard costs for on ground works and reasonable costs for training and community capacity building activities.	14
MERI. Indicators clearly defined, clear methodology for measuring on ground outcomes provided. Methodology built into its design to demonstrate on ground practice change.	10
Best available evidence. Demonstrated evidence of community need. Scientific, technical or other information provided to demonstrate best practice methodology or theory behind project.	14
Evidence of collaboration. Applicant has engaged with relevant local partners to design project delivery. Evidence of sharing resources and collaborative decision making.	18
Total	100

Attachment B – Scoring Methodology for Assessment Criteria

0	Non-compliance or poor response. Well short of requirements and unsubstantiated claims - unacceptable.
1 - 2	Unsatisfactory response. Does not meet minimum requirements or is inadequately substantiated - poor.
3 - 4	Marginal compliance. The Project contains certain material deficiencies that prevent full compliance with requirements – below average.
5	Satisfactory compliance. May contain minor deficiencies preventing full compliance - average.
6	Full compliance. Adequate to requirements and appropriately substantiated - good.
7 - 8	Exceeds compliance. Very satisfactory response; more than adequate to requirements and well substantiated – very good.
9	Significantly exceeds requirements. Excellent response; surpasses all requirements and is fully substantiated - excellent.
10	Superior or outstanding compliance. Far exceeds specified requirements, surpasses all requirements and is fully substantiated - outstanding.