Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

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Faster Assessments Incentive Program

Round two competitive grant guidelines

July 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

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Faster Assessments Incentive Grant Program

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1. Overview

These guidelines outline the parameters and assessment criteria for round two of the Faster Assessments Incentive Program.

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 each round to the best performing eligible councils across metropolitan and regional NSW.[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 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.

The first round of the program was designed to establish a performance baseline across the state by taking an average of the previous three years of development assessment data.

Round two

This guideline outlines the eligibility parameters and assessment process for round two of the program. Round two will reward successful councils for their performance in the 2025-26 financial year, in line with the Statement of Expectations Order and performance against each council's own benchmark for the financial year.

Round two will focus on two aspects of improvement:

- improvement against councils' individual target for the 2025-26 financial year (measured as a percentage), and
- absolute improvement in the financial year compared to the previous financial year (measured as number of days improved).

[1] Eligible councils include those expected to deliver more than 1,000 dwellings in the Housing Accord period.

The methodology for this round focuses on demonstrated improvement over the 2025-26 financial year. Councils making significant improvements to meet and exceed their individual expectations will receive the highest scores.

The methodology ensures councils that have made significant progress are not disadvantaged in comparison to those with stagnant performance. Maintaining the same level of performance is unlikely to be rewarded.

Round three

Round three will reward successful councils for their performance in the 2026-27 financial year, in line with the Statement of Expectations Order. The parameters for round three will be announced in 2027.

1.2 Context

Councils' role in housing supply

Councils assess more than 85% of development applications (DAs) in NSW, playing a crucial role in increasing housing supply across NSW. 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 (round one)
- 105 days of lodgement between 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026 (round two)

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.

Funding source

This program is funded by the NSW Government through the NSW Consolidated Fund.[2]

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

Round two 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 have not been provided an LGA-specific housing target.

All eligible councils will automatically be considered in the ranking based on information from the Council League Table. There is no need to formally apply to the program.

1.4 Grant Values

Up to $200 million in grants will be allocated to successful councils over the three program rounds. Round two provides up to $67 million to successful councils. The maximum amount of funding a successful council can receive as part of Round two is outlined in the tables below. Councils with higher dwelling targets have higher funding caps than those with lower targets.

Table 1 - Maximum annual funding for eligible councils with housing targets

Housing target	Round two grant cap per council	Eligible councils
>10,000	$3 million	Bayside, Blacktown, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury Bankstown, Liverpool, Newcastle, Parramatta, Ryde, Sydney, Cumberland, Hills Shire (12)
5,000 –10,000	$2 million	Central Coast, Canada Bay, Hornsby, Northern Beaches, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Penrith, Wollongong, Fairfield, Georges River, Inner West, Ku-ring-gai, North Sydney, Sutherland Shire, Wollondilly Shire (15)
1,000-5,000	$1 million	Cessnock, Hawkesbury, Shellharbour, Shoalhaven, Willoughby, Lane Cove, Burwood, Strathfield, Port Stephens, Randwick, Waverley, Woollahra (12)

[2] The guideline for round one, published in August 2025, indicated that the program would be funded under Restart NSW. The NSW Government has made the decision to fund the program through the NSW Consolidated Fund, which better aligns with the objectives and infrastructure funding requirements of the program. Therefore, unlike previously stated, the *Restart NSW Fund Act 2011* does not apply to this program.

Table 2 - Maximum annual funding for eligible regional councils without a housing target

Anticipated growth (2024-29)[3]	Round two grant cap per council	Eligible councils
>1,000	$1 million	Albury, Ballina , Bathurst, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Orange, Tamworth, Tweed Shire, Wagga Wagga, Eurobodalla, Mid-Coast, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Wingecarribee (14)

1.5 Assessment criteria

Round two scores and ranks councils based on the following two performance criteria for the 2025-26 financial year using data from the NSW Planning Portal to measure development assessment timeframes.

Table 3 - Assessment criteria

Criterion	Weighting
Percentage improvement against individual target: Councils are scored on the percentage by which their average assessment days meet or exceed their individual target for the 2025-26 financial year. Councils that do not meet their target will receive a negative score.	60%
Absolute improvement in the financial year: Councils are scored on the number of days they improved in the 2025-26 financial year compared to their performance in 2024-25. This is measured as absolute number of days improved.	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 councils that make reductions beyond their individual targets while encouraging councils that have not performed well in previous years to make significant improvements in their average assessment timeframes to meet their average assessment day expectations.

As part of the data preparation and quality assurance, the Department will undertake a trend analysis of historic versus current data to ensure that average assessment timeframes are accompanied by a clear effort by councils to meet and exceed their housing targets. Councils with high development application volumes and faster processing times will be prioritised over councils with modest development application volumes.

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:

[3] Councils that do not have a housing target have been classified as per their implied dwelling demand for the Housing Accord period. Only councils with implied dwelling demand above 1,000 are included.

- made significant improvements to their average assessment timeframes in 2025-26 compared to the 2024-25 financial year, and
- 60% of development assessments meet their development assessment expectation under the Statement of Expectations Order.

Eligible councils will be ranked using each council's total score.

Only the top performing councils, 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 2025-26 financial year and the round's funding caps and funding envelopes.

In case of a tie between two or more councils that would affect the allocation of funding, the volume of development applications determined and number of homes being delivered will also be taken into consideration.

Infrastructure assurance

Successful councils will be requested to make one infrastructure funding application under the program up to the infrastructure funding cap. All projects to be recommended for funding will be required to meet the infrastructure eligibility criteria outlined in this guide (Section 3).

If a successful council makes an application that does not meet the program eligibility criteria, the council will be asked to reapply within a timeframe specified by the program team. If a council fails to make an application for an eligible project within the required timeframes, it may not receive funding under the round. All eligible projects will undergo an assurance process by the Department prior to being recommended for funding.

Round two successful projects must be completed by 30 June 2030.

2. Key dates

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

Table 4 – Stages and milestones

Stage	Milestone	Indicative timeframe[4]
Announcement of successful councils	Council ranking results for Round two announced. Successful councils requested to make an application for an infrastructure project within grant funding cap.	August - September 2026
Infrastructure nominations	Round two infrastructure application period via SmartyGrants for successful councils (6 weeks).	October - November 2026
Infrastructure assurance	Round two infrastructure assurance period (strategic and technical assessment of nominated infrastructure projects)	December – February 2027
Investment recommendations	Infrastructure projects to be funded under Round two announced	March – April 2027
Funding agreements / remittance	Round two funding agreement execution and release of funds.	April – June 2027
Project delivery	All Round two infrastructure projects must be completed	Jun 2030

[4] Indicative timeframes are for information only and may be subject to changes. Any variation of these timeframes will be communicated to councils.

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 two ranking, the Department will use data from the NSW Planning Portal to measure development assessment timeframes for each council in the 2025-26 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 to meet and exceed their targets.

Councils that do not demonstrate significant improvements to achieve the average DA assessment timeframes set out in the Statement of Expectations Order will not be considered for funding. In addition, councils that have not reduced their assessment timeframes below their 2024–25 benchmark are unlikely to score well.

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 2025-26 financial year data will be created at the start of July 2026 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.

The Department will undertake a review of the snapshot data to ensure there are no data anomalies or inconsistencies prior to the preparation of the scoring, inclusive of a trend analysis of historic versus current data for eligible councils, and the associated reasons for these trends.

The Department is available for contact regarding the data used at FAIP@dphi.nsw.gov.au.

Successful councils

Only the top performing councils, being those with the highest scores, will be offered grant funding for the round and asked to make an application.

3.2 Infrastructure applications via SmartyGrants

Successful councils will be notified and invited to apply for a maximum of one project for funding via SmartyGrants.[5] A link to the SmartyGrants portal will be provided to the successful councils, together with guidance and resources on how to make a application. Councils will be given up to 6 weeks to apply via the SmartyGrants platform.

Should a council choose not to make an application, funding may not be available for the council as part of the round.

The following list is an overview of the type of information that will be required to support infrastructure applications. 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 (as a single polygon, line or point in Shapefile format).
- project geographic catchment (as a single polygon, clearly labelled, in Shapefile 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 2026 to 30 June 2030. Council will need to provide annual forecasts beyond 2030 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 requires additional funding to proceed to the next stage, including a declaration of secured funding from other funding sources.[6]
- documents to support project deliverability including funding strategy, cost estimates and basis for cost estimates, planning and other approvals obtained (if relevant),

[5] Councils which had funding guaranteed for round one, subject to satisfactory completion of the project assurance process in round two, that are also successful in round two are able to nominate two sets of projects for funding (one for each round), as outlined in the guidelines for Round One.

[6] Projects and project stages which already have funding allocated are not eligible.

detailed 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

Once infrastructure applications 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 an application does not meet the eligibility or assurance criteria, the council may have the opportunity to submit an alternative project within a timeframe requested by the Department.

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

Table 5 - Infrastructure eligibility criteria

Eligibility Criterion	Description	Rationale
Maximum applications	Each successful council can apply for one project for funding if successful for the round.	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.
Project Staging	Program funding enable projects to be fully delivered. Funding for land acquisition, strategic business cases, and planning and design work will only be considered if it can be demonstrated that project delivery is achievable with the available funding by 30 June 2030.	This ensures funding is directed towards infrastructure projects that can be completed by 30 June 2030.

Eligibility Criterion	Description	Rationale
Co contribution	Funding from other sources, including co-contribution by council is accepted but not mandatory. If the grant funding represents a minor contribution to a very large budget, it will need to demonstrate that it necessary for the project to be delivered.	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. 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.
Completion	Project must be completed by 30 June 2030.	Eligible projects must support/enable housing within the Housing Accord Period.
Ineligible expenditure	• Operational expenditure post-delivery; • Infrastructure (including stages or build elements 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 Agreement is executed; • Salaries of existing staff or staff not involved in the project; • Administrative overheads such as printing, office equipment and vehicles; • Costs associated with events, announcements, openings, launches, ceremonies, or related promotional activities.	Ensure grant funding is used towards unlocking infrastructure not already funded by another source. Prevents the repurposing of new funding to offset or 'free up' previously committed expenditure for a project. Ensures duplication of grant allocations is avoided across funding sources. Funding is efficiently allocated to key delivery outcomes.
Complete application	All applications must be fully completed and formally submitted through the SmartyGrants platform. A application must include quality information for assessment. Projects may miss out on funding if insufficient information is provided to undertake the assurance process.	Evidence-based decision making to promote the efficient use of public money.

3.4 Infrastructure assurance process

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

- **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 by 30 June 2030. An independent technical consultant will complete this assessment.

Table 6 - 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 by 2030.	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.
Strategic assessment	Strategic merit	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 the 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.

Table 7 - 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 outcomes of the strategic and technical assessments will be reported to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces indicating the level of support for projects according to the criteria outlined above. 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 2026-27 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 any unspent funds, and indicative reporting and acquittal requirements, in line with the Grant Administration Guide (2024).

Funding will be made available in accordance with 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 reported to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces 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.

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 applications 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.