



Department of Regional NSW

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# Regional Media Fund

Program Guidelines



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## Overview

The \$3 million Regional Media Fund is part of the NSW Government's \$3.3 billion Regional Growth Fund and is designed to support innovation and sustainability for regional NSW media and news gathering organisations.

The Regional Media Fund will improve the long-term sustainability of regionally focused media and news gathering organisations by providing support towards innovation, digitisation and technology enhancements that enable more effective creation and distribution of media content in regional NSW.

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## Objectives

The key objectives of the Regional Media Fund are to:

- improve the long-term sustainability of regionally focused media and news gathering organisations
  - support organisations that are investing in the regional media industry by maintaining or creating employment opportunities in regional areas
  - support innovation and digitisation that will enable more effective creation and distribution of regional media content
  - ensure that people living in regional NSW have access to a diverse range of news and content.
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## Timeline

<b>Applications open</b>	31 January 2023
<b>Applications close</b>	11 April 2023
<b>Notifications and announcements</b>	Successful applicants will be notified confidentially from 30 May 2023 or as soon as possible after a grant is approved, at the incoming NSW Government's discretion.
<b>Contracting</b>	Contracting may commence once the successful applicant has signed and returned their Letter of Offer and Confidentiality Agreement. Funding Deeds must be entered into within 3 months of signing the confidentiality agreement
<b>Project completion:</b>	Projects must be completed within 18 months after the execution of the Funding Deed

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Table 1 identifies the indicative timeframes for the RMF grant process. These are subject to change at the discretion of DRNSW. Funding assistance provided through the RMF is subject to funds being available and is conditional on the decision of an incoming government. The RMF application and assessment process may be cancelled at any time. The NSW Government makes no binding funding commitment to an applicant until both parties sign a funding deed.

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## Grant Amounts

Applications for funding can be for a minimum of \$20,000 up to a maximum of \$60,000 per project.

**Applicants can submit multiple applications; however, funding per applicant is capped at a maximum of three projects and each project must be designed to benefit different geographical areas of regional NSW.**

## Co-Contributions

Projects that include a financial co-contribution from the applicant and/or other project partners will be preferred, however it is not a requirement of the funding to provide a co-contribution.

## Unspent Funds

If the situation arises where a grant recipient's project is completed and there are unspent funds remaining from the grant allocation, the Department of Regional NSW may require the grant recipient to return the unspent funds. If the grant recipient requests to use the funds to extend the scope of the project, the Department may assess that request if it aligns to the objectives of the grant program. The Department may require the grant recipient to provide supporting information such as revised economic or social impact data.

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## Eligibility Criteria

All applications will be assessed for eligibility and only eligible applications will be considered for funding.

## Applicants

To be eligible, applicants must demonstrate that they:

- are a media or news gathering organisation with a primary focus of creating, producing, and distributing news and content to a readership or audience in regional NSW
- have been trading for over 12 months
- have resources located in regional NSW, or that a significant portion of the organisation's business is undertaken within regional NSW through other means such as remote work.

Organisations that primarily provide news and content for a niche audience such as local sporting clubs, exercise groups, community groups and events, political parties, and tourism focused material will not be considered eligible.

Applicants must provide evidence that they are an incorporated entity by providing either an Australian Business Number (ABN) or an Australian Company Number (ACN). Applicants must be a company incorporated in Australia, a company incorporated by guarantee, an incorporated trustee on behalf of a trust, fixed unit trust, an incorporated association or co-operative, partnership, individual/sole trader or indigenous corporation, and are required to provide a copy of evidence of incorporation or registration in their application.

Applicants must be financially viable and have at least \$20 million public liability insurance or be willing to secure the insurance before entering into a Funding Deed if the application is successful.

Applicants can submit a joint application with a project partner; however, the lead applicant must be an eligible entity. If the application is successful, the lead applicant will enter into the Funding Deed and will be responsible for delivering the project.

## Project Locations

Projects must deliver benefits in one or more of the 93 regional NSW Local Government Areas (LGA), in the Unincorporated Far West region, or on Lord Howe Island. Projects delivering benefits in the Greater Sydney metropolitan area, and the Newcastle and Wollongong LGAs are ineligible for funding.

A full list of the eligible project locations can be found in the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) section of the [Regional Media Fund webpage](#).

## Project Types

Examples of eligible project types include:

- developing and delivering online engagement strategies to complement and enhance existing distribution methods
- undertaking website development and upgrades to improve the user experience and distribution
- acquiring equipment that will increase the quality and/or quantity of printed or video content
- acquiring equipment to diversify content and distribution channels
- developing and trialling innovative methods of distribution that will enable more people in regional NSW to access relevant news and content.

## Ineligible project types and costs

Project types and costs that are not eligible for funding include:

- costs that are considered business-as-usual activities and operations
- projects or activities already receiving or expecting to receive NSW Government funding
- marketing, advertising and signage that is not directly related to the project
- staff wages and other employee costs such as training and development, with the exception of costs directly related to delivering the project such as project management and administration
- activities, equipment or supplies that are already being supported through other sources
- financing costs, including interest and debt financing
- costs involved in the purchase or hire of software (including user licenses) and computer equipment that is not directly related to the project
- costs such as rent and utilities unless specifically related to the project
- insurance costs (applicants must hold and maintain adequate insurance coverage for any liability arising from their participation in funded activities)
- depreciation of plant and equipment beyond the life of the project
- opportunity costs relating to allocating resources to the agreed grant project
- projects that require ongoing grant funding from the NSW or Australian government
- projects that are likely to proceed without any NSW Government financial assistance
- retrospective funding to cover any project component that is already complete before funding is announced.

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## Assessment Criteria

Eligible applications will be assessed against the following merit-based assessment criteria.

### Criteria 1: Strategic alignment

Applications must demonstrate how the project:

- will improve the long-term sustainability of the regionally focused media or news gathering organisation while also ensuring that people living in regional NSW have access to a diverse range of local news and content
- will support innovation and digitisation to enable more effective creation and distribution of regional media content
- is part of a long-term commitment and investment in the regional media industry by maintaining or creating employment opportunities in regional areas
- is aligned with the needs of the local community and is supported by key stakeholders as demonstrated through letters of support or other means of community engagement

Where an applicant has submitted multiple applications, the assessment will consider evidence provided by the applicant that demonstrates how each project will benefit different geographical areas of regional NSW.

Weighting: 60 per cent

### Criteria 2: Deliverability and affordability

Applicants must demonstrate that the project is deliverable and affordable by providing:

- a project budget including cost estimates and quotes provided by suppliers or contractors
- previous project management experience and/or an outline of the capabilities of key personnel who will deliver the project
- a detailed and realistic project management plan, including a risk assessment
- forecasted changes in audience/readership size, distribution and engagement as a result of the project
- a detailed approach to measuring and reporting outcomes during project delivery and on completion.

Applicants may include up to 25 per cent of the total project cost for contingency and up to 10 per cent of the total project cost for project management and administration.

Weighting: 40 per cent

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## Application Process

### Stage One: How to Apply

Applicants will be required to submit a completed application form through the Smarty Grants portal that includes:

- evidence that the applicant is an eligible entity
- evidence that the project will be in an eligible location and is an eligible project type

- evidence of at least \$20 million in public liability insurance, or a commitment that the applicant is willing to secure at least \$20 million in public liability insurance if successful.
- a project management plan and risk assessment
- a project budget and cost estimates
- evidence of experience delivering projects of similar size and scope, or demonstrated capability to deliver the project
- evidence of local support for the project, such as letters or other forms of communication from key stakeholders.

The assessment process is competitive and applications with insufficient detail will be disadvantaged during the assessment process. Applicants should ensure they provide as much relevant information as possible with their application.

## **Stage Two: Assessment Process**

The Department of Regional NSW will coordinate the assessment process.

An Assessment Panel will be convened to consider the applications received and to determine the suitability of each project for funding.

The Assessment Panel may recommend partial funding for projects if there is insufficient funding available for the whole project, or where only a component of the project is considered suitable and eligible.

Broader factors that may be considered during the assessment process include the following:

- total amount of funding available
- importance of a project to the local economy and community
- geographical distribution of projects across regional NSW
- suitability of a project for other government funding opportunities
- alignment with existing NSW Government policies and strategies.

During the assessment process, the Department of Regional NSW may ask applicants to provide additional information to assist in the assessment process. Advice may be sought from other NSW Government agencies or other sources to assist in the assessment of projects. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process.

The Department of Regional NSW, at its sole discretion, can take other factors into account that may make an application ineligible for funding, such as any person, business or organisation that could cause reputational or other risk to the NSW Government.

All projects may be referred to other NSW or Australian Government funding programs for consideration.

## **Decision making**

The Department of Regional NSW will provide the Assessment Panel's advice and recommendations to the Deputy Secretary Regional Development and Programs for consideration and final approval.

## **Probity advice**

Independent probity advisors will provide guidance and advice to the Department of Regional NSW and the Assessment Panel throughout the application, assessment, and decision-making process.

This will ensure decisions are made with integrity, fairness and accountability, while delivering value for money for NSW.

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## Successful Applicants

### Notification

Successful applicants will be notified confidentially from 30 May 2023 or as soon as possible after an application is approved, at the incoming NSW Government's discretion.

Applicants may be requested to keep the grant confidential for a period if an announcement is likely to be made by the NSW Government.

### Funding Deed

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a Funding Deed with the NSW Government and to complete their project/s within 18 months of the executed Funding Deed.

The NSW Government makes no binding funding commitment to an applicant unless and until both parties sign a Funding Deed.

The contracting process to enter into a Funding Deed will require the successful applicant to provide a copy of all relevant insurances, project approvals and other supporting documentation relevant to the project or as requested by the Department of Regional NSW.

Grants will be paid as set out in the Funding Deed. Timing and requirements will vary at NSW Government's discretion, depending on the scope and risk of the project.

For applicants registered for GST and where it is payable, successful applicants will be paid the approved grant amount plus 10 per cent by the Department of Regional NSW. Where an applicant is not registered for GST, it is not payable on grant amounts. Applicants not registered for GST must incorporate any GST paid by them to third parties into their application.

Successful applicants will be required to submit project progress reports to the NSW Government as outlined in the Funding Deed. Examples of measures to be included in the report are the completion of project activities, changes in readership or audience size for the media provider, employment outcomes as a result of the project including outcomes for young people, Aboriginal communities and people with disability.

### Unsuccessful applicants

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application and will be offered a feedback session.

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## Important terms and conditions

Applicants should note:

- the NSW Government may choose to publicly announce funding for individual applications, including the amount of funding. It may also use information provided in the application to develop case studies
  - requests for variations or changes to the project will only be considered in limited circumstances
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- successful applicants may be required to pay back unspent funds, or any funds not spent in accordance with the Funding Deed
- successful applicants will be required to participate in a program evaluation after the project has commenced. The evaluation will require applicants to provide evidence of how projects have resulted in measurable benefits consistent with the Regional Media Fund objectives, focusing on the benefits to regional economies and communities
- all recipients of NSW Government funding should acknowledge this financial support as per the requirements outlined at the [Sponsorship and Funding Acknowledgement webpage](#) and the terms outlined in the Funding Deed
- grants are assessable income for taxation purposes, unless exempted by taxation law.

It is recommended applicants seek independent professional advice about taxation obligations or seek assistance from the Australian Taxation Office.

The NSW Government does not provide advice on individual taxation circumstances.

The Department of Regional NSW reserves the right to undertake an audit of grant funding within seven years of the Funding Deed ending.

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## Additional Information

### Getting Support

To help applicants prepare their application, additional information and resources will be available on the [Regional Media Fund webpage](#), including templates and [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Applicants are encouraged to consult with representatives from their local Regional Development Team within the Department of Regional NSW, who can provide support during the application process. Please contact [media.fund@regional.nsw.gov.au](mailto:media.fund@regional.nsw.gov.au) or call 1300 679 673 for a referral to your Regional Development team.

Please check with the Department of Regional NSW prior to submitting if you are unclear about any part of the application.

Applicants are encouraged to seek advice from their legal, business and financial advisors to determine the suitability of the funding before applying.

### Complaints

Any concerns about the Regional Media Fund or individual applications should be submitted in writing to [regionalnsw.business@regional.nsw.gov.au](mailto:regionalnsw.business@regional.nsw.gov.au). If you do not agree with the way the Department of Regional NSW handled the issue, you may wish to contact the NSW Ombudsman via [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au).

### **Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009**

Applicants should be aware that information submitted in applications and all related correspondence, attachments and other documents may be made publicly available under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW). Information that is deemed to be commercially sensitive will be withheld.

The *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW) makes government information accessible to the public by:

- requiring government agencies to make certain sorts of information freely available
- encouraging government agencies to release as much other information as possible
- giving the public an enforceable right to make access applications for government information
- restricting access to information only when there is an overriding public interest against disclosure.

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