

Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability

Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration

Grant Guidelines Round 3

May 2025

Version 1.1

Grant Program Details	
Opening date and time	Monday 19 May 2025, AEST 5 pm
Closing date and time	Friday 30 May 2025, AEST 11:59 pm
Application outcome date	Within two weeks of grant closure
Project delivery timeframe (for successful applications)	Employment of Net Zero Manager from 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2026 (18 months)
Evaluation timeframe (for successful applications)	Project Management Plan – due August 2025 Mid-term report – due March 2026 End of term report – due December 2026 Ongoing communication requirements
Decision-maker	Emily Yip, Director Sustainability and Circular Economy Partnerships
NSW Government Agency	Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)
Type of grant opportunity	Targeted, competitive
Grant value (total available funding for the grant and the available individual grant amounts, excluding GST)	Total grant value – \$2,278,800 (excluding GST) Maximum individual grant value – \$253,200 (excluding GST)
Enquiries	Sam Gardner Senior Project Officer, Sustainable Councils, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) Email: sam.gardner@environment.nsw.gov.au

Contents

Overview of grant program	1
1 Overview of Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration grant program	2
1.1 Purpose and objectives.....	2
1.2 Grant value.....	3
1.3 What the funding can be used for	4
1.4 What the funding cannot be used for.....	5
Selection criteria	6
2 Selection criteria	7
2.1 Eligibility criteria	7
2.2 Assessment criteria	7
Application process.....	8
3 Application process.....	9
3.1 How to apply	9
3.2 Required supporting documents	9
3.3 Support available to applicants	9
Assessment process	10
4 Assessment process	11
4.1 Assessment of grant applications	11
4.2 Notification of application outcome	11
4.3 Feedback on applications.....	11
4.4 Publication of grants information	11
Successful grant applications.....	12
5 Successful grant applications.....	13
5.1 Grant agreement.....	13
5.2 Grant payment.....	13
5.3 Unspent funds.....	14
5.4 Reporting and acquittal requirements.....	14
5.5 Employment terms of Net Zero Manager.....	16
5.6 Evaluation.....	17
Additional information and resources.....	18

6	Additional information and resources.....	19
6.1	Complaint handling	19
6.2	Access to information.....	19
6.3	Ethical conduct	19
6.4	Conflict of interest management	19
6.5	Confidentiality	19

1

Overview of grant program

1 Overview of Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration grant program

The Sustainable Councils program, delivered by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), supports local governments in regional NSW to save energy and money, reduce emissions, and set a path to net zero.

To achieve alignment with NSW's net zero targets of 50 per cent reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050, local governments/councils need to set targets for operational and community-wide emissions, have strategies and plans in place for how they will reduce them and implement actions to reduce emissions across their operations and communities.

Many smaller regional councils face chronic resourcing and capacity constraints that limit their ability to reduce operational emissions or play a role in leading emissions reductions in their Local Government Areas and communities. To help overcome this resource constraint, \$2,278,800 is being provided by the NSW Government through round 3 of the Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration (JONZA) grant program.

Since 2023, the JONZA program has been successful in building capability within council organisations to drive net zero outcomes. The JONZA network provides a connection between local and state government entities, develops capabilities within Joint Organisations (JOs) or non-metropolitan Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs) and member councils, delivers carbon reduction for councils, and has delivered significant energy and cost savings (eligible JOs and ROCs are referred to in this document going forward simply as JOs). The grant is open to eligible NSW JOs and non-metropolitan ROCs.

Given the benefits achieved through the first two rounds of the JONZA program, round 3 has been extended from 12-months to an 18-month program, and will fund Net Zero Managers from July 2025 to December 2026.

The NSW Government acknowledges that every JO has its unique challenges when dealing with decarbonisation. This grant provides flexibility for each JO to develop and implement activities as needed by the councils in each JO.

While building capability and capacity within the JO, each Net Zero Manager funded through this program will seek to address the current and most pressing needs for their joint organisation and member councils.

Please read instructions outlined in these Grant Guidelines before applying.

1.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this grant is to build capacity and capability within regional JOs to support the delivery of net zero outcomes for their member councils. This grant, provided by the NSW Government, will achieve this objective by funding a Net Zero Manager who is employed by the JO and is dedicated to progressing the JO and member councils toward net zero. This employee will also act as a link to other NSW Government support mechanisms.

This grant program will:

- provide an opportunity for JOs to establish or accelerate a net zero pathway plan for their member councils;
- increase the capacity of JOs to identify and implement projects that directly reduce emissions for councils, or progress the region's net zero trajectory;
- strengthen collaboration between State and local governments to improve the delivery of net zero outcomes in line with community expectations;
- build on the outcomes of the first two rounds of the JONZA initiative and partnerships.

1.2 Grant value

This grant provides up to **\$253,200 (excl. GST)** per applicant, which includes salary, on-costs and ancillary costs. This includes:

- Maximum salary component of **\$183,480 (excl. GST)** over 18 months (*this is equivalent to an average annual salary of **\$122,320 (excl. GST)***)
- On-costs of up to **26% of salary** (a maximum of \$47,700 excl. GST, over 18 months)
- Ancillary costs of up to **12% of salary** (a maximum of \$22,020 excl. GST, over 18 months)

The total grant program funding available is **\$2,278,800 (excl. GST)**, funded through the Sustainable Councils program. Funding has been increased by 3.5% from the previous grant round to align with a CPI increase from 2024.

If an applicant appoints a Net Zero Manager below the maximum salary component, then on-costs and ancillary cost claims must be reduced proportionally. Please see the provided JONZA grant calculator tool to forecast the maximum claimable grant amount at various salary levels.

On-costs include expenses such as superannuation, insurance, payroll tax and leave loading.

Ancillary costs include expenses for IT, phone, travel, training and other reasonable and justified expenses.

All on-costs and ancillary costs must be accounted for and demonstrated. The JONZA grant calculator tool includes a template for the information required to justify and claim for grant expenses.

Where a Net Zero Manager works on a part-time basis, the salary, on-costs and ancillary costs must be pro-rated accordingly. The calculator tool provided can assist in forecasting the total grant funding available under part-time scenarios. The applicant may employ two part-time staff in a job-sharing arrangement, where combined they act as the Net Zero Manager for that region, provided the combined salary component is within the maximum grant allowances. JO's may also consider a secondment to appoint a suitable candidate.

If the applicant spends over the maximum allowable grant components for salary, on-costs or ancillary costs, then this difference must be covered by the hiring JO.

Where a JO chooses to appoint a staff member who is already employed by the JO, the JO must demonstrate an overall additionality of outcomes through this grant funding. The funding cannot be used to supplement or offset existing JO staff salaries.

It's expected that JOs cover in-kind contributions for the ongoing management of the Net Zero Manager, including hosting the employee and allowing access to other resources within the JO.

Variations to the contract may be made for project delivery funding, subject to funding availability and project assessment by the Sustainable Councils team.

1.3 What the funding can be used for

The additional internal employee funded through this program must be suitably qualified to deliver outcomes for the JO and its member councils towards net zero goals.

The activities undertaken by this additional employee will vary between each JO and will be dependent on the current progress and needs of the JO and member councils.

Some example activities include (but are not limited to):

- developing and implementing **emissions baselining** for member councils, using the provided C-Compass tool, or other comparable tool;
- developing or progressing a **regional energy plan**;
- developing or implementing **emissions reduction plans**, or **net zero plans**, both for individual councils and the region;
- developing business cases and implementing **energy efficiency projects**;
- developing business cases and implementing **renewable energy projects**;
- developing or implementing a regional **Electric Vehicle (EV) plan**;
- hosting council **EV days** for council fleet and equipment;
- establishing **Revolving Energy Funds (REFs)** for local councils;
- establishing a **Power Purchase Agreement (PPA)** or Renewable Energy Supply Agreement (RESA) for renewable energy purchase for some or all member councils;
- establishing processes for **carbon offsetting**;
- **researching and analysing** emissions reductions activities;
- exploring pathways to **reduce landfill emissions** from council-owned facilities
- organising **meetings, seminars, training and events** relevant to net zero outcomes;
- supporting member councils to **apply for grants** for related programs to progress the actions in the plans;
- improving processes for **data gathering and management** to more better plan and deliver net zero projects; and
- progressing **opportunities** for member councils as they arise.

All activities should align to the JO Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities, JO Board amended regional statement, regional energy and/or emissions reductions plans, and be approved by the JO board where applicable. The Net Zero Manager can be used to develop the Project Management Plan, which will outline the priority activities planned for the grant period.

1.4 What the funding cannot be used for

The Net Zero Manager employed with this funding may not be used for activities that are considered “business as usual”, such as everyday JO or council operations and reporting.

The work undertaken under this program is for climate change mitigation activities and does not include climate change risk assessment or adaptation projects, unless otherwise approved by the Department.

The grant funding cannot be used for capital expenditure or ongoing operational costs (outside of 12% component attributed to ancillary costs, as outlined in Available Funding). Funding cannot be used towards consultancy costs. The salary component must be used for the Net Zero Manager(s) salaries, and not toward support staff salaries, unless there is a part-time role-sharing agreement established. Funding can only be used for activities conducted within the period specified in the funding agreement and not for retrospective activities, nor costs associated with applying to the grant program.

2

Selection criteria

2 Selection criteria

The Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration grant round 3 is a targeted, competitive grant. All applicants must meet the eligibility criteria and will then be assessed against merit criteria. All applicants must, at a minimum, meet the passing score of 50% for each of the merit criteria.

2.1 Eligibility criteria

The grant is open to functional NSW JOs and non-metropolitan ROCs. A representative council may apply for the grant funding on behalf of a JO or ROC.

To be eligible, the JO or ROC must:

1. currently employ an Executive Officer or equivalent that leads the organisation;
2. have processes in place to deliver projects (e.g. procurement, contract management); and
3. be financially stable to host an in-house resource for 18 months to deliver outcomes.

In the interest of supporting the JO mechanism to deliver results for member councils, there may be preference given to JO applications over ROC applications during assessment process, if there is a large volume of eligible applications.

2.2 Assessment criteria

Eligible submissions will be assessed against the following merit criteria to determine successful applicants.

Table 1: Merit Criteria and Weighting

#	Criterion	Weight
1	Demonstrated need for additional internal capacity resource to help drive net zero outcomes	30%
2	Proposed impact of net zero initiatives being delivered by the Net Zero Manager for JO member councils	40%
3	Demonstrated commitment and capability within the JO to achieve outcomes	30%

Each application will be assessed by the grant assessment panel against the merit criteria above.

3

Application process

3 Application process

3.1 How to apply

Applications are submitted online through the NSW Government's Grant Management System (GMS). To apply, go to netzeroNSW.smartygrants.com.au/JONZARound3 and click on the 'Start a submission' button.

You will receive an application number when you apply online. Please quote this number in all communications with the department relating to your application. A complete application including supporting material must be submitted by the application deadline.

Please note the following:

- Supporting documents must be in an acceptable file type, such as Word, Excel, PDF, or JPEG.
 - All applications must be submitted through the GMS. No hard copy applications will be accepted.
 - Any application that is late, incomplete or ineligible will not be considered.
 - The Sustainable Councils team may contact applicants through the assessment stage if clarity or more information is required.
 - Applicants must not provide false or misleading information in the grant application. Any application identified containing false or misleading statements will be ineligible for funding.
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3.2 Required supporting documents

Please submit the following documents along with your application:

1. Letter of engagement or equivalent to show a currently employed Executive Officer or equivalent that leads the JO (personal or sensitive information can be redacted).
 2. Document to demonstrate processes in place to deliver projects. This could include an example project (not required if previously participated in, and delivered projects under Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration grants round 1 or 2).
 3. A current audit report, P&L or equivalent to demonstrate a financially stable position to host an in-house resource for 18 months to deliver outcomes. This could include a long-term financial plan, if available.
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3.3 Support available to applicants

Additional information is available on the grant program web page netzeronsw.smartygrants.com.au

For further information about your eligibility or for assistance submitting your application online, please email scc@environment.nsw.gov.au and a team member will be in contact.

4

Assessment process

4 Assessment process

4.1 Assessment of grant applications

Applications will first be checked against the eligibility criteria by the program team. Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not progress.

Each application will then be assessed against the merit criteria outline in Section 2.2, by an independent assessment panel. The recommendations from the panel will be considered by the Director Sustainability and Circular Economy Partnerships for final approval as the grant program decision maker. Applications must score minimum thresholds of 5 out of 10 for all merit criteria to be recommended.

4.2 Notification of application outcome

All applicants can expect to be notified of the outcome of their applications within 2 weeks of grant closure.

4.3 Feedback on applications

If an applicant wishes to receive feedback on their application or appeal a decision, the Sustainable Councils team can arrange a meeting to share feedback from the application assessment process.

4.4 Publication of grants information

The [NSW Grants Administration Guide](#) (Guide) 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).

5

Successful grant
applications

5 Successful grant applications

5.1 Grant agreement

Successful applicants will receive a funding agreement, which will confirm receipt and terms of the grant. Once received and signed by the Department, this document will act as the official agreement between the Department and JO for the duration of the grant.

5.2 Grant payment

The milestone payments for successful applicants are shown in the table below.

Item	Amount	Milestone	Approximate timings
Payment 1	70% grant amount (maximum value \$177,240 excl. GST)	On signing of the funding agreement	June 2025
Payment 2	15% grant amount (maximum value \$37,980 excl. GST)	On the approval of the mid-term report by Sustainable Councils	March 2026
Payment 3*	15% grant amount (maximum value \$37,980 excl. GST)*	On the approval of the end-of-term report by Sustainable Councils and acquittal of funding agreement	December 2026
Total*	\$253,200 (excl. GST)*	Total maximum grant value	By December 2026

** For Payment 3, the JO must provide a detailed breakdown of expenditure incurred over the course of the grant round. Any unspent funds from Payments 1 and 2 must be returned if the total payments exceed the amount actually expended under this grant.*

Additional funding may be provided for projects that support the delivery of the grant depending on available funding and at the discretion of the Sustainable Councils team. Where there is funding availability, the Sustainable Councils may seek a business case from the applicants for how the funds will be best used. Funding will be divided in an equitable way among applicants, based on number of councils, the remoteness of those councils and previous funding allocated to the JOs. The funding will be delivered through a variation to the funding agreement, which will outline the amount, deliverables, reporting requirements and timings of payments.

5.3 Unspent funds

If any funds remain unspent at the completion of the grant round, the grant recipient must return the surplus to the Department.

For unspent funds arising from an approved funding variation tied to specific project deliverables, recipients may request approval from the Sustainable Councils Team to roll the funds into the next period. Approval will only be granted where there is a clear and demonstrated pathway to deliver the outstanding project outcomes.

5.4 Reporting and acquittal requirements

The applicant and the Net Zero Manager funded through the JONZA grant round 3 are required to comply with the following reporting and communication requirements. Reporting and acquittal arrangements may vary in line with evolving program requirements. Variations to reporting and acquittal will be agreed with participants and approved by the Sustainable Councils team.

#	Item	Purpose	Format
1	Regular informal meetings with the Sustainable Councils project team – ‘Tuesday Tune In’	To ensure projects are on track and the Net Zero Manager is supported. These meetings foster collaboration between JOs and Sustainable Councils team and is an opportunity to share important information from other state government teams and programs. There will be regular guest speakers to present or seek feedback from the cohort. Other JO representatives, such as Executive Officers, General Managers or other project staff are welcome to join these meetings. While these meetings are non-compulsory, regular non-attendance will be followed up.	60-minute weekly meeting hosted online and recorded.
2	Collaboration meetings	Meetings attended by JO staff, Sustainable Councils, and other key state department speakers as needed. Aim is to foster collaboration and share learnings between JOs and other key parties.	Fortnightly, or as determined by the Sustainable Councils team.

#	Item	Purpose	Format
3	Face-to-face events	The Sustainable Councils Team hosts two face-to-face events per year to support the JONZA Net Zero Managers.	Typically two-day events, in person in either Sydney or a regional location to be agreed on. First day conference style, the second a site visit.
4	Project Management Plan	A plan that outlines the projects to be delivered under the grant round, the intended outcomes and outputs, key risks and key stakeholders. This plan acts as a roadmap for the Net Zero Managers and will be reported against in the mid-term and end-of-term reports.	A template plan will be provided by the Sustainable Councils Team.
5	Mid-term report	A progress report at the halfway mark that outlines what has been achieved, what barriers to implementation (if any) exist and next steps.	A progress reporting template will be provided by the Sustainable Councils team through the on-line GMS. This template will be provided by February 2026 and progress reports will be submitted in the GMS.
6	End-of-term report	A final report at the end of the 12-month engagement that outlines what was achieved, barriers to implementation (if any) and recommended next steps for the JO. Once approved by the Sustainable Councils team, this signed document will serve as the acquittal for the grant funding agreement.	A final reporting template report will be provided by the Sustainable Councils team through the on-line GMS. It will include a request for a certified financial statement. This template will be provided by November 2026. And final reports will be submitted in the GMS.

When communicating the project internally and externally, please acknowledge the support received from NSW Government, as per guidance provided by Sustainable Councils.

5.5 Employment terms of Net Zero Manager

Recruitment

It is the responsibility of the Joint Organisation to recruit for the Net Zero Manager positions. The Joint Organisation must also manage the ongoing employment of the Net Zero Manager, including workload management, leave entitlements and performance reviews.

Where possible, Net Zero Managers should be located in the region of the Joint Organisation. If an applicant is unable to recruit a suitable local candidate for the role, then it is recommended that the applicant seek employees who can work remotely. For Net Zero Managers requiring additional travel expenses due to council remoteness, additional allowance may be allocated at the discretion of the Sustainable Councils team.

During recruitment of the Net Zero Managers, a member of the Sustainable Councils team must be invited to form part of the recruitment assessment panel. The Sustainable Councils team can also assist with advertising and promoting available roles if required.

When advertising the role, it is recommended to list the opportunity on internal council recruitment boards, the Ethical Jobs Board, and the DCCEEW jobs board (which the Sustainable Councils team can assist with).

Job-share arrangements

The Net Zero Manager role may be shared on a part-time basis where it suits the employee, the Joint Organisation and grant program. There must, however, always be one main Net Zero Manager who will be responsible for deliverables and the key point of contact for Sustainable Councils. The secondary part-time Net Zero Manager must also make themselves available for meetings, participate with the JONZA network, and demonstrate outcomes in line with the grant guidelines. A clear break down of salaries and deliverables must be provided to the Sustainable Councils team in the acquittal reporting.

Working interstate

Net Zero Managers working from interstate in an ongoing arrangement is not allowed under this grant. If there are extenuating circumstances and a Net Zero Manager must work from interstate for an ongoing or short period, arrangements must be communicated to the Sustainable Councils team and agreed upon. The Net Zero Manager is required to attend the face-to-face events.

Working overseas

Net Zero Managers working from overseas in an ongoing arrangement is not allowed under this grant. If there are extenuating circumstances and a Net Zero Manager must work from overseas for a short period, arrangements must be communicated to Sustainable Councils and agreed upon, and program deliverables reported back to Sustainable Councils for that period. Presence at the regular online meetings is also required during these periods.

5.6 Evaluation

The Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration grant may undergo an evaluation to measure performance against the stated purpose and objectives of the grant program. Applicants and grantees may be asked to provide input for audit or evaluation purposes of the program or team. This may be in addition to the reporting outlined above.

6

Additional information and
resources

6 Additional information and resources

6.1 Complaint handling

Complaints can be sent to the Sustainable Councils mailbox at SCC@environment.nsw.gov.au. They will be addressed directly or escalated, as needed.

6.2 Access to information

The Government Information Public Access (GIPA) Act provides for the proactive release of government information by agencies and gives members of the public an enforceable right to access government information held by an agency (which includes Ministerial offices). Access to government information is only to be restricted if there is an overriding public interest against disclosure.

The NSW Legislative Council has the power to order the production of State papers by the Executive Government. Standing Order 52 provides that the House may order documents to be tabled by the Government in the House. The Cabinet Office coordinates the preparation of the papers – that is, the return to order. The return to order may contain privileged and public documents. Privileged documents are available only to members of the Legislative Council.

Note that documents submitted as part of a grant application may be subject to an application under the GIPA Act or an order for papers under Standing Order 52.

Provide any relevant contact details or other sources of information for individuals seeking information from the relevant agency about the GIPA Act and/or Standing Order 52.

6.3 Ethical conduct

Applications must be completed with accuracy and intention to deliver as written. The online Grants Management System requires a declaration by an authorised applicant office holder that the content submitted is true and accurate.

6.4 Conflict of interest management

All applicants must declare any conflict of interest in the preparation of this grant application.

If a conflict of interest exists, please contact the Sustainable Councils team directly at SCC@environment.nsw.gov.au to declare the interest. All conflicts of interest will be reviewed by the Sustainable Councils team and registered on file. Sustainable Councils will advise on how to proceed with the application given the conflict of interest.

6.5 Confidentiality

Applicants must adhere to guidance from the Sustainable Councils team on sharing grant results

publicly. The Department or Minister may wish to delay publication of grant results for a ministerial announcement.