

Stronger Country Communities Fund

Round 5

Program Guidelines



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Cover image: A teen enjoys skating at the Bernie Goodwin skate Park, Morisset.
Photo credit: Lake Macquarie City Council.

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From top: Bernie Goodwin skate park and playground. Photo credit: Lake Macquarie Children enjoy training at their local Rugby Union Club, in Grenfell.

Message from the Deputy Premier



The NSW Government is committed to making regional NSW the best place to live. That is why I am so pleased to announce Round 5 of the popular Stronger Country Communities Fund with up to \$160 million available to support our regional communities big and small.

Having faced the worst floods, drought and bushfires on record alongside the impacts of COVID-19, it has been a challenging time for people living and working in our regions. This continued investment in regional NSW aims to restore and strengthen our regional economies.

Over the past four rounds of the Fund, we have provided more than \$500 million to over 2,000 local grassroots projects aimed at reinvigorating rural communities in every single regional Local Government Area across the state.

Now in its fifth round, the Stronger Country Communities Fund will continue to deliver vital community infrastructure such as bike paths, sports fields, main street upgrades, playgrounds, community centres and much more.

I am proud to say this Fund helps bring to life our vision for growing local economies and making everyday life better for everyone who lives, visits or does business in regional NSW.

I hope you take the time to submit a funding application and I look forward to seeing the final projects supported through this Fund.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Toole". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Hon. Paul Toole MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Regional NSW, and Minister for Police

Overview

The Stronger Country Communities Fund was established in 2017 by the NSW Government to deliver local projects that enhance the lives of people living in regional communities.

Round 5 of the Stronger Country Communities Fund will see a further \$160 million made available for community projects that increase the wellbeing of regional NSW communities, including up to \$50 million dollars for projects delivered by Eligible Community Applicants.

The Stronger Country Communities Fund is administered by the Department of Regional NSW.

\$500m

Round 1-4

\$160m

Round 5

\$660m

Stronger Country
Communities Fund total

Program objective

The objective of the Stronger Country Communities Fund is to boost the wellbeing of communities in regional areas by providing new or upgraded social and sporting infrastructure or community programs that have strong local support.



A young child enjoys playing in Grenfell.

Key dates

Applications open:

5 August 2022

Applications close:

23 September 2022 at 5pm AEST

Notification/Project announcement:

Successful Applicants will be notified confidentially from November 2022 or as soon as possible after a grant is approved, at the NSW Government's discretion.

Public announcement by the NSW Government may occur at any time after an Applicant has been notified of a successful outcome.

Contracting:

From November 2022

Contracting will commence once an Applicant has signed and returned their letter of offer and confidentiality agreement.

Project completion:

Projects must commence within 6 months of a funding announcement and be completed within 3 years from executing a funding deed.

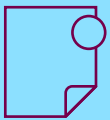
In extenuating circumstances, late applications may be accepted at the sole discretion of the Department of Regional NSW.

Program funding

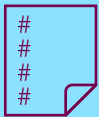
There is a total of \$160 million available in Round 5 of the Stronger Country Communities Fund, including up to \$50 million for projects delivered by Eligible Community Applicants.



The funding is available for project types including local community and sporting infrastructure, street beautification, projects that improve accessibility and inclusion for people with disability, projects that improve outcomes for Aboriginal people, community programs and local events.



Eligible Applicants may contact the Department of Regional NSW for the available funding for their Local Government Area.



If an Eligible Council Applicant submits an application seeking funding above their nominated funding allocation for the Local Government Area, the Eligible Council Applicant is asked to rank projects, including joint projects (if applicable), in their order of local priority.



Where a Local Government Area's funding allocation is not fully exhausted, the option to utilise these funds in future will be assessed on a case-by-case basis at the sole discretion of the Department of Regional NSW.



From top: Youths play basketball at a local park in Narrandera. Kyle Lionheart and James Bennett play for an audience in Lake Macquarie.
Photo credit: Lake Macquarie City Council.

Grant amounts



Project type	Minimum grant funding	Maximum funding
Infrastructure	\$100,000	Local Government Area allocation. For requests over \$2 million, a financial co-contribution of 25 per cent is required.
Program	\$100,000	

Applicants requesting over \$2 million in grant funding for a sports project must obtain a letter of support from the relevant NSW peak sporting organisation.

Eligible Applicants can contact the Department of Regional NSW for the maximum funding allocation for their Local Government Area.

Co-contributions



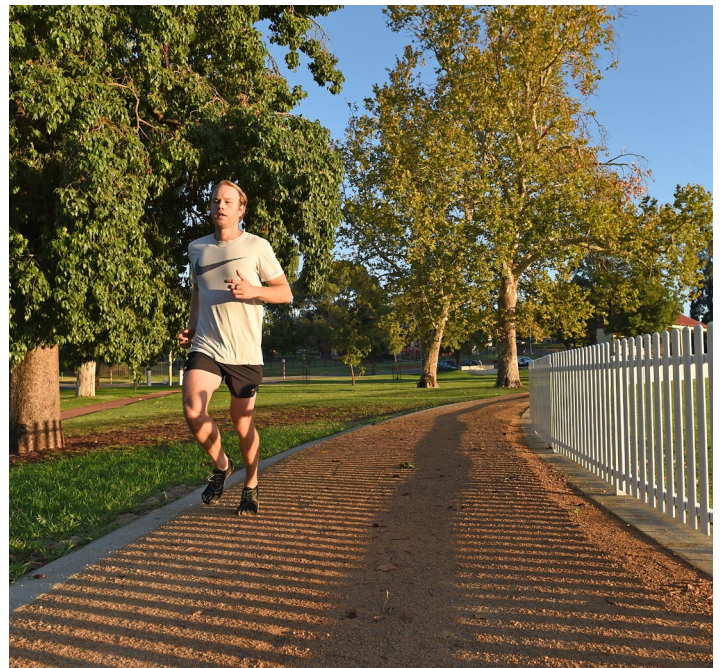
1. Applicants requesting \$2 million or more in grant funding for an individual project are required to make at least a 25 per cent financial co-contribution to that project. This is a mandatory eligibility requirement. Co-contributions could include leveraging Applicant funds as well as funding from other sources including other NSW or Australian Government programs.



2. The financial co-contribution source may be from the Applicant or other funding sources but must be confirmed as part of the application process through the provision of supporting evidence.



3. Project delivery or viability should not be dependent on co-contributions that have not been secured.



From top: Locals workout on outdoor gym equipment in Grenfell. New library facilities, Lake Macquarie. Photo credit: Lake Macquarie City Council. A young man enjoys a run on a local pathway, Narrandera.

Eligibility Criteria

All applications submitted under Round 5 of the Stronger Country Communities Fund will need to meet the Fund's Eligibility Criteria and will be assessed against the Assessment Criteria.

Eligible Applicants

Applicants must be an incorporated entity and hold an Australian Business Number (ABN), Australian Company Number (ACN), be registered with NSW Fair Trading under the Associations Incorporation Act 2009 or incorporated under an Australian federal, state or territory Act of Parliament. Unincorporated organisations, individuals and for profit and commercial organisations are ineligible to apply.

Eligible Council Applicants	Eligible Community Applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW regional councils, excluding Greater Sydney, Wollongong & Newcastle • NSW regional joint organisations of councils • Section 355 committees of council* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community organisations registered as incorporated associations • Not-for-profit community organisations registered as public companies • Local Aboriginal Land Councils • Lord Howe Island Board • Unincorporated Far West groups

*Section 355 committees of council must apply via the relevant council.

Eligible Council Applicants are encouraged to work with community groups to identify priority projects and should consider project partnerships where the Eligible Council Applicant is the landowner. The Eligible Council Applicant will be solely responsible for the project's delivery and reporting through a funding deed.

Eligible Applicants are encouraged to work with key local stakeholders including their local Members of Parliament, local council, peak sporting or cultural organisations to identify priority projects in their Local Government Area to ensure projects with high community support are submitted. Letters of support are encouraged from all local stakeholders to strengthen applications.

Eligible Applicants must have or be able and willing to purchase at least \$20 million public liability insurance.

Project locations

Projects must be located in one of the 93 regional NSW Local Government Areas, Lord Howe Island or the Unincorporated Far West. Projects in Greater Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong are not eligible.

Projects located across Local Government Areas are not eligible. If an Applicant wishes to apply for a project across more than one Local Government Area, the project should be split into multiple projects and submitted for the relevant Local Government Area.

Flood impacted Local Government Areas

The flood impacted Local Government Areas of Clarence Valley, Richmond Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Ballina, Byron and Tweed will be provided additional support during the application and project delivery process.

What types of projects are eligible?

Projects must be for infrastructure or community programs that boost the wellbeing of regional areas through improved amenity and positive social outcomes.

Projects must be for:

- 

construction of new, or upgrades to existing, local community infrastructure

- 

construction of new, or upgrades to existing, local sporting infrastructure

- 

capital works related to street beautification and other public places that promote the health, happiness and wellbeing of the community

- 

delivering programs that benefit the local community and provide public benefit

- 

infrastructure to assist the delivery of general community programs

- 

infrastructure or community projects or programs which improve and promote accessibility and inclusion

Projects must deliver public benefit and outcomes that contribute to the program objective (see page 6). Applicants will be expected to establish monitoring procedures to demonstrate the delivery of the expected benefits.

Projects can demonstrate public benefit by showing how the project will benefit the public generally, or a sufficient section of the public. Similarly, while projects can be located on private land they must not be solely for private benefit. The Applicant will need to show how the facility will be open to the community.

See page 14 for examples of Eligible Project Costs.

Inclusion and accessibility

The NSW Government is seeking to support regional communities to future-proof infrastructure and programs by funding universally designed projects. These projects should move beyond current day compliance standards and provide dignified and equitable inclusion to social and community programs for people with disability.

Funding will support projects that improve community participation, livable communities and accessibility and inclusion outcomes. These will assist people with disability and accessibility requirements to participate independently with equity and dignity.

Applicants must demonstrate consideration of accessibility and inclusion measures in their application. Projects which demonstrate the provision of fit-for-purpose, accessible and safe facilities, and increased participation opportunities by increasing accessibility and inclusion/universal design are encouraged.

This applies to both infrastructure projects and community or social programs aiming to improve existing accessibility and inclusion to encourage greater participation.

Improved outcomes for Aboriginal people

The NSW Government is committed to supporting Aboriginal people and communities to drive local and place-based initiatives and solutions through funded projects. It acknowledges regional communities are unique and therefore initiatives and solutions need to be bespoke, tailored and determined by the local community.

Projects that seek to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people must align with the skills, aspirations and experiences of local Aboriginal communities. Projects must address a demonstrated community issue and deliver positive impact on social outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities in regional NSW.



From top: Urunga Boardwalk on the Coffs Coast. Women enjoying a visit to the Yaamaganu Gallery in Moree. Photo credit: Destination NSW

What are Eligible Project Costs?

Eligible Project Costs may include those associated with:



building new or upgrading existing local community amenity and community service infrastructure



delivering community programs and events

Applicants may include up to 25 per cent of the total project cost for contingency and up to 10 per cent of the total project cost for project management and administration. Design, including regulatory applications and approvals costs, must be listed as administration costs.



Families and children enjoy the park and playground in Forbes.

Examples of Eligible Project Costs:

Community programs and events

- Community events
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community cultural education programs
- Multicultural festivals
- Intergenerational activities – sharing knowledge through activity-based experience
- Environmental education and working bees
- Short-term disability and/or carer support programs
- Workshops to identify accessibility and inclusion needs in the community
- Cultural and/or disability awareness training sessions
- Community, sporting and recreational programs which seek to remove barriers to participation through promoting accessibility and inclusion
- Community wellbeing programs.

Community amenity and community service infrastructure

- Community centres and halls
- Libraries
- Community amenities and barbecue/picnic areas
- Recreation facilities
- Club houses, change rooms, canteens
- Murals or community art instalments
- Memorials or statues
- Emergency services infrastructure (e.g. aerodrome water refilling)
- Surf Life Saving Club infrastructure
- Aquatic facilities and pools
- Amenities for participants and spectators
- Playgrounds, parks, shared paths and fixed fitness stations
- Seating, planting boxes, landscaping and paving
- Street lighting to improve safety
- Street/footpath reconfigurations in commercial and recreational areas. Footpaths in a residential area are only eligible where there is a clear transport link to facilities
- Shade cloth, awnings and pergolas
- Public toilets
- Infrastructure for health and community services facilities (e.g. domestic violence centres for women)
- Homeless shelters
- Men's sheds
- Provision of a sensory room
- Community aged care facilities
- Infrastructure upgrade to local community radio station facilities
- Infrastructure to support and improve accessibility to community facilities
- Town and tourism signage
- Main street beautification projects
- Non-fixed assets that enhance accessibility and inclusion. Examples include beach access mats, pool hoists, portable changing places amenities and adaptive sporting equipment such as court-based wheelchairs.

*Please note that the examples provided above are suggestions only and other projects that meet the program objective are welcomed.

Ineligible Projects

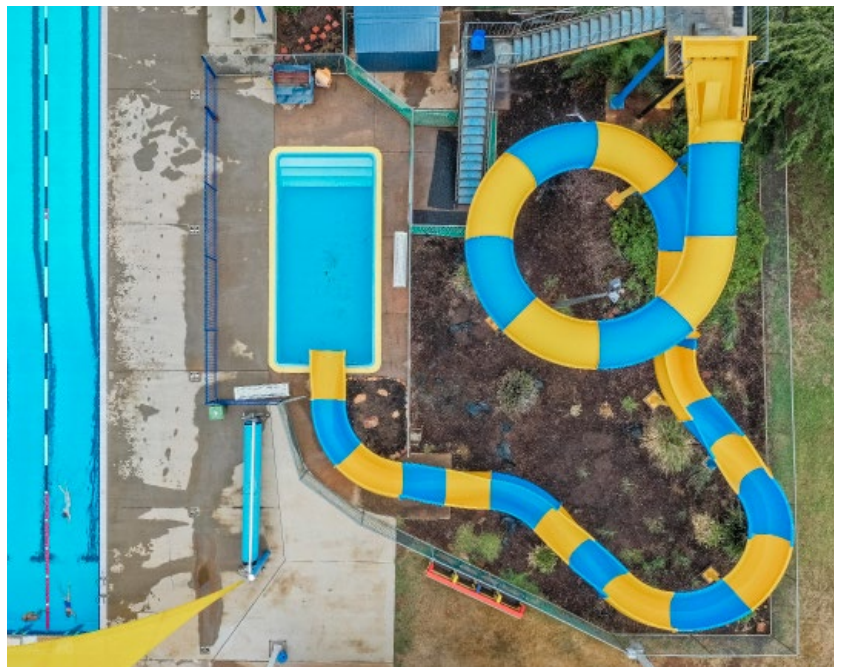
Projects are not eligible for funding if they are:

- located outside an eligible regional Local Government Area
- not submitted by an eligible entity
- located across multiple Local Government Areas boundaries
- exclusively for planning activities (e.g. master planning or heritage studies)
- for the maintenance or construction of local roads or other ongoing core service infrastructure works that are the ordinary responsibility of council or other levels of government
- for the delivery of essential or core government services that should be funded from another source such as local government, the NSW Government or the Australian Government
- seeking retrospective funding to cover any project component that is already complete before Applicants are informed of the funding decision outcome or funding is announced
- seeking grant funding for ongoing staff or operational costs beyond 3 years from project announcement for programs, or any ongoing staff or operational costs for infrastructure projects
- for a general works package without specific scope, costs and location (e.g. 'upgrading lighting at sports ovals' without identifying the work required, number of sites or the locations)
- exclusively for marketing, branding, advertising or product promotion including tourism marketing
- providing direct commercial and/or exclusive private benefit to an individual or business
- not clearly providing benefits that will significantly contribute to the objective of the Stronger Country Communities Fund
- the recipient of duplicate grant funding from another NSW or Australian Government grant program for the same project
- solely for the maintenance of any infrastructure i.e. painting or beautification repairs without upgrading the functionality of the infrastructure.

What are Ineligible Project Costs?

Ineligible Project Costs include:

- costs related to buying or upgrading non-fixed equipment or supplies, unless considered essential to program delivery and are incidental costs to the overall project budget
- costs relating to the purchase of vehicles, buses, boats, trailers, motorhomes, or other modes of transportation
- purchase of land or buildings
- financing, including debt financing or rental costs
- costs relating to depreciation of plant and equipment beyond the life of the project
- non-project related staff training and development costs
- ongoing/recurrent funding that is required beyond the stated timeframe of the project
- for infrastructure projects, funding for any ongoing staff or operational costs
- for community programs, funding for ongoing staff or operational costs beyond the scope and timeframe of the funded project
- projects that seek to solely subsidise memberships for existing services
- project management or contingency costs that exceed the eligibility requirements (see page 13).



From top: Children enjoying a game at the local Grenfell Soccer Club.
Holland Park Swimming Centre, West Wyalong

Assessment Criteria



All applications that meet the Eligibility Criteria must also meet the relevant Assessment Criteria to receive funding. Eligible applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. Viability
2. Community support
3. Alignment with Stronger Country Communities Fund objective

1. Viability

A project will be considered viable if it:

- has in the Department of Regional NSW's view, a realistic budget based on quotes or detailed estimates, reasonable assumptions or previous experience with similar projects
- is cost-effective and represents value for money
- can be delivered in stages
- can be delivered within 3 years from the project funding announcement
- has estimated costs for combined project management and administration that do not exceed 10 per cent of the total project cost
- has estimated costs for contingencies that do not exceed a maximum of 25 per cent of the total project cost
- demonstrates access to the necessary expertise and support to deliver the project
- does not require ongoing funding from the NSW Government
- demonstrates how it will be operated and/or maintained when the project is completed (where applicable).

The Department of Regional NSW may seek information from relevant NSW Government departments to verify the viability of a project and retains the discretion to disclose information to these agencies where relevant.

2. Community support

- The project must have demonstrated community support.
- Consultation is an important part of the process to ensure that projects are supported by the community and help to make regional communities even better places to live.
- Applicants will be required to provide evidence of consultation and support for the projects they submit, such as:
 - engagement through council's Community Strategic Plan, online surveys, letters of support from Members of Parliament, councils, peak sporting and cultural organisations, or other documents demonstrating community support for the projects.

3. Alignment with Stronger Country Communities Fund objective

The project clearly demonstrates that anticipated community benefits will directly contribute to the objective of the Fund (see page 6).

Alignment with the relevant Disability Inclusion Action Plan for projects that seek to enhance accessibility and inclusion for people with disability.

Evidence that the project aligns with the aspirations and experiences of local Aboriginal communities for projects that seek to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people.

The Department of Regional NSW may request additional information or clarification from Applicants to assist in the assessment.



The Tocomwal Water Playground.

Application process



Round 5 of the Stronger Country Communities Fund will be a single stage application process.

Eligible Council Applicants will be required to submit all of their projects (up to a maximum of 10 projects) in the one application form.

All Applicants are required to submit the application documents into the Fund's online portal.

Applications cannot be reopened or amended once the closing date has passed.

How to apply

Visit <https://regionaldevelopment.smartygrants.com.au/SCCF5> to submit an application to the Stronger Country Communities Fund Round 5.

What needs to be included in an application?

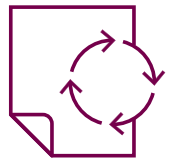
All applications need to include:

- a clear project scope
- a project plan
- a project budget based on quotes or detailed estimates, reasonable assumptions or previous experience with similar projects
- landowner consent if the land is not owned by the Applicant
- proof of incorporation for community groups
- evidence of \$20 million Public Liability Insurance in the name of the Applicant
- evidence of project co-contribution for projects requesting \$2 million or more in funding (if applicable)
- a letter of support from the relevant NSW sporting organisation if a sports-related project is seeking over \$2 million in grant funding (if applicable)
- evidence of community consultation and strong community support for the project

For council applications these will need to be provided for each project included in the application.

Templates can be found at nsw.gov.au/SCCFr5

Assessment process



Decision making

Following receipt of applications, the Department of Regional NSW will review projects against the Eligibility Criteria and then arrange for the assessment of projects against the Assessment Criteria.

Through the assessment process, the Department may request additional information from the Applicant. The Department may also seek advice from other NSW Government agencies or other third-party providers (such as probity advisors) to assist with the assessment of projects. The Stronger Country Communities Fund assessment panel will review project eligibility and assessment outcomes and form a list of projects that are deemed suitable/not suitable for government consideration.

The assessment panel may recommend part-funding projects where there is insufficient funding available for the whole project or where only a component of the project is considered suitable for funding. This may include part-funding projects under the minimum grant threshold of \$100,000.

Broader factors that may be considered when assessing the overall package of projects suitable for funding include:

- amount of funding available
- suitability of projects for other government funding opportunities
- other factors deemed relevant and important in a local or whole-of-NSW context.

The Department can take other factors into account that may make an application ineligible for funding, such as any person, business or organisation that could cause reputational or other risk to the NSW Government.

The assessment panel may at their discretion recommend a project conditionally on the basis that an external, professional project management service be engaged for the project to ensure appropriate affordability and deliverability. Where appropriate, projects may be referred to other funding programs in the NSW or Australian Government for consideration.

The assessment panel's advice and recommendations will be provided to the Deputy Premier for consideration and final approval.

Probity advice

Independent probity advisors will provide guidance to the Department on any issues concerning integrity, fairness and accountability that may arise throughout the application, assessment, and decision-making process. This will ensure decisions are made with integrity, fairness and accountability, while delivering value for money for NSW.

Can Ineligible Projects be referred to a more appropriate funding program?

Yes. Projects that are more suitable for other NSW Government programs may be referred to those programs. Applications that are referred will be subject to the full Assessment Criteria of the other NSW Government program to which they are referred. Applicants may need to update their application to meet the criteria of the referred program.

Successful Applicants



Notification

Successful Applicants will be notified by email and/or letter. Applicants must keep the grant confidential for a period if an announcement is likely to be made by the NSW Government.

What happens if the project is successful?

Funding Deed

- Successful Applicants will be required to enter into a funding deed with the NSW Government. A sample funding deed can be viewed at nsw.gov.au/SCCFr5
- Successful Applicants will be required to provide all supporting documentation and approvals before the Department of Regional NSW can enter into a funding deed. This includes \$20 million Public Liability Insurance, Development Approval (if applicable) and approval from the Department of Education (DoE) Asset Management Unit for projects being undertaken on DoE land.
- The NSW Government makes no binding funding commitment to an Applicant unless and until both parties sign a funding deed.
- Successful Applicants must not make financial commitments for funded activities until funding deeds have been executed by both parties.
- Grants will be paid via milestone payments set out in the funding deed. Timing and requirements will vary at NSW Government's discretion.
- Successful Applicants may be required to submit progress reports to the NSW Government as outlined in the funding deed.

Important terms and conditions

- All projects must demonstrate they can commence within 6 months of the announcement of funding and be completed within 3 years as outlined in the project plan.

- Applicants must hold all relevant insurances, including a minimum \$20 million Public Liability Insurance.
- Requests for variations or changes to the project will only be considered in limited circumstances.
- All awarded grants will be GST exclusive. If you are registered for GST, this will be applied on top of the agreed grant value when payment is made to you. Grants are assessable income for taxation purposes, unless exempted by taxation law. It is recommended Applicants seek independent professional advice about taxation obligations or seek assistance from the Australian Taxation Office. The NSW Government does not provide advice on individual taxation circumstances.
- Successful Applicants will be required to pay back unspent funds or those funds which have not been spent in accordance with the funding deed.
- Successful Applicants will be required to participate in a program evaluation to determine the extent to which their projects have contributed to the objective of the Fund. The evaluation will require Applicants to provide evidence of how projects have resulted in a measurable change to the lives of local residents that is consistent with the objective of the Fund.
- Any information submitted by an Applicant may be used for promotional material prepared by the NSW Government.
- The NSW Government may choose to publicly announce funding for individual applications. It may also use information provided in the grant to develop case studies.
- All recipients of NSW Government funding should acknowledge this financial support as per the Funding Acknowledgement Guidelines for Recipients of NSW Government Grants available at nsw.gov.au/branding/sponsorship-and-funding-acknowledgment-guidelines.
- The Department reserves the right to undertake an audit of grant funding within a period 7 years from the signing of the funding deed.
- Applicants must advise the Department of any changes to their legal status or of changes or delays to their project.

Unsuccessful Applicants

Applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of each application and will be offered a feedback information session for any unsuccessful application.

Available support

For help preparing applications, information and resources including relevant application templates are available from nsw.gov.au/SCCFr5.

A webinar will be held during the application open period. Information about the webinar will be available on the Fund's webpage when details are confirmed.

The Department of Regional NSW can assist Applicants to develop strong applications. Please contact sccf.enquiries@regional.nsw.gov.au or call 1300 679 673 for a referral.



From top: Queanbeyan 2021 Taskforce meeting.
Sport and Rec Camp at Borambola.

Complaints

Any concerns about the Fund or individual applications should be submitted in writing to regionalnsw.business@regional.nsw.gov.au.

If you do not agree with the way the Department of Regional NSW handled the issue, you may wish to contact the NSW Ombudsman via ombo.nsw.gov.au.

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW)

Applicants should be aware that information submitted in applications and all related correspondence, attachments and other documents may be made publicly available under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW). Information that is deemed to be commercially sensitive will be withheld.

The Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW) makes government information accessible to the public by:

- requiring government agencies to make certain sorts of information freely available
- encouraging government agencies to release as much other information as possible
- giving the public an enforceable right to make access applications for government information
- restricting access to information only when there is an overriding public interest against disclosure.

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The guidelines are subject to change at any time at the sole discretion of the Department.



Kids enjoy a sunny day at the local pool, in Warren. Photo credit: Warren Shire Council

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