



Our Country Our Future

PROGRAM GUIDELINES



Australian Government

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation



The **ILSC GROUP**

PEOPLE. COUNTRY. OPPORTUNITY.

JUNE 2026



How can we help you?

Our Country Our Future is the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation's principal funding program where we work with Indigenous groups across Australia to own and manage land and water interests.

These guidelines will help you decide whether *Our Country Our Future* is a good fit for you and your project.

Acknowledgement of Country

In all our activities we pay our respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, waters and skies on which we live and work. We honour the resilience and continuing connection to Country, Culture, and community of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. We recognise the decisions we make today will impact the lives of generations to come.

What we offer

We offer a wide range of assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups seeking support for their projects including:

- **Direct funding** for purchasing, managing and/or developing land or water-related interests
- **Advice and capability support** for property owners including information, knowledge and training to assist with project development and delivery
- **Facilitation, advocacy and negotiation** to develop partnerships, markets and other opportunities.

Who we work with

We partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups* across the broad diversity of Indigenous Australia, from cities to regional and remote areas, from inland to coastal environments; and across a range of industries/sectors.

*see eligibility criteria (page 05)

Need some inspiration?

Check out our *Returning and Managing Country* publication available on our website www.ilsc.gov.au where we report on the variety of projects that we have recently supported through *Our Country Our Future* funding.

Our funding parameters and investment priorities changed in 2025-26 – please see *OCOF investment priorities and funding parameters* provided at www.ilsc.gov.au

What do you want to do?

If you want to...

- Purchase a land or water-related interest
- Commence or expand a land or water-based enterprise
- Undertake planning, capability building or feasibility assessment
- Build or upgrade infrastructure, plant or equipment
- Improve your organisation's service delivery
- Conduct on-ground management activities to Care for Country (land, water, biodiversity, cultural heritage)
- Enable or improve access to Country with cultural significance
- Maintain, support and revitalise culture
- Develop opportunities for formal and informal training and/or employment
- Address urgent health and safety issues on Country (people, livestock, environment)

...and these activities will lead to Indigenous people:



Growing the value of Country



Owning & managing Country sustainably



Driving policy & opportunity



Preserving & protecting culture

...we may be able to help.



Read on for the application steps, eligibility criteria and full guidelines



Boola Boornap Tree Nursery, Noongar Boodja Country, WA
Image credit: Noongar Land Enterprise Group

How it works

Our Country Our Future is a three-step, flexible program with expressions of interest accepted throughout the year.

STAGE ONE - Expression of Interest
1. Download the introductory pack (Expression of Interest form, Program Guidelines and Investment priorities and funding parameters) from the ILSC website www.ilsc.gov.au
2. Complete and submit the simple Expression of Interest form to seek early advice on whether your project is likely to be funded.
3. ILSC will confirm receipt of your EOI.
4. ILSC will assess your EOI through its fortnightly cycle.
5. Applicant advised whether their EOI has been declined or approved to proceed to application.
STAGE TWO - Application
6. If approved to proceed, applicant directed to complete the application form - Short or Standard - relevant to the funding request. The funding stream (Plan, Manage or Return) will depend on the project type.
7. Applicant submits application form along with any supporting documentation (page 08).
8. ILSC will confirm receipt of your application.
9. ILSC will confirm your eligibility against formal evidence; if eligible, your application will be referred to the ILSC's National Assessment Panel for assessment against the assessment criteria, investment priorities and funding parameters (page 07).
10. Applicant advised of assessment outcome.
STAGE THREE - Grant agreement*
11. Successful applicants will need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enter into a legally binding grant agreement with the ILSC that sets out terms and conditions of the grant, describing how the project will be implemented and how and when funding payment(s) will be provided carry out the project activities and deliverables as agreed in the grant agreement negotiate a level of reporting appropriate to the complexity and scale of your project - this is to demonstrate how you are completing contracted activities and working towards your intended outcomes complete an evaluation report on project completion submit a financial acquittal report to confirm funding has been spent.
QUESTIONS?
Contact your local office - our details are on the back cover.

* Each grant agreement has general terms and conditions that apply to all successful grantees with any additional conditions determined throughout the assessment process by the decision-maker. We will identify these in the grant agreement. You may request changes to the grant agreement. However, we will review any changes to make sure they do not affect the grant as approved by the decision-maker, are consistent with the grant guidelines and do not create inconsistency or administrative unfairness.

Eligibility

- The EOI will ask you to declare your eligibility for OCOF funding against the criteria below.
- If you're not sure, submit your EOI form anyway or contact your local office - our details are on the back cover.
- If you are invited to prepare a full application, we will require documentation to confirm your eligibility.

To be eligible to apply for OCOF funding you must be able to answer 'Yes' to the following criteria.

<p>Does your project involve one (or more) of the following?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> acquisition of land and/or water management of land and/or water planning to acquire land and/or water OR planning and capability building to support the management of existing Indigenous-held land and/or water 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>For projects that involve acquisition:</p> <p>Are you an incorporated entity (or in the process of becoming incorporated) and are you Indigenous controlled?¹</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>For projects that involve management</p> <p>Are you either of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander holder of land or a water-related right² an organisation interested in investing in Indigenous-held land or waters. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>For projects that involve planning</p> <p>Does your project involve any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> planning activities that will lead to acquisition of land and/or water interests and/or an associated land or water-based enterprise? planning activities to commence or expand a land/water-based enterprise on Country that is already Indigenous held capability building activities for an Indigenous organisation or business to enable better management of existing land and/or water interests? 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Does your project have the support of the Indigenous land/water holders and have they provided their consent for its use?</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Will Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoy access, opportunities and benefits from land or waters as a result of your project?</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Are you one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporated organisation that is Indigenous-controlled Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Land Trust Indigenous Body corporate under State or Territory legislation Native Title Prescribed Body Corporate Indigenous-controlled business, private company, partnership or trust holder of a land or water interest Indigenous individual holder of a land or water interest Non-Indigenous entity undertaking activities on Indigenous held land and/or water with consent of the holder/s of the land. <p><i>Please note if your Expression of Interest proceeds to an application stage, you may need to provide further evidence of your organisation's legal status, ownership and control. This may include your certificate of incorporation from the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission, Australian Securities and Investments Commission or your state/territory business registration.</i></p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Are you compliant with your incorporating legislation and any agreements you currently have with the ILSC?</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1 The ATSI Act permits the ILSC to make grants of land and water-related rights to ATSI Corporations which are:
- Corporations incorporated under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*
- Corporations where all members are Indigenous persons (e.g. Associations, Companies limited by guarantee)
- In the case of Corporations limited by shares, where a controlling interest is held by Indigenous persons.

2 The ILSC can only fund management projects:
- where an interest in the land is held by an ATSI Corporation or Indigenous person/s (e.g. freehold, lease, licence, management agreement, native title etc.)
- where water-related rights are held by an ATSI Corporation or Indigenous person/s (e.g. rights to take water, fishing licences, native title rights).

Three streams of funding

If your EOI is successful, you will be allocated to one of three streams of funding to prepare an application. The two application forms – Short and Standard – are designed to enable a proportional assessment based on the amount of funding being requested.

PLAN – planning to acquire land and/or water OR planning and capability building to support the management of existing Indigenous-held land and/or water*

Funding brackets: up to \$100,000; \$100,000 to \$300,000

Supported activities include (but are not limited to):

- business development and feasibility planning
- community development planning
- independent specialist advice regarding an economic opportunity on Country in a priority sector (inland water, carbon, environmental markets, renewables and clean energy, fisheries and aquaculture)
- land, sea and water management planning that contributes to the sustainable management of Indigenous held Country, and assets such as:
 - conservation management plans
 - monitoring and protecting threatened species
 - weed and pest animal management
 - fire management
 - cultural site management
 - natural disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation.
- acquisition planning for land and/or water interests and/or an associated land or water-based enterprise
- capability building activities – such as training and leadership development, organisational strategic planning that directly support the managed use, care or improvement of Indigenous held land or water.

When a First Nations group or organisation does not already hold legal interests in land or water, the planning documents must include a section that identifies the land/water interest, its location, and an estimated cost. They must also outline the proposed funding or financing approach for acquiring, leasing, or securing access to the interest, including any related enterprise.

MANAGE – management of land, water or related commercial assets

Funding brackets: up to \$100,000; \$100,000 to \$300,000; over \$300,000#

Provides funding for management activities on Indigenous-held land/water that include (but are not limited to):

- managing and/or developing land or water-related interests
- commencing or improving a land or water-based enterprise
- building or upgrading infrastructure, plant or equipment
- conducting on-ground management activities to Care for Country (land, water, biodiversity, cultural heritage)
- enabling or improving access to Country with cultural significance
- activities to address risks posed by natural disasters and climate change
- maintaining, supporting and revitalising culture.

RETURN – acquisition of rights in land and/or water

Any value#

Provides funding for the purchase of a land or water-related interest. See page 07 for additional requirements.

* Applicants who do not yet meet Manage or Return stream capability requirements may be directed to the Plan stream

Projects above \$2 million will need to meet exceptional criteria – see *Investment priorities and funding parameters* (page 08)

How we assess and prioritise applications

Our Country Our Future is a competitive funding program with a fixed budget. Our prioritisation and assessment criteria ensure we invest in the projects that deliver the highest possible outcomes to First Nations peoples. In addition to the assessment criteria and our NILSS priorities, applications are assessed relative to other project proposals we receive.

Assessment criteria

Opportunity and Outcomes	Project Viability
<p>What is the need/opportunity, how will this be addressed, and what outcomes will be delivered as a result?</p> <p>We consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • your project's key activities, objectives, milestones, timeframes • progress already made in developing your project • the extent to which your project activities align with/ contribute to one or more of the ILSC's four long-term outcomes (page 02) • the Indigenous people/groups most likely to benefit from your project and in what ways 	<p>Will the proposed activity have sufficient funds to meet its operating (expenditure) requirements and therefore deliver the projected outcomes?</p> <p>We consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether your proposal is realistic and achievable • whether the project is sustainable beyond the life of ILSC funding • any financial or in-kind contribution your organisation will make to the project • whether there is sufficient co-investment (financial or in-kind partnerships) to support the project
Financial Health	Capability
<p>Has your organisation demonstrated sound financial performance and is it currently in a solid financial position?</p> <p>We consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • financial performance (income, expenditure, profit/loss) over the past three years • financial position (assets, liabilities, liquidity, debt, equity) • stability of your income/funding streams • financial managements processes and controls 	<p>Can you effectively demonstrate the ability to manage, implement, monitor and report back on the project?</p> <p>We consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether the organisation demonstrates good governance and operates effectively • your experience and past performance with similar projects/activities • skill levels and experience of staff and project partners (if applicable)

Projects are assessed objectively against the criteria below, proportionate to the funding stream/request.

Investment priorities and funding parameters

Aligned to our commitments in the National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy 2023-28, we also prioritise projects that support our current investment priorities:

- First Nations groups with no, or limited, access to Country
- First Nations leadership in future industries
- Areas of socio-economic disadvantage
- Equity of access to OCOF program
- Acquisition of water and water-related rights and interests

These investment priorities and our funding parameters may be adjusted periodically – please see *OCOFC investment priorities and funding parameters* provided at www.ilsc.gov.au

If you are applying to acquire Country

Where you are applying for the acquisition of land and/or water-related interests you will be required to:

1. be an incorporated, Indigenous-controlled entity permitted to hold assets (according to your constitution/rules of incorporation) and therefore eligible to sign a lease and/or be granted the property or water-related rights
2. work with the ILSC to define an agreed strategy for negotiating purchase, **AND**:
 - where the property is to be directly acquired by the proponent with ILSC funding, enter into a contract describing how and when the project activities and deliverables will be implemented and how and when the funding payment(s) will be provided **OR**:
 - where the property is acquired by the ILSC on your behalf, enter into a contract to lease the property and develop an agreed pathway to ownership in collaboration with the ILSC
3. carry out the project activities and deliverables as agreed in the contract and, if relevant, in the pathway to ownership
4. submit half-yearly progress reports for five years to demonstrate how you are completing contracted activities and working towards intended outcomes, and complete an evaluation report when requested
5. where the property is acquired by the ILSC on your behalf – once conditions are met, enter into a new contract to be granted the property or water-related rights.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005*, requires that the ILSC retain an ongoing interest in all assets it grants or divests. This interest, commonly a caveat over the title of a land-based asset but also applicable to water interests, ensures the ILSC is consulted and consents to any significant dealing with the divested asset including mortgaging, sale, lease and/or subdivision. This ensures that assets divested by the ILSC are not later lost from Indigenous ownership.

Supporting documentation

The ILSC is committed to maximising the success of the projects it supports and therefore undertakes a high standard of commercial-level due diligence. This means your application will require supporting documentation.

This might include:

- a business/feasibility plan, including detailed, three-year financial forecasts
- evidence of formal project partnership arrangements
- evidence of financial/in-kind support
- a property management plan for acquisition projects.

For capital works/building/infrastructure projects:

- cost estimates/quantity surveyor report
- detailed drawings or concept plans
- asset lifecycle management plans.

During the application process we will discuss which documents will be required and if you may need support to fund some of these items.

We will also advise if there is a requirement to undertake an engagement and consent process with relevant Traditional Owners in accordance with the ILSC's *Traditional Owner Engagement and Consent Policy*.

The ILSC reserves the right to discontinue applications where requested information is not forthcoming.

What we won't support

Our Country Our Future will not fund:

- activities that do not align with the ILSC's statutory purposes, or do not generate any benefits for Indigenous peoples
- activities that are the responsibility of another agency
- any ongoing service delivery/program costs
- any ongoing operational costs such as insurance, rates, power, water etc.
- administration/sitting fees
- livestock.

This list is not exhaustive.

We will also consider whether any previous funding has been received by an applicant and if the ILSC is the most appropriate funder for your project. We may decline applications on this basis.

For further detail please contact your ILSC office.

What you can expect from us

During the application and assessment process we (the ILSC) will:

- work with you to develop and submit your application
- clearly communicate so you understand what is required at each step of the application process
- follow up in a timely manner, including:
 - letting you know how your application is proceeding once it has been submitted
 - giving you an opportunity to clarify any concerns or questions if your application is at risk of not being funded
 - providing you with specific feedback in the event your application is not approved.

What we expect from you

During the EOI, application, and assessment process, we (the ILSC) expect you (the project applicant) to:

- submit your expression of interest and application form in full with all necessary attachments and supporting documentation (see Supporting documentation)
- provide, on request and in a timely manner, any other documents that may be required to enable the ILSC to make an informed and efficient assessment.

For management (Manage) and acquisition (Return) projects the ILSC may also conduct field visits to check the progress of your project.

Australian Government eligibility requirements for all Commonwealth grant funding recipients

The National Redress Scheme

Non-government institutions that are named in applications to the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, or in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and that choose not to join the Scheme, are not eligible for future Australian Government grant funding.

Your grant agreement will include conditions requiring your organisation, and any project partners, to meet these National Redress Scheme eligibility requirements for the entire term of the agreement.

More information, including a list of participating institutions and those named institutions who have declined to join, is available here: www.nationalredress.gov.au

Commonwealth Child Safe Framework and working with Vulnerable Persons

If your project involves contact or working with children or vulnerable persons, there will be additional measures required that will be negotiated with you as a condition of funding that must be in place before your project commences.

Specific clauses will be included in the grant agreement where the ILSC considers the grant is for:

- activities that involve contact with children that is a usual part of, and more than incidental to, the grant activity; and/or
- activities that involve possible contact with children that is irregular or unplanned.

The successful applicant will be required to comply with all relevant child safe obligations included in the grant agreement prior to execution of the grant agreement.

Irrespective of the child safety obligations in the grant agreement, you must always comply with state and territory legislative requirements for working with children and mandatory reporting.

Definitions:

- **Child** means an individual(s) under the age of 18 years; **Children** has a similar meaning.
- **Vulnerable Person** means an individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation for any reason, including age, physical or mental illness, trauma or disability, pregnancy, the influence, or past or existing use, of alcohol, drugs or substances or any other reason.

Other OCOF funding pathways

Depending on the nature of your project, the ILSC may also refer you to a more specialist funding stream and application process. This includes Urgent Health & Safety grants and Disaster Recovery Quick Response Grants.

For more information, contact your local office – our details are on the back cover – or visit www.ilsc.gov.au



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Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation



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Complaints and feedback

Consistent with our *Service Charter*, the ILSC welcomes all reasonable comments and feedback as this provides valuable information on the quality of our service delivery and the effectiveness of policies and procedures. Compliments, suggestions and complaints are recorded, where appropriate to assist in the review and improvement of ILSC processes.

To make sure that your complaint is handled as quickly as possible, please call the ILSC on 1800 818 490 to ensure that our staff can direct your matter to the appropriate area for resolution. You can also use our online form: www.ilsc.gov.au/contact

We understand that in most instances disagreements and complaints can be resolved over the phone, however if you still need to have your complaint dealt with formally through the ILSC's Complaints Handling Procedure, it will need to be submitted in writing.

If you do not want your complaint handled by your nearest ILSC office, you may request that the Chief Operating Officer review your matter; please advise ILSC staff when you contact us if this is the case.

Depending on the nature of your complaint and who it involves at the ILSC, our staff will be able to advise you on how to proceed with lodging a written complaint. We will reply in writing to your written complaint within 30 working days of receipt.

In circumstances where you are not satisfied with how the ILSC has dealt with your complaint, you may have a right to request the Commonwealth Ombudsman to investigate the matter.

How to contact the ILSC

By phone free call: 1800 818 490

For divisional office contacts refer to the back page or the ILSC website www.ilsc.gov.au/contact

Privacy

Through the *Our Country Our Future* application process the ILSC collects personal information from the applicant and partners and, in some cases, personal information about other members of the applicant's group. This information is accessible only to ILSC staff.

Additional guidance on how we manage your information is included in the OCOF Expression of Interest and Application Forms, and in our Privacy Policy located on the ILSC website www.ilsc.gov.au

Strategic context

The *Our Country Our Future* program is the ILSC's chief delivery mechanism for meeting our strategic priorities – Returning Country and Managing Country – identified by our National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy (NILSS) 2023-28. Available at www.ilsc.gov.au, the NILSS 2023-28 reaffirms the ILSC's key role as the lead national agency responsible for returning and managing Country.

Through the commitments we made in the NILSS – and the priority actions outlined in our associated Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategies (RILSS) – we will continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to expand Indigenous rights and interests in Country and grow Indigenous-led initiatives on Country.

PURPOSE

TO ASSIST ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES TO ACQUIRE AND MANAGE LAND AND WATER¹ TO GENERATE ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BENEFITS

VISION

For Indigenous Australians to enjoy the rightful entitlements, opportunities and benefits that the return of Country and its management brings

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

1. Indigenous peoples are maintaining and growing the value and productivity of Country
2. Indigenous peoples are owning and managing Country sustainably
3. Indigenous peoples are influencing policy and opportunity for Country
4. Indigenous peoples are strengthening Culture through reconnection to Country

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Caring for Country

We care for and consider Country in all that we do and support Indigenous peoples to look after Country their way

Self-determination

We remove barriers to self-determination within the ILSC to provide Indigenous peoples with power and control over their Country and development

Partnership

We shift the distribution of power and how we work to be an equal partner to Indigenous peoples and provide choice in ways to work with us

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

A Returning Country

Expand Indigenous rights and interests in Country

B Managing Country

Grow Indigenous-led initiatives on Country

C Sector leadership

Increase Indigenous influence on priority sectors

D Meaningful connection

Build beneficial partnerships

E Excellent service

Provide high-quality services

F Cultural leadership

Step up as a Culturally capable leader

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

- A The ILSC uses diverse, innovative approaches that amplify expansion of legal rights over Country for Indigenous Australians
- B Indigenous groups can readily access fit-for-purpose ILSC services that enable management of Country on their own terms
- C Indigenous groups have greater influence and leadership within priority sectors
- D Partnerships with the ILSC are open, transparent, accountable, respectful and mutually beneficial
- E The ILSC demonstrably meets the needs and standards of Indigenous stakeholders, and continuously seeks opportunities for improvement
- F1 The ILSC exemplifies Cultural leadership, setting the standard for other government agencies and partners
- F2 Indigenous interests, aspirations, preferences and priorities are considered in all aspects of the ILSC's operations.

27 KEY ACTIVITIES

Aligned to our purpose and strategic priorities, our *Key activities* are the commitments² we made to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy

ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

The actions we will take to deliver our *Key activities*. The full version is published as a companion to our Corporate Plan in August at www.ilsc.gov.au

REPORTING

ILSC Annual Report – Annual Performance Statements (non-financial performance)

¹ Includes both freshwater and seawater Country

² 'What we will do' statements in the NILSS



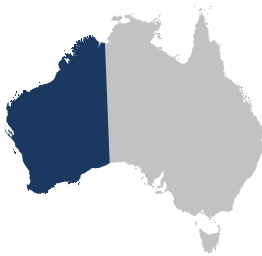
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Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation



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**Central Division
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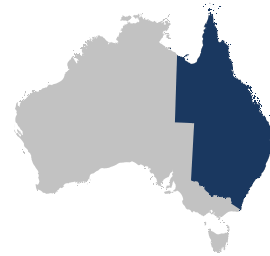
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FREECALL 1800 818 490

Established in 1995, and now operating under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act*, we provide for the contemporary and future land needs of Indigenous peoples, particularly those unlikely to benefit from Native Title or Land Rights.

We work with our Indigenous peoples to grow their economic, environmental, Cultural and social capital by supporting their acquisition and management of land and water. In redressing dispossession, we provide for a more prosperous and Culturally centred future for Indigenous peoples.

The ILSC is a Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.