March 2026

Tips for preparing your budget and examples of criteria responses

Preparing your budget

Clear budgets help the assessors understand what you will be spending money on.

Your project budget explains the total cost of your project, and how you intend to fund it. The budget includes details of all funding that will contribute to the project (income) and the cost of all the items required to complete the project (expenditure).

Here are some tips to get started:
1. Start with a project plan, so you can identify everything you need for your project. Identify all of the expenditure items that will make up your project. You can use an AI search to help you identify the common costs associated with the type of project you're applying for.
2. Use your project plan to decide which items you want NECF to fund, and which items will be funded from other sources. Allocate all of your expenses to a funding source.
3. Be sure to include all forms of funding including NECF funding, other grant or philanthropic funding, cash contributions, fundraising, in-kind contributions etc.
4. Prepare your budget in the budget tables in your SmartyGrants application.

You'll be expected to provide quotes for any items over $1,000 (excl GST). This gives the assessment panel confidence that you've correctly budgeted for the costs associated with the project and reduces the risk of running short of funds.

Elements of your budget

Expenditure

Expenditure describes all costs related to the delivery of the project. When calculating your expenses, make sure to budget for all goods or services you need to deliver your project. Include details in the budget line and provide a quote with your application. Examples of common types of expenses include:
- Construction related expenses
- Project administration & overheads
- Fees & permits
- Salaries & wages (construction, project management, administrative)
- Fitout expenses
- Advertising & Promotion
- Marketing
- Production costs
- Project administration (this should be no more than 10% of your total grant budget)
- Project evaluation (this should be no more than 10% of your total grant budget)

- In-kind expenses
- Other expenses

Income

Income describes all the funds and resources that will be required to support your proposed project. At a minimum, your income table must include the amount being requested from the North East Community Fund.

Depending on your project, you might list other sources of income (co-contributions) including funds from:
- Sponsorship
- Fundraising
- Organisational cash contributions
- Other grants such as government, council or philanthropic

If you are applying for a Partnership, your budget must include a co-contribution. Requests to North East Community Fund for a partnership could be up to $100,000 but must not be more than 50 per cent of the total project cost.

When you are listing income, please note if that money is either confirmed (ie. you already have it) or if it is still to be confirmed (you are still in the process of securing or raising it). If you have unconfirmed funding, you may be required to demonstrate how the project can be rescoped if the funding is not confirmed.

In-kind contributions

An in-kind contribution describes the value of goods, services or support that is being donated to the project free of charge. Some common examples of in-kind support include:

- Free venue or equipment hire
- Donated materials or goods (e.g kitchen equipment)
- Unpaid staff or volunteer time (e.g. painting work, installing furniture or coordinating event) donated service (e.g free advertising or marketing support or professional advice from an architect)

According to Volunteering Australia, volunteer general labour should be calculated at $30 per hour and $45 per hour for a specialist labour such as engineer or architect.

In-kind contributions need to be shown as both an income and expense item for your budget to balance.

Balancing your budget

Your income and your expenditure should be the same amount ie. Income $ – Expenditure $ = $0. This should also include your in-kind contributions, so remember to list these in the expense section of your budget.

Sample Budget

Expenditure

Expenditure Category	Expenditure detailed description	Amount (Ex GST)	How will you pay for these items?	Please attach quotes for items over $1,000
Construction Related	Construction of kitchen	$75,000	North East Community Fund	Filename: kitchen quote
Construction Related	Construction of kitchen	$30,000	Fundraising	Filename: kitchen quote
Fitout expenses	Appliances	$15,000	Other grant funding	Filename: Harvey Norman quote
Fees and permits	Council application fee	$1,600	Organisation cash	Filename: Building permit quote
Salaries and wages	Project management	$3,400	In-kind contribution	In kind contribution calculation
Salaries and wages	Labour	$900	In-kind contribution	In kind contribution calculation
Total project cost		**$125,900**		

Budget Income

Income Type	Income Description	Confirmed Funding	Income Amount ($)
Government Grants	North East Community Fund	Unconfirmed	$75,000
Fundraising	Organisation fundraising event	Unconfirmed	$30,000
Other grant funding	Philanthropic Grant	Confirmed	$15,000
Organisation cash contribution	Happy Hubbers	Confirmed	$1,600
Total income			**$121,600**

In-kind support

What "in-kind" support is being provided towards the project?	Who is providing the in-kind support	$ value of in-kind support	Confirmed?	Please attach evidence of in-kind contributions
Project Management	Happy Hubbers	$3,400	Confirmed	In-kind contribution calculation
Promotion and marketing	Happy Hubbers	$900	Confirmed	In-kind contribution calculation
Total in-kind contribution		**$4,300**		

Budget Totals

Total Income Amount	Total In-Kind Income Amount	Total Expenditure Amount	Income - Expenditure
$121,600	$4,300	$125,900	$0.00

Note: Income and Expenditure must balance

Tips for Writing Strong Responses

Clear and detailed responses help the assessors understand your project and benefits to the community. Try to answer each question directly and provide specific examples where possible.

Project Summary – briefly describe the project you'll be delivering (150 words)

Include:

- Project title

- What the project is (a short description)

- Who the project is for

- What need or problem it addresses

- How the project will respond to that need

- Key activities you will run to deliver the project

Criteria Response: Community connectedness and benefit (30% of overall score) (250 words)
Explain how your project will bring people together and benefit the community.

Consider including:

- How the project will help people connect with each other

- How it will bring different groups together

- How it will encourage people to participate in community activities

- How it supports the community priorities you selected

Criteria Response: Community Impact (50% of overall score) (250 words)
Tell us how construction of the North East Link (NEL) is affecting your organisation and community.

Include:

- How your **organisation has been impacted**

- Whether your **members or participants are affected**, and how

- How close you are to the **construction works**

- What **specific disruptions or challenges** you have experienced

- How your project will **help reduce or respond to these impacts**

- Whether the project will benefit **only your organisation or the wider community**

Criteria response: Organisations capacity (20% of overall score) (250 words)
Explain how you will successfully deliver the project.

Include:

- How you will **manage the project and stay within budget**

- Whether you have a **project manager or coordinator**

- The role of **volunteers, staff or committee members**

- Any **in-kind support or partnerships**

Examples of **similar projects or activities you have successfully delivered**

If you have any queries, please contact the North East Community Fund team via email communityfund@northeastlink.vic.gov.au or phone 1800 105 105.