

# Hepburn Shire Council

## Biodiversity Grants Program Guidelines 2025



## Introduction

Our local ecosystems, shaped by millions of years of evolution and a deep connection with human history, are invaluable and irreplaceable. Native ecosystems purify our water and air, support vital wildlife, and are treasured by both residents and visitors. Yet, they have been fragmented by past land clearing and are now under threat from invasive species, pollution, and climate change. To create a positive environmental future, it is essential to involve the entire community in education and environmental stewardship.

We are proud to continue offering the Biodiversity Grants Program to support our local communities. This funding acknowledges the ecological challenges our environments and wildlife face and seeks to assist a broad range of organizations and community groups dedicated to protecting and enhancing our region's biodiversity and environmental health. As a cornerstone of our Sustainable Hepburn Strategy 2022/2026, the program provides opportunities to build a more resilient, diverse, and sustainable local environment, while fostering increased biodiversity awareness and skills throughout the municipality.

Since its inception in 2019, the Biodiversity Grants Program has enabled numerous impactful projects, including educational campaigns, on-the-ground weed control efforts, and the establishment of indigenous plant gardens. These initiatives empower communities across the Shire to take meaningful local action, promoting ideas that enhance the natural environment and boost biodiversity within our communities.

In alignment with our vision of a healthy, supported, and empowered community, as well as a resilient, sustainable, and protected environment, the Biodiversity Grants Program supports the priorities outlined in the Council Plan, the Community Vision 2021-2025, the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan, and the objectives set forth in the Grants Funding Policy 2024. The program is designed to distribute funding equitably, effectively, and transparently to community groups working to make Hepburn Shire a more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable place to live. We welcome applications from groups across all regions and districts within the Shire and look forward to seeing innovative ideas come to life, leading to healthier environments for all.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Henderson".

Councillor Don Henderson

Mayor

## Program Objectives

Hepburn Shire Council's Biodiversity Grant Program supports community-based projects and initiatives that enhance and protect the biodiversity of Hepburn Shire.

Council has committed \$22,000 to support community driven biodiversity initiatives in 2025. Successful applicants will need to demonstrate how their project links to the seven objectives of the *Natural Environment and Biodiversity theme* within the Sustainable Hepburn Strategy 2022-2026. Funding is available for projects that can demonstrate benefits to biodiversity via on-ground works or increasing the public's interest and capacity to protect and enhance Hepburn's biodiversity.

Organisations can apply for funding of up to \$5,000 for 12-month projects and up to \$8,000 for 24-month, projects which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity through conducting on-ground works and/or increasing community interest and capacity to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Projects may include:

- On-ground works such as planting or 'assisted natural regeneration', weed control, pest control on public land or private land that enhances the regions biodiversity.
- Strategic group equipment purchase (includes maintenance, storage and security asset register process)
- Publications, electronic media or events aimed at raising awareness of biodiversity issues and promoting action.
- Activities such as training and networking activities that increase capacity and sustainability of volunteer groups.

## Program Principles

Three principles guide the Hepburn Shire Council's Grants Programs, including how Council Officers work with, support, and respect the community and administer the program.

### 1. Transparency

Transparency is defined as the lack of hidden agendas or conditions and the availability of all information needed in order to collaborate, cooperate and make decisions effectively.

### 2. Equity

Equitable grant making is being conscious of the barriers and disadvantage being faced by some groups or individuals because of the inequitable distribution of power and resources.

### 3. Efficiency and Effectiveness

Every grant dollar should produce the maximum benefit for Hepburn Shire communities. Every grant should be both efficient and effective throughout the whole lifecycle of the Community Grant process, from promotion to evaluation.

## Strategic Alignment

The Biodiversity Grants Program aligns with the principles and objectives outlined in the [Council Plan and Community Vision 2022-25](#) and directly aligns with the seven objectives outlined in the Natural Environment and Biodiversity theme of the [Sustainable Hepburn Strategy 2022-26](#).

The applicant will need to identify how their project aligns with the objectives of the 'Biodiversity and Natural Environment Theme' of the Shire's Sustainability Hepburn Strategy 2022-26. The following is a summary of objectives from the Strategy that may be used for project alignment.

1. Ensure good planning / governance of biodiversity actions
2. Prioritise protection of existing biodiversity & habitat on both Council controlled and private land
3. Increase extent, connectivity & integration of natural ecosystems
4. Identify & reduce threats to biodiversity
5. Improve Council's and community's connection to and understanding of biodiversity
6. Strengthen connection to DJAARA
7. Promote and increase access to expert advice on Agrobiodiversity, Agroforestry and ecologically informed sustainable management of privately held forests

## Who Can Apply

Local not-for-profit and community groups in the Hepburn Shire, which are incorporated with an ABN, or have an auspicing agent, are encouraged to apply. Groups based outside of the Shire are encouraged to apply if they can partner with local organisations to deliver the project. In 2024, Council will consider projects that can be completed in either 12 months or 24 months. 12 month projects can be funded up to a maximum of \$5,000 and 24-month projects up to \$8,000. The Biodiversity Officer will be available to discuss your projects' suitability and scope and determine which time-frame best suits the project.

## Application Process

1. It is strongly encouraged that all applicants contact Council's Community Strengthening Officer or Biodiversity Officer to discuss your initial idea for your project, application requirements and the online application process.
2. Visit: [www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants](http://www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants) for more information.
3. Go to the [Hepburn Shire Council Grants Portal](#) and submit your application online with Smartygrants.

**Applications not meeting the eligibility guidelines will not be considered for assessment.**

## Key Dates

Application Stage Opens:	3 February 2025
Application Stage Closes:	16 March 2025
Assessment Panel Convenes:	10 April 2025
Applicants notified of Assessment outcomes:	11 April 2025
All 12-month projects completed and acquitted:	30 June 2026
All 24-month projects completed and acquitted:	30 June 2027

## Eligible Projects for All Categories

To be eligible for assessment projects must:

- Request funding of up to \$5000 for a 12-month project or up to \$8,000 for a 24-month project which is either discrete, or forms a well-defined stage within a longer-term project (i.e. not maintenance).
- Demonstrate links to the objectives of the Biodiversity Theme of the Sustainable Hepburn Strategy 2022-2026
- Be strategically/ecologically sound and identify sustainable improvements (i.e. have an identified source of follow-up resources if required)
- Complete their activity or project before June 30, 2026 (for 12 month projects) or June 30, 2027 (for 24-month projects)- including acquittal.
- Be conducted solely within Hepburn Shire to the benefit of its residents.
- Have an organisation that is a legal entity with an Australian Business Number (ABN). For example; an incorporated body, co-op, trust, or, be auspiced by a suitable group.<sup>1</sup>
- Schools and health services applicants are encouraged to partner with other community organisations to achieve projects (excluding school 'maintenance')
- Have all permits, permissions and approvals for the project.<sup>2</sup>
- Have valid public liability insurance or can demonstrate the ability to obtain such insurance before the project commences.
- Be a not-for-profit<sup>3</sup> or a community group.
- Be willing to participate in public relations for the project, including a potential media release and photo with members of the applicants' organisation and funding representatives.
- Involve community in its planning and implementation.

<sup>1</sup> An Auspicing Agent is another organisation that is a legal entity with an ABN. A letter signed by two committee members from the auspice agent confirming they will auspice the application must be provided

when the grant application is submitted. Auspicing agents retaining a fee for this service will not be considered.

<sup>2</sup> If the project is to undertake works on Council owned / managed land or property, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, or Parks Victoria land, you must provide written approval from the relevant land manager.

<sup>3</sup> Your organisation meets the requirements of being a not-for-profit by having specific statements in its governing rules; the not-for-profit and / or dissolution clause <https://www.ato.gov.au/non-profit/getting-started/is-your-organisation-not-for-profit/>

### Ineligible Projects for All Categories

- Individual applicants, profit-making organisations and political parties
- An activity that is the funding responsibility of the state or federal government, or can be funded by fees, sponsorship or service agreements.
- An activity that already receives or has received funding or in-kind-support from other sources within Hepburn Shire Council, i.e., funding agreements or sponsorship arrangements.
- Applicants that have an outstanding Council grant acquittal or unpaid invoice from Council.
- Projects that have already commenced or have been completed.
- Applications made outside the Application Stage closing date.
- Organisations based outside the Shire, unless the project is of benefit to Hepburn Shire residents and the applicant partners with local community organisations to deliver the project.
- Applications completed by a third party on behalf of an applicant will not be considered.

### Assessment

- Technical and grant writing support will be made available to applicants before and during the application stage.
- At the conclusion of the Application stage, applications are reviewed to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria. Those not meeting the criteria will be notified and will not progress to assessment.
- Eligible applications will be assessed by a panel consisting of Council Officers against the Assessment criteria.
- Applications are ranked by overall average score, with funding allocated to the highest scoring applications until the funding pool or pool of suitable applicants is exhausted.

### Assessment Criteria

All Council Grant Programs are assessed against the following Assessment Criteria.

- Addresses an evidence-based community need or opportunity.

- Demonstrates alignment with the Hepburn Shire Council Plan and the relevant strategy (Sustainable Hepburn Strategy 2022-2026.)
- Demonstrates a clear benefit to Hepburn Shire Council residents.
- Demonstrates a clear ability to carry out and undertake the project/activity/event through to completion.
- Provides supporting documentation including quotations.
- Demonstrates no ethical or other conflict of interest.

### Funding

Successful applicants will be notified of the assessment panel outcomes by May 6 2024. Once notified, successful applicants are required to sign a funding agreement and submit a tax invoice to Council using the Smartygrants platform.

### Acquittal Process

An online acquittal must be completed through the SmartyGrants portal at the conclusion of the funded project/activity/event. Successful applicants are required to keep records of all items used and purchased in facilitating the grant project/activity/event and upload these records to our grants portal as part of the acquittal process.

### Funding Conditions and Requirements

- All planning and building permits and other applicable authorisations remain the responsibility of the applicant. Evidence of permits / permissions must be provided where relevant
- Public Liability Insurance is the responsibility of the applicant and must be obtained prior to commencing any works that has been funded.
- An offer of a grant does not mean an ongoing funding commitment or obligation by Council.
- Hepburn Shire must be acknowledged on any promotional material related to the Project / Event. This must be approved by Council's Communications Officer prior to distribution. You are required to extend a written invitation, with a minimum of two weeks' notice, to the Mayor and Hepburn Shire CEO to attend openings and events when available.
- Councillors to be invited to attend openings and the event when available.
- Successful applicants, or their Auspicing Agent, are required to enter into a formal funding agreement with Council. If the Project / Event does not adhere to the conditions of the agreement, Council may require grant funds to be returned.
- All funded Projects must complete an Evaluation and Acquittal including evidence of expenditure, e.g., receipts.
- Ongoing maintenance and repair costs for equipment purchased with grant funds are the responsibility of the applicant.

- In the event of a Project/Event only being part-funded, Council will provide an explanation for this decision. Applicants have the right to accept partial funding or withdraw their application.

For applicants who are seeking funding from external grant sources, you are required to advise Council as soon as possible on the status of this external grant funding.

If your application includes grants funds from Council and another source of funding; if the external funding source becomes unavailable, you will be required to submit an alternative proposal and budget within 30 days of the external funding decision date.

Applications are submitted online only. Council officers can assist with this process where required, e.g., if you have an impairment that prevents you using the online process.

### How to Apply

Visit [www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/grants](http://www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/grants) to view the Biodiversity Grants page. All grant applications are made through the SmartyGrants portal – [Hepburn Shire Council Grants Portal](#).

### Key Council Contacts

Biodiversity Officer

Grants Specialist

Email: [bbainbridge@hepburn.vic.gov.au](mailto:bbainbridge@hepburn.vic.gov.au)

Email: [grants@hepburn.vic.gov.au](mailto:grants@hepburn.vic.gov.au)

Phone: 0437 048 648

Phone: (03) 5348 2306

Please get in touch if you would like additional information, or if you require assistance to complete your application.