Farm Co-operatives & Collaboration
Pilot Program

Farm Co-operatives and Collaboration Pilot Program

Farmer Group Projects Funding Guidelines

Farming together.

Southern Cross University

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Farmer Group Projects Funding Rounds

Overview

Farmer Group Projects is a competitive funding component of the Farm Co-operative and Collaboration Pilot Program which will assist eligible groups of farmers to implement collaborative business arrangements, in order to realise a fairer return at the farm gate for their products.

These guidelines provide the eligibility criteria and describe the application process.

Guidelines may be reviewed and updated during the Program. Updated Guidelines will be emailed to all eligible Farmer Groups.

Objectives

Consistent with the Farm Co-operative and Collaboration Pilot Program's objectives, funding will be provided to projects that have the potential to:

- facilitate knowledge sharing and legacy beyond the Pilot Program
- demonstrate significant scope and scale of on-farm impacts
- create transferable outputs that address identified needs of farmers and groups
- help provide momentum and strategic support to boost the confidence of other farmer groups to adopt a collaborative business approach
- assist farmer groups to overcome barriers experienced in seeking to make change
- form regional and cross-jurisdictional networks.

How the Program will Operate

Two rounds of funding will be offered during the life of the Farm Co-operative and Collaboration Pilot Program, opening in January and June 2017. A third round may be offered at the Program Steering Committee's discretion.

This is a co-investment program and applicants must contribute a **minimum of 10%** of the total cash budget of the project. A significant in-kind contribution will be required as well.

Funded activities must not be undertaken before execution of a funding agreement.

The Program will aim to fund a minimum of 15 Farmer Group Projects over the life of the Program.

It is expected that projects will not exceed $175,000 in funding. In some exceptional circumstances grants may be made outside this range. Please discuss with the Farming Together Program Team before applying.

Eligibility Requirements

Who is Eligible to Apply for Funding?

Applicants must have moved through the two levels of support within the Farm Co-operative and Collaboration Pilot Program: Knowledge Exchange and Expert Support.

To be eligible for funding, applicants must be farmers who have, or are eligible for primary production status with the Australian Tax Office.

Groups of two or more farmers are eligible to apply. The group may include members that are not primary producers (e.g. farm service providers, members of the supply chain beyond the farm gate) but the majority of members must be farmers and the applicant for funding must be a primary producer or a collaborative entity (e.g. co-op, incorporated association).

While small groups are eligible to apply, preference will be given to larger groups to ensure maximum benefit from the program where available resources are limited.

The group may be related by family, but preference will be given to groups where there are a number of participants who do not have a family relationship.

Eligible Applications

Applications must meet all of the requirements below.

1. Demonstrate how the collaborative project will meet one or more of the program objectives (see Farmer Group Projects Funding Rounds – Objectives).
2. **Co-invest a minimum of 10% of the total project budget in cash**. Funding awarded from other grant programs cannot be claimed as the co-investment.
3. Applicants will also be required to provide a significant in-kind contribution, which must be documented. In-kind contribution is the donation of goods or services. In the case of the Farming Together Program, in-kind contribution may include: a group members' time, use of equipment, donation of materials, or use of facilities for the purpose of undertaking the project.
4. The project or activity must be undertaken in Australia and its territories and must have benefit for Australia.
5. Funding activities must be planned to be completed within **12 months of execution of a funding deed, or no later than 30 April 2018.**
6. The funding being sought can be used in conjunction with, but must not be dependent upon, other sources of funding.

Eligible Activities and Budget Items

Funding can only be used for activities and costs directly related to carrying out or administering the project. These include, but are not restricted to:

- project work –specifically employment of a project manager with a short (12 months or less) start and finish date related to the project. Examples could include; pilot project or trial, implementation phase of a new concept
- feasibility studies – employment of an expert/s to undertake the study
- application of research
- self-sustaining web presence e.g. a web portal offering regional produce

- development of specific products or processes linked to the collaborative project goals.

Specific examples of items which could be funded include: the employment of dedicated project staff with clear start and finish dates relating to the project, contracting of an expert/consultant to provide services, development of marketing materials and registration of legal entity (one off fee).

Ineligible Activities and Budget Items

Activities that will not be funded include, but are not limited to:

- the direct investment of funds in an individual business
- ongoing employment and administrative costs related to the normal operations of an organisation or individuals' commercial operation
- asset and equipment purchases or leases
- marketing tours and overseas travel
- ongoing secondary, tertiary or VET education courses
- research only.

Specific examples of items that will not be funded include the following normal ongoing and operational costs of an organisation, or ongoing expenses: salaries for existing or ongoing positions – this includes board members, office rent, computer lease, license or software annual fees, software purchase, certification, vehicle hire, vehicle maintenance, infrastructure purchases.

How Applications are Assessed

Successful projects will be selected through a competitive merit-based process assessed against program priorities, eligibility requirements and assessment criteria.

There are five steps in the application assessment process:

1. The Program Management and Delivery Team will check that the application meets eligibility requirements as outlined in these guidelines.
2. All eligible applications will be assessed and scored by the Program Management Team on the application's own merit against the assessment criteria. Sub-points under each assessment criteria will be weighted equally.
3. Following individual assessment and scoring, a final score and rank for overall merit will be determined by the Panel. The panel will consider program priorities in order to achieve the best investment in each round of funding.
4. Feedback will be sought from the Industry Advisory Group as part of the consideration process for shortlisted projects.
5. Recommendations will be made to the Program Steering Committee on eligible applications which:
    - could be funded without change

- could be funded subject to negotiation
- should not be pursued further.

Where an application is recommended for funding, subject to negotiation, funding may not be awarded if the applicant is unable or unwilling to meet the conditions of the recommendation. The Program Steering Committee has final approval on projects funded.

Assessment Criteria

The following assessment criteria will be used to determine a project's ranking and suitability for funding and relevance to achieving the Program's objectives. Applications that address the assessment criteria to a high level are more likely to be funded.

Criterion 1. Contribution to Program Objectives

The applicant must demonstrate how the project will:

- support one or more of the program objectives (see above)

Criterion 2. Likelihood of Project success

The applicant must demonstrate:

- project feasibility, and how the project will deliver clear, measurable outcomes
- the capacity to deliver the project and manage funds
- clearly identified and satisfactory project timeline
- use of approaches that build on existing best-practice.

Criterion 3: Risk management

The applicant:

- must identify risks to project delivery, including the risk of failure to achieve the project aims
- must have a risk management plan showing how identified project risks will be managed, including the risks of activities not being able to proceed as planned or project failure.

Criterion 4 Budget and Costs

The application must:

- include a project budget that provides a level of detail sufficient to demonstrate value for money for the project outcomes
- detail both the cash co-investment and in-kind co-contribution over the life of the project.

Criterion 5. Benefit and Impact of Project

Assessors will consider:

- potential for on-farm financial gains
- scope and scale of on-farm impact
- legacy of the project, in terms of transferrable knowledge outputs
- the degree of innovation

- degree to which the concept contributes to new and emerging agricultural industries
- geographic reach
- a demonstrated need for funding e.g. would not otherwise be undertaken. For example, due to the project having a large scale, broad scope and/or requiring cross-sectoral collaboration.

There is an intention to achieve a balance of projects across geographical regions and agricultural industry sectors over the life of the Pilot Program. Projects that also have either a cross-regional, cross-jurisdictional or national approach to business collaboration will be viewed favorably.

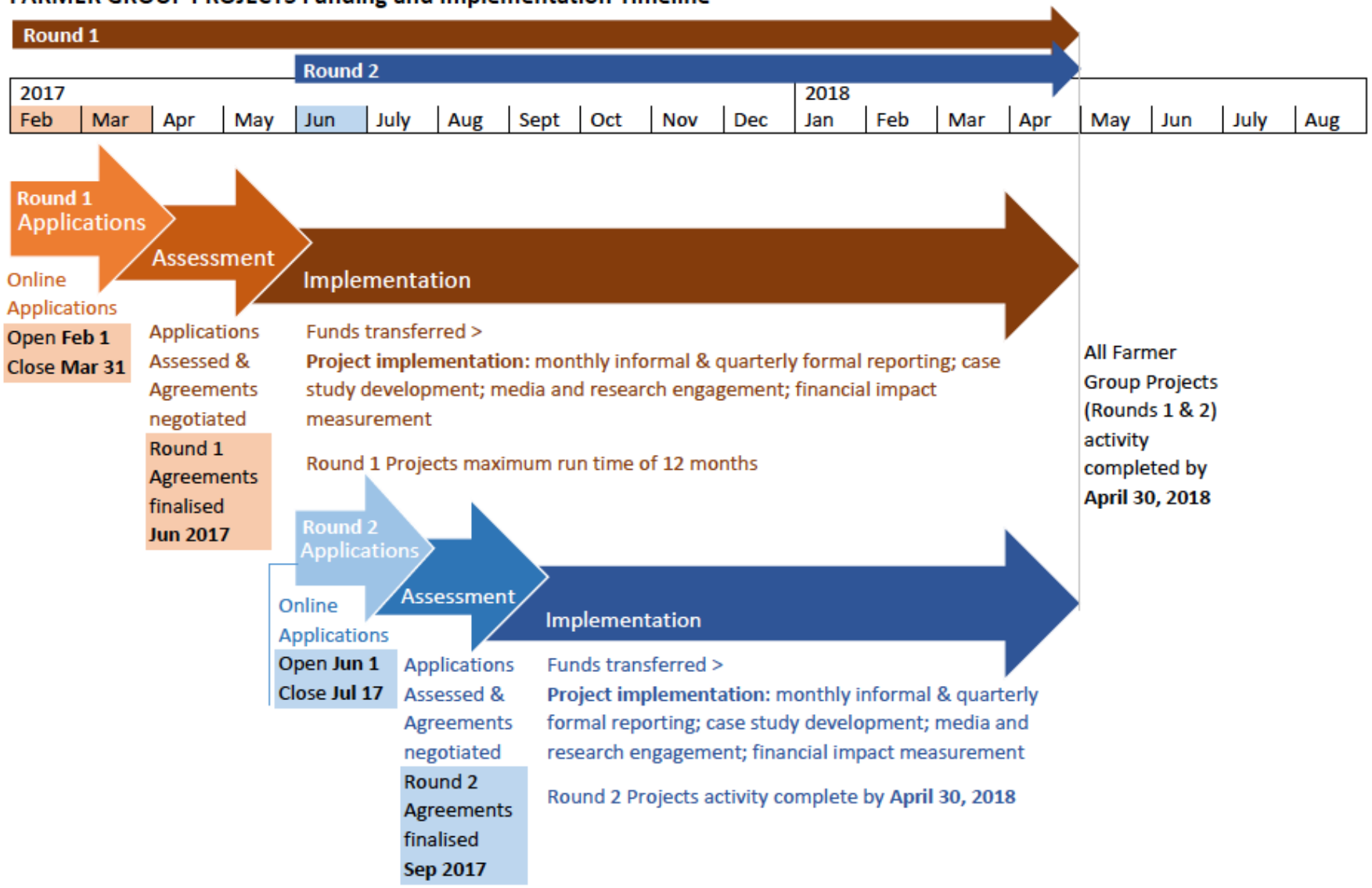
Key dates

Table 1 Program Details

Milestones	**Anticipated Dates***
Round 1 applications open	1 February 2017
Round 1 applications close	31 March 2017
Round 1 funding agreements finalised	June 2017
Round 2 applications open	1 June 2017
Round 2 applications close	Midnight (AEST), Monday 17 July 2017
Round 2 funding agreements finalised	September 2017
Duration of all projects	Maximum of 12 months, and no later than **30 April 2018**
Activity Period for the program ends	30 April 2018

*subject to change

FARMER GROUP PROJECTS Funding and Implementation Timeline



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Applications

How to Apply

The Farmer Group Projects funding application consists of two parts:

1. Completion of an online application form
2. Submission of a project proposal addressing criteria outlined in the email invitation.

Eligible applicants will receive an email inviting them to apply. This email invitation will contain all relevant links and templates for their application.

Questions during the Application Process

If you have any further questions during the application period, contact the Project Team on 02 6620 3020 or email info@farmingtogether.com.au.

Late Applications

Applications should be received by the deadline for the funding round published in this document. Late applications may not be accepted.

The Program may consider the submission of late applications under extenuating circumstances where an alternative timeframe has been agreed prior to the closing date or the delay is a result of an issue with the Program's information and communication technology systems. Requests for an extension of time to lodge an application must be made in writing to the Farmer Group Projects Team Leader by email to info@farmingtogether.com.au. Any decision by the Program to accept or not accept a late application will be final.

Corrections to Funding Applications

Applicant must ensure their application is complete and correct. The Program will not accept responsibility for any misunderstanding arising from the failure of an applicant to comply with the guidelines. If an applicant discovers any material discrepancy, ambiguity, inconsistency or errors in their application, they must immediately contact the Farmer Group Projects Team Leader (info@farmingtogether.com.au). The Program may request clarifying information from an applicant and allow them to remedy any discrepancy, ambiguity, inconsistency or errors in an application. The Program may consider information submitted by an applicant after the closing date for the purpose of resolving any material discrepancy, ambiguity, inconsistency or errors in an application provided that no new information has been added, which has not been referred to in the original application. The Program's decision will be final.

False and Misleading information

Applicants should be aware that any funding granted on the basis of false or misleading information may be required to be repaid.

Notification and Announcement of Application Outcomes

The Program reserves the right to negotiate with applicants on any aspect of the funding prior to the execution of the funding agreement, including supporting fewer projects/activities, offering less funding than the amount for which applicants applied, or seeking further outputs.

Successful applicants will receive a letter of offer outlining the approved funding amount and any conditions of the approval. The letter of offer does not constitute a funding agreement and successful applicants must not begin a project until a funding agreement has been negotiated and executed between the Program and the successful applicant.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing by the Program and feedback provided. Unsuccessful applicants are encouraged to re-apply in the next funding round if applicable.

Applicants should note that basic information on funded projects may be published, including:

- name of the entity receiving the funding
- project title and purpose
- amount of funding received
- project location

By submitting an application for funding under this Program, the applicant consents to publication of the above.

Funding Conditions

Successful applicants must sign a funding agreement with Southern Cross University, containing the terms and conditions of the funding. Applicants should seek independent legal advice before entering into a funding agreement. No legally binding relationship exists until a funding agreement is executed.

In addition, successful applicants will agree to activities that include (but are not limited to):

1. Participating in media opportunities.
2. Undertaking interviews and surveys with researchers.
3. Sharing of information to further assist their industry (not including intellectual property attached to the project), including the publication of a case study of their project.

Financial and Legal consequences of Accepting Funding

Applicants are advised that any grant funding may have taxation implications and that they should seek independent taxation and financial advice. GST may be payable on grant funding and the funding agreement will include GST where applicable.

Applicants should seek advice on the legal implications of their acceptance of a funding grant.

Project Reporting

All successful applicants must report on the project activities undertaken with the funds received. Reporting requirements will include:

1. **Monthly milestone reports, quarterly formal reporting, financial acquittals and audited financial statements** — this can include qualitative and quantitative information, such as surveys, phone and face-to-face consultations/site visits.
2. **Final financial statement to acquit the project** — this may need to be accompanied by a signed statutory declaration (if an individual) or a financial statement signed by the chair, treasurer or chief financial officer (if a group or organisation). The financial statement must include details of how the funding was spent against the budget, and both the cash co-

investment and in-kind co-contribution. Details on how this was spent/used must be included.

3. **Final report** — Detailing the project's activities, outcomes and achievements against the program's objectives, including quantitative information on outcomes achieved and independent expert analysis of expected and/or demonstrated quantifiable returns on investment and legacy outcomes.

If a funding recipient fails to comply with any requirements in the funding agreement, they may be required to repay some or all of the funding received.

Complaints Process

Any applicant dissatisfied with the way their application has been handled by the Program can lodge a complaint through info@farmingtogether.com.au. The Program will not reconsider applications as part of the complaints process. Complaints will be considered internally within the Program by someone independent from the original process, and the applicant will receive a response from the Program. If the complaint is still not resolved, a formal complaint can be made under the SCU Complaints procedures described at scu.edu.au/complaints/.

Conflict of Interest

Applicants must advise where any actual or potential or perceived conflicts of interest exist in relation to their application. If a conflict of interests exists, or may arise, the applicant must:

- make full disclosure of all relevant information relating to the conflict in their application
- bring it to the attention of the Program in writing if the conflict arises after the application has been received
- outline the steps the applicant intends to take to resolve or otherwise deal with the conflict

The Program reserves the right to reject an application if it is not satisfied that there are arrangements in place to appropriately address or manage a perceived or actual conflict of interest. A register of notified conflicts of interest will be maintained by the Program throughout the application and assessment process. The register will include applicants' conflicts of interest as well as those of the expert assessment panel and Program team members.

Privacy Statement

The collection of personal information by the Program in relation to the application form is for the purposes of assessing eligibility of the application. If the relevant personal information requested in this application is not provided, the Program will be unable to assess the application's eligibility for this program.

Personal information provided to the Program is for the purpose of administration or evaluation of the program and assessment of an application. In providing personal information, applicants consent to the use of the information for the above-mentioned purposes or related purposes.

The Program may disclose an applicant's personal information to relevant parties that may be engaged for the purposes of assessment of applications and program evaluation or as otherwise required by the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW).

For information on how Southern Cross University treats personal information applicants can access the Privacy Management Plan at policies.scu.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00018#s1.

Confidential Notification

Applicants must identify any information within their applications or in any documentation that they consider should be treated as confidential and provide reasons for the request. Applicants will be asked to identify any confidential information during the application process. Applicants may also notify the Program of confidential information at any time.

Information provided to the Program that has not been identified by the applicant as confidential may be shared or published, as determined by the Program. Confidential information may be released as required by law.

Contacts

Farming Together Program Team
E: info@farmingtogether.com.au
P: 02 6620 3020