

SUPPORTED COMMUNITY GRANTING

A GUIDEBOOK FOR PRACTICE



Prepared by Fire to Flourish

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Acknowledgement

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.

This report was created by people living on Boonwurrung/Bunerong, Brinja-Yuin, Djiringanj, Walbunja, Wurundjeri Country.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we work and live across Australia.



Fire to Flourish

Fire to Flourish was a five-year (2021-2025) community-led program that worked in partnership with communities impacted by the 2019-2020 Australian bushfires to trial innovations in long-term community-led disaster resilience.

Led by Monash University, and philanthropically funded, Fire to Flourish worked at the intersection of community development and disaster resilience in ongoing partnership with communities to co-create and support new approaches to community disaster resilience initiatives. The program has developed and tested new tools and processes to support community action and disaster resilience across four partner communities: Eurobodalla, Tenterfield and Clarence Valley in New South Wales (NSW) and East Gippsland in Victoria (VIC).

Fire to Flourish has enabled communities to have decision-making power over flexible, easy-to-access grant funding, and to have access to resources that equip communities to design and implement projects to enhance disaster resilience.

In Eurobodalla, Fire to Flourish worked in deep partnership with community members, organisations, Elders, and local leaders to strengthen resilience through cultural connection, social capital, community wellbeing, skills development and belonging.



Strength through community-led action



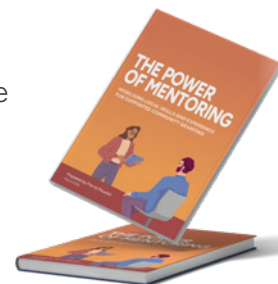
PURPOSE OF THIS PRACTICE GUIDE

Throughout its five year program, Fire to Flourish trialled new approaches to community granting, sometimes called participatory granting.

The Fire to Flourish team in Eurobodalla experimented with community and participatory granting and created a new approach and process for granting that supported community members and applicants all along the way.

This practice guide outlines the approach to supported community granting undertaken in Eurobodalla. It captures the key stages and elements of the granting process, with insights and recommendations to support replication.

A companion report titled *The Power of Mentoring: Mobilising local skills and experience for supported community granting* provides further information on Eurobodalla's participatory granting process, with a particular focus on the critical role of community mentors and the important and ongoing influence this had on funded projects and the community more broadly.



Establishing your ways of working

Values, principles and purpose

When designing a granting process, it is important to carefully consider and decide upon your key aims and broader goals.

In the Eurobodalla, the 'Our Country in Healing Hands' process was about providing funds to communities to support community disaster resilience. It was also about supporting and strengthening skills in grant writing and project development; about enhancing social networks and community connections; learning about other ways of working; being encouraged to be as inclusive as possible; and having an open mind to creative ways of strengthening community disaster resilience. The design for supported granting was informed by the Fire to Flourish key principles and ways of working. And ultimately, the whole process was designed in accordance with community priorities and needs of Caring for Country, and supporting community health and wellbeing.

Flexibility was embedded in the process. It was important to allow the community to identify and describe what disaster resilience meant to them. In this way, it eliminated stringent or overly prescriptive criteria. Instead, eligibility and grant criteria were informed by community priorities and needs, but not tightly constrained by a predetermined assumption about what that was expected to look like in practice. This gave space and opportunity for communities to create projects that suited their context and needs, rather than ones that made sense to an external funder.

Things to think about:

What principles or values will inform your granting process? How will you ensure that these shape the design and outcomes of the process and projects?

Is there a particular goal in mind that the granting will address? Are there constraints on the types of projects that will be considered for funding? Or are creative and new projects welcome?

Who is involved?

There are four main roles involved in the supported granting process.

1 Community Facilitators



They help with overall grant design, ensure processes are followed, that people are engaged and that accountable decisions are made.

They can help to design the granting round in response to community priorities and needs, though are not decision makers.

2 Community Project Mentors (CPMs)



Community Project Mentors (CPMs) are local community members who walk alongside applicants, helping them refine ideas, develop strong applications, and navigate the challenges of turning community vision into reality.

These are community members who bring particular experience and expertise, and are responsible for providing tailored support to project applicants.

3 Community Project Applicants



Community members who apply for funding through the granting round. They will submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) funding form, and will participate in the Community Forums or workshops.

If invited, they will submit a full application to be considered for funding.

4 Independent Community Assessors



'Decisions for community, by community' is an essential element of participatory granting process.

A group of decision-makers from community must be formed, and supported to develop criteria to guide their decision-making about which projects will receive funding. These are people who are not directly involved in the mentoring of applicants but can provide an independent assessment on whether a project meets community need.

The supported granting journey

Identifying community priorities

Who is involved?

- Community Facilitators
- Community Members (could be local community groups, residents, local Aboriginal Elders)

What does this look like?

The process for identifying community priorities will look different for every community and granting process. You could consider a community survey, community workshops or community forums. Mechanisms that bring people together and foster conversation between different people to identify the needs, concerns and vision for the local community. This can lead to identifying current community priorities.

It is important to consider the diversity of people's needs and the ability to contribute in the design of these gatherings and information gathering processes.

Things to consider include:

- Who is involved? Are there additional people that need to be engaged?
- Where are gatherings taking place? Are these accessible to all people?
- Will the processes enable diverse voices to be heard?

How did we do this?

The design of the Eurobodalla granting process began with facilitated community consultation processes to define community priorities. This process created space for meaningful engagement and open discussion to allow community priorities and concerns to emerge. From these conversations, two priority themes emerged - Caring for Country and Health & Wellbeing.

The Eurobodalla Community Facilitators also held a First Nations Leadership Gathering, where Indigenous Elders and community leaders came together to voice and articulate their vision and priorities for the local community.

This two-day event asked Indigenous leaders:

- What are the important things in your community right now that would benefit from more support?
- How can community leaders best be supported?

The insights from this First Nations Gathering were critical to informing the design of the 'Our Country in Healing Hands' grant round.



Design of the granting process

Who is involved?

- Community Facilitators

What does this look like?

The community priorities from the various community engagement processes need to inform and shape the granting process. This means, the priorities need to be translated and embedded into the grant process, from the recruitment and training of Community Project Mentors, the community forums and workshops, to the Expression of Interest and full project application forms. This way the values and priorities articulated and identified by the community continue to shape the design and outcome of the granting process, ultimately better supporting communities by addressing their needs and priorities.

The design phase is an important one undertaken by the facilitators. This is when the application forms and eligibility can be created and consolidated, in line with the community priorities.

For example:

- What were the key themes and priorities?
- Was a particular geographical focus identified through your community engagement activities?
- How will these be translated into project application criteria?

It will be important to design and decide in advance how decision making will work in the granting round.

What did we do?

We wanted to avoid over burdening potential applicants with lengthy applications before it was known whether or not they were likely to be successful.

To address this, we created an Expression of interest process that allowed people to signal their interest in applying and give an indication as to the type of project they wanted to pursue.

This way we knew who was interested and likely to attend the community forums.

This information also allowed us to help match grant applicants with a Community Project Mentor with relevant skills and experience.

The priorities from the community engagement processes were translated into criteria and used for the EOI and full application. These priorities were also explained to all participants at the community forums, and to the CPMs and the Independent Community Assessors.

Example from Eurobodalla

'Our Country in Healing Hands'

Eligibility

- People and organisations within the Eurobodalla Shire

Criteria

- Targeted group programs that support Disaster Resilience through strengthening Community Social Capital or Health and Wellbeing capabilities.
- Activities that support Disaster Resilience through skill-building. This could include training opportunities to Work on Country.
- Community events that promote Disaster Resilience by reducing social isolation and/or encouraging Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Support.
- Tools and resource development that support Disaster Resilience. This could include information packages, toolkits, planning for built and/or natural environments (e.g. protecting or revitalising cultural heritage).
- Projects that support Disaster Resilience through Connection to Culture, Country and Identity.
- Projects that support Disaster Resilience by improving our natural environment. This could include revitalisation or Protection of Country.

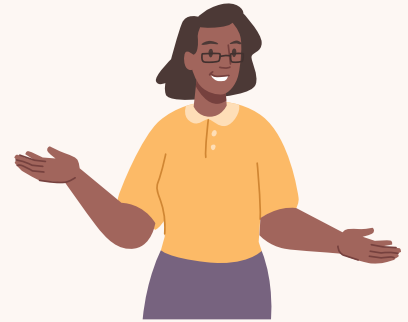
Applicants will be asked:

To demonstrate how their project meets the Fire to Flourish principles:

- Foreground Aboriginal wisdom and knowledge
- Be community-led
- Be strengths-based and trauma-informed
- Address inequities and enhance inclusion
- Be holistic and impactful
- Learn, adapt and evolve

To identify their project domains:

- Social Capital
- Built Environment
- Natural Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Economic Wellbeing



You must demonstrate:

- How your project has been identified and supports community-led action
 - How your project encourages inclusive engagement and support, including for those who do not typically access these opportunities
 - How your project strengthens disaster resilience
 - How your project encourages skill-building and how these skills have been identified/expressed by community
 - How your project builds inclusive community networks (e.g. between marginalised groups)
-

Extra

Applicants will be supported by a Community Project Mentor to provide assistance to develop and design their project concept

Strongly encouraged to apply: small, groups, unincorporated entities, Aboriginal people, people living with a disability, people with lived experience of mental health and LGBTQI+ communities

Community Project Mentors

Recruitment and Training

Who is involved?

- Community Facilitators
- Community Project Mentors
- Independent Community Assessors

What does this look like?

You will need to recruit Community Project Mentors and Independent Community Assessors.

Community Project Mentors

These are community members who are recruited to provide support to project applicants throughout the process, or who will be the decision makers for the successful projects.

Community Project Mentors (CPMs) are respected local leaders who support applicants through idea development, grant writing and project design. The creation of this role reflects a belief that community members themselves hold the wisdom, experience and insight required to support their community and guide projects to deliver value for all. This role also helped to fill a critical gap in many community granting processes, which leave project leads unsupported. The CPMs helped to strengthen the ideas submitted for funding, undertake detailed project implementation planning, build a network of project leads and ensure that project leads are supported as they undertake work for the benefit of their broader community.

“It was great having access to an experienced mentor to help you fine-tune – come and voice what we are doing. I’m not very good at putting things on paper – so to speak and be more verbal than written was good”

Grant Applicant

CPMs provided a range of practical support to grant applicants, including:

- Workshopping ideas and strengthening project plans
- Supporting development of the full application, including budget information
- Ensuring alignment with community priorities
- Supporting culturally safe engagement
- Helping applicants articulate project need and do detailed implementation planning.

Project mentors are trained to support grant applicants in this role and ensure consistency across mentors.

In Eurobodalla, this included an introduction to Fire to Flourish, its guiding principles, and the five domains that are commonly used to describe holistic disaster resilience. CPMs were also introduced to the Fire to Flourish six community capabilities for disaster resilience, and given an overview of participatory granting, the key differences between other traditional approaches, and the steps planned for this particular grant process.

Expression of Interest

(EOI) Stage

Who is involved?

- Community Facilitators
- Community Members

What does this look like?

Supported granting needs to begin at the start of the application process. Rather than giving people a lengthy (or confusing!) application form, this process begins by inviting people to submit an Expression of Interest form. This allows early stage project ideas to be welcomed and fostered. This can reduce barriers to participation by allowing people to express interest in participating without needing to develop a full project proposal from the outset.

The EOI process also can provide an overview of the types of projects and ideas that community members wanted to pursue. This information will help the community facilitators to plan the community forums, and to start thinking about matching applicants with Community Project mentors who have relevant experience and skills.

What did we do?

The Eurobodalla Fire to Flourish Community Facilitators made the EOI process available to community members approximately 6 weeks before the Community Forums. This allowed ample time for people to express interest in participating and applying for a grant, and for the community facilitators to begin to match potential applicants with complementary CPMs.

To support the preparation of grant applications, the Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla team had developed a Grant Writing Toolkit. This responded to an identified need in the community for a straightforward document to help community members navigate a granting process and prepare an application. The toolkit was distributed widely across the community and shared with all interested community members to support development of their applications.



The key criteria and priorities for funding projects were described as well as the role of the Community Project Mentors and the types of support anticipated that would be expected to be provided to grant applicants.

Importantly, the community mentors were also remunerated for their time, in recognition of the expertise and support they were providing to the granting process and broader community.

Independent Community Assessors

These are Community Project Mentors who will be involved in the decision making process for the granting round. In addition to the CPM training, they received training in the decision making process.

What did we do?

Held a series of training workshops with the CPMs in advance of the community forums. This was to ensure they were familiar with the process, the priorities and the criteria before all the community members and potential applicants gathered together. This also meant they were able to listen deeply and draw potential connections between project ideas shared by community members on the day, and to think about potential support and solutions they could offer.

Community Forums

Caring for Country and Health & Wellbeing



Who is involved?

- Community Facilitators
- Community Project Mentors
- Project Applicants

What does this look like?

Community Forums were a central feature of the model.

There were two forums – one focused on Caring for Country, and the other on Health & Wellbeing (being the two community priorities that emerged from our consultation). The forums served as a shared learning space where potential applicants connected with each other, and tested project ideas in a facilitated and supported environment.

Each project lead was matched with a mentor to support development of the project, as well as connect applicants that had a similar idea or project. All applicants were required to attend at least one of the Forums. Participation ensured that the resulting projects reflected genuine community needs and avoided duplication. It was also a way to facilitate sharing and connection, so that where appropriate, potential collaborations could be explored without jeopardising privacy or confidentiality.

The Forums were also the opportunity to share the purpose and requirements of the grant process. In line with the objectives of Fire to Flourish, grants were focused on building community disaster resilience, which also had to align with the program principles including being community led and foregrounding Aboriginal wisdom.

The overarching advice to applicants was to maintain the integrity of the project and vision and make sure the Fire to Flourish funding supported their needs, rather than designing a project to fit the program or funding. Consistent with the community-led objective of Fire to Flourish, the core focus of this granting round was to ensure it addressed community needs (rather than requiring the community to adapt their projects in order to comply with program guidelines, as is the more common experience).

Supported Application Development

Who is involved?

- Community Project Mentors
- Project Applicants

What does this look like?

This is a way of providing continuing support to potential applicants. Rather than a one off training or workshop, the CPM model provides a personal contact for applicants to reach out to if they have questions or want to brainstorm and talk through their ideas and project application.

What did this look like?

Following the Community Forums, Community Project Mentors provided support for a further three weeks for applicants to refine the project before the EOIs proceeded to assessment.

This allowed for one-on-one support to develop the project idea, do detailed planning for project implementation and review draft applications.

This was an iterative process; support and feedback was available and provided as the idea and application developed. As the mentors developed stronger understandings of the proposed projects, they would also link the applicant with other mentors who had relevant experience for assistance on particular components.



Shortlisting Applications



Who is involved?

- Community Project Mentors
- Independent Community Assessors

What does this look like?

Deciding on the shortlisted projects is very important. It is the first step in deciding who will be successful for funding. The EOI and community forums are designed to ensure a transparent process all along the way, this includes eligibility and suitability of projects for funding. It is also intended to support applicants and strengthen the project idea and final application. Through this process, people may also self-select to withdraw their project.

The shortlist process is a way to identify the strongest applicants and invite them to submit a full funding application. This way, the energy invested in writing an application is only expended by those most likely to be successful (rather than having other projects write applications for ideas that were potentially never aligned or relevant in the first place).

What did this look like?

Within Eurobodalla, the EOI and community forum process worked successfully. This was particularly evident when four projects withdrew EOIs following the forums, having decided that their project was not best suited to this particular funding or that their project didn't adequately address the community priorities.

The EOI process was also a way to ensure projects were consistent with our key principle of being community-led. If project proponents were unwilling to amend their proposal to respond to community feedback, the project became ineligible for funding as it no longer met the criteria of being community-led and valuing the contribution of community.

The CPMs and six Independent Community Assessors then proceeded to shortlist EOIs and invite full applications from those applicants. In our process, the CPMs had the role of championing (or not) the project they were supporting, depending on their assessment. Recognising that ideas can be great on paper, this process meant there was a personal assessment of capability and likelihood of success. The CPM recommendation was taken into account by Independent Community Assessors who were the final decision makers.

Decision Making and Funding Allocation

Who is involved?

- Community Facilitators
- Community Project Mentors

What does this look like?

Once the full applications are received the Community Assessors can begin determining the successful grant recipients. This will be done by following the previously agreed upon decision making process.

A good decision making and assessment process could include:

- Individual assessment of the projects: this allows each Community Assessor time and space to consider and evaluate each project without the influence of others
- Collective discussion and deliberation.

In a supported EOI process, it is likely that the majority of applications will address the criteria and align with key priorities and principles.

This process of review will be to look in more detail at the project and consider factors such as:

- Realistic budget
- Potential risks
- Supports required for implementation
- The preferred mix of projects (to avoid duplication)

Consideration may need to be given to how funds will be distributed.

- How will the grant pool be divided between the applications?
- Do adjustments need to be made or requested of the applicants?

What did this look like?

A combination of mentor insights, independent decision-making and community endorsement was used to determine which projects were awarded funding. This ensured transparency, equity and alignment with community priorities.

CPMs independently assessed projects that they had not been supporting. To eliminate bias and conflict, there were also 6 Independent Community Assessors. They then came together as a cohort to discuss each project. Projects proceeded if there was close to consensus (ended up with ~14 asked to submit full application). Feedback given to unsuccessful (~2 projects).

The full application process was assessed on four criteria:

1. **Principle alignment:** with Fire to Flourish principles, the funding round criteria and priorities
2. **Burden of risk:** many applicants and programs hadn't received funding before, so there was a risk management assessment for the individual, community and program
3. **The capacity to deliver:** this focused on demonstrating that this was a deliverable project and identifying what support may be needed for implementation, including a detailed budget.
4. **Community impact:** working towards supporting community disaster resilience

Ultimately 103 projects were funded and over AU\$2.7 million was distributed to support community disaster resilience.

Community Projects

Funded in Eurobodalla

Salt Dust Connection

Gwiyaala Aboriginal Art free art workshops where you can come and paint as you share your stories.

Bronwen Smith

Bangguri Gadhu Food Trailer

Our project aims to serve as a dependable source of food for communities during times of crisis, while providing employment for young individuals.

Belinda Kelly

Dive & Draw

Our program will give young people the immersive experience of live 'dry dives' using underwater drones, followed by guided art sessions to share their inspiration, connecting them with local sea country and encouraging creative expression.

Cat Leach

Dark South Wellbeing Program

Our program offers limited scholarship spots for a boxing camp focused on building Physical Fitness, Mental Resilience, and Personal Growth, tailored for all skill levels in a supportive environment.

Skye Falzon

Traditional Aboriginal Healing

Cultural & Social Work Practices to improve Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Strengthen Disaster Resilience.

Natalie Gallagher

Back to Home project

The Back to Home project will host Skill Building workshops collectively resulting in a transportable housing prototype suited to Community Led responses.

Jackson Dannock



Fireboy

This documentary film is the story of a Yuin boy's journey across Country in search of Ancestral Fire Lore and knowledge to protect his Community and Regenerate Traditional Lands.

Jamil Hassan

Yarning on Country

An immersive Men's Healing program combining Traditional yarning circles and Cultural workshops to promote Community Resilience.

Murray Van Der Verr
& Wayne Carberry

Colours of Resilience

Healing communities through colour therapy, fostering connection, creativity, and strength with Aboriginal artists and Safe Space for You.

Erzsebet de Saxe

Connect 2 Flourish

Heal. Connect. Flourish. Join us at Little Paddocks for a series of community gatherings and wellness workshops including Ceramics, Playback Theatre, Chakra Dance, Mindfulness Tasters, Pit Fired Pottery, Bushfire Readiness Expo, Exhibition and Mini Festival.

Sallyann Burtenshaw

Umbarra's Healing

Umbarra's Healing project creates Community Cultural Awareness, Promotes Indigenous Land Management, Strengthens Community Disaster Resilience and Environmental Connectedness.

Adam Nye

Embers to Essence

The Ember to Essence festival is a three-day music event commemorating the 5th Anniversary of the Black Summer Bushfires.

Tremayne Chatfield



Appendices

Appendix 1

Worksheet 1: Identifying community priorities

The following list of questions can be used to design a community granting, or other community engagement process.

Questions to ask:

- What geographic area do you want to cover?
- Who are the different communities living and working within this area?
- What is the best way to reach each of these different communities?
- Are there vulnerable or marginalized cohorts.
- What additional steps are needed to facilitate inclusive participation?
- What are key issues affecting this community?
- How can you ensure different voices are heard in exploring and understanding community priorities?

Appendix 2

Worksheet 2: Identifying community mentors

The following list of questions can be used to help identify community mentors.

Questions to ask:

- What is the focus of your community engagement process?
- What kind of support might community members need from mentors?
- What networks could your mentors bring that would enhance this process?
- What networks might be valuable to your applicants / participants?
- How do the community needs and priorities shape who you might need to recruit?
- Who could be a good mentor in light of the identified community needs and priorities?
- Do they have the time and capacity to contribute? The skills and ability to contribute meaningfully?
- What might you need to do to encourage the participation people as community mentors? Consider accessibility options, will zoom be required? Digital skills? Do they live locally? Can they travel to the required destinations?
- Are there any potential conflict of interests?



The Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla team would like to thank our Community Project Mentors and the broader community for your participation and support throughout this journey.

Together, we have shared stories and experiences, built new connections and deepened others.

We are hopeful that the legacy of Fire to Flourish is a demonstration of how community resilience can be achieved. Supporting community leaders, and supporting communities to stand shoulder to shoulder, together.



**FIRE to
FLOURISH**

Strength through community-led action

