
Department of Planning and Environment

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2023-24 Crown Reserves Improvement Fund

Guidelines

September 2023





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Published by NSW Department of Planning and Environment

dpie.nsw.gov.au

Guidelines

First published: September 2023

Department reference number: DOC23/201571

More information

reservemanager.crownland.nsw.gov.au

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1. Overview

The Crown Reserves Improvement Fund Program (CRIF) provides financial support for the maintenance, improvement or development of Crown reserves. More than \$198 million has been allocated by the NSW Government through the CRIF over the last 10 years. This funding has supported important initiatives such as the maintenance of showgrounds and community halls, the improvement of local parks, reserves and caravan parks, and eradication of pests and weeds.

The CRIF funding process is very competitive. The total funding of project applications normally exceeds available funding by four to five times. This 2023-24 funding round will offer around \$16m to the highest priority projects in grants (\$14m) and loans (\$2m). Priority is given to those applications that best address the assessment criteria and meet all eligibility criteria.

Crown land managers of any NSW Crown reserve are eligible to apply to the CRIF. If you are not the authorised land manager you must provide signed written authorisation to apply from the Crown land manager – if applying for multiple reserves, every land manager must give approval.

The funding round will be open to all project types as follows:

- **general projects** – showgrounds (including freehold), caravan parks, state parks, local parks, commons and other Crown reserves
- **pest projects** – works on Crown reserves only
- **weed projects** – works on Crown reserves only

Key dates

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Monday, 16 October 2023 | Applications open 9am |
| Friday, 17 November 2023 | Applications close 5pm AEST sharp |
| November to April | Eligibility, assessment and approval process |
| May 2024 | Announcement of successful projects |
| May 2024 – June 2024 | Outcome advice sent out along with funding deeds; grant acceptances and payment processing |

2. Objectives of the program

The Crown Reserves Improvement Fund Program (CRIF) provides financial support for the maintenance, improvement or development of Crown reserves. This funding has supported important initiatives such as the maintenance of showgrounds and community halls, the improvement of local parks, reserves and caravan parks, and eradication of pests and weeds.

3. Eligibility Criteria

External applicants and their respective applications will be assessed against the common eligibility criteria. **Failure to meet any of the eligibility criteria will result in the application being ineligible for funding.** Applications for pest or weed activities will be assessed against specialised pest and weed criteria.

COMMON ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

1. Land and Manager Criteria (eligibility of the applicant and site)

- a) The land(s) the application relates to must be a **Crown Reserve** as defined by the *Crown Land Management Act 2016 section 12.26*. For clarity, eligible land includes:
 - NSW Crown managed land (including land managed by a Crown land manager)
 - All NSW Showgrounds (including freehold – for general projects)
 - Commons
- b) The land manager must have no outstanding overdue CRIF final project reports as at the round closing date.
- c) Non-council land managers (excluding Commons) must have submitted their 2022-23 annual report to the department by the round closing date via the Reserve Manager portal.
- d) The land manager must have the ability to meet all terms of the loan (if relevant).
- e) The application must be authorised by the official manager of the Crown reserve:
The person **entering the on-line application** must be one of:

Table 1. List of authorised persons eligible to apply for funding

| Crown land manager type | Authorised persons |
|--|--|
| Statutory Crown land manager board | Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, or appointed Administrator |
| Council Crown land manager | General Manager or Director |
| Corporate Crown land manager | CEO, CFO or General Manager |
| Freehold showground | President, Secretary or Treasurer |
| Commons – Trust board | Board executive position holder, primary contact or administrator registered with the department |
| Commons – Council Managed | Council General Manager or Director |
| Other (e.g., Government agency, perpetual lease) | Crown Lands Area Manager or Director |

If the person entering the online application **DOES NOT** hold a position listed above, then it is **mandatory for a signed written authorisation from an authorised person listed above be uploaded as part of the application submission.** This authorisation will include confirmation that a valid tenure is held for the reserve. (Refer to Annex A)

2. Activity Criteria (eligibility of the proposal)

a) The application must address at least one of the funding round objectives

1. Manage and renovate infrastructure and other assets on public reserves to maximise community impact and comply with regulatory obligations, in particular to ensure public safety and work health and safety is maintained.
2. Facilitate initiatives that enhance the operational sustainability of the land manager (via reducing ongoing costs, increasing revenue, or improving governance).
3. Enhance environmental assets by supporting conservation initiatives and invasive species (pest and weed) control.
4. Support renewable energy use, energy efficiency, water efficiency and environmentally sustainable practices that work towards net zero emissions.
5. Support the important role that volunteers play in the ongoing management of Crown land.
6. Promote greater inclusion of Aboriginal communities and interests through co-management, cultural heritage recognition and education.

7. Maintain and develop recreational and tourism facilities for community use and enjoyment.

b) Appropriate quotes / cost estimates must be provided with the application:

Requirements for quotes/cost estimates are dependent on the value of each activity element. Quote requirements are detailed in Tables 2 and 3 below. Quotes must provide a breakdown of the GST component.

Table 2. Requirements for quotes and cost estimates for non-Council CLMs

| Activity element amount (GST inclusive) | Quote requirements per activity element |
|---|--|
| \$0-\$30,000 | At least one written quote |
| \$30,001-\$150,000 | At least three written quotes (preferred)(1) |
| \$150,001 or more | Acceptable cost estimate and a commitment (that is, a strategy) for procurement via a competitive public tender. |

Table 3. Requirements for quotes and cost estimates for Council CLMs

| Activity element amount (GST inclusive) | Quote requirements per activity element |
|---|--|
| \$0-\$30,000 | At least one written quote |
| \$30,001-\$250,000 | At least three written quotes (preferred)(2) subject to the procurement policy for that Council and compliance with Section 55 of the Local Government Act 1993. |
| \$250,001 or more | Acceptable cost estimate and a commitment (that is, a strategy) for procurement via a competitive public tender. |

Table 2 & 3 Footnotes :

- 1) Due to supply chain issues, applications will be eligible if they include only one quote for each activity element however, this will be at the risk of scoring poorly if the quote does not represent good value for money. It is strongly encouraged that applications include up to 3 quotes to demonstrate value for money
 - 2) Estimates will be acceptable when the local government (Council) is the land manager and is undertaking the works themselves. However, they must provide a comprehensive breakdown of activities and costs (hours, materials etc) to enable an informed assessment and will still be assessed for value for money.
- c) The **activity must be consistent with section 12.29 of the Crown Land Management Act 2016** – usually this would mean for the maintenance, improvement, or development of Crown reserves.
- d) **The activity must occur on Crown land for all general, pest and weed projects** with the only exception being general projects on freehold showgrounds.

- e) The application must relate to a **project or activity that has not yet commenced**.

- f) **The minimum grant application amount to be considered is \$1,000 and the maximum is \$1,000,000 (All amounts are GST inclusive). Loans up to \$2,000,000 can also be applied for.**

- g) **Inclusion of all relevant financial information**
All General applications are required to provide basic information on their financial position, while those seeking a loan are required to submit the following financial statements with their application:
 - a. profit and loss statement and other comprehensive income
 - b. balance sheet or statement of financial position
 - c. most recent bank statement(s)

h) Ability to service loan repayments (if applicable)

The Crown land manager can meet all terms of the loan. This includes the capacity of the Crown land manager to adequately service loan repayments.

The Funding Team will review applications to determine eligibility. Eligibility criteria are evaluated on a 'yes/no' basis. Failing to meet any of the criteria means the application is ineligible for funding consideration.

Additional information will be accepted after the application submission period has closed for administrative oversight purposes only at the discretion for the Funding Coordinator. Applicants will **not** be allowed to submit information that enhances their application after the closing date to ensure probity of process is maintained.

4. Assessment Criteria – General Grant & Loan Applications

An application’s total score will be expressed as a percentage and will be the primary decision point as to whether the application will be successful or not. Despite the total score, applications may be assessed as ‘not recommended’ for specific reasons. These may include that the activity conflicts with:

- the reserve purpose
- Aboriginal interests (native title, ILUA’s etc)
- existing community use
- the reserves Plan of Management
- the priorities of the department
- current tenure arrangements

To ensure applications are recommended, it is strongly suggested that applicants discuss their projects with their local Crown Lands office before submitting their application.

The assessable criteria are:

| Assessable Criteria | Weighting |
|---|-----------|
| <p>Community Impact</p> <p>Demonstrate how effectively the project will contribute to the social, economic, cultural and/or environmental advancement of the community by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining or increasing public access, amenity and use of the reserve • Supporting social cohesion and participation in community life • Enabling people with accessibility requirements or living with a disability to be included • Delivering a service or infrastructure to enable Aboriginal people to access, care for, protect and manage land • Conserving heritage values and/or natural values, and/or • Creating employment or business opportunities | 60% |
| <p>Public Safety</p> <p>Demonstrate how the project contributes to ensuring public safety and preventing risk to human life</p> | 20% |

| | |
|--|------------|
| <p>Deliverability and Affordability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for money – estimated costs through competitive, multiple quotes or a demonstrated procurement process • Demonstrated capacity and capability to deliver the project • Any co-contributions from other sources (cash or in-kind) • Ability to access other funding sources for the project | <p>20%</p> |
|--|------------|

*In kind contributions should be quantified and included in the project budget. These include labour or materials or other goods or services contributed to the project by the CLM or community. Unless these contributions are clearly articulated, they cannot be considered in the assessment process.

Assessors will be provided with guidance documentation to ensure accurate and consistent assessment scores across the state.

5. Specific Assessment Criteria – Pest and Weeds Programs

For both pest and weed applications the activity must occur on Crown land.

The additional assessable criteria are as follows:

Pest Program

- The severity of the pest/s and potential to spread and/or degrade agricultural land, natural vegetation, community land etc. Area (ha) / range or population density on a map to be included.
- The activity addresses objectives of the NSW Invasive Species Plan 2023-2028.
- The activity is compatible with the NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy 2022-2027 and/or the relevant Regional Pest Management Strategy.
- The activity demonstrates “best practice” in pest management / control as recommended by the department or local control authorities.
- The activity will lead to long term control of the identified pest animals, including a plan to implement follow up work.
- The activity is collaborative and/or attracts funding from Local Land Services or other stakeholder/s.
- The activity outlines processes to monitor the effectiveness and achievement of the control measures.

Weed Program

- The severity of the weed and potential to spread and/or degrade agricultural land, natural vegetation, community land etc. (site specific weed risk assessment and / or management plan would be highly desirable). *Applicants will be encouraged to include area (ha) estimate of the area to be treated or the number of plants if applicable. Providing photos and maps are recommended.*
- The activity addresses objectives of the NSW Invasive Species Plan 2023-2028.

- The activity is compatible with the relevant Regional Strategic Weed Management Plan and the NSW Weeds Action Program.
- The activity demonstrates “best practice” in weed management / control as recommended by the DPI NSW Weed Control Handbook <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/>, DPE or local control authorities.
- The activity will lead to long term control of the identified weed/s, including a plan to implement follow up work.
- The activity is collaborative and/or attracts funding from Local Land Services or other stakeholder/s.
- The activity outlines processes to monitor the effectiveness and achievement of the control measures.

6. The application process

There will be only one round for the 2023–24 CRIF program:

- Applications will be accepted from **9am on Monday 16 October 2023**.
- Applications will close at **5pm on Friday 17 November 2023** (there are no extensions).

Links to access online application forms on the SmartyGrants platform are available on the CRIF website.

There is a separate application process for the three (3) project types:

- General Projects – assessed by Local, Regional then state wide Crown land panels
- Weed Projects – assessed by specialised Regional Weed Assessment panels.
- Pest Projects – assessed by specialised DPI Invasive Species Unit.

It is **critical** that applicants use the correct application form depending on the project type that they are applying for. Using the wrong form or combining different project types will put your application at a distinct disadvantage given the project type will not match to the appropriate assessment process.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to:

- allow adequate time to submit applications by the closing date – no extensions will be given
- provide succinct and accurate information in the form, answering all relevant questions
- attach all relevant documentation. Applications without adequate quotes or authority to apply will be ineligible for funding
- ensure final project reports for previous CRIF projects under the control of the Crown land manager (CLM), are up to date.
- ensure that the reserves 2022/23 Annual report has been submitted via the reserve portal
- include photographs to support your application wherever possible
- note that funds are only provided for projects that have **not yet commenced**
- note that application preparation costs are not claimable through the CRIF. This includes the engagement and payment of third-party grant writing organisations or consultants. The use of professional grant writers will not necessarily increase the likelihood of obtaining CRIF funding. It is recommended that CLMs complete applications for the reserves they manage. If you require assistance or guidance on any aspect of the application, contact your local Crown lands office or the Funding Team.

7. The vetting and assessment process

Each external general application and pest or weed application will be assessed in accordance with the following key steps:

1. Applications will be received centrally by the Funding Team and vetted to ensure they are complete and eligible for consideration.
2. General applications will then be assessed by the relevant **local** Crown lands office.
3. The Crown Lands **regional** offices will liaise with their local offices to assess and rank all general applications from their respective areas.
4. Pest and weed applications will be directed to Landscape Services Centre for distribution and oversight to the following panels:
 - a. Pest applications will be assessed by the DPI Invasive Species Unit
 - b. Weeds applications will be assessed by each specialist Regional Weed Assessment Panel
5. Loan applications will be further assessed by the Director Group Finance Crown Lands and Public Spaces – focussing on the applicant’s ability to service the loan. It is expected applications for large amounts (in excess of \$500,000) should seriously consider applying for a loan rather than a grant. Assessors may recommend a loan be offered even if the applicant requests a grant.
6. Applications totalling more than \$250,000, or the 40 applications with the highest dollar value, will be further assessed by a specialist asset management team within the department – focussing on project methodology, technical feasibility, capacity to deliver, risks and the value for money of the proposed solution.
7. The regional and specialist area assessments will be combined with the loan analysis for a final, **state-wide** corporate review by the CRIF Assessment Committee. (CRIFAC).
8. Applications recommended for funding from the approved grant budget allocation will be prioritised as follows:
 - I. in descending order of their total score to an agreed cut off score per application type (General, Pest and Weeds),
 - II. if the total funding requested exceeds funds available for those projects at the cut off score; applications will be prioritised for funding from lowest grant amount requested to the highest until all funds are allocated.
9. Geographic equity – The outcome in (8) above must result in successful general fund applications in each of the seven Crown Land administrative regions receiving at least 5% of the total funding available in the grants round (for example, \$14 million x 5% = \$700,000 each).

If any region does not have successful general grants to this minimum threshold, then the next highest ranked unsuccessful applications **from within the region** will be funded until either:

- a. the region's successful grants reach the threshold, or
- b. the remaining available applications fall below a total score of 50%.

If step (9) is required then step (8) may need to be recalculated again once step (9) is completed.

10. The recommendations will be considered by the Minister responsible for administering the *Crown Land Management Act 2016* who has final approval of funding round outcomes.

Note:

Eligibility criteria will be evaluated on a 'yes/no' basis by the Funding Team. Where an answer of 'no' applies to any of the criterion, the Coordinator Funding may allow additional information to be submitted after the closing date in certain circumstances to enable an application to meet eligibility criteria.

This discretion will be used consistently across all applications and will not prejudice any application. All discretionary decisions are documented and reviewed by the CRIF assessment committee and the probity auditor for the program.

8. Payment and reporting process

Once assessment and approval of applications is completed, the following steps will occur:

- Crown land managers of successful applications will receive a funding deed offering them a grant and/or loan.
- The department will write to the unsuccessful Crown land managers.
- Successful Crown land managers will have two months to accept the offer and the associated terms, otherwise the offer will lapse.
- The department will deposit the agreed amount **into the bank account of the Crown land manager** upon receipt of an executed funding deed.
- The Crown land manager will need to complete the activity within 12 months of the deposit of funds.
- The Crown land manager will submit the final project report, before-and-after photographs where applicable, and return any unspent grant funds to the department within two months of project completion.
- If the Crown land manager is a local council that is audited by the Auditor General NSW without any qualifications, a special purpose financial statement signed off by an appropriately qualified CA/CPA staff member certifying a 'true and fair' view in acquitting grant funds, to the satisfaction of NSW Department of Planning and Environment – Crown lands assessment staff, may be acceptable.

In some cases, this report can be used in lieu of producing invoices for every payment made, however, it may be appropriate to provide supporting system/ledger reports as reasonable evidence of appropriate use of funds and/or to support amounts reported in expenditure categories of the special purpose report.

The following is an example statement in certifying the report:

'I certify that this special purpose report represents a true and fair view of how project grant funds were spent.'

Signed and dated with full printed name, position and current professional membership details.

- The Crown land manager will:
 - acknowledge the grant and/or loan in its annual report and in its financial statements submitted to Crown lands (for Crown reserves)
 - comply with the *Funding Acknowledgement Guidelines for Recipients of NSW Government Grants* as appropriate, depending on the amount of funding awarded. The guidelines are available at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/branding/sponsorship-and-funding-acknowledgment-guidelines/funding-acknowledgement-guidelines>

Recipients of loans will commence their repayments one year after the date of the deposit of funds.

9. Project audits

A representative sample of projects will be subject to audit each year. Crown land managers will receive prior notification if they are chosen.

Note that your project may be subject to an audit upon completion. This will involve a review of relevant documentation and an on-site visit in order to confirm the project:

- was delivered in accordance with the terms of the funding deed
- was managed effectively and efficiently
- expended its budget appropriately, with any excess funds returned to the department
- delivered the benefits outlined in the original application.

10. Standard terms of CRIF grants and loans

Successful applicants will be required to comply with a number of specified terms. These terms typically cover the following matters:

- the time limit for the completion of the activity and the post-activity report (and return of unspent funds)
- the conditions attached to loans e.g. interest rate and repayment schedule
- general compliance with relevant legislation and policy.

11. Goods and services tax

Payment of funds is made GST inclusive. Grant recipients registered for GST must agree to the department issuing a Recipient Created Tax Invoice. As funds are paid inclusive of GST, please include this in your Business Activity Statement where applicable.

If you require specific GST advice please visit the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) [website](#) or contact the ATO by phone on 13 72 26.

12. Assistance

The [CRIF webpage](#) will contain:

- a. 3 links to each of the different application types – General, Pest and Weeds
- b. Any updates or notifications re:
 - i. SmartyGrants application system status including advise on any errors or other important information.
 - ii. General advice re the status of the funding round.

Technical and help instructions relating to the online application process are found within the green help tab on the top right hand corner of the online SmartyGrants application.

Application questions will have “hints & tips” in greyed text below to further guide and explain the expected responses.

If you have read this document and still require assistance with the application process, please contact the Funding Team on 1300 886 235 (option 2/5) or reservefunding@crowland.nsw.gov.au.

2023-24 Crown Reserve Improvement Fund Program Authorisation to apply

This letter serves as authorisation of [APPLICANT ORGANISATION], [APPLICANT NAME], to submit an application for funding in the 2023-24 Crown Reserve Improvement Fund on behalf of [CROWN LAND MANAGER] for [RESERVE NAME].

I acknowledge that I am an authorised person for this Crown reserve as per the table below and that [APPLICANT ORGANISATION] holds a valid tenure (*licence or lease agreement*) for its use and occupation of the reserve.

I understand that, if successful, the Crown land manager will be responsible for the acceptance, delivery and reporting obligations associated with this project.

Name of authorised person:

Position:

Signature:

| Crown land manager type | Authorised persons |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Statutory Crown land manager board | Chair, Secretary, Treasurer or appointed Administrator |
| Council Crown land manager | General Manager or Director |
| Corporate Crown land manager | CEO, CFO or General Manager |
| Freehold showground | President, Secretary or Treasurer |

| Crown land manager type | Authorised persons |
|---|--|
| Commons – Trust board | Board executive position holder, primary contact or administrator registered with the department |
| Commons – Council Managed | Council General Manager or Director |
| Other e.g. Government agency, perpetual lease | Crown Land Area Manager or Director |