ABORIGINAL RANGER PROGRAM

ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ROUND 4 EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

This document will guide the assessment process and methodology for Round 4 Expressions of Interest (EOI) under the Aboriginal Ranger Program.

1. Overview of the program

The Aboriginal Ranger Program (ARP) was launched in 2017 with $20 million over five years. In 2021 the Government committed to build on the success of the ARP with an additional $50 million of funding over four years. Under this expansion, support for Aboriginal ranger operations will now be focussed under three funding streams – the ARP Development Fund, the ARP Expansion Fund, and the ARP Innovation Fund.

The objectives of the ARP are:

- To work with Aboriginal communities to develop and implement a successful and sustainable Aboriginal Ranger employment program to provide new jobs, protect the environment and provide social and economic benefits to Aboriginal people across the State.
- To provide training for Aboriginal people to develop their skills in conservation and land management, and other relevant industries to better meet the demand for ranger work.
- To leverage funds from other State and Commonwealth agencies, industry and philanthropic groups.

Under Round 4, up to $22 million is available to fund positions within established ranger programs for up to four years under the Expansion Fund. The new ARP Expansion Fund has been created to provide more targeted support to ranger programs that are already established and successfully operating, through providing longer term funding security for key positions in the ranger team. The key objectives of the Fund are:

- help established Aboriginal ranger programs to consolidate their programs and plan for the future, by establishing and/or supporting key ranger positions;
- support continuous learning (both western and traditional) for Aboriginal rangers including leadership development, particularly for women; and
- support Aboriginal organisations to strengthen partnerships and organisational capacity to secure other income streams and explore economic opportunities for their ranger programs.

Through primarily funding wages and training, and covering some basic operational costs and administration, it allows a focus on the development and retainment of rangers,

upskilling the workforce, leadership pathways and knowledge exchange. The actual works and projects the rangers will undertake will be negotiated between DBCA and the successful applicant year by year.

Expressions of Interest to the Aboriginal Ranger Program for the Expansion Fund will be open from 25 February 2022 until 8 April 2022. Applications can only be made online via DBCA's *SmartyGrants* portal.

Aboriginal Ranger Program *Expression of Interest Guidelines Round 4* (the Guidelines) will be made available for download during this time at www.dbca.wa.gov.au/aboriginalrangerprogram.

2. Internal administrative procedures

Meetings with applicants

All meetings with applicants that seek to discuss or clarify matters regarding the EOI process, assessment or methodology are to have in attendance the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator or Executive Director of Parks and Visitor Services and at least one other person. The meetings are to be based on the principle that they are for discussion purposes only and any request for information or clarification from applicants is to be addressed through written form with only written responses being binding.

All agreed items discussed and actions arising from meetings will be recorded including:

- meeting details;
- attendance;
- decisions and recommendations made;
- actions agreed; and
- responsibility and time frame.

Any meetings with applicants that the seeks to gather regional operational or logistical information for developing an application must have at least two staff in attendance. Staff involved in developing proposals with applicants will not be involved in assessing the application.

A file note is to be maintained of all meetings held.

Records maintenance

Dealing With applicants - Correspondence (General)

- Copies of all incoming and outgoing material will be held on secure online folders and/or in the nominated corporate file.

Incoming material

- Original hardcopies received will be stamped with date and time of receipt and record of file number.
- Original of hardcopy material will be placed on file.
- Copies of electronic material received will be printed and placed on file, with date and time of receipt clearly indicated.

Outgoing material

- Copy will be retained on file.
- The copy on file will indicate the method of dispatch (i.e. email, courier, etc.)
- All outgoing material will contain the file reference number.

3. Applicant enquiries protocol

Dealing with applicants – enquiries

All enquiries from applicants will be required to be submitted in writing. All written enquiries will comply with the procedure regarding 'Correspondence (General)'.

The Enquiries Protocol requires that all enquiries by applicants be submitted in writing to the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator. The Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator will accept verbal enquiries but may require an enquiry to be made in writing at his/her discretion.

The original of the applicant's enquiry will be placed in the relevant file by the Executive Officers after updating the Enquiries Register. The Executive Officers will, thereafter, prepare an initial draft response and will arrange for it to be reviewed by the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator.

All responses to the registered applicants will be in writing, signed by the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator or Executive Officers.

The Executive Officers will update the Enquirer Register with the response action.

The Executive Officers will produce a written report as appropriate to the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator, detailing the enquiries received and action taken. Where the enquiry is deemed by the Executive Officers to be confidential in nature, this enquiry shall be immediately referred to the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator for action.

Dealing with applicants – general advice

In accordance with the Enquiry Protocol above, each enquiry received from applicants will be reviewed by the Executive Officers to determine whether the enquiry is of a confidential or general nature. Where there is any ambiguity, this determination is to be made in consultation with the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator and Probity Auditor.

Where the enquiry is agreed to be of a general nature, a 'General Advice to all Registered Applicants' will be released to all applicants as soon as possible.

Where the enquiry is determined as 'General', the applicant raising the enquiry will be advised accordingly and given the opportunity to either confirm or refute the determination made by the Executive Officers.

All 'General Advice to Registered Applicants' will be issued in numeric sequence and signed by the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator. All advice will go to the Probity Auditor prior to issue to registered applicants. A Register, summarising the details of material issued, will be maintained.

4. Office security

General

Security of all information that becomes available and pertaining to this application process is the responsibility of all members of the Assessment Panel.

All persons must take reasonable precautions to prevent the unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.

It is the responsibility of the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator to ensure that reasonable precautions are taken to prevent the unauthorised disclosure of information by Government agencies and regional managers of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) to which applications are referred.

In referring applications to Government agency staff and DBCA regional managers, confidential information will be redacted.

All office files will be established in accordance with DBCA's overall policies and stored in secured cabinets. All files must be returned to the central cabinets each night where they will be locked when the office is unattended.

Physical security

It is the personal responsibility of all persons privileged to confidential documents to ensure that they are securely stored and unobtainable to others not authorised by the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator.

Any documents, files or copies of submissions that are given to Panel members should be identified by number and signed out by the Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator or Executive Officers.

Computer security

The computer environments containing confidential procurement information at DBCA shall be secured and accessed only by authorised individuals with their own passwords. The system administrator shall ensure individuals only have access to areas of information that are appropriate to the roles assigned to them.

5. Confidentiality

All applications are considered confidential and are not to be disclosed prior to the completion of the assessment process.

Each person having access to confidential assessment information shall sign a confidentiality agreement before being granted access to the information.

All members of the Assessment Panel, and any other persons having authorised access to confidential information, are to sign a declaration document.

6. Conflicts of Interest

All panel members are to complete a Conflict of Interest declaration (to be provided by the Executive Officer) at the beginning of the process and provide it to the nominated Executive Officer. Panel members are responsible for identifying any additional conflicts that arise for the duration of the process and reporting them to the Executive Officer. Strategies for the appropriate management of conflicts will be determined by the Assessment Panel at the beginning of the process. Strategies to manage individual conflicts will be documented and put on file.

Register

A conflict of interest register will be established, maintained and reviewed during the EOI process, including the appropriate strategies to manage each conflict.

7. Probity

In the interests of all parties involved, a probity auditor has been appointed to determine whether the process is conducted according to the Guidelines and to provide a level of independent assurance that the process has been undertaken with due regard to legislative obligations, codes of ethics and conduct and the Guidelines.

The probity auditor addresses accepted principles of probity relating to:

- confidentiality and conflict of interest;
- impartiality
- transparency of the process;
- accountability; and
- value for money.

The probity auditor provides advice to the Assessment Panel and Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator in relation to these issues and applicants can also discuss any probity concerns they have directly with the Probity Auditor.

8. Establishment and role of Assessment Panel

An Assessment Panel comprising representatives from DBCA has been established. The members of the panel represent a broad range of skills and experience related to Aboriginal rangers and are as follows:

- Executive Director, Parks and Visitor Services Division (Panel Chair - Voting)
- Coordinator, Aboriginal Ranger Program (Voting)
- Coordinator, Aboriginal Engagement and Heritage Unit (Voting)
- Senior Projects Officer, Native Title Unit (Voting)
- Other (x 2), DBCA or external, technical/regional/cultural/ policy advisors (Voting)
- Probity Auditor (Independent - Non-voting)
- Executive Officers (Non-voting)

9. Procedure for assessment

The procedure for assessment is as follows:

Closing date for EOIs
↓

Eligibility of applicants checked
↓

Shortlisting of applications
↓

Disbursement of applications to the Assessment Panel, Government agencies and DBCA Regional Managers
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Assessment Panel receives advice from Government agencies and DBCA Regional Managers
↓

Panel convenes to assess and discuss applications
↓

Panel to seek clarification from applicants (if required)
↓

Recommendation to the Minister for Environment
↓

Subject to Minister for Environment's approval, successful and unsuccessful applicants notified
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Successful applicants enter into a legally binding agreement with DBCA

All applications to the Aboriginal Ranger Program lodged online will be sent an automatic email confirming receipt of their application. No physical copies of applications will be accepted.

Shortlisting

Shortlisting of applicants will be based on an evaluation against the following Assessment Criteria identified in the Guidelines:

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA		WEIGHTING
1	**Delivers strong environmental and/or cultural outcomes and priorities** a. There are clear strategic management plans or guiding documents in place that identifies the outcomes and priorities for managing and protecting the environment and cultural values on country, that will form the basis of the ranger teams' annual work program. For example, Healthy Country Plans, Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) plans, pest management or fire management plans, WA Government management plans, or any agreed fee-for-service activities. b. The areas of activity have significant environment and/or cultural values and/or an identified conservation or land/ sea management need.	25%
2	**Demonstrates effective partnerships and community support** a. Evidence of how previous grants, external or leverage funding, additional income (such as fee-for-service contracts) and partnerships have contributed to growing and strengthening the ranger program. b. Evidence of ongoing financial or in-kind contributions or arrangements (such as infrastructure, management oversight, equipment, or technical expertise) from the applicant. c. Demonstrates how the program integrates community involvement or support.	15%
3	**Demonstrates sound governance and business management** a. The administrative body (the organisation that will hold the funds) is identified and demonstrates ability for managing contracts with sound financial, human resource, reporting and data management systems in place. If a third party, legal arrangements are in place and demonstrated. b. Evidence of effective project oversight and organisational governance for decision making and management of the team c. Evidence that systems in place for engaging Traditional	30%

		ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	WEIGHTING
		Owners, or those that speak for country, in making decisions about the ranger program or caring for country (cultural governance). d. Evidence that infrastructure essential to support ranger team operations on country is available, or access to these.	
4		**Demonstrates sound capacity to deliver** a. Evidence of the ranger program delivering on-ground outcomes or projects to a high standard. b. Plans for retaining and developing rangers is established, such as mentoring of new rangers and exchange of knowledge and experience. c. Evidence that day-to-day systems and support for the management for rangers (e.g. logistics, performance management, equipment, resources) are in place and working effectively. d. Evidence of sound risk planning and management. e. Systems are in place for feedback and continual improvement of the ranger program, or evidence is provided of how the program has adapted and grown to achieve positive outcomes. f. Demonstrated ability to monitor and report requirements and satisfactorily acquit expenditure.	30%
		TOTAL	100%

In shortlisting against the Assessment Criteria, applications will be categorised according to previous recipients of ARP funding or not, as well as by each Aboriginal representative body region, and will be assessed separately. Applications will be scored against each criterion using the scoring legend zero to nine identified in Section 9 Assessment Methodology. An average score for each criterion will be determined by combining the individual scores. A total score will be determined by aggregating the average scores determined for each criterion.

The top 50 percent of each category in each Aboriginal representative body region will progress to detailed assessment by the Assessment Panel (see Assessment below).

Comments may be provided which can be used in providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants as well as to inform evaluation by the Assessment Panel.

Shortlisting will be undertaken by two non-voting Executive Officers. The Executive Officers will identify the relevant State Government agencies to which the shortlisted applications will be referred and any confidential information not to be disclosed.

Referral of applications

The Assessment Panel will seek advice from within DBCA and from relevant Government agencies on the shortlisted applications. Relevant Government agencies are those that may have a statutory role in approving elements of the application, an interest in the activities or outcomes proposed in the application, or whose advice may be important in assessing the application.

Shortlisted applications will be referred to the Assessment Panel, relevant Government agencies and DBCA regional managers immediately once shortlisted. The Aboriginal Ranger Program Coordinator is responsible for referring applications.

Advice received from DBCA regional managers and relevant Government agencies will be referred to the Assessment Panel for consideration.

Assessment

Shortlisted applications will be assessed against the following Assessment Criteria identified in the Guidelines:

	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	WEIGHTING
1	**Delivers strong environmental and/or cultural outcomes and priorities** a. There are clear strategic management plans or guiding documents in place that identifies the outcomes and priorities for managing and protecting the environment and cultural values on country, that will form the basis of the ranger teams' annual work program. For example, Healthy Country Plans, Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) plans, pest management or fire management plans, WA Government management plans, or any agreed fee-for-service activities. b. The areas of activity have significant environment and/or cultural values and/or an identified conservation or land/ sea management need.	25%
2	**Demonstrates effective partnerships and community support** a. Evidence of how previous grants, external or leverage funding, additional income (such as fee-for-service contracts) and partnerships have contributed to growing and strengthening the ranger program. b. Evidence of ongoing financial or in-kind contributions or arrangements (such as infrastructure, management oversight, equipment, or technical expertise) from the applicant. c. Demonstrates how the program integrates community involvement or support.	15%
3	**Demonstrates sound governance and business management** a. The administrative body (the organisation that will hold the funds) is identified and demonstrates ability for managing contracts with sound financial, human resource, reporting and data management systems in place. If a third party, legal arrangements are in place and demonstrated. b. Evidence of effective project oversight and organisational governance for decision making and management of the team c. Evidence that systems in place for engaging Traditional Owners, or those that speak for country, in making decisions about the ranger program or caring for country (cultural governance).	30%

	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	WEIGHTING
	d. Evidence that infrastructure essential to support ranger team operations on country is available, or access to these.	
4	**Demonstrates sound capacity to deliver** a. Evidence of the ranger program delivering on-ground outcomes or projects to a high standard. b. Plans for retaining and developing rangers is established, such as mentoring of new rangers and exchange of knowledge and experience. c. Evidence that day-to-day systems and support for the management for rangers (e.g. logistics, performance management, equipment, resources) are in place and working effectively. d. Evidence of sound risk planning and management. e. Systems are in place for feedback and continual improvement of the ranger program, or evidence is provided of how the program has adapted and grown to achieve positive outcomes. f. Demonstrated ability to monitor and report requirements and satisfactorily acquit expenditure.	30%
	TOTAL	100%

Applicants should address each criterion as part of completing the Expression of Interest application form. Failure to satisfactorily address all the criteria or demonstrate how they will be addressed prior to the allocation of funding may result in the application being considered non-compliant.

In this round, the ARP will also take into consideration during the assessment and approval process, the following:

- The Aboriginal organisations access to other resources under other State and Commonwealth government initiatives (such as Plan for Our Parks) to otherwise retain staff and sustain operations.
- Positive opportunities for sustaining or growing women rangers.
- Programs that integrate plans for creating career pathways to employment in land and sea management as rangers or leadership will be highly regarded.

The Assessment Panel will consider the total scores of applications for each category. Based on the total scores, at least one project will be recommended for each Aboriginal representative body region.

Applicants will also be required to meet the eligibility requirements of the Program, including demonstrated support of the Traditional Owners for the program location; comply with the conditions in the Guidelines; and have appropriate insurances[1] in order to be recommended as suitable for funding.

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[1] DBCA may request additional insurances if they are not provided but are relevant to the project.

The assessment will be made in accordance with the Assessment Methodology identified below (see Section 9).

The advice received from State Government agencies and DBCA regional managers and any relevant additional information available to DBCA will be used in the assessment.

<u>Assessment Panel may seek clarification from applicants</u>

The Assessment Panel may request that an applicant amend their project, including as a result of further consultation or to consolidate the project with other similar or complementary projects. The Assessment Panel may also contact applicants to seek clarification about their application and/or request evidence in support of any declaration made in the application.

All communication seeking clarification from applicants will be discussed with the Chair of the Assessment Panel.

<u>Recommendation to Minister for Environment</u>

The Assessment Panel will make a recommendation to the Minister for Environment who will make the final decision as to which applicants are successful.

<u>Notification of applicants</u>

All applicants will be informed in writing of the status of their applications at the conclusion of the process and following approval by the Minister for Environment.

Unsuccessful applicants will be provided the opportunity to receive feedback on their applications. Feedback cannot include a direct comparison to any other application because all applications are treated in strict confidence except where the law requires otherwise.

A successful applicant may not be offered the level of funding requested and may be asked that some elements of the project be modified

10. Assessment methodology

DBCA is using a competitive process to allocate funding under the Aboriginal Ranger Program that allows for applicants to use their own initiative to develop applications that will meet the outcomes of the Program and the aspirations of Aboriginal organisations and communities.

In assessing applications, all information requested in the Round 4 EOI, and any relevant additional information available to DBCA, provided by other Government agencies, or provided by applicants in response to the EOI, will be taken into account. A scoring system will be used to assess the applications, including the shortlisting process. The scoring legend zero to nine is outlined as follows:

0   Does not address Assessment Criteria.

1   Limited understanding or capability, no confidence that Assessment Criteria will be met.

3	Less than satisfactory understanding or capability, limited confidence that Assessment Criteria will be met.
5	Satisfactory understanding or capability, reasonably confident that Assessment Criteria will be met.
7	Good understanding or capability, confident that Assessment Criteria will be met.
9	Excellent understanding or capability, complete confidence that Assessment Criteria will be met.

"In between" scores such as 2, 4, 6 and 8 may be used to reflect variation to these scores.

In assessing shortlisted applications, all members of the Assessment Panel will provide an individual score against each of the assessment criterion. An average score for each criterion will be determined by combining scores of each member of the Assessment Panel. The aggregate of these average scores will form a total score for each applicant, which will be used in the final assessment of applications to form the recommendation to the Minister.

Determining the successful applicants

Following the assessment and scoring by the Assessment Panel, applications are ranked according to their total score for each category. The panel will then consider which applicants to recommend to the Minister as preferred applicants by applying a principle of fairness that takes into account the geographic spread of successful projects across the State and female rangers. The amount of funding requested and the amount available will also be considered in this context. Based on the total scores, at least one project will be recommended for each Aboriginal representative body region.

The assessment panel will only make recommendations to the Minister for Environment. The assessment panel will not make the final decision as to which applicants are successful. The Minister for Environment will consider the recommendations of the assessment panel and will determine which applicants will be successful. The Governance for the process is as set out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Governance for the assessment process.

Aboriginal Ranger Program - Assessment Process and
Methodology