

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

Better Open Spaces program

Grant Guidelines – Round 1

June 2026

dphi.nsw.com.au





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure 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.

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Better Open Spaces program, Round 1

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Grant Program Details

Opening date and time	30 June 2026 9am
Closing date and time	31 August 2026 5pm
Application outcome date	30/11/2026
Project delivery timeframe (for successful applications)	1 March 2027 to 30 June 2029
Decision-maker	NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
NSW Government Agency	NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Type of grant opportunity	Targeted, competitive
Grant value (total available funding for the grant and the available individual grant amounts)	\$36 million total available funding (Round 1) \$150,000 to \$2 million per grant Matched co-contribution required
Enquiries	betteropenspaces@dphi.nsw.gov.au

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1

Overview of the grants program

The NSW Government is investing \$40 million in the Better Open Spaces program to support local councils to deliver public open space improvements across NSW. It builds on the success of the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's Everyone Can Play program by applying best-practice inclusive design to a broader range of public open spaces.

Round 1 of the Better Open Spaces program will achieve this by prioritising public open space projects in high-housing growth metro and regional areas and requiring 100 per cent matched funding from local councils. This partnership approach was a key strength of *Everyone Can Play*, and will enable upgrades to park amenities and facilities, waterways and riverfront areas, and town squares and plazas.

The program utilises and extends the approach that was developed for *Everyone Can Play* and related programs including *the Public Spaces Legacy Program*, *Places to Swim* and *Places to Play*. This will ensure projects meet the best-practice principles and standards for design and engagement which have been developed for the program.

Projects funded through the *Better Open Spaces program* will support delivery of the NSW Government's *Public Open Space Strategy for NSW* and the *NSW Disability Inclusion Plan*.

They will also support the NSW Government's housing agenda by embedding inclusive, high-quality public open space into new and growing communities that are liveable and sustainable.

The first round of the program will provide up to \$36 million to eligible local councils. Projects will be recommended for funding in order of the highest dwelling approvals in each local government area during the National Housing Accord period, providing they satisfy the remaining assessment criteria, including value for money, project deliverability, inclusive design and strategic alignment.

These guidelines relate to Round 1 of the Better Open Spaces program and outline the grant application

process, selection criteria, assessment procedure, and process for successful applicants, as well as assistance available for councils. The guidelines have been developed in compliance with the Grants Administration Guide.

Separate guidelines will be prepared for Round 2 of the program.

Why inclusive public open space?

Public open space is the foundation of liveable communities. These spaces play a crucial ecological, economic, social and cultural role in our lives.

When public open spaces are designed to be inclusive, everyone can use them for their intended purposes. They cater to people of all physical and mental abilities, ages, cultures, and genders.

This makes local neighbourhoods more welcoming and connected, supports health and wellbeing, and improves the quality of life for residents. They build community resilience, provide places to celebrate together, and contribute to thriving local economies.

While they are at the heart of everyday life, the benefits of public open spaces are not always accessible to everyone. Inclusive design recognises this by respecting and embracing the diversity of communities by supporting their needs.

It also enables the representation of diverse people who do not fit the most common social characteristics of residents in New South Wales. By bringing them into the planning and management of these places, inclusive design can acknowledge and address barriers to full participation in economic, social, political and cultural life.

Inclusive public open spaces are designed to meet the needs of as many people as possible. They provide access to a variety of experiences for people to enjoy together and remove obstacles to create a welcoming place where people feel a sense of connection and belonging.

They are easy to access, simple to navigate, and offer a variety of elements, equipment and facilities within a comfortable setting. When the principles of inclusive design are combined, public open spaces become places that everyone can enjoy.

1.1 Purpose and objectives

Building on the success of *Everyone Can Play*, the purpose of the Better Open Spaces program is to deliver a wide range of open space upgrades that demonstrate inclusive design. These upgrades are to support areas with increasing demand for open space based on the highest housing growth.

Inclusive open space means everyone can use it for its intended purpose. People of all abilities, ages, cultures and genders can say yes to three principles:

Can I get there?

This principle is about ensuring equitable access to public open spaces. It means no one is left out due to physical, social, or geographic barriers.

It asks whether people with diverse needs can safely and affordably reach the space. It also considers how well the space connects to surrounding communities and networks.

Can I stay?

This principle focuses on comfort, safety, and dignity. It means the space allows all people to feel at ease, unhurried, and respected.

It asks whether people feel welcome to linger, rest, and use the space without pressure to leave. It also involves reducing any stigma that might discourage people from using the space.

Can I join in?

This principle shifts the focus from participation to identity, safety, and inclusion. When people feel they can join in, they're more likely to engage, care for, and return to the space – making it a living part of their everyday lives.

It asks whether people feel genuinely welcomed, seen, and valued. It also considers the removal of any exclusionary cues and promotes emotional safety, cultural expression, and a sense of community.

The specific objectives of the program are to fund upgrades that:

- support the amenity of new homes by ensuring high-growth metropolitan and regional communities have free access to inclusive public open space
- deliver value-for-money through long-term economic, health and environmental benefits that outweigh project costs
- demonstrate best practice design that improves accessibility, connection and inclusion by aligning with established guides for high-quality public open space
- reach practical completion on time and on budget
- align with strategic planning that reflects the needs of diverse local communities, particularly where there is a deficiency in open space.



Image 1: George Kendell Riverside Park. Completed in 2024 and funded by the Parks for People program.

1.2 Grant value

The NSW Government will invest a total of \$40 million under the Better Open Spaces program. This amount has been split into two rounds of funding as follows:

- \$36 million of funds allocated to Round 1
- \$4 million of funds allocated to Round 2.

Funding for Round 1 is split into two pools which reflects the approximate share of growth between the two groups:

- \$32.4 million in funding for 43 LGAs across Greater Sydney, Illawarra-Shoalhaven, Central Coast, Lower Hunter and Greater Newcastle
- \$3.6 million in funding for 10 LGAs in regional NSW based on the highest dwelling approvals in the period of 1 July 2024 to 28 February 2026.

Funding that is unable to be allocated from one pool may be redistributed to the other pool.

For the first round, each grant will award between \$150,000 to \$2 million in funding and requires a matched co-contribution of 100 per cent from councils. This is based on the success of the *Everyone Can Play* program and reflects the value of upgrade projects funded under similar programs such as *Places to Swim*, *Places to Play* and *Places to Roam*.

2

Selection criteria

2.1 Eligibility criteria

Eligible public open space

The Better Open Spaces program is inviting applications for three broad categories of public open space that are publicly accessible and free to use, including:

- upgrades to parks and sports fields including new and improved amenities
- improvements to swim sites such as waterways, beaches, riverfronts and foreshores
- public domain improvements to town squares and civic plazas.

Specific combinations of facilities and amenities may include but are not limited to:

- play spaces
- walking and cycling tracks
- picnic shelters and BBQ facilities
- outdoor fitness areas
- lighting
- skateparks and bike tracks
- off-leash dog areas
- multi-purpose sports courts and nets
- shade structures and trees.

New open spaces involving land acquisition are outside the scope of the program due to the limited amount of funds relative to the number of projects it seeks to support.

Applicants will need to provide a brief description of the project and indicate the category it falls under, including the specific amenities and facilities to be delivered or upgraded. This will allow an assessment of benefits that are aligned to the *NSW Framework for Valuing Green Infrastructure and Public Spaces*.

Examples of best practice and inclusive design for each of these types of open public space are provided under various guidance documents. These include:

- [Everyone Can Play \(2023\)](#)
- [Adventurous Spaces Guidelines \(2024\)](#)
- [Places to Swim Guidelines \(2024\)](#)
- [Biodiversity in Place Guidelines \(2024\)](#)
- [NSW Guide to gender-inclusive placemaking \(2024\)](#).

Eligible applicants

Round 1 will support all 43 councils in Greater Sydney, Illawarra-Shoalhaven, Central Coast and the Lower Hunter set out below. The NSW Government has released a 5-year housing target for each local government area (LGA) over the National Housing Accord period to 2029.

Category 1: LGAs in Greater Sydney, Illawarra-Shoalhaven, Central Coast and the Lower Hunter

Bayside	Liverpool
Blacktown	Maitland
Blue Mountains	Mosman
Burwood	Newcastle
Camden	North Sydney
Campbelltown	Northern Beaches
Canada Bay	Parramatta
Canterbury-Bankstown	Penrith
Central Coast	Port Stephens
Cessnock	Randwick
Cumberland	Ryde
Fairfield	Shellharbour
Georges River	Shoalhaven
Hawkesbury	Strathfield
Hornsby	Sutherland
Hunters Hill	Sydney
Inner West	The Hills
Kiama	Waverley
Ku-ring-gai	Willoughby
Lake Macquarie	Wollondilly
Lane Cove	Wollongong
	Woollahra

Round 1 will support regional areas with the top 10 highest dwelling approvals in NSW in the period 1 July 2024 to February 2026. Approvals are based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics Building Approvals dataset which counts individual homes (referred to as ‘dwelling units’) that have construction approval.

Category 2: LGAs with the highest growth in regional areas

Albury	Port Macquarie-Hastings
Clarence Valley	Queanbeyan-Palerang
Coffs Harbour	Tamworth
Dubbo	Tweed
Mid-Coast	Wagga Wagga

Co-contribution (matched funding)

Projects supported by Round 1 of the Better Open Spaces program require 100 per cent matched funding from councils. This means an equal and secure council co-contribution to the grant amount requested

A secure council co-contribution refers to funds that council currently has access to. It excludes potential revenue it has not yet received from development contribution plans or planning agreements. Matched funding will leverage the support of the NSW Government to deliver better open spaces sooner than what councils might otherwise be able to achieve without the grant. It also aligns with projects that are ready or almost ready to be delivered based on a council’s own commitment.

Applications must state:

- the total project cost
- the amount of grant funding requested
- the co-contribution amount that makes up the difference
- the source of the co-contribution
- whether the co-contribution is approved and available, supported by written evidence.

The grant funding and co-contribution will need to factor in any project contingencies as there is limited scope for project variations. Cost estimates will be considered as part of the assessment process.

The use of grant funds received from state or federal government as part of other grant programs is not an acceptable source of council co-contribution.

Maximum number of applications and grants

Each council can apply for up to two grants if they choose to participate in the Better Open Spaces program. With 53 eligible applicants, a maximum of 106 applications may be considered.

Project packaging

Councils may combine projects across multiple locations into a single application, noting that councils must provide 100 per cent matched funding for any grant amount sought.

Each application must state the total number of projects being submitted to the Department for consideration.

Eligible project location

Projects may be located anywhere in an eligible LGA except where an LGA includes a Tier 1, Transport Oriented Development Accelerated Precinct. Projects cannot be located within those precincts which are expected to be supported by the Transport Oriented Development Community Infrastructure Program and/or the Parks for People program.

Projects must be on Community Land or Crown Land that is under the care, control and management of the council. It must be free, open and accessible to the public.

Each application must include:

- the principal site address of the proposed project
- Geographic Information System (GIS) data in the form of shapefiles showing the geographic extent of the project.

Project phase

Applications will be accepted for:

- design and construction projects
- construction projects.

To prime the construction delivery pipeline, an indicative cap of up to 30 per cent will be applied towards funding of design components.

Delivery timeframe

All projects must be delivered by 30 June 2029. This aligns with the National Housing Accord period and the 2029 housing targets. The design component of a design-and-construction project must be completed within 18 months of receipt of funding to allow adequate time for construction within this timeframe.

Applications must indicate a delivery date and provide supporting information on project timeframes to assist with the assessment of the project.

Project and funding exclusions

The following public open space projects are ineligible under Round 1:

- public indoor facilities such as community centres, libraries and clubs, multi-purpose courts
- events, marketing, branding or advertising
- seawalls
- carparks
- road and street upgrades
- synthetic sports fields
- standalone active transport links that do not connect to public open space
- commercial buildings or any operations involving access fees
- protected bushland and national parks
- community gardens
- maintenance of existing public open space, facilities and amenities
- projects already fully funded or that require ongoing funding by the NSW Government.

The following project types are ineligible:

- projects involving land acquisition
- business cases
- planning and design projects.

The following uses of grant funding are not permitted as part of any project:

- expenditure for ongoing operation and maintenance
- street furniture with advertising
- standalone public artworks
- community consultation
- legal matters
- costs incurred before a funding announcement
- salaries of existing staff or staff not involved in the project
- administrative overheads such as office equipment, vehicles and mobile capital equipment.
- retrospective funding to cover any project component that is already complete or underway.

Projects included in local contributions plans

Councils may nominate items included in a local contributions plan provided they are eligible infrastructure projects under the Better Open Spaces program.

Councils must indicate in their application whether the item is in a local contributions plan and are responsible for ensuring they can receive grant funding for projects included in a local contributions plan.

Councils must also indicate when the project would otherwise be expected to be delivered without the grant and the improvements to inclusive design enabled by grant funding.

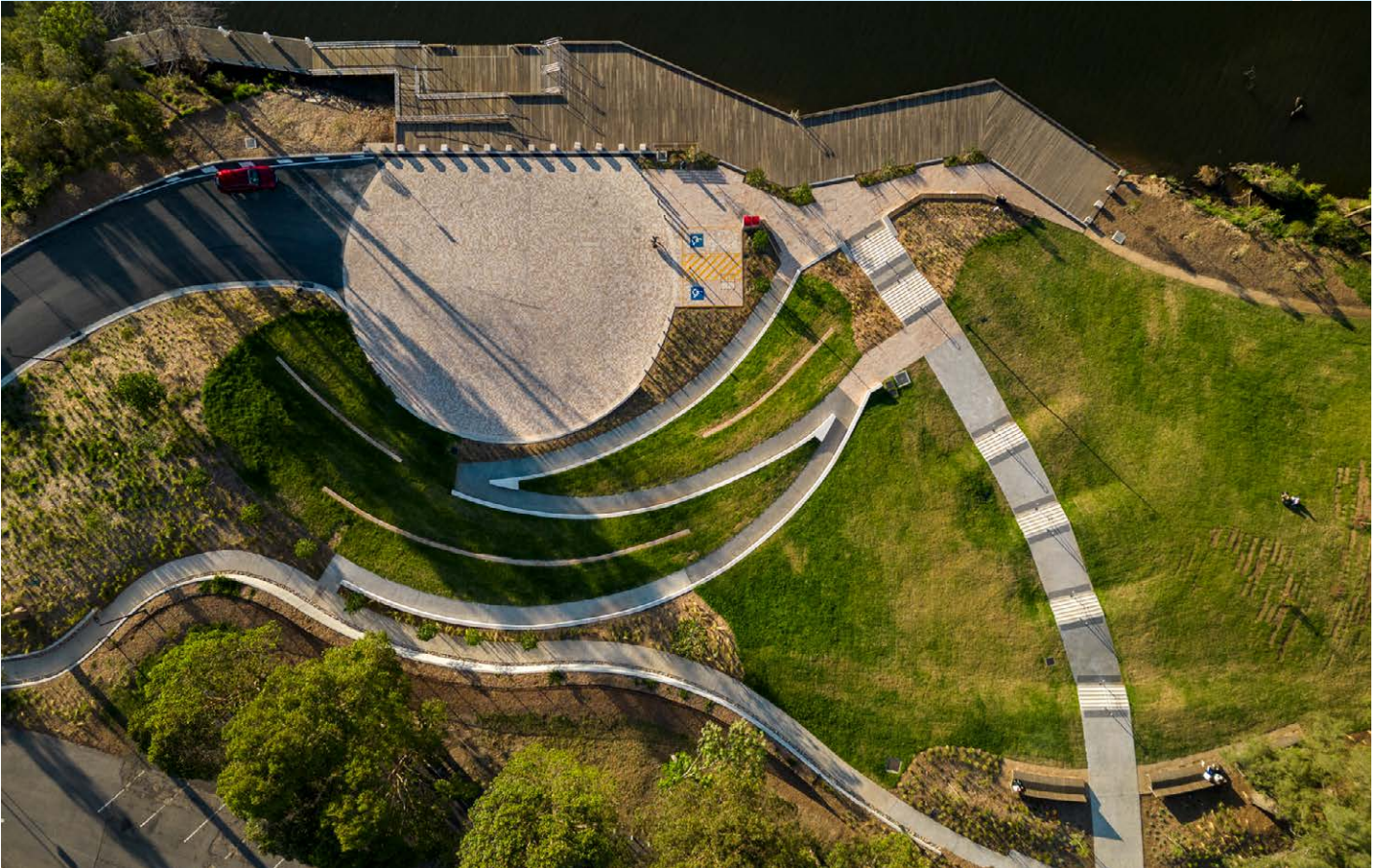


Image 2: Tench Reserve. Completed in 2023 and funded by the Parks for People program.

Completing the application form

Applications must be fully completed and of a sufficient standard to allow for accurate assessment. Incomplete or poorly prepared applications may be deemed ineligible for assessment.

During the eligibility review, the program team will review each application and identify any common gaps

or issues with the information provided. If appropriate, the nomination period may be briefly reopened to allow an equal opportunity to all applicants to update their applications.

Further requests for information will not be conducted during the detailed assessment stage due to the limited assessment resources and to avoid advantaging a particular applicant.

2.2 Assessment criteria

Applications for the Better Open Spaces program will be comparatively assessed against 5 criteria:

- **the number of dwelling approvals to date in the LGA during the National Housing Accord**
- **the project's value-for-money**
- **the deliverability of the project**
- **how it demonstrates inclusive design**
- **strategic alignment with plans, policies and local open space needs.**

These criteria are aligned with the objectives of the program and will demonstrate that the funded projects will be an efficient, economical and ethical use of money in accordance with section 10.3A(2) of the *NSW Government Sector Finance Act 2018*.

The first criteria (dwelling approvals) will be used to score and rank LGA's. The remaining criteria using quantitative and qualitative metrics will be used to assure the project. All criteria will require information and data from councils for the assessment to take place as set out in Table 1 to 5 below.

Each criterion will be assessed by a relevant subject matter expert as detailed in *Section 4*.

Table 1: Criteria 1: LGA dwelling approvals

Specific information and evidence required and assessed	Scoring
<p>This criterion is assessed through an analysis of ABS Building Approvals undertaken by the program team in consultation with internal subject matters experts.</p> <p>The ABS Building Approvals is a national dataset that counts individual homes (referred to as 'dwelling units') that have construction approval.</p> <p>This criterion will rank LGAs with the highest number of dwellings issued with construction approval from 1 July 2024 (commencement of the National Housing Accord Period) until the period covered by the latest release of the ABS Building Approvals expected to be published in September 2026. This ranking will determine the order in which projects are recommended for funding, provided they satisfy the remaining assessment criteria.</p> <p>Applicants are not required to undertake this analysis. No information is required from applicants in relation to this criterion.</p>	<p>Quantitative ranking: Category 1 and Category 2 LGAs ranked by dwellings approved from 1 July 2024 to the date covered by the latest release of ABS Building Approvals data released in September 2026 (expected to be 31 July 2026).</p>

Table 2: Criteria 2: Value-for-money

Specific information and evidence required and assessed	Scoring
<p>This criterion is assessed using a rapid cost-benefit analysis undertaken by the program team, in consultation with independent experts.</p> <p>Applicants are not required to undertake this analysis. They are only required to provide the following information.</p> <p>Project costs: Applicants are required to provide a breakdown of costs, including expenditure items for which grant funds will be used and contingencies. The nomination form requires project costs to be detailed in a consistent format and provides the option to upload detailed estimates, such as quantity surveyor reports.</p> <p>Estimated operational costs will be required for the purpose of the assessment only and should not be factored into the amount of grant funding requested or the total project delivery cost.</p> <p>Project benefits: Applicants are only required to provide the size of the project site in square metres and Geographic Information System (GIS) data (shapefiles) showing the location and geographic extent of the project.</p> <p>An independent expert arranged by the program team will determine a project catchment size. This is the area in which regular users are likely to travel to the open space.</p> <p>Using the identified catchment, an independent expert and the project team will determine the number of existing and forecast homes serviced by the project and assess the monetary benefits of the project using the NSW Government's <i>Framework for Valuing Green Infrastructure and Public Spaces</i>. The benefits include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amenity benefits from user enjoyment – this measures user enjoyment of living within a catchment of open space based on uplift in property values (noting open space is an essential part of medium- and higher-density development that provides more affordable dwelling types overall). • Health benefits from physical activity – this measures the avoided cost of physical inactivity for residents living near public open space. It is based on them adopting more active lifestyles which lowers healthcare costs per person per year. • Urban cooling, air quality and greenhouse gas benefits from tree canopy – this measures avoided healthcare and energy costs from reductions in local temperature which can be attributed to an increase in tree canopy. It is based on fewer days being over 30 degrees, as well as air quality improvements and carbon sequestration. <p>Benefits related to biodiversity will be considered qualitatively as part of the inclusive design criterion as the <i>Framework</i> does not measure their quantitative value if the open space is smaller than 5 hectares.</p>	<p>Quantitative: Net Present Value (NPV) and Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) determined using Rapid Cost-Benefit Analysis prepared by an independent assessor. The NPV/BCR must be a positive to satisfy the criterion. It is not ranked from highest-to-lowest.</p>

Table 3: Criteria 3. Project deliverability

Specific information and evidence required and assessed	Scoring
<p>Applicants are required to provide the following information related to the delivery of the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A project scope and key deliverables. • A schedule of works and key milestones. This should allow adequate time for activities such as site investigations, planning approvals, procurements, and site set-up including signage. • A risk profile. This should address hazards such as flooding (especially for foreshores) and contamination such as asbestos. • Interdependencies. This should include planning approvals such as DAs or REFs, agency referrals for state roads and foreshores, and heritage matters. • Cost estimates. This must include their source such as from a quantity surveyor or in-house team, date, contingencies, and level of certainty – for example 90%. • Co-contribution details including the amount, source and proof that the funds are available. • Public exhibition. This should address whether the project will be subject to an exhibition process and the extent this may change the project scope or delivery timeframes. • Procurement approach. This should address the readiness of any tenders, approvals from council, the time between the cost estimates and eventual tender quote (in case this inflates costs), and any risks associated with combined tenders for design-and-construction projects. • Project management and delivery capacity. This should provide information about council’s team responsible for delivering the project including the number of projects they currently have under management and their delivery record. <p>Applicants should allow adequate time to prepare a detailed application that demonstrates due diligence to allow for a full assessment of the project and reduce the risk of future variations.</p>	<p>Qualitative: level of support for the project indicated by subject matter experts as to whether it can be delivered on-time and on-budget. The project must be supported overall to be recommended for funding. It does not impact the ranking of the applications.</p>

Table 4: Criteria 4. Inclusive design

Specific information and evidence required and assessed	Scoring
<p>Applicants are required to provide brief statements demonstrating how the proposed project is consistent with the overarching principles of the Better Open Spaces program as described under section 1.1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I get there? • Can I stay? • Can I join in? <p>Applicants are further required to comment on how the project demonstrates best practice in inclusive design by referring to its consistency with any of the following guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone Can Play • Adventurous Spaces Guideline • Connecting with Country Framework • Places to Swim • Guide to gender-inclusive placemaking • Biodiversity in Place • Greener Places Framework. 	<p>Qualitative: level of support for the project indicated by subject matter experts based on open space principles and guidance. It must be supported overall. It does not impact ranking of applications.</p>

Table 5: Criteria 5. Strategic alignment

Specific information and evidence required and assessed	Scoring
<p>Applicants are required to provide a statement demonstrating how the project aligns with relevant plans, strategies or surveys. These may include relevant directions or references contained within:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community strategic plans • open space and/or community recreation strategies or plans • community participation plans • community engagement strategies • the Public Open Space Strategy for NSW • the Greater Sydney Outdoors Survey • state rezoning packages • community surveys (e.g. PlaceScore) • other documents such as urban design plans, town centre or economic strategies, active travel and transport plans. <p>Applicants are also required to provide a statement explaining how the project addresses a local need for open space such as an existing deficiency in the provision of a particular type of open space.</p>	<p>Qualitative: level of support for the project assessed by subject matter experts in open space planning and design. The project must be supported overall. It does not impact the ranking of applications.</p>

3

Application process



Image 3: Merrylands Civic Square. Completed in 2023 and funded by the NSW Public Spaces Legacy program. Credit: Cumberland Council.

3.1 How to apply

The application period is open from 9am 30 June 2026 to 5pm 31 August 2026.

Applications must be submitted online through SmartyGrants. The application link will be provided on the program website and via email to eligible council applicants.

To apply:

- Review the template form that was emailed to all eligible applicants and use it to prepare the information for the application in advance.
- Register a new account or login to SmartyGrants using the link mentioned above.
- Create a new application in SmartyGrants.
- Save the draft application every 20 minutes to prevent application data loss, as SmartyGrants logs out inactive users for security reasons.
- On submission of the application, SmartyGrants will generate an automatic confirmation.

The nomination form is designed to capture all information required for the assessment and is intended as the sole reference point for assessors. Incomplete applications will likely be deemed ineligible for assessment by the program team. Additional documents may be attached to the form, but should only serve to support or evidence the information in the nomination form.

Late nominations will not be accepted.

Following an initial eligibility review, the program team may reopen the nomination period to all applicants if common issues or missing information are identified. Please be ready to act on any emails from the program team within this window as individual requests for further information will not be made during the assessment period.

3.2 Support available to applicants

The program team is available to assist applicants during the nomination period.

Applicant information session

All eligible applicants will receive an email inviting them to attend an online information session that will provide a general overview of the program, application requirements, and the assessment and decision-making processes. This will be hosted during the nomination period and a link to the recording will be shared by email following the session.

One-on-one support

Applicants may also email the program team to request a one-on-one meeting over Microsoft Teams to discuss their applications and ask any specific questions. To ensure fairness, the program team will share any information of general relevance discussed during these meetings with all applicants.

Contact information

For support or to request a meeting, applicants can email the program team at betteropenspaces@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

The team will respond within 1-2 business days.

4

Assessment process

4.1 Assessment of grant applications

Applications will be assessed through an eligibility review and comparative assessment against the criteria in Tables 1 to 5.

For Round 1 of the program, applications will be ranked based on the result for criterion 1. This will be the number of dwellings approved in the period commencing 1 July 2024 to the date covered by the latest release of ABS Building Approvals published in September 2026 (this will cover dwelling approvals until 31 July 2026). Applications must satisfy the remaining criteria by demonstrating a positive result for value-for-money and be supported for inclusive design, project deliverability and strategic alignment.

Investment recommendations will continue in ranked order until the relevant funding allocation is exhausted. The Category 1 and Category 2 LGAs specified under section 2.1 will be ranked separately for the allocated funding pools specified under section 1.2.

A reserve list will be maintained for supported projects that are not able to be accommodated by the respective funding allocations. Projects on the reserve list may be awarded grant funding if a successful project does not proceed.

Table 6 sets out the structure for the assessment process by roles and responsibilities of the assessors and decision-makers. An independent probity advisor will oversee the process.

Table 6: Assessment process roles and responsibilities

Responsibility	Role
Eligibility review	Infrastructure Strategy and Implementation – Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Assessment of Criterion 1: LGA dwelling approvals	Infrastructure Strategy and Implementation with the Planning Evidence Centre – Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Assessment of Criterion 2: Value-for-money	Infrastructure Strategy and Implementation – Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure with an Independent Economic Expert (external consultant to be appointed)
Assessment of Criterion 3: Project deliverability	Independent Technical Expert (external consultant to be appointed) Open Space team – Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Assessment of Criterion 4: Inclusive design and Criterion 5: Strategic alignment	Open Space team – Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Investment recommendations	Infrastructure Strategy and Implementation – Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure Subject to internal approvals.
Investment decision	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
Probity advice and assurance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants Administration Guide compliance. Conflicts of interest management. Assurance to the decision-maker. 	Independent Probity Advisor



Image 4: Nandi Reserve. Completed in 2024 and funded by the Parks for People program.

4.2 Approval of investment recommendations

Investment recommendations will be informed by the outcomes of Criterion 1 and the assessments undertaken under Criteria 2–5. The program team will prepare an Investment Recommendation Report for consideration and approval by the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces.

4.3 Notification of application outcome

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application by email after the Minister has approved the investment recommendations. Each applicant will receive written advice outlining the key reasons for successful and unsuccessful applications.

A public announcement of successful projects will be made at the same time to ensure coordinated and transparent communication. Successful applicants may be contacted beforehand to confidentially assist with promotional materials.

Feedback on applications

All projects are likely to demonstrate merit, however, a comparative process will allocate limited funding to the highest-growth LGAs. The program team will be available to meet with any applicant to provide detailed feedback on their assessment results.

The program team can also review any aspect of the assessment to ensure it was conducted in accordance with these guidelines. While the assessment process itself will not be changed or re-opened, feedback will be considered to improve the process for grant programs.

4.4 Publication of grants information

Information about the Better Open Spaces program grants will be published on the Department's website and the [NSW Government's grants and funding webpage](#).

All records in relation to grant decisions will be managed in accordance with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* and the *State Records Act 1998*.

5

**Successful
grant
applications**

Successful grant applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement. The agreement is a legal contract between the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure as the grantor and the successful applicant as the grantee.

The funding agreement provides important terms and conditions associated with grants awarded under the program. A copy of the draft standard template agreement will be circulated to all eligible applicants at the time nominations open. This will provide applicants an opportunity to review the terms and

conditions prior to lodging their application, noting the Department has discretion to change the draft standard template during the program.

Successful grant applicants will be issued with the final funding agreement for execution. Applicants must review the agreement carefully and ensure they are satisfied with the final terms and conditions. Amendments to the final funding agreement will not be accepted to ensure a consistent and equitable funding framework applies to all grantees.

An authorised delegate will be required to sign the funding agreement as soon as possible after each grantee has been notified of their successful application outcome.

5.1 Grant agreement

The funding agreement includes key details about the project and the terms and conditions of the grant. It includes:

- key project milestones and the funding amounts payable upon their completion
- the project scope subject to funding, commencement dates, and completion dates
- the amount of funding awarded, and the amount of co-contributions made by the grantee towards the project
- grantee insurance requirements
- circumstances that may trigger possible repayment of funds or recovery of unspent funds
- termination rights
- reporting and invoicing requirements
- requirements for acknowledgement of financial support by the NSW Government in accordance with the [NSW Government Funding Acknowledgement Guidelines](#).

The funding agreement does not ordinarily allow for project variations. If a variation becomes necessary, it must be formally agreed to in writing by the Department and the grantee. It would then be referenced in the variation schedule of the funding agreement.

Project plan

A draft project plan will be produced by the Department using the project information submitted with the application. This will inform and accompany the funding agreement. After signing the agreement, both parties will arrange and agree on a final project plan.

In the case of joint applications, the draft project plan will reflect the information provided in the application. The final project will then be refined to reflect the individual responsibilities of the supporting councils.

5.2 Grant payment

Grant payments will be made in accordance with the payment schedule set out in the funding agreement. Under the schedule, a percentage of the total funding awarded will be paid against the completion of certain project milestones.

For successful projects under Round 1, one grant payment will be made for the full amount upon acceptance of the final project plan within 3 months of the funding agreement being executed. Table 6 sets out the key milestones and indicative payment schedule.

Table 7: Payment schedule of grant funds by project milestones (indicative)

Project milestone	Funding payable
Execution of funding agreement	Not applicable
Acceptance of a final project plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> due within 3 months of execution. 	100%
For construction projects, notice of construction commencement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> due no later than 20 days before construction begins. For design-and-construction, acceptance of project design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> due within 18 months of final project plan subject to review to ensure alignment with the guidelines' inclusive design principles. 	Not applicable
Project completion and acquittal	Not applicable

5.3 Recovery of unspent or misspent funds

The funding agreement specifies the circumstances in which funds may be recoverable by the Department and to what extent.

In the event the project is completed at a cost less than the amount of funding awarded, the Department may enable ongoing expenditure of unspent funds towards any goals or objectives associated with the project, subject to potential conditions the Department considers appropriate.

5.4 Indicative reporting and acquittal requirements

Reporting requirements

Grantees are required to provide quarterly updates to the Department in an agreed-upon reporting format. The key updates must include:

- the extent to which the project milestones set out in the funding agreement are being met
- whether any project outcomes are being achieved
- any changes or issues arising out of the project.

Acquittal requirements

Grantees are required to provide a project acquittal report and procurement certificate to the Department within 3 months of project completion.

Project acquittal report

At a minimum, the project acquittal report must include:

- a practical completion date of the project
- an itemised breakdown of actual project costs, including a record of invoices received and payments
- the date the project will be available for community use.

The funding agreement requires grantees to keep accurate financial accounts and records relating to the expenditure of funding towards the project.

Procurement certificate

The procurement certificate must include a statement that the grantee has complied with the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act and Regulations, as well as the grantee's own procurement policy.

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Additional information and resources

6.1 Complaint handling

The program team is available to assist applicants with any issues encountered throughout the assessment process or about grant decisions.

Complaints can be directed via email to betteropenspaces@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

For matters concerning ethical conduct or the integrity of the program, applicants may also contact the program's probity advisor (refer to section 6.4).

6.2 Access to information

The *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act) provides for the proactive release of Government information by agencies and gives members of the public an enforceable right to access Government information held by an agency (which includes Ministerial offices).

The GIPA Act and the *Government Information (Public Access) Regulation 2018* may make certain grant-related information publicly available, unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.

Requests to access information on the Better Open Spaces program can be submitted via email in the first instance to betteropenspaces@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

6.3 Ethical conduct

Applicants must adhere to certain ethical conduct requirements concerning the submission of their grant application. Applicants will be asked to make the following declarations when lodging their application:

- All information, responses to assessment questions, and all other representations made in the grant application are true and correct to the best of the applicant's knowledge.
- The application has been lodged by an authorised person who has the authority to:
 - submit the grant application
 - represent and bind the applicant to the grant's assessment process, once the application is lodged.
- The applicant understands that any false declarations made may render the application ineligible/invalid in the grants assessment process.
- The applicant has declared any relevant conflicts of interest.

6.4 Compliance and probity

Rounds 1 of the Better Open Spaces program has been designed to meet the requirements and principles of the Grants Administration Guide. It is a mandatory and legal requirement that the program complies with the Guide under the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018 (NSW)* (GSF Act).

These guidelines have been drafted using the Grants Administration Guide template. Other Grants Administration Guide checklists and templates will be used to assure the Minister that investment recommendations made under this program satisfy section 10.3A of the GSF Act.

As this is a high-value grant program, an independent probity advisor has been appointed to provide initial and ongoing advice to ensure the integrity of the program. The probity advisor is responsible for drafting a probity plan that will ensure the Better Open Spaces program complies with its legal requirements and that all conflicts of interest are declared, reviewed and managed appropriately.

The probity advisor will also review the investment recommendations report to ensure projects recommended for investment have followed the assessment process prescribed in these guidelines.

Applicants may contact the probity advisor directly at vbaueris@procuregroup.com.au about any probity-related issues concerning the Better Open Spaces program.



Image 5: Beaumont Hills. Completed in 2024 and funded by the Parks for People program.