Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

dphi.nsw.gov.au

Faster Assessments Incentive Program

Updated Round one competitive grant guidelines

June 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Published by NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

dphi.nsw.gov.au

Faster Assessments Incentive Grant Program

First published: June 2026

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DPHI-MC-R-LC-V1.0

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1. Overview

These guidelines outline the parameters and assessment criteria for round one of the Faster Assessments Incentive Program. They have been updated to reflect the funding of the program changing from Restart NSW Fund to the NSW Consolidated Fund.

1.1 Purpose

The Faster Assessments Incentive Program is an evidence-based, competitive grant program that rewards medium and high growth councils for reducing and maintaining low average development assessment timeframes. Up to $200 million is available in local infrastructure grants over 3 funding rounds, with up to $67 million awarded to the best performing eligible councils across metropolitan and regional NSW after each financial year.[1] Successful councils each round, being those with the best scores based on the program's assessment criteria, will receive grant funding for infrastructure projects that support new homes including new and upgraded regional walking and cycling facilities, roads and traffic upgrades, open space and social infrastructure.

The program supports the objective of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment (Statement of Expectations) Order 2024* (Statement of Expectations Order) to reduce councils' average development assessment timeframes, targeting councils with the largest share of housing targets/implied dwelling demand in NSW.

Round 1

The first round of the program rewards eligible councils for their performance during the 2024-25 financial year in reducing and maintaining low average development assessment timeframes. Subsequent rounds will reward eligible council's performance in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 financial years, in line with the Statement of Expectations Order. Councils are encouraged to keep striving to reduce their average development assessment timeframes.

Digital Assistance Program
The program may be supported by a Digital Assistance Program, open to most councils in NSW,

providing councils with financial assistance towards Application Programming Interface (API) updates. Councils must opt in for this separate program. The API upgrades promote better integration with the NSW Planning Portal, streamlining development assessment and approval processes.

1.2 Context

The National Housing Accord

NSW has a commitment under the National Housing Accord to deliver 377,000 new well-located homes by 2029. Local, State, and Federal Governments are all signatories to the National Housing Accord and are working together to respond to the national housing crisis.

Councils assess more than 85% of development applications (DAs) in NSW, playing a crucial role in increasing housing supply across the State. The Faster Assessments Incentive Program supports housing delivery by providing infrastructure funding incentives to medium and high growth councils to reduce average development assessment timeframes.

Statement of Expectations Order

The Statement of Expectations Order came into effect on 1 July 2024, setting benchmarks for council performance on development assessment, planning proposals and strategic planning. The minimum performance standards in the Statement of Expectations Order for determining development applications (DAs) for which councils are the consent authority (including DAs determined by a local planning panel) are whichever is the lesser of the council's previous financial year average, or an average of:

- 115 days of lodgement between 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025
- 105 days of lodgement between 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026

The Faster Assessments Incentive Program supports the Statement of Expectations Order by providing a financial incentive to eligible councils to reduce average development assessment timeframes, rewarding top performing councils and those making the most progress in reducing average development assessment timeframes.

Find out more information on the Statement of Expectations Order on the Department's website.

Grants Administration Guide

These guidelines have been prepared in line with the NSW Cabinet Office's *Grants Administration Guide* (2024). The key principles of the guide are embedded throughout the program, including transparency, accountability and probity.

1.3 Eligibility

All eligible councils will automatically be considered in the ranking. There is no need to formally apply to the program.

Round one of the Faster Assessments Incentive Program is open to all councils with housing targets (published May 2024) above 1,000 dwellings. Implied dwelling demand for the Housing Accord period is used for councils that do not have a housing target.

Table 1 - Eligible councils

Metropolitan[2] (33 LGAs)	Bayside Council, Blacktown City Council, Camden Council, City of Campbelltown, City of Canada Bay, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Central Coast Council, Cumberland City Council, Fairfield City Council, Georges River Council, Hornsby Shire Council, Inner West Council, Ku-ring-gai Council, City of Liverpool, City of Newcastle, North Sydney Council, Northern Beaches Council, City of Parramatta, City of Penrith, City of Ryde, Sutherland Shire Council, City of Sydney, The Hills Shire Council, Wollondilly Shire Council, City of Wollongong, Randwick City Council, Strathfield Municipal Council, Lane Cove Council, City of Willoughby, Burwood Council, Waverley Council, Woollahra Municipal Council, and City of Hawkesbury.
Regional[3] (20 LGAs)	Albury City Council, Cessnock City Council, City of Lake Macquarie, City of Maitland, Mid-Coast Council, Port Stephens Council, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, City of Shellharbour, City of Shoalhaven, Tweed Shire Council, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, City of Wagga Wagga, Wingecarribee Shire Council, Dubbo Regional Council, Eurobodalla Shire Council, City of Orange, Tamworth Regional Council, Coffs Harbour City Council, Ballina Shire Council, and Bathurst Regional Council.

Eligible metropolitan councils have a combined housing target of 289,300, representing 76% of the 377,000 homes to be delivered in NSW under the Housing Accord. Eligible regional councils represent 77% of the total implied dwelling demand for regional NSW during the Housing Accord period.

1.4 Grant values

Up to $140 million (70%) in grants will be allocated to successful metropolitan councils and $60 million (30%) to successful regional councils over the 3 funding rounds. This funding split is in line with Restart NSW requirements and reflects the larger share of new homes expected to be built in metropolitan Local Government Areas (LGAs) during the Housing Accord period.

Round one funding

Round one provides up to $67 million to successful councils, with the following indicative funding split:

- Up to $47 million to successful metropolitan councils
- Up to $20 million to successful regional councils.

The maximum amount of funding a successful council can receive as part of round one is outlined in the tables below. Councils with higher dwelling targets / implied dwelling demand have higher funding caps than those with lower targets.

Table 2 - Maximum annual funding for eligible metropolitan councils

Housing target	Round one grant cap per council	Eligible councils
>10,000	$3 million	Bayside Council, Blacktown City Council, Camden Council, City of Campbelltown, City of Canterbury Bankstown, City of Liverpool, City of Newcastle, City of Parramatta, City of Ryde, City of Sydney, Cumberland City Council, The Hills Shire Council (12)
5,000 –10,000	$2 million	Central Coast Council, City of Canada Bay, City of Hornsby Shire, City of Northern Beaches, City of Penrith, City of Wollongong, Fairfield City Council, Georges River Council, Inner West Council, Ku-ring-gai Council, North Sydney Council, Sutherland Shire Council, Wollondilly Shire Council (13)
1,000-5,000	$1 million	City of Hawkesbury, City of Willoughby, Lane Cove Council, Municipality of Burwood, Municipality of Strathfield, Randwick City Council, Waverley Council, Woollahra Municipal Council (8)

Table 3 - Maximum annual funding for eligible regional councils

Housing target / implied dwelling demand (2024 29)[4]	Round one grant cap per council	Eligible councils
5,000 – 10,000	$2 million	City of Lake Macquarie, City of Maitland (2)
1,000-5,000	$1 million	Albury City Council, Ballina Shire Council, Bathurst Regional Council, Cessnock City Council, City of Coffs Harbour, City of Dubbo Regional, City of Orange, City of Shellharbour, City of Shoalhaven, City of Tamworth Regional, City of Tweed Shire, City of Wagga Wagga, Eurobodalla Shire Council, Mid-Coast Council, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, Port Stephens Council, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, Wingecarribee Shire Council (18)

1.5 Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria is evidence-based using data from the NSW Planning Portal to measure development assessment timeframes for eligible councils. Round one scores and ranks councils based on the following two performance criteria for the 2024-25 financial year:

Table 4 - Assessment criteria

Criterion	Weighting
Average development assessment timeframe: Councils are scored on their average assessment days in the 2024-25 financial year based on Planning Portal data. The lower the average, the higher the score.	60%
Reduction in average development assessment timeframe: Councils are scored on their improvement against the average assessment days of the previous 3 years. This is measured as the difference between the average assessment days for the 2024-25 financial year and the average over the 3 financial years prior (2021-24). The greater the reduction, the higher the score.	40%

Each council will receive a total score as a number between 0-100, defined as the weighted average of the two criteria. This weighted scoring is designed to reward strong performers while encouraging councils that have not performed well in previous years to make significant improvements in their average assessment timeframes.

Councils that do not meet their average assessment day expectations as per the Statement of Expectations Order will only be considered in the ranking if they have made significant improvements to their average assessment timeframes in 2024-25 compared to the previous 3 years and their average is within 10% of their expectation.

Eligible councils will be ranked within each of the two program categories (metropolitan and regional) using each council's total score. Only the top performing councils in each of the two categories, those with the highest scores, will be offered infrastructure grant funding for the round. The number of successful councils will depend on the performance of eligible councils during the 2024-25 financial year and the round's funding caps and funding envelopes.

Infrastructure assurance

Successful councils will be guaranteed funding and asked to nominate a project under the program. All nominated projects to be recommended for funding will be required to meet the infrastructure eligibility criteria outlined in this guide (refer to Section 3).

If a successful council nominates a project that does not meet the program eligibility criteria, the council will be asked to nominate a new project within a timeframe specified by the program team. All eligible projects will undergo an assurance process by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure prior to being recommended for funding.

Successful projects must be completed within the Housing Accord Period (30 June 2029).

1.6 Guidelines for subsequent rounds

Program eligibility, assessment and infrastructure assurance criteria for rounds two and 3 may differ from those applying to round one. These may be adjusted in line with the objective of increasing performance requirements for average DA assessment timeframes under the Statement of Expectations Order.

- Program guidelines for round two of the program will be published by June 2026.
- Program guidelines for round 3 will be published by June 2027.

2.Key dates

The following table provides an overview of the round one program stages, milestones and indicative timeframes. These are explained in detail in Section 3 below.

Table 5 – Stages and milestones

Stage	Milestone	Indicative timeframe[5]
Announcement of ranking of eligible councils	Council ranking results for round one announced. Successful metropolitan and regional councils requested to nominate an infrastructure project within grant funding cap.	Oct - Nov 2025
Infrastructure nominations	Round one infrastructure nomination period via SmartyGrants for successful councils (6 weeks).	Feb - Mar 2025
Infrastructure assurance	Round one infrastructure assurance period (strategic and technical assessment of nominated infrastructure projects)	Apr - May 2026
Investment recommendations	Infrastructure projects to be funded under round one announced	Jun 2026
Funding agreements / remittance	Round one funding agreement execution and release of funds.	Jul - Oct 2026
Project delivery	All round one infrastructure projects must be completed	Jun 2029

3.Program stages

3.1 Ranking of eligible councils

Eligible councils will be ranked on their performance according to the assessment criteria outlined in Section 1.5. To calculate the round one ranking, the department will use data from the NSW Planning Portal to measure development assessment timeframes for each council in the 2024-25 financial year.

The competitive nature of the program means some eligible councils may miss out on funding, as there are limited funds available in each round. The criteria have been designed to reward councils making significant progress, and ensure consistent high performance is acknowledged.

Councils that do not meet the average DA assessment timeframes set out in the Statement of Expectations Order and have not made significant progress towards reducing their assessment timeframes will not be considered as outlined in Section 1.5.

Councils that miss out on funding can compete for funding in the following program rounds.

Data

The program uses Planning Portal data, in line with the performance monitoring under the Minister's Statement of Expectations Order. A summary of this data is published and updated monthly on the council league table. Average assessment days is defined on the council league table as:

> *'Total calendar days between lodgement date and determination date of all development applications determined, divided by the total number of development applications determined within the selected time period. Calendar days include weekends and public holidays.'*

A snapshot of the 2024-25 financial year data will be created at the start of July 2025 and used to calculate council scores. This single static version of the data for the period will ensure data consistency for the purpose of the ranking, as Planning Portal data is regularly updated.

You can email any questions about the data used for the program to FAIP@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

Successful councils

Only the top performing councils in each of the two categories, those with the highest scores, will be offered grant funding for the round and asked to nominate one infrastructure project.

3.2 Infrastructure nominations via SmartyGrants

Successful councils will be notified and invited to nominate a maximum of one project for funding via SmartyGrants. A link to the SmartyGrants portal will be provided to the successful councils, together with guidance and resources on how to make a nomination. Councils will be given up to 6 weeks to nominate their project via the SmartyGrants platform.

The following list is an overview of the type of information that will be required to support infrastructure nominations. This information will assist in determining the project's eligibility and inform the strategic and technical assessments during the assurance process:

- project location and extent (in GIS format)
- project geographic catchment (in GIS format): estimated area where existing and future dwellings will benefit from access to the new infrastructure. Catchment methods may include distance-based buffer zones, isochrone (an area based on travel time to access the infrastructure), or an established boundary for a precinct or district.
- number of new dwellings supported or enabled by the project measured in annual forecast intervals from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2029. Council will need to provide annual forecasts beyond 2029 if relevant.
- strategic justification for the project with reference to existing strategic planning documents such as regional and district plans, local strategic planning statements or other documents prepared by council.
- evidence the project is ready to commence but unfunded or needs top-up funding to proceed to the next stage, including a declaration of secured funding from other funding sources.
- documents to support project deliverability including funding strategy, cost estimates, planning and other approvals obtained (if relevant), project schedule and timeline, milestone tracking, feasibility report, contractor and procurement plans.
- risks and dependencies identified and addressed including bushfire, flooding, site contamination and other environmental risks, delays, approvals and consent timelines, and evidence of contingency planning.
- landowner consent secured (if applicable).
- optional: information on other merits of the project, including climate and natural disaster resilience merits to support the strategic merit review.

3.3 Infrastructure eligibility assessment

Nominations by successful councils must meet the following eligibility criteria to be considered for funding under the program.

Table 6 - Infrastructure eligibility criteria

Eligibility Criterion	Description	Rationale
Maximum nominations	Each successful council can nominate one project for funding.	Priority project that can benefit from program funding up to program funding caps
Eligible areas	Projects can be located anywhere within the LGA. Councils are encouraged to pick projects in key housing growth precincts. The strategic merit of projects will need to be justified as part of the assurance process.	Projects to enable or service new dwellings
Ineligible projects	Funding for land acquisition, strategic business cases, planning and design work will only be considered if it can be demonstrated that project delivery is achievable by 30 June 2029.	This ensures funding is directed towards infrastructure projects that can be completed within the Housing Accord Period.
Co contribution	Funding from other sources, including co-contribution by council, is accepted but not mandatory. There is no limit to the total value of the nominated project, if funding required from the program is within the program funding caps per council.	Program is designed to support projects that align with local needs, regardless of overall project value.
Funding caps	The funding ask is within the maximum amount provided by the program to a council each round. The caps apply as a total per council (see Section 1.4).	Projects remain within funding limits and align with program budget constraints.
Completion	Project must be completed within the Housing Accord Period by 30 June 2029.	Eligible projects must support/enable housing within the Housing Accord Period.
Ineligible expenditure	Operational expenditure post-delivery; infrastructure (including parts of infrastructure) already fully funded by council or other sources including State or Federal grants and local infrastructure contributions; community consultation; legal matters; costs incurred before the funding announcement; salaries of existing staff or staff not involved in the project; administrative overheads such as office	Prevents duplication of grant allocations across funding sources / infrastructure funding programs. Funding is efficiently allocated to key delivery outcomes.

	equipment and vehicles.	
Incomplete nomination	A nomination must include quality information for assessment. Projects may miss out on funding insufficient information is provided to undertake the assurance process.	Evidence-based decision making to promote the efficient use of public money.

Eligibility assessment

Once infrastructure nominations are received and the submission period has closed, the program team will complete a preliminary assurance check.

If there are information gaps in a council's submission, the team may request the council to provide additional information within a reasonable timeframe set by the Department.

If a nomination does not meet the eligibility or assurance criteria, the council will have the opportunity to submit an alternative project within a timeframe requested by the Department.

Should a council choose not to nominate an eligible project, an invitation may be provided to the next eligible council to nominate a project for funding consideration.

3.4 Infrastructure assurance process

All nominations that pass through the eligibility review will progress to the assurance process, which includes a strategic and a technical assessment. The data provided by councils via SmartyGrants will be used to undertake the strategic and technical assessments.

- **Strategic assessment:** The strategic assessment will determine the strategic merit and servicing of new homes by the nominated projects. The Department will complete this assessment.
- **Technical assessment:** The technical assessment will determine the projects' deliverability, including technical soundness, and demonstration that the project can be completed within the Housing Accord Period by 30 June 2029. An independent technical consultant will complete this assessment.

The outcomes of the strategic and technical assessments will be reported to the Grants Governance Committee (GGC) indicating the level of support for projects according to the criteria outlined below.

Table 7 - Infrastructure assurance criteria

Assessment type	Assurance criteria	Description	Assessor

Strategic assessment	Servicing new homes	The project enables or supports new housing in the LGA. This includes infrastructure in areas the council has identified as having a strong potential for new dwellings to be built during the Housing Accord period.	The Department will review the project dwelling servicing catchment and housing supply estimates provided by councils. GIS officers will be engaged to provide an assurance of housing benefit claims, in line with the Department's dwelling/population projections.
		The project is justified with reference to existing strategic planning documents. Councils can also include other merits in their justification, including climate and natural disaster resilience merits, if relevant to the project.	The Department will review the strategic justification for the project and make a recommendation regarding a level of support for the project considering the project's servicing of new homes and its strategic merits.
Technical assessment	Deliverability	Project is technically sound, and council has demonstrated the project can be completed within the Housing Accord Period.	An independent technical consultant will assess information provided by the council to determine deliverability of the project and provide a report indicating a level of support for the project.

If either assessment supports the project subject to clarification of a particular matter, the project can only be recommended for investment if the matter is clarified.

If either the strategic assessment or technical assessment identify a project as having significant concerns in relation to the assurance criteria and these concerns cannot be clarified or appropriately mitigated, the project will not be recommended for investment. In this case, the council will be guaranteed funding for round one however, they will need to nominate a new project. This new project will be assessed as part of round two, due to a lack of time to assess a new project following the finalisation of the assurance process. A council in this situation would still be eligible for round two, and if it is successful for Round two, it would be able to nominate two sets of projects for funding.

Table 8 - Decision protocol for investment recommendations

Assessment scenarios	Decision protocol

Technical and strategic assessment both support project	Project can be recommended for investment.
Either assessment supports project subject to clarification of a particular matter	Project can only be recommended for investment if the matter is clarified.
Either assessment does not support project	Project will not be recommended for investment.

3.5 Investment recommendations

The final list of projects recommended for funding will be submitted for Ministerial approval.

3.6 Funding agreements

The Department will oversee the management of funding agreements for projects supported under the program. These agreements will be developed using information submitted by the council through SmartyGrants and are expected to be finalised and executed before the end of the 2025-26 financial year.

Payment of funding under the program is conditional on funds being used only for the project, in keeping with the terms and conditions of the funding agreement. Funding agreements will outline the parameters for unspent funds, and indicative reporting and acquittal requirements, in line with the Grant Administration Guide (2024). Funding will be made available with the milestones and payment schedule set out in the funding agreement. To receive payments, councils must meet their obligations under the agreement. Councils must submit a final acquittal and project report when the project is complete.

4. Additional information and resources

4.1 Program governance

The Department administers the program. The Strategy and Implementation team within the Infrastructure Programs branch manages the day-to-day operation of the program and communicates directly with applicants.

The ranking of successful councils and project recommendations will be endorsed by the Grants Governance Committee (GGC) and will also be reviewed by a probity advisor.

The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces is the final decision-maker for the awarding of program grants to successful infrastructure projects.

4.2 Probity

Procure Group has been appointed as an independent probity advisor to the program in accordance with section 6.1.2 of the *Grants Administration Guide 2024*.

The probity advisor's role is to provide probity advice on the design, application, assessment and decision-making phases of the grants program, as per the requirements of the *Grants Administration Guide 2024*. Processes are in place to identify and manage any probity issues that may impact the integrity of the program. This includes conflicts of interest, confidentiality, and codes of conduct.

Councils may contact the probity advisor at meady@procuregroup.com.au. All correspondence is confidential.

Project responsibility

Grant recipients are responsible for delivering and completing the project in line with the terms and conditions of the funding agreement. Councils will not be relieved of this responsibility because of any involvement with a third party (for example, subcontractors or partners).

Insurance requirements

Grant recipients must maintain appropriate public liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, and any other relevant coverage as required, in accordance with relevant guidelines.

Signage and branding

In line with the NSW and/or Australian Government's guidelines, where infrastructure projects are funded or co-funded through Government funding, this needs to be acknowledged through appropriate signage and/or branding.

4.3 Publication of grants information

The Grants Administration Guide 2024 requires that certain information is published in relation to grants awarded no later than 45 calendar days after the grant agreement takes effect (see section 6.5 of the Guide and Appendix A to the Guide). This information is also open access information under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW) (GIPA Act), which must be made publicly available unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.

In accordance with these requirements, relevant information about the grants awarded will be made available on the NSW Government Grants and Funding Finder as soon as possible after the grant funding is approved or declined.

All records in relation to this decision will be managed in accordance with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998 (NSW).

4.4 Support available to councils

The program team is available to assist councils with any questions regarding the program. Councils can email the team at FAIP@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

A webinar information session will also be arranged to explain the grant process.

Scheduled meetings over Microsoft teams can be arranged to answer questions and resolve issues where a meeting may be better suited. Otherwise, the program team will aim to respond to written inquiries within 1-2 business days.

The program team is mindful of treating all applicants fairly and providing access to consistent information. We will endeavour to share our answers to individual inquiries where it would benefit all applicants while maintaining confidentiality about specific projects or council circumstances.

The program team will endeavour to provide applicants with feedback about their nominations at the end of program. We also welcome any feedback on improvements to our future programs.

Questions, concerns or complaints should be raised with the program team in the first instance. Concerns and complaints can also be forwarded to the probity advisor or escalated to the NSW Ombudsman if needed.

4.5 Complaints procedure

Questions, concerns or complaints should be raised with the program team in the first instance. Any complaints about the grant process must be made in writing.

If you have questions about decisions for this grant opportunity, please email the program team at FAIP@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

If you do not agree with how the Department has handled your complaint, you may raise this with the probity advisor or escalate it to the NSW Ombudsman if needed. The Ombudsman will not usually investigate a complaint unless you have already raised it directly with the relevant Department. Visit the NSW Ombudsman at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.

4.6 Privacy policy

The Department is required to comply with the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1988*. The Department collects the minimum personal information you voluntarily provide to enable it to contact an organisation and to assess the merits of an application. Any information provided by you will be stored on a database that will only be accessed by authorised personnel and is subject to privacy restrictions. The information will only be used for the purpose for which it was collected. Applicants must ensure that people whose personal details are supplied with applications are aware that the Department is being supplied with this information and how this information will be used.

4.7 More information

For more information on these guidelines or any related matter, please email the program team at FAIP@dphi.nsw.gov.au. You can also visit the program's website.