

LOCAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY PROGRAM - VICTORIA

FUNDING GUIDELINES FOR BUSHFIRE RECOVERY REGIONAL ECONOMIC STIMULUS AND RESILIENCE GRANTS

Program description	Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants Fund – single competitive round. Eligible projects must produce an economic benefit to a fire affected region (East Gippsland and/or North East Victoria).
Available funding	\$34 million
Eligible applicants	Refer to section 7.1-7.4
Administered by	Regional Development Victoria Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
More information	Refer to Section 13 of these guidelines for contact details.

1. Background

Throughout the 2019-20 summer period, fires burnt large areas of Victoria, primarily in East Gippsland and North East Victoria. These fires burned about 1.5 million hectares and had significant impacts on communities, businesses and the environment.

The economic impacts of the fires were profound, with around 8,600 businesses located within five kilometres of the fires, and 656 farms had infrastructure damaged or destroyed, with 10,000 livestock lost.

More information is available at: www.br.vic.gov.au

2. Local Economy Recovery Program

The Local Economic Recovery (LER) Program was announced by the Commonwealth Government in May 2020. The LER Program supports programs and projects that contribute to recovery of communities most heavily impacted by the 2019-20 Victorian bushfires.

The \$68.6 million LER Program for Victoria is co-funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments under Category D of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).

The LER Program is being implemented in two components:

- 1. Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Projects and Programs** (\$42 million). This includes:
 - Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants Fund (\$34 million)
 - Regional Economic Programs Fund (\$8 million)

2. Bushfire Recovery Local Community Projects Grants Program (\$26.6 million)

Funding applications will be invited for the Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants Program and the Bushfire Recovery Local Community Projects Grants Program.

The programs funded under the Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Recovery Programs Fund will be delivered by the Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR).

These guidelines apply to the **Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants Fund**.

3. Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants Fund

The \$34 million Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants have been established to support regional economic recovery by stimulating economic growth and building economic resilience in bushfire affected regions.

The projects funded under the Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants will be drawn from approved economic recovery plans developed at regional and/or municipal levels. The regional and municipal recovery plans have been developed in consultation with the local community, and the local industry and business sectors.

4. Program objectives

- increase economic and social benefits through investment in enabling infrastructure
- increase employment opportunities and decrease skills shortages in key sectors, including the promotion of Aboriginal participation
- increase the capacity of the business community by enhancing employment, business and economic opportunities with a focus on tourism and primary industries, including small business or other sectors, consistent with the objectives of local and state government
- increase business capability, including Aboriginal businesses, and continuity by providing increased opportunities to collaborate, innovate and drive change
- increase longer term economic and community resilience for future emergency events
- increase and restore visitor confidence in the region
- protect and enhance Aboriginal culture, and support participation and ownership
- addresses a need of the communities that has arisen due to the impact of the 2019-20 bushfires.

5. Timeframes

The program will be delivered through a single competitive round. Interested parties are invited to speak with their local Regional Development Victoria (RDV) office.

- Thursday 29 October 2020: program opens

- Thursday 10 December 2020: application for funding closed
- Mid to late January 2021: successful applicants notified
- By 30 June 2022: approved projects completed.

6. Funding

An upper-limit of \$5 million in funding will apply to individual projects.

Applicants may submit grant applications for more than one project. Applicants will be asked to indicate which project they consider to be their priority project.

7. Eligibility criteria

7.1 Eligible Local Government Areas and Alpine Resort Areas

The following Local Government Areas (LGAs) and Alpine Resort Areas can access LER Program funding:

- East Gippsland:
 - East Gippsland Shire
 - Wellington Shire
- North East Victoria:
 - Towong Shire
 - Alpine Shire
 - Indigo Shire
 - Mansfield Shire
 - Rural City of Wangaratta
 - Wodonga City
 - Falls Creek Alpine Resort
 - Mount Hotham Alpine Resort
 - Mount Buller & Mount Stirling Alpine Resort

It is anticipated that most funding will go to the LGAs most directly impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires: East Gippsland Shire, Towong Shire and Alpine Shire (in that order).

7.2 Eligible organisations

To be eligible, an applicant must be an organisation that is a:

- Local Government Authority
- Resort Management Board
- industry organisation
- private sector businesses, including Aboriginal organisations, sole traders, micro and small businesses
- business and industry groups, including:
 - chambers of commerce and business associations
 - industry peak bodies
 - business and industry clusters and networks.
- utility and services providers and water corporations
- TAFE institution and university
- public/private partnership, through an incorporated entity
- not-for-profit organisation, including community groups that are an incorporated body, cooperative, association or social enterprise
- other organisation agreed between the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and the Victorian Government.

and must:

- be an incorporated legal entity, with the exception of sole traders, micro and small businesses which may only require an ABN; and
- have a current Australian Business Number (ABN); and
- have no outstanding reports or other reports required for any previous Victorian Government grant programs.

Note that eligible Traditional Owner / Custodian groups and Aboriginal businesses are encouraged to apply.

7.3 Auspice organisations

Auspice organisations can support unlimited applications from lead applicants.

If your organisation is not incorporated or does not have an ABN you may ask an eligible auspice organisation to submit an application.

An auspice organisation is an organisation that meets the eligibility requirements and that has agreed to manage the grant for you. An auspice organisation must agree to enter into the grant agreement with the State and be liable for delivering the project.

7.4 Ineligible organisations

- State and Commonwealth Government departments and agencies
- unincorporated organisations or joint ventures (unless under an auspice arrangement, see *above*)
- trusts
- pre-schools, primary and secondary schools
- Individuals are not eligible to apply.

7.5 Eligible projects

Projects are eligible if they are designed to produce an economic benefit to a fire affected region (East Gippsland and/or North East Victoria) and align with one or more of the following LER Program categories:

<p>Enabling infrastructure</p>	<p>Economic infrastructure and new infrastructure focused on functionality improvements, enhancements or upgrades including betterment.</p> <p>Support for projects focused on micro-grids, local energy grids, that helps deliver resilience and economic value for communities.</p>
<p>Industry and business development, including small business and micro-enterprises/sole traders' development.</p>	<p>Initiatives supporting entrepreneurship and innovation.</p> <p>Development of regional specialisations and economic diversification.</p> <p>Business retention, new business development and business expansion and attraction.</p> <p>New technologies, plant and equipment and systems to improve productivity, competitiveness, and business and jobs growth.</p> <p>Capacity building, workforce participation, skills development, and local and regional industry networks.</p>

7.6 Ineligible projects

Examples of the types of projects that will not be supported include:

- projects that, in the state's opinion, may have a negative impact on existing businesses / services
- projects that require ongoing or recurrent funding to succeed or deliver benefits, unless there is demonstrated agreement from the relevant entity, including Commonwealth, state or Local government, to provide that funding
- projects where, in the State's opinion, funding is normally provided, or has otherwise been provided, by other state, Commonwealth and/or local government sources.

7.7 Ineligible costs

Examples of program costs that will not be covered by grant funding:

- early stage planning, feasibility studies, strategic and growth plans and township planning (business cases and design and construct projects are not considered ineligible).
- business-as-usual operational costs and expenditure, including overhead costs
- costs of works completed prior to approval of funding for the project (retrospective funding)
- the purchase of land or buildings
- private sector projects undertaken as a result of another government contract
- projects that the State considers are normally funded through commonwealth, state or local government sources
- costs of works and activities that are reimbursable under other funding sources, including insurance
- projects requiring operational funding from the Victorian Government once completed
- activities that that the State considers are considered Local Government Authority and Alpine Resort Area core business
- passing on the funding to a third party in the form of a sponsorship, grant, cash prize or commercial gift.

7.8 Further mandatory requirements

For a successful application, applicants must ensure:

1. the proposed project is located in an eligible Local Government Authority and/or Alpine Resort Area
2. that all regulatory requirements for the project including land tenure, planning and environmental issues have been identified and will be met
3. applications for projects on public land are endorsed by the relevant land manager (e.g. Local Council or the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning)
4. the proposed project will comply with Victorian COVID-19 restrictions and requirements.

Funding applications must also include information and evidence regarding whether the applicant has already applied for and/or received funding from the Commonwealth, State or local government, for the same or a similar project(s).

8. Application process

Step 1: Expression of interest

Prior to submitting an application for a Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grant, applicants must:

- familiarise themselves with these guidelines

- discuss their project idea with the relevant RDV representative and provide evidence of that discussion with their application
- read the terms and conditions for the funding offered, within these guidelines and the grant agreement template
- express interest in applying for financial assistance by preparing a short description of the project, including the magnitude of the investment and jobs to be retained and created through the project.

RDV regional offices will undertake an initial assessment against program eligibility and assessment criteria and provide feedback. If this initial assessment is positive, the applicant will be invited to apply for funding. A positive assessment at this expression of interest stage is not approval of an application.

Step 2: Prepare an application

RDV regional offices will provide applicants with an application form as soon as possible following the assessment of their initial expression of interest.

Applicants will be required to address the assessment criteria of the program (see section 9) and provide the supporting documents required, including:

- a completed project plan including a risk plan
- cost estimates/quotes
- letters of support, as appropriate
- evidence confirming funding sources
- evidence of land ownership/tenure.

As required by RDV, applications may also need to include:

- a copy of completed Cultural Heritage Management Plan, Vegetation Assessments, Environmental Management Plans, etc. as appropriate or evidence that these types of plans are not required
- evidence that relevant approvals to commence the project have been obtained, such as Planning Permit, Heritage Victoria Permit, etc.
- schematic plans for the project. For projects over \$500,000 a quantity surveyor's estimate and construction plans for the project (desirable) should be provided.

For grants above \$50,000 applicants are required to provide copies of annual reports and audited financial statements (i.e. audited profit and loss statements and balance sheets) of the applicant organisation covering the last three years with their application. This will enable RDV to assess the financial viability of the applicant and their ability to manage and complete the project.

Where the applicant proposes to enter the grant agreement on behalf of a supported organisation (auspice arrangement) the application must include written confirmation from the supported organisation that it has reviewed the application and agree to its content and that the project will be delivered by the auspicating applicant on behalf of the supported organisation.

Step 3: Assessment process

Applications will undergo a multi-stage assessment process:

- RDV will determine the project's eligibility against the applicant and project eligibility criteria above and undertake probity checks and financial risk assessments of the applicant organisations where necessary. Ineligible applicants will not proceed to assessment.
- An Assessment Panel comprising state government representatives will assess eligible applications against the Assessment Criteria to determine a list of recommended projects.
- The relevant Minister/s and the National Bushfire Recovery Agency will review the recommendations of the Assessment Panel and a final list of recommended projects will be determined.
- Funding approval will then be sought from the Minister for Regional Development.

All persons involved in the assessment of the projects will have to declare and demonstrate appropriate management of any real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Step 4: Letter of offer

Applicants will be advised of the decision relating to their application in writing. Successful applicants will receive a letter of offer from the Minister for Regional Development.

9. Assessment criteria

Projects must align with one or more of the eligible LER Program categories (section 7.5) for the Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants Fund.

Applicants must demonstrate an evidence base for the project need and benefit. The more evidence (qualitative or quantitative) provided to demonstrate adherence with Assessment Criteria 1-5, the greater the likelihood that the project will be funded.

1. Regional economic benefit

Applicants must explain how and why the project:

- aligns with one or more of the eligible LER Program categories (section 7.5);
- how well the project addresses one or more of the program objectives (section 4);
- will deliver regional economic benefits in a fire affected area, including the quantum and type of economic benefit and timeframe over which it will be realised;
- avoids unintended consequences (for example, adverse impacts on neighbouring local businesses, vulnerable groups or the environment, or ongoing costs for the community or local government); and
- cannot be delivered through other funding sources.

2. Local participation, support and delivery

Applicants must demonstrate that the project has local participation and support showing the community was engaged at the project planning stage (where relevant) and/or there are identified pathways for the project benefits to be shared in the community.

The project should demonstrate one or more of the following:

- support from the community (e.g. through letter/s of support or resolutions of industry or community groups, Municipal Recovery Committees, Community Recovery Committees, Traditional Owners and/or local government);
- encourage the participation of communities including Traditional Owners (e.g. through job creation, involvement in planning processes and development); and/or
- enhance local and Aboriginal employment and procurement opportunities, including opportunities for local trades, services and other input-supplying businesses.

3. Alignment with relevant economic recovery plans

Applicants must demonstrate how the project:

- aligns with and supports one or more of the medium-long term economic recovery needs identified in the State Recovery Plan, Municipal Recovery Plans and/or other endorsed economic recovery plans;

Applicants must also demonstrate how the project is consistent with one or more of:

- the priorities from the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (e.g. helping to understand or reduce disaster risk, enhancing investment, encouraging greater uptake of adequate insurance); and/or
- the characteristics of a resilient community identified in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (e.g. functioning well under stress, successful adaptation, self-reliance and social capacity).

4. Enduring socio-economic outcomes

Applicants must demonstrate how the project:

- supports vulnerable groups/diverse populations;
- supports long term socio-economic outcomes for communities in a bushfire affected region; and
- local and regional recovery is tangible, sustainable (i.e. delivers ongoing benefits and employment opportunities), builds future resilience, and reduces future disaster risk.

5. Project feasibility and delivery

Applications must demonstrate all of the following:

- they are financially viable and have the capacity to manage and complete the project;
- that suitable project management arrangements are in place and included in the project implementation plan and budget, including clear project timeframes and milestones, and an anticipated completion date;
- that project costs are accurate and reasonable (including any in-kind and/or co-contribution funding support);
- that project risks have been identified and strategies are in place to manage them;

- that delivery partners have the capacity and experience to deliver the project;
- if relevant, how the project incorporates principles of environmentally sustainable design and addresses Universal Design while complying with relevant anti-discrimination legislation; and
- if relevant, that the project is consistent with good heritage practice, i.e. The Burra Charter (if heritage listed).

10. Assessment weighting

Applications will be assessed against the Assessment criteria as outlined in the table below.

Assessment Criteria	Weighting
Economic benefit	40%
Local participation and support in planning and delivery	20%
Alignment with relevant economic recovery plans	20%
Enduring socio-economic benefits	20%
Project feasibility and delivery	Yes/No

11. Compliance and governance

11.1 Acknowledgement of joint State / Commonwealth Government assistance

Grant recipients will be required under the grant agreement to follow guidelines for acknowledging joint Commonwealth and Victorian Government funding under the DRFA. These guidelines can be found at:

- [Bushfire Recovery Victoria website](#)
- [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018](#)

A breach of these guidelines is considered a breach of your grant agreement with the Victorian Government.

As the project is being delivered, applicants will need to identify announcements, progress and finalisation of program media opportunities. The applicant must communicate these opportunities in line with the terms of the grant agreement, which will include protocols.

A Victorian and Commonwealth Government endorsed sign must also be placed at the site of infrastructure activities.

BRV in consultation with RDV will oversee approval of joint media releases and associated materials for government agencies and councils, in consultation with National Bushfire Recovery Agency.

11.2 Grant Agreement

Organisations approved for funding will enter into a Grant Agreement with DJPR, as represented by RDV, detailing all funding obligations and conditions including:

- the grant's terms and conditions, including use of funds

- proper use of the funds
- key deliverables,
- instalments and due dates, and
- reporting requirements.

Organisations that are successful in receiving funding will have 60 days in which to enter into an agreement. If a grant offer is not accepted during this period, the grant may be withdrawn.

During a project, RDV may conduct site visits as necessary. In some instances, based on project size, complexity and the amount of funding being provided, a project control group (or equivalent) may need to be established with regular meetings and reports. At its discretion, RDV may either participate or be an observer in these meetings.

Grant recipients are subject to the requirements of Local Jobs First Policy where the value of the grant is above \$1 million. Local Jobs First requirements can be found at: <https://localjobsfirst.vic.gov.au/>

11.3 GST

Applicants should note that all project costs included in the application must be exclusive of GST. Applicants must have an ABN and be registered for GST or provide written advice from the Australian Taxation Office that no withholding tax is required to be withheld from the grant payment.

11.4 Reporting and evaluation

Once the grant agreement has been signed, grant recipients will be required to actively manage and deliver the project and provide accurate progress reports to RDV.

The grant agreement will set out the agreed reporting requirements and timelines.

Grant recipients will be required to submit progress and completion reporting, assess progress of the project against milestones, outputs and outcomes and provide evidence of project completion.

After completion of the project, grant recipients must submit annual evaluation reports assessing the project's success in meeting its stated objectives, outputs and outcomes. Appropriate data will need to be collected by grant recipients to demonstrate how the project has achieved the objectives and desired outcomes of the project. Depending on the significance of the project, these evaluation reports may be required for up to three years following completion of the funded project.

The Victorian Government may request funding information and progress reports outside of this agreed reporting activity if required.

Grant recipients will be required to cooperate with an evaluation which is undertaken during and/or after completion of the project.

11.5 Privacy

Any personal information about the applicant or a third party in the application will be collected by RDV, a statutory body within DJPR for the purpose of grant administration. This information may be provided to other Victorian Government agencies for the purposes of assessing applications. If

personal information about third parties is included in the application, the applicant must ensure that the third parties have consented to their information being collected and used for the purpose of assessing the application, and are aware of the contents of this privacy statement and the DJPR Privacy Policy available from the Privacy Officer (details below).

Any personal information about the applicant or a third party in correspondence will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)* and other applicable laws. DJPR is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information.

The department's privacy policy is available from:

Privacy Officer

Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
GPO Box 2392
Melbourne, VIC, 3001
Email: privacy@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Enquiries about access to information about you held by DJPR should be directed to:

Freedom of Information Manager

Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
GPO Box 2392
Melbourne, VIC, 3001
Email: foi@ecodev.vic.gov.au

11.6 Record keeping

All agencies must keep an accurate audit trail. DRFA records must be available for seven years from the end of the financial year the claim is acquitted by the Australian Government. For audit purposes, the Australian Government may at any time, via BRV and DJPR, request documentation from agencies to evidence the State's compliance with any aspect of the DRFA. This may include, but not be limited to, access to project level information to confirm acquittal in accordance with the DRFA.

11.7 Information only

These Guidelines, and any discussions the applicant or its advisors may have with an RDV representative, are for information only, and do not constitute advice. Applicants should seek independent advice before making an application or entering into a grant agreement. Expressions of interest and applications are at the sole cost of the applicant.

RDV makes no representation that a grant of funds will be made to any applicant and reserves the right to make no funds available under the Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants Program.

DJPR reserves the right to amend these guidelines and the application terms at any time as it deems appropriate.

11.8 Discretion to grant funding

The final assessment of an application and any decision to approve funding are matters for the State

of Victoria in its absolute discretion acting through its Ministers and the DJPR.

12. Additional information and resources

Municipal Recovery Plans

- East Gippsland Municipal Recovery Plan
- Towong Municipal Recovery Plan
- Alpine Municipal Recovery Plan

Regional Business and Economy Recovery Plans

- Gippsland Regional Business and Economy Recovery Plan
- Hume Regional Business and Economy Recovery Plan

State Recovery Plan

- Eastern Victorian Fires 2019-20 State Recovery Plan

Regional Partnerships Outcomes Roadmaps

- Gippsland Regional Partnership Outcomes Roadmap
- Ovens Murray Regional Partnership Outcomes Roadmap

13. Contact Details of Regional RDV Offices:

Shepparton

79a Wyndham Street Shepparton 3630

Tel: (+61 3) 5895 4100

Fax: (+61 3) 5822 2554

Email: information.shepparton@rdv.vic.gov.au

Traralgon

33 Breed Street, Traralgon 3844

Tel: (+61 3) 5116 7300

Fax: (+61 3) 5175 0324

Email: information.traralgon@rdv.vic.gov.au

Wangaratta

Wangaratta Government Centre

1st Floor 62 Ovens Street, Wangaratta 3677

Tel: (+61 3) 5722 7101

Fax: (+61 3) 5722 7109

Email: information.wangaratta@rdv.vic.gov.au

Wodonga

Level 2, 111–113 Hume Street, Wodonga 3690

Tel: (+61 2) 6059 0200

Fax: (+61 2) 6059 0250

Email: information.wodonga@rdv.vic.gov.au