

NSW Environmental Trust River Connections Program 2018

Program and Application Guidelines



Stage 1 (EOI) opening date: Tuesday 30 October 2018

Stage 1 (EOI) closing date: 3:00pm, Monday 25 March 2019

Stage 2 (business plan) invitation only: October 2019 – closing date:
3:00pm, Monday 3 February 2020

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How to use this guide

These program guidelines give you an overview of the NSW Environmental Trust's River Connections grants program, including the types of organisations that can apply and the types of activities that the Trust may fund. The guidelines also outline how the Trust will assess your application and what to expect if you are awarded a grant.

There are three stages to the application process: Stage 1 calls for Expressions of Interest (EOIs). The Trust will then invite selected applicants to proceed to Stage 2, where they will be required to produce a detailed business plan. Seed funding of up to \$30,000 is available to help the selected applicants complete their business plan. These plans will be assessed, and the best one/s will be awarded a full River Connections grant for implementation, or Stage 3.



Important dates and milestones

Stage 1 Applications:	Open 30 October 2018 and close 3pm 25 March 2019.
Stage 1 Assessment:	March – August 2019
Stage 2 Applications:	18 weeks (by invitation only) October 2019 – close 3pm 3 February 2020
Stage 2 Assessment:	February – May 2020
Grants awarded:	Successful projects are expected to be announced in mid 2020 pending Environmental Trust approval.

Part 1 – About the River Connections Program

River Connections is a contestable grants program seeking to improve health outcomes for inland rivers in New South Wales.

Funded by the NSW Environmental Trust, the program encourages partnerships between government, non-government and community organisations to develop new approaches to integrated river management.

What are we trying to achieve?

The program will fund and support co-operative, consortium-based projects that investigate the barriers, threats and opportunities to integrated river management; trial innovative approaches or techniques; and include a range of river users with diverse values to improve river health in inland NSW.

Objective 1

To establish partnerships that align a range of river users with diverse values into a common purpose to improve river health, that will continue beyond the program and its funding.

Objective 2

To trial new approaches or combinations of approaches to integrated river management and connectivity that deliver improved health outcomes for inland rivers.

Objective 3

To create an incentive for coordinated activities that contribute to improved river health.

Why are we funding long-term partnership projects?

The Trust is increasingly investing in a range of programs which recognise the need for adequate time to achieve long-term environmental outcomes. This model is a leading practice in environmental grants program design.

Typically, river and riparian management actions are focussed on single or localised outcomes which of themselves do not contribute to a larger scale improvement in riverine ecosystems. Insufficient integration of individual river and riparian land management projects in New South Wales, coupled with a lack of inclusion of river managers and users with diverse values, has often seen projects operating in isolation, even when striving for similar purposes. It is acknowledged that it has often also been difficult to engage with river users that may be having a negative impact on river health.

A 10-year investment period provides adequate time for projects to develop and implement new management techniques. Where successful, it allows time for new practices and combinations of practices to mature and embed into the business as usual of all relevant river managers and users. It also provides adequate time to share the key lessons and learnings with other river regions in delivering better environmental and project outcomes across the state.

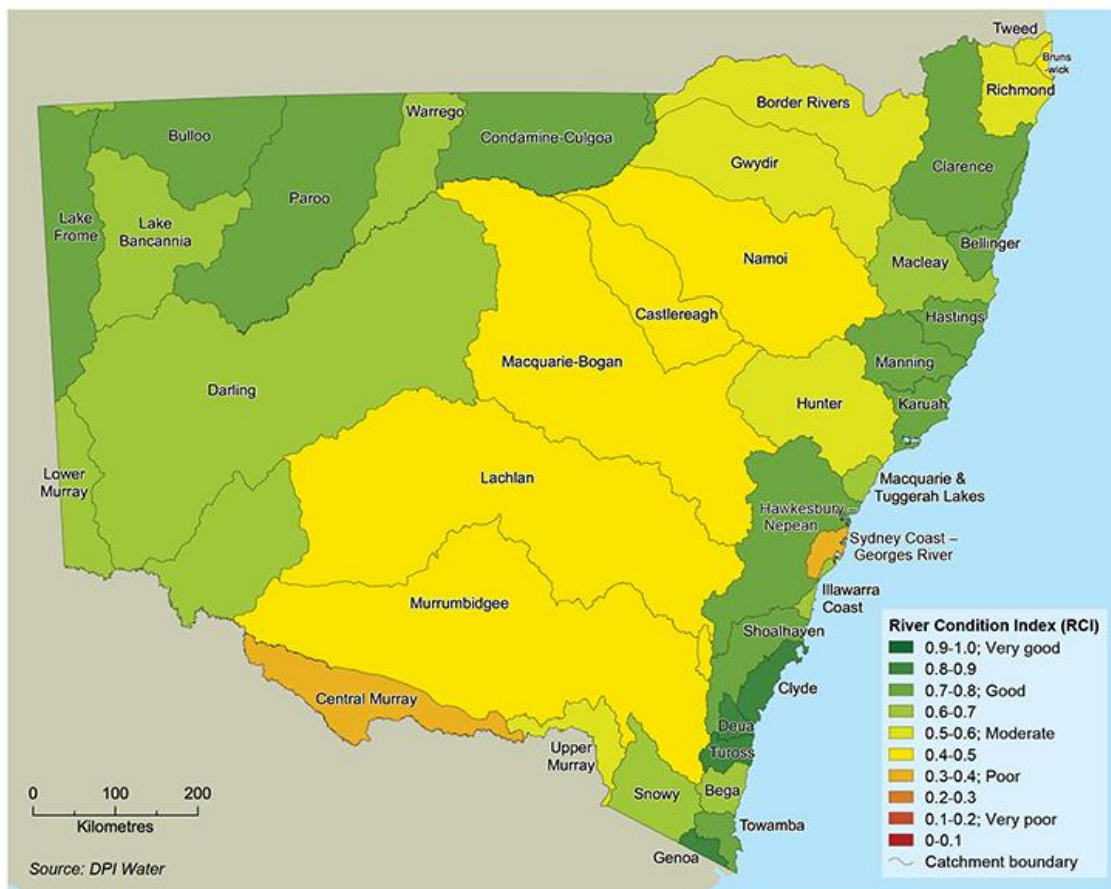
Why target inland rivers?

While a total of 97% of river length in New South Wales has been altered by river regulation, habitat modification, land use practices and introduced pests and weeds, inland rivers have fared worse than coastal rivers (Figure 1). Continued degradation of riverine ecosystems includes the loss of riparian vegetation and in-stream substrate, poor water quality, streambank erosion, sedimentation and a loss in species diversity and numbers. Since European settlement and river regulation, losses of regional wetlands range from 40-80%, with some areas recording losses of up to 92% of their floodplain wetland area.

Fish condition index scores indicate that the condition of most inland rivers in New South Wales is poor to extremely poor, with exotic species accounting for 72% of fish sampled in post-millennium drought surveys. The abundance of macroinvertebrates has declined in some areas with several species classified as threatened. Recent improvements with targeted management of environmental water has demonstrated that recovery of native fish populations is feasible, if objectives for river, riparian and connected wetland condition are integrated well.

Funding for inland rivers provides a strong opportunity to establish a baseline and demonstrate direct tangible improvements from investment. The Trust aims to fund projects that align a range of river users with diverse values into a common purpose; trial new approaches to integrated river management and connectivity; and stimulate coordinated activities to improve river health in inland New South Wales.

Map 17.1: River condition index



Notes: The map shows that, across NSW, river condition is moderate. Rivers in the Murray–Darling Basin are generally in poorer condition than those in the Eyre Basin or on the coast of NSW, while the rivers in the best condition are found on the far south coast.

Figure 1: River condition index for NSW. (2015 State of the Environment Report,)

Funding available

The River Connections program is a large-scale contestable grant program administered by the Trust. Funding of between \$5 million and \$9 million is available for one to two projects which will be expected to run over 10 years.

Your application will be more successful if you can demonstrate how your project will integrate with, and leverage from, existing projects and allocated funding.

You should demonstrate how you will contribute and add value to the Trust's investment. An ability and willingness of your project and/or its partners to contribute cash and in-kind contributions will make your application more competitive.

Stage 1 of the application process comprises an Expression of Interest (EOI). Selected applicants may be awarded seed funding of up to \$30,000 to develop a detailed business plan for consideration in Stage 2.

TIP

Higher priority will be given to proposals that maximise co-investment and cost effectiveness and can demonstrate on-going commitment beyond the 10-year project period.

Applicants can apply for grants of between \$5 million and \$9 million

Funding priorities

The River Connections grants program will fund projects that:

- establish partnerships that align multiple values into a common purpose that will continue beyond the program and its funding
- undertake an analysis of barriers, threats and opportunities to integrated river management.
- investigate and trial innovative approaches and technologies that demonstrate a high chance of being successful at changing business as usual approaches and achieve outcomes beyond the funding.
- create an incentive for coordinated activities that connect river communities and users, drive behaviour change and contribute to improved river health
- involve *all* individuals, groups, organisations and agencies that impact or could impact on river health in the project area
- draw upon the ground work, research and investment already conducted by programs such as The Living Murray program, Murray Darling Basin Plan and Murray Darling Basin Authority strategies for native fish and salinity mitigation
- have a strong monitoring and evaluation framework that allows you to measure and demonstrate the environmental improvements your project achieves
- maximise co-investment and cost effectiveness
- demonstrate ongoing commitment beyond the 10-year project period

The program will expect applicants to demonstrate how their project will deliver innovative approaches/techniques and effective combinations of existing approaches to integrated river management and an ability to meaningfully engage all relevant parties in the project, that will lead to improved river health outcomes such as:

- improved coordination of river management

- effective governance arrangements between all responsible parties
- improved water quality
- improved habitat extent, condition and diversity
- increased abundance and resilience of native aquatic and riparian species (including threatened species)
- increased functional connectivity in-river, and with riparian zones, floodplains, and wetlands
- reduced bank erosion and sedimentation
- increased wetland health and extent
- improved river morphology
- improved groundwater recharge.

Eligibility

Projects must be located within NSW inland river catchment or sub-catchment areas i.e. west of the Great Dividing Range (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Project eligibility area; NSW inland rivers which are west of the Great Dividing Range.

Who can apply?

The project lead must be an established government agency, community group or non-government organisation with a legal status. Where private industry organisations form part of a project consortium, their involvement must not result in profit-making from the grant funds.

Applicants are invited to bring together a consortium to support their bids that can collectively demonstrate a sustained track record of effective environmental management. All applications must be supported by a partnership between multiple stakeholders acting as a coordinated consortium. The membership must be of sufficient breadth to include all those who are required to effectively deliver an integrated approach to improve river health.

Consortium members may include:

- Community organisations
- Community groups
- Landholders
- Incorporated associations
- Incorporated non-profit organisations
- Non-commercial co-operatives
- State government agencies
- Commonwealth Government
- Councils
- Regional organisations of councils
- Other local government-controlled organisations
- Universities
- Corporations
- Local aboriginal land councils
- Philanthropic co-investors

TIP

Consortia should include those organisations or individuals whose activities are limiting/impacting environmental recovery in your project location. Projects that do not engage with these groups or address these issues will not be funded.

What is a consortium?

A consortium is an association of two or more individuals, companies, groups, organisations or government entities (or any combination of these) with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources for achieving a common aim or objective.

The Trust aims to fund consortiums that comprise a range of river users with diverse values to ensure that integration of diverse outcomes can occur.

Each consortium must have a lead organisation that holds primary responsibility for the successful delivery of the project, including all administration and finance requirements, and must be an incorporated or registered organisation.

Co-investment by consortium partners is encouraged where it will increase the scope and capacity of the outcomes, and this will advantage the application. As a guide, previous consortia-based programs have attracted co-investment of between \$1.50 to \$3 for every Trust dollar invested.

Past performance

Please note that the Trust will take into consideration any record of past poor performance in respect of previous grant projects, or any history of non-compliance with statutory or regulatory obligations when assessing eligibility.

If it is considered that negative past performance could present a substantial risk to the timely and effective performance of the project, an applicant will be asked to respond to the negative determination and this response will be taken into consideration alongside the overall merits of the application. Special conditions may be included in the funding agreement to address any residual issues of concern.

Administering organisations

Lead groups which are not an incorporated entity may nominate another organisation to administer grant funds on their behalf. The administrator must be a legal entity and grant agreements are prepared in the name of the administering body. Grant payments are made to the administrator who is responsible for dispersing funds on the grantee's behalf, as well as preparing financial reports. It is still expected that the project will be led by the applicant, not the administrator.

Administering organisations may be nominated on a maximum of two applications to this program.

Part 2 – Application process

Stage 1: Expression of Interest

In Stage 1 of the application process, you must provide an Expression of Interest (EOI). The Trust's independent subcommittee will assess the EOIs and make recommendations to the Trust Secretary, who will decide which applications will proceed to Stage 2.

The EOI form can be found on the NSW Environmental Trust website at <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/grants/river-connections.htm>.

Stage 2: Project Business Plan

If you are successful at the EOI stage, the Trust will invite you to develop a business plan for consideration. You will be able to access seed funding of up to \$30,000 through the form of a grant which you can spend on resources (internal or external skills and expertise) required to develop your business plan.

Please note that this stage is still contestable, which means that not all applicants who complete a business plan will be successful in gaining full project funding.

You must provide significantly more detailed information in your business plan, including:

- the project logic and outcomes
- detailed descriptions of the project design, plan and governance arrangements
- a communication strategy identifying project stakeholders, partners and collaborators
- a monitoring and evaluation framework with project measures and reporting details
- project funding and committed co-contributions, detailed budget and in-kind support
- investigation/analysis of barriers, threats and opportunities to effective river management
- risk assessment and mitigation strategy.

For more information on what your EOI and business plan should include, see Part 4 – Assessment Criteria.

Stage 1 Expression of Interest	Stage 2 Business Plan	Stage 3 Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expression of Interest (EOI) applications received • Applications are assessed • Applications are shortlisted, and seed funding grants approved • Successful and unsuccessful applicants notified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seed funding awarded. Successful applicants sign and return grant agreement and tax invoice. Payment made. • Receive business plans • The independent subcommittee assesses the business plans against assessment criteria • The Trust considers the subcommittee's recommendations and awards funding • Successful and unsuccessful applicants notified • Seed funding grants acquitted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful applicant/s sign and return grant agreement and tax invoice. First payment received. • Grant projects rollout, including progress reporting, continuous monitoring and evaluation, and periodic payments. • Grantee submits certified financial statements with all annual progress and final reports. • Project is evaluated • Grant is acquitted

The Trust has established an independent subcommittee for the program, with members possessing knowledge and experience relevant to inland rivers. The Trust administration will facilitate all communication between applicants and the subcommittee

Part 3 – Developing your grant

Scale

The River Connections program is looking to fund projects that tackle river and aquatic degradation at a landscape scale. Landscape scale restoration is more cost-effective and is more likely to build long-term resilience for communities and the environment.

This practically means that applications should look at sub-catchment scale as a minimum and should aim to identify and offer solutions across areas of common or interacting issues. For example, a long section of river where connectivity can be improved concurrently with instream, riparian and connected wetland habitat and where causes of vegetation loss and soil erosion can be reduced, under a shared management plan.

TIP

Applicants will need to justify the scale of their project in terms of it being able to: demonstrate lasting improvements in river health and ecosystem resilience; cost effectiveness; new management and governance models; and economic benefits.

Tools and Resources

Your application will be stronger if you consider and, where possible, integrate with and leverage from existing ground work, research and investment in river and riparian management. We suggest applicants also familiarise themselves with the following tools and resources:

- The [NSW River Condition Index](#) is a useful tool for reporting long-term river health, assisting with water sharing plan development, as well as monitoring and evaluation.
- The [River Styles® Framework](#) is useful in determining the character, behaviour, condition, and recovery potential of your target river/s.
- The [Water Act 2007](#).
- Programs such as [The Living Murray program](#), [Murray Darling Basin Plan](#), and the [Murray Darling Basin Authority](#) strategies for native fish and salinity mitigation.
- The [Natural Resources Commission's Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management](#) will help guide you when planning your project.
- The Society for Ecological Restoration's [National Standards for Ecological Restoration](#) may be useful.
- The Australian River Restoration Centre has a range of best practice [resources](#).

Program activities

The River Connections program will fund activities that improve river health; riparian, floodplain and wetland health; and partnerships that facilitate integrated river management. Activities that may be considered in scope for funding (where they are not already the core business of another organisation and/or already funded) could include:

AREA	ACTIVITY
River health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing connectivity and fish passage • Improving in-stream structure and habitat • Reducing exotic species • Reducing native fish entrainment to off-river systems • Reducing impacts from releases from impoundments
Riparian, floodplain and wetland health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native riparian revegetation • Exclusion of livestock and pest animals from waterbodies and margins • Reducing erosion of stream banks and sedimentation of waterholes • Complementary activities linked to environmental flows • Connectivity of wetlands/floodplain
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging stakeholders and river users to maximise environmental, economic, cultural and social opportunities to improve river health • Increasing education and awareness of river health • Community engagement/education and collaboration • Connecting with others to communicate stories, successes/failures/lessons learnt and experience

Eligible items

The table below gives examples of the kinds of things that the Trust may fund. Grants are not limited to the examples provided, however project actions must contribute toward meeting the River Connections program objectives listed on page 1 of this document.

ITEM	DESCRIPTION
Weed management	Control, containment or eradication of environmental weeds through physical intervention (mechanical, chemical or biological) to facilitate river recovery. Invasive native species control may also be considered.
Native riparian revegetation	Introduction of suitable native plant species to improve river health, stabilise river banks etc.
Pest animal management	Control of feral pest animal species through physical intervention to facilitate the recovery of native fish, animal and plant species.
Fencing	Installation of fencing to restrict livestock access to waterways.
Erosion control	Works to protect soil stability and prevent water quality degradation to adjacent waterways on a localised level.
Habitat improvement or creation	Improvement to habitat or installation of natural and artificial structural habitat for river/riparian fish, birds and other fauna.
Built environment / infrastructure	Treatment of issues such as cold-water pollution, fish passage or wetland irrigation via strategic infrastructure or creation of artificial habitats
Signage and educational resources	Educational or interpretive resources relating to the project outcomes that increase community awareness of the benefits associated with the project and influence positive behavioural change.
Capacity building	Training, up-skilling and/or educating volunteers, community members and landowners in Natural Resource Management techniques to improve the tangible environmental outcomes of a project.
Project coordination	Costs associated with coordinating or facilitating projects. Please note: While this may be budgeted for, prioritisation will be given to projects which maximise on-ground activities.
Complementarity / additionality	Projects or actions which build on existing investment or activities
Environmental flow leverage	Activities that leverage from planned or existing environmental flows
Trials of new approaches to integrated river management	Investigation and trial of new approaches and technologies for river management that connect river communities and users and drive behaviour change to better manage and share riverine systems

Ineligible items

The table below gives examples of the kinds of things that are ineligible for funding under the River Connections program. If you require further clarification regarding proposed actions, please contact the Trust.

ITEMS	DESCRIPTION
Existing funded projects	Projects already being funded or committed to by another funding program
Applications from individuals	All applications must be a partnership between multiple stakeholders operating as a coordinated consortium.
Administration	Existing day-to-day administration or operational costs of organisations (administration costs, specifically for the project, can be included).
Equipment	Capital equipment purchases unless it is evidently more cost effective to purchase than lease equipment for the life of the project.
Core business	Activities where an existing organisation or individual can be held legally responsible for the task (e.g. duty to control weeds under the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i>) or where funds obtained through a grant are used for cost-shifting purposes.
Devolved grants	Offering funding to other organisations or individuals through a grant program.
Maintenance	Ongoing maintenance of projects to which organisations have previously committed to.
Existing employees	Salaries of existing employees working on the project as part of their usual duties (this is to be considered an in-kind contribution). The Trust will, however, fund salaries of staff employed specifically to work on the project. Note for all applicants: if you seek Trust funds for someone currently employed by your organisation, you must explain why the Trust is being asked to fund an already-existing employee.
Retrospective activities	Activities or equipment purchases carried out or committed to prior to accepting and signing the grant management agreement. This includes costs to prepare your application.
Research	Projects which focus on research which are not specifically linked to on-ground outcomes for the project. Ongoing monitoring or research as part of a previously funded project. Commercialisation of existing technologies.
Mandated activities	Projects or activities that are required to be carried out. For example, activities that are mandated through a court order, an enforceable undertaking or as a committed activity as part of a grant.

TIP

'Core business' can be difficult to define as it varies for different organisations. As a general guideline core business is essential business, announced plans and strategies, legal and regulatory responsibility of an organisation.

Applicants will be required to demonstrate how their project is not core business.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

In your EOI you must outline your approach to developing your Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) framework that will guide works and demonstrate the achievement of outcomes.

If you proceed to Stage 2, you must develop a robust and rigorous MER framework into your business plan. This will help you demonstrate how you will trial, monitor, measure and evaluate new approaches to integrated river management during your proposed 10-year project. Evaluating each activity will allow you to adjust, adaptively manage and improve your project outcomes. The Trust expects you to provide indicators of success as part of your application. It is also essential to consider the types of monitoring actions you require to measure your outcomes in an effective and consistent way. You must meet the following minimum standards:

- 1) Use of consistent monitoring methods to measure activity implementation and progress e.g. photo monitoring, mapping, participant surveys etc
- 2) Gathering of benchmarks / baseline data at the commencement of projects and individual activities which may be used to clearly and progressively demonstrate the outcomes that your work is achieving over the project duration.

Evaluation methodologies will vary between projects; however, you must evaluate your progress as part of your project's progress and final reports. You will need to adaptively manage your project by integrating improvements or changes in both activities and timing into an annual implementation plan for the following year.

Generally, the Trust does not fund surveys to solely gather information regarding the status or condition of a river or site; projects must demonstrate tangible environmental outcomes. The Trust assumes that you have gathered sufficient understanding of the prevailing issues / problems and stakeholders as part of your business planning process. If you wish for such activities to be considered, you must clearly demonstrate their necessity and how they will directly lead to tangible and effective interventions and outcomes. Where possible the MER should consider the economic and social benefits of each project.

TIP

The MER framework is to demonstrate the success of your project,
not to monitor general river health.

Stakeholder Engagement and Dissemination

Your project must include a stakeholder engagement component, and you must outline a stakeholder engagement plan and dissemination plan in your EOI. If you proceed to Stage 2 you must include a robust and rigorous stakeholder engagement plan and a dissemination plan.

Analysis of previous river programs in New South Wales have found that it takes four to five years to plan and implement an engagement plan and to successfully involve stakeholders in a project. An effective stakeholder engagement plan will make use of the project's 10-year timeframe to:

- understand the diverse values, barriers, threats and opportunities associated with rivers
- align a range of river users with diverse values and find ways to arrange activities around a common purpose
- coordinate efforts and resources so that stakeholders work in an integrated manner to achieve a common outcome
- identify new approaches to integrated river management
- adaptively manage stakeholder issues so that lessons are integrated, and the project continuously improves
- provide opportunities to educate the community about the project, where appropriate
- acknowledge other initiatives and programs where appropriate
- embed new practices into business as usual.

Your stakeholder engagement plan should identify who your stakeholders are, their levels of influence and interest, what they need from the project, what your key messages to them will be and how you will communicate with them.

It is also very important to share or disseminate what you learn and the resources you produce with other NSW river regions. If you proceed to Stage 2, you should develop a strong dissemination plan that describes how you will:

- capture key successes, failures and lessons learned
- present the information, considering the needs, perspectives and capabilities of your audience
- distribute the information and resources, including workshops, journals, online content, presentations, publications etc.
- measure the success of your dissemination activities, specifically including any resulting actions taken by recipients, any tangible improvements in river health or the demonstrated inclusion of lessons learned in other environmental river health projects/planning/strategies in New South Wales.

If your project is funded you must report on your MER, stakeholder engagement and dissemination plan in your progress and final reports.

Part 4 – Assessment Criteria

Stage 1 – Expression of Interest (EOI) Criteria

- Criteria 1: Identifies proposed project location and project outline, which aligns with the program objectives;
 - identifies the environmental issue/s to be addressed;
 - justifies and demonstrates the need for the project; and
 - outlines the proposed actions and intended outcomes to achieve improved biological, ecological function or connectivity for inland rivers
 - overall feasibility of the project (section 2 of EOI form).
- demonstration that the project is not cost-shifting and core business of government entities (legislative and regulatory requirements, substitute funding, activities necessitated by government decision).
- Criteria 2: Project lead organisation and consortium partners identified, and capacity of consortium partnerships. Outline of stakeholder engagement plan, capacity of stakeholder relationships identified and their level of interest in working together for the purposes of the project (section 3 of EOI form).
- Criteria 3: Clear and robust process outlined for developing a full monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) framework that can demonstrate achievement of outcomes (section 5 of EOI form).
- Criteria 4: Appropriate risk identification and management of barriers, threats, opportunities in integrated river management (section 6 of EOI form).
- Criteria 5: Outline of a dissemination plan to capture and share lessons (section 7 of EOI form).
- Criteria 6: Demonstrates how the project will contribute to and add value to Trust investment over the 10 years, including levels of cash and in-kind, co-contributions. Demonstrates good value for money (section 4 of EOI form).

Stage 2 - Business Plan Criteria

Criteria 1: Proven environmental needs and tangible environmental benefits

- clear explanation of the environmental issue/s to be addressed
- demonstrated need for the project and appropriateness of proposed actions
- likelihood that activities and outcomes will achieve improved biological, ecological function or greater connectivity for inland rivers
- detailed analysis of barriers, threats and opportunities to effective, integrated river management
- identification of new and innovative river management technologies, approaches or techniques to be trialled or adopted that demonstrate a high likelihood of changing business as usual, and longevity of project outcomes.
- overall feasibility of the project

Criteria 2: Consortium capacity to deliver

- clear project governance within the consortium
- degree of project partner collaboration, with clear identification of roles and responsibilities
- all stakeholders who are required to effectively deliver an integrated approach, as part of improving river health, including those currently having a negative impact.
- well-defined purpose and commonly accepted set of objectives
- demonstrated knowledge, skills and expertise within the consortium in relevant fields
- demonstrated commitment of the consortium to undertake and complete the project
- capacity and willingness of the consortium to improve their knowledge of integrated river management
- demonstrated commitment by the consortium to maintain outcomes beyond the life of the grant.

Criteria 3: Planning and methodical approach

- robust MER framework
- sound project planning methodology
- activities clearly targeted towards achieving expected outcomes
- sufficient time and resources for program delivery, monitoring, evaluation and reporting
- sufficient timeframe for successful stakeholder engagement, planning and implementation (analysis of previous NSW river programs indicates that four to five years is required)
- demonstrated understanding of multiple stakeholder values
- detailed stakeholder engagement plan
- how well the proposal addresses risks
- how well the identified monitoring activities will demonstrate the success of the project
- demonstrate ongoing commitment beyond the 10-year project period
- alignment with and/or consideration of activities/tools, including those mentioned under Tools & Resources on page 10
- strategic dissemination plan.

Criteria 4: Value for money

- level of co-contribution including cash and in-kind over the 10-year timeframe.
- demonstration that the project is not cost-shifting and core business of government entities (e.g. legislative and regulatory requirements, substitute funding, activities necessitated by government decision).
- extent to which the budget supports the project outcomes and whether it will ensure the viability of the project overall
- extent to which investment is strategic and creates synergies between multiple parties and/or investments

- environmental health of river is integrated with socioeconomic aspects
- extent to which the budget is adaptable to delivery capacity
- likely environmental benefit of the proposal relative to the amount of grant funds
- appropriateness of the mix in the total budget between:
 - direct project costs
 - administration costs
 - 'In-kind' support from applicant and other organisations
 - cash contributions from applicant and other organisations.

Part 5 – Managing your grant

If you receive Trust funding for stage 2 and/or stage 3, you must establish and implement your project according to the flow chart and timeline below.

Project timeline and obligations

October 2019	<p style="text-align: center;">Seed funding grant (if applicable)</p> <p>If you are invited to proceed to Stage 2 and are awarded seed funding to develop your business plan, you must spend the funding as per section 4.2 of your Expression of Interest form. You will receive a signed grant agreement which you must sign and return to the Environmental Trust with a tax invoice for the first instalment. The Trust will pay the seed funds as one-off lump sum after receiving your signed grant agreement and tax invoice.</p>
May 2020– June 2020	<p style="text-align: center;">Business Plan</p> <p>If your business plan is approved, you will proceed to Stage 3: Implementation. You must deliver your project according to your business plan.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Grant agreements</p> <p>You will receive a signed grant agreement which you are required to counter sign and return to the Environmental Trust with a tax invoice for the first payment</p> <p style="text-align: center;">First payment</p> <p>The Trust will make the first funding instalment after receiving your signed grant agreement (within 30 working days) and tax invoice.</p>
July -2020- 2029	<p style="text-align: center;">Project activities commence</p> <p>Your project must follow your approved business and annual implementation plans, focus on establishing stakeholder roles and responsibilities, communication protocols, collecting baseline data and ensuring activities have been refined and prioritised.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER)</p> <p>You must implement your MER plan and report on your progress in your progress and final reports. You must include a certified financial statement with each annual and final report, and reporting will be linked with staged funding instalments. Reports will be reviewed to provide feedback for adaptive management purposes.</p> <p>Your project will be subject to independent evaluation during and/or at the end of your grant.</p>
2029	<p style="text-align: center;">Final report</p> <p>You must submit your final report, including a certified financial statement, by the date specified in your grant agreement</p>

Part 6 – Probity

The Trust places high importance on the integrity and transparency of program and project governance. It is vital that all funded projects are delivered in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements, as well as other accepted governance and project management standards. Value for money in project delivery is also a significant priority for the Trust.

Procurement

To conform to relevant governance and probity standards, you must follow NSW Government procurement procedures. This relates to all major budget items, such as the purchase of materials, or the engagement of contractors or consultants.

You must choose all contractors (including consultants) on their merits and ability to effectively deliver the work. The Trust requires that you select contractors or consultants using a competitive process.

Contractors or consultants appointed using Trust funds of greater than \$5000 require at least one written quote and those greater than \$30,000 require at least three written quotes. Evidence of these quotations will be required for any projects awarded a grant.

The conditions of tendering shall be the same for each tenderer on any particular tender process and all tenders must comply with the NSW Government Code of Practice for Procurement (2005) online at <https://www.procurepoint.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-reform/nsw-government-procurement-information> .

Third Party Assistance

While the River Connections program is for consortiums only, you should carefully consider any commercial relationships that you enter into. You are welcome to seek assistance from a third party to develop your project and complete your EOI application, however please be advised that any costs associated with this service cannot be reimbursed using Trust funding.

Likewise, any third-party assistance provider who helps you develop your application should not be eligible to tender for contract activities for your project (due to an unfair advantage).

General obligations

Signing the grant agreement commits you to fulfilling the obligations outlined in the agreement. Some key commitments are outlined below:

- Comply with all conditions contained in the grant agreement and approved Business Plan.
- Provide evidence of all land owner agreements (including council) to work on the project site(s) within a reasonable time from commencement of the project.
- Where relevant, provide evidence of licenses to work in Endangered Ecological Communities or with Threatened Species as per *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* or subsequent iterations within six months from commencement of the project.
- Have adequate, current insurance coverage as specified in the grant agreement, and provide evidence to the Trust.

- Ensure that all procurement (purchasing) and employment is undertaken in line with standard government practices and legal requirements.
- Seek prior approval for budget changes of \$50,000 or greater per line item, cumulatively over the life of the grant. Project administration costs are not to exceed 10 percent of the direct project costs (regardless of budget variations).
- Seek prior approval to vary proposed outputs, objectives or timeframes.
- Provide progress and final reports, including annual certified financial statements, in accordance with the Trust's reporting guidelines. This should also include a report on project measures.
- Acknowledge the Trust's support in all promotional material or any public statements about your project. You will find approved wording to include in written or printed materials in your grant agreement.
- Ensure that the Trust will be granted a royalty-free licence to use any Intellectual Property created as part of the project.
- Note that all grants will be independently evaluated, and results will be made publicly available.
- Note that all knowledge gained as part of the grant may be made publicly available, such as publishing the final report or promoting the project via other avenues available to the Trust.

Project variations

You will determine your relevant timelines and activities through the development of your business plan and annual implementation plans. You will also need to determine the risks and appropriate mitigation and management strategies before you start your project. The Trust recognises, however, that variations to your project are sometimes inevitable and these can be negotiated with your Project Officer as the project progresses. Please discuss all proposed variations before you implement them, as retrospective variations may not be approved and are considered as part of your overall grant performance record.

Privacy

The Trust uses the information you supply for processing and assessing your application. While we do not publicly release your application as a matter of policy, we may be required to do so under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* or other lawful requirement.

The Trust may also disclose information you supply to us for the purpose of evaluating its grant programs. If you require strict commercial and/or personal confidentiality, you should address this in your application.

Glossary

Activities: Are significant steps or actions that produce the identified projected outputs. They map out the key steps for the project and set dates for ensuring specific actions will be achieved and the projects objectives met.

Activity completion date: The realistic and achievable date by which an activity is expected to be completed.

Catchments (sub-catchments): Collection of rainfall over a natural drainage area. Catchments are divided into sub catchments, also along the lines of elevation.

Cold water pollution: An artificial lowering of the temperature in a water body.

Cultural flows: Cultural Flows “are water entitlements that are legally and beneficially owned by the Nations of a sufficient and adequate quantity and quality to improve the spiritual, cultural, natural, environmental, social and economic conditions of those Nations. These are our inherent rights.” Murray Lower Darling River Indigenous Nation (Echuca Declaration, 2007)

Environmental water: Water that is allocated and managed specifically to improve the health of rivers, wetlands and floodplains.

Floodplain: an area of low-lying ground adjacent to a river, formed mainly of river sediments and subject to flooding.

How will progress be measured: The methods used to monitor progress of an activity must be sufficient and relevant. Monitoring techniques should adhere to best practices and/or proven methods, where possible.

Immediate outcome: Describe the changes in levels of participation and engagement in the projects activities or use of the outputs.

Integrated management: a collection of processes required to ensure that the various elements of the project are properly coordinated. It involves making trade-offs among competing objectives and alternatives to meet or exceed stakeholder needs and expectations.

Intermediate outcome: Describe the changes in an individuals or group’s knowledge, skills, attitudes, practices and behaviours.

Milestones: Markers of project progress, measured against project objectives. They can be represented as either outcomes or outputs or may signify an important decision. Milestones can add significant value to project scheduling and help to more accurately determine whether or not the project is on schedule.

Multi-user values: a range of river users that have diverse/different values around a common use.

Multiple benefits: numerous outcomes that occur when management actions deliver benefits across institutions, spatial areas, resource assets, times scales and interest groups within a community.

Murray Darling Basin: The Murray–Darling Basin is Australia's largest and most iconic river system and is one of the biggest river systems in the world. It covers about 14% of Australia's landmass. It includes a range of diverse landscapes and complex ecosystems, including over 77,000km of rivers and more than 25,000 wetlands. It spans across most of New South Wales.

Outputs: Represent resources that need to be developed to assist project participants to achieve outcomes, e.g. promotional materials such as brochures, DVDs, maps or guides, or a new model for undertaking road works in environmentally sensitive areas.

Project measures: Project measures are a standardised list of indicators (outputs) with units of measure that the Trust uses to report across its projects. Project measures may be quantitative (numerical – how much did we do?) or qualitative (descriptive – how well did we do it?). Refer to Schedule C – Project Measures for more information.

Regulated Rivers: The term 'regulated river' is a river or stream where the flow is modified from its natural flow. This modification is generally in the form of a dam. The flow rate in regulated rivers is more regular and reliable than natural flows. Regulated rivers favour introduced species like carp.

Riparian: Pertaining to the banks of a river, stream, creek.

River health: River health is defined as a condition for a riverine ecosystem that supports a diverse range of native flora and fauna and their connected habitats (vegetation, microbes, invertebrates – terrestrial and aquatic, mammals, birds, frogs, turtles, fish, reptiles) within the river, its riparian margins and its catchment, including hydrological recharge zones.

Total projected outputs: The amount, level or degree to which a project measure (output) is projected to achieve. For this purpose, these figures would be the same as the figures provided in the 'Total Projected' column in Schedule C - Project Measures.

Ultimate outcomes: Describe the overall impact of the project/project on the biophysical and social environment. For example, changes in environmental condition. They are quantitatively or qualitatively measurable. They are clear, realistic and measurable intended results of a project.

Unregulated Rivers: The term 'unregulated river' applies to rivers without major storages, or dams, as well as to rivers where the storages do not release water downstream (in these cases, water is piped to where it is needed, such as metropolitan centres).

Wetlands: Wetlands are areas of land covered or saturated with water. Wetlands can be covered with fresh, brackish or salt water that's generally still or slow moving. The water can also sit just below the surface.

What tools/resources are required: Tools/resources that are required to monitor progress of an activity. Tools/resources must be sufficient and relevant to the monitoring techniques.

When will progress be measured: Identifies when monitoring will be undertaken. Monitoring may occur more than once for a particular activity e.g. monthly, quarterly etc.

Who is responsible for measuring: The person responsible for undertaking monitoring. Identify the person with the skill and experience to be responsible for monitoring the activity.