

# Hepburn Shire Council

## Environmental Group Grants Program Guidelines 2025-2026



## Purpose

Hepburn Shire Council's Environmental Group Grants Program supports community groups that work to enhance and protect the environment in Hepburn Shire.

Council has committed \$20,000 to support local community environment groups in 2025-2026. Potential applicants are identified by Council Officers and will be invited to apply by the Biodiversity Officer. Applicants will need to demonstrate that their group conducts on-ground environmental works or promotes/advocates for the protection and enhancement of ecological health within Hepburn Shire.

## 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.

## Program Objective

The Hepburn Shire Environmental Group Grants Program provides funding annually to community groups and organisations actively engaged in protecting our natural environment. Organisations can apply for funding to support their group's sustainability and effectiveness. Only groups which work to protect and enhance the environment through conducting on-ground works, or groups that promote increased awareness of environmental issues with Hepburn Shire, will be invited to apply.

Funding may be offered to support groups that deliver the following:

- Publications, electronic media or administrative tasks related to environmental works and advocacy: e.g. copying, production of brochures, newsletters, mailing, website maintenance etc
- Training of individuals and groups to improve their effectiveness as an organization, or carry out on-ground environmental works, e.g., first aid training, Agricultural Chemical Users Permit Course etc
- On-ground works such as planting or 'assisted natural regeneration', weed control, or pest control on public land or private land.

Council will invite community groups to submit applications for their project. Submissions will be assessed for their suitability by a panel consisting of Council officers. Technical support will be provided to guide and refine the scope of potential projects, before and during the application stage. All applicants are advised to contact Council's Biodiversity Officer or Community Grants Officer to ensure that the project meets the funding aims.

### Strategic Alignment

All Hepburn Shire Council's Grants Programs align with the Domains and key focus areas detailed in the [Council Plan 2025-2029](#) and Council Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Applicants will need to identify how their project aligns with one or more of these focus areas:

#### Council Plan Domains:

##### Hepburn Life

- Connected communities that are resilient and adaptable, able to respond, and supported to recover from climate-related impacts, emergencies and other community challenges.
- A healthy and inclusive community, where all people regardless of background or life stage have the opportunity to participate and thrive.
- An informed and engaged community.

##### Future Hepburn

- Preserve the unique character of our towns and communities, plan for future growth and protect our productive rural landscape.
- Responsible management of infrastructure and environment to support wellbeing now and for future generations.

- A dynamic, vibrant and resilient economic environment.

### **Hepburn Working Together**

- Future-focused services that are easy to use and inclusive.
- Maintain corporate governance to enable good Council decision making and to ensure long-term financial viability.
- An engaged, safe and skillful workforce.

### **Municipal Public Health and wellbeing Plan focus areas:**

- Increased active living
- Increased mental wellbeing

The program also connects with the strategic themes from the [Sustainable Hepburn Strategy 2022-2026](#). The following themes from the Strategy may be used for project alignment:

- Beyond Zero Emissions
- Low Waste
- Climate resilience
- Natural Environment and Biodiversity.

### **Who Can Apply**

Local not-for-profit and community environmental groups based in Hepburn Shire will be approached by the Biodiversity Officer to discuss their group's suitability. Eligible groups must be an incorporated body with an ABN, or have an auspicing agent. If you believe your group and project is eligible, contact Council's Biodiversity Officer or Community Grants Officer.

### **Application Process**

1. It is strongly encouraged that all potential applicants contact Council's Community Grants Officer or Biodiversity Officer to discuss your project's suitability.
2. Applicants deemed eligible will be invited to apply by the Biodiversity Officer.
3. Visit: [www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants](http://www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants) for more information.

**Applications not meeting the eligibility guidelines will not be invited to apply.**

## Key Dates

Due to Council's recent restructure, the program dates for Environment Group Grants are still being finalised. Please check this page for updates. It is envisaged that the program will open in the second half of the 2025/26 financial year for a total funding pool of \$20,000.

Application stage opens:	27 MAR 2026
Application stage closes:	11 MAY 2026
Assessment panel convenes:	TBA
Applicants notified of assessment outcomes:	25 MAY 2026
All grants acquitted	30 JUN, 2027

## Eligible Projects

To be eligible for assessment, projects must:

- Utilise funding to train individuals or groups to strengthen their organisation and effectiveness, conduct on-ground environmental works, support on-ground environmental works with activities such as planting or weeding, or request funding to support the administration of on-ground environmental works
- Be strategically/ecologically sound and identify sustainable improvements (i.e., have an identified source of follow-up resources if required)
- Be a group that conducts activities 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>
- Have all permits, permissions, and approvals for the project.<sup>2</sup>
- 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 the planning and implementation of the project.

<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

Projects will be deemed ineligible for funding if:

- The applicant is an individual, profit-making organisation, or political party.
- The applicant is a group whose primary purpose is not focused on improving the environment or fostering ecological health.
- The project is an activity that is the funding responsibility of the state or federal government, or can be funded by fees, sponsorship, or service agreements.
- The applicant has an outstanding Council grant acquittal or unpaid invoice from Council.
- The application is made outside the Application Stage closing date.
- The applicant is based outside the Shire, unless it conducts activities that directly benefit Hepburn Shire residents and the local environment.

**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 and suitability, with funding allocated equitably to all suitable 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:

- Criterion 1: Evidence of a community need or opportunity, and evidence of support from the community (25%)
- Criterion 2: Alignment with the Council Plan 2025-2029 (25%)
- Criterion 3: Benefit to Hepburn Shire residents (20%)
- Criterion 4: Ability to deliver the project effectively and within budget (15%)
- Criterion 5: Managing risk (15%)

### Funding

Once notified, successful applicants will be required to sign a funding agreement and submit a tax invoice to Council. To provide access to funding to as many groups as possible, the total amount provided by Council may vary from what was requested by the applicant. Applicants will be given the opportunity to proceed with the funding amount or withdraw from the program. Funding will be allocated equitably to all successful applicants.

### Acquittal Process

An online acquittal must be completed 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 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 Council must be acknowledged on any promotional material related to the Project / Event. This must be approved by Council's Communications Officer prior to distribution.
- Successful applicants are required to extend a written invitation, with a minimum of two weeks' notice, to the Hepburn Shire Mayor, Councillors, and CEO to attend openings and events 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.

Applicants who are seeking funding from external grant sources 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 an external source of funding, and the external funding becomes unavailable, you must submit an alternative proposal and budget within 30 days of receiving the external funding decision.

### Ready to Apply?

All grant applications must be lodged through the [Hepburn Shire Council Grants Portal by Smartygrants](#). Click the link to begin your application during the application period.

Applications can only be submitted online only using the Smartygrants portal. Council officers can assist with this process where required, e.g., if you have an impairment that prevents you from lodging your application online.

### Funding Alternatives

The Hepburn Grants Finder provides local community groups with a comprehensive and up-to-date list of grant and funding opportunities available from a range of funding providers including State and Federal government and philanthropic organisations. The Hepburn Grant Finder also includes an alert service meaning you will never miss a grant opportunity again.

Access the [Hepburn Grant Finder](#) on our grants website to explore what other funding opportunities may be available to support the implementation of your project.

### Key Council Contacts

Biodiversity Officer

Community Grants Officer

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 to discuss your application.