



RFS

FY26 Bush Fire Risk Mitigation and Resilience Support Program

Application Guide



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1. Introduction

This document is a guide to applications for funding programs managed by the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) to support bush fire mitigation.

The RFS administers and manages funds to assist land managers to undertake mitigation works and resilience activities to protect the NSW community from bush fires. Funds are made available through the RFS budget or State and Commonwealth Government initiatives.

The amount available in any year is determined by the Minister in consultation with the RFS Commissioner.

Funding provided through programs administered by the RFS is intended to resource extra mitigation activities that are additional to those supported by internal organisation budget.

All land managers, public and private, are obliged under Section 63 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* to undertake certain actions to prevent the occurrence and minimize the spread of bushfires. Every public land manager is expected to commit its own resources to meeting these obligations.

Note: under s63 landowners/managers have a duty to prevent the occurrence and spread of bush fires on and from their land. The financial obligation to fund the necessary works falls upon these landowners/managers. Any funding granted for these works from the RFS is provided to assist landowners/managers to meet their obligations. Lack of funding from the RFS does not in any way absolve a landowner/manager from the duty to carry out the work.

Which program should I seek funds from?

The application process has been harmonised across the programs, so that it is unnecessary for applicants to nominate a Program for their application.

1.1. Submission period

There is one key round for submission of funding applications, which typically closes mid-June. Other opportunities for funding may become available during the financial year, however this is dependent on the budget. In the event additional opportunities become available announcements will be made.

Funding applications for urgent hazard reduction burning can be submitted by RFS and public land managers / owners at any time. However, for these types of applications, please contact the Bush Fire Support Program team, to request approval to submit a priority application.

1.2. Acronyms

APZ	Asset Protection Zone
AWP	Annual Works Plan
BFCC	Bush Fire Coordinating Committee
BFMC	Bush Fire Management Committee
BFRMP	Bush Fire Risk Management Plan
BPED	Bushfire Protection for Existing Dwellings
FAFT Plan	Fire Access and Fire Trail Plan

FY	Financial Year
HR	Hazard Reduction
IGA	Independent Guardian Application
NSW	New South Wales
RFS	Rural Fire Service

2. Who can apply for funding?

Funding applications may be submitted by the following:

- Local Government Councils
- State Government Agencies / Corporations
- Forestry Corporation of NSW
- NSW Rural Fire Service
- Fire and Rescue NSW

Applications must be prepared by an authorised staff member of a Local Government Council or State Government Agency / Corporation.

Where an activity crosses multiple tenures, one agency must ‘sponsor’ the entire work. If the application is successful, the sponsoring agency will be the funding recipient and will be required to enter into a funding agreement with the RFS.

The sponsoring agency must provide all administration and management required for the works to be carried out. This may include contractor procurement, obtaining permissions to enter, environmental and other necessary approvals. The sponsoring agency must be capable of and willing to provide engineering oversight of the works, where relevant.

3. What will be considered for Funding

Applications for funding will be accepted for the following:

- Hazard reduction activities
- Fire trail works
- Community resilience projects

3.1. Hazard Reduction Activities

Reduction of bush fire fuel by burning or mechanical activities are eligible for funding. This includes:

- Burning
- Hand clearing
- Mowing / slashing / trittering
- Tree pruning / removal
- Reach / flail / side arm mower
- Earth moving machinery

All hazard reduction activities must be correctly registered in Guardian and scheduled for the 2025-26 financial year. Burning work that extends onto private land is permitted, however hazard reduction mechanical activities are excluded.

RFS Districts (RFDs) may only seek hazard reduction funding assistance to cover the costs of **burning works** conducted by RFS Brigades. District Managers need to determine which burns are the most important in terms of risk, and most likely to be conducted given brigade interest and commitment in the area. Where only a smaller burn of the entire mapped area is to be undertaken, funding should only be sought for the works you intend to undertake.

3.2. Fire Trail Works

Eligible fire trails for funding are Strategic Fire Trails that are:

- Identified in the Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) Plan, and
- Listed in the FAFT Plan Treatment Register for the financial year.

3.3. Community Resilience Projects

This type of application is typically reserved for projects other than hazard reduction activities or fire trail works. In order to qualify for funding, these projects must be directly for the purpose of bush fire mitigation or resilience (e.g. upgrade of fire spotting tower, community engagement initiatives). They should be designed to achieve safer, sustainable communities, better able to withstand the effects of bush fires and reduce the risk, damage and losses caused by them.

This funding is generally intended for physical works rather than studies and the like.

4. What will NOT be considered for funding?

Applications associated with the following circumstances will generally not be eligible for funding:

- a. Works required to comply with a condition of development consent imposed after 1 August 2002 based on advice from the RFS;
- b. Works required to comply with a Notice or Order issued by the RFS;
- c. Work that is unnecessary for fire suppression / mitigation (e.g. undertaken for commercial, tourism, recreational, amenity or stock movement purposes) or goes beyond that reasonably required to protect assets;
- d. Works that involve routine maintenance of roads, sports fields, managed recreation areas or similar;
- e. Fire trail work significantly beyond the requirements of the *NSW RFS Fire Trail Standards*;
- f. Inspection or assessment reports, such as environmental assessment (some exceptions apply for Strategic Fire Trails identified through a FAFT Plan);
- g. Oversight, project management or other administrative costs (other than specialist input, e.g. engineering certification of construction works);
- h. Payment of agency personnel costs that are part of normal business (e.g. normal salary cost for employees – see *Note below);
- i. Payment of agency personnel costs including overtime, penalty rates, allowances and the like;
- j. Fire fighting and other capital resources that are part of normal business (e.g. fire stations, fire tankers, water pumps etc.);

- k. Purchase of equipment, tools or machinery, even if it will be used on the activity (e.g. weed spraying vehicles, chainsaws, leaf blowers etc.);
- l. Rehabilitation or restoration works;
- m. Removal and / or disposal of rubbish or hazardous material (e.g. asbestos, unexploded ordinance etc.). Some exemptions may apply.
- n. Reimbursement for works undertaken and / or costs incurred prior to funding approval;
- o. Works on Commonwealth Land;
- p. Hazard Reduction that is predominately being chemically treated.
- q. Manual and mechanical hazard reduction works on private tenure;
- r. Generally, maintenance of Strategic Fire Trails that have been certified as compliant with the *NSW RFS Fire Trails Standards*. These works are generally funded through internal Agency Programs (some exceptions may apply for certified fire trails located on private tenure)

*Note – As outlined above, program funds will not be allocated to pay normal staff costs for agencies. However, there may be instances where it would be more cost effective to utilize the agency's own staff, rather than engaging contractors to carry out certain work. For example, it may be cheaper to use the agency's staff to operate the agency's own plant, than to engage a contractor and plant to undertake the same work. If an agency wishes to use its own resources, it will need to retain documentation demonstrating that this was the least expensive option. This documentation will need to be produced upon request from the RFS or for auditing purposes.

5. Making a funding application

All funding requests must follow the correct pathway based on the type of activity proposed.

The RFS uses a combination of online submission through Guardian and coordinated nomination processes (Fire Trail Works) to ensure that works align with strategic planning, risk priorities, and eligibility requirements.

Any person applying must have the appropriate authority and delegation from their agency to do so.

RFS users can assist Councils with the preparation of funding requests, but all funding requests must be submitted online through Guardian by a user from the relevant Council. Incorrect submissions may be excluded from any funding considerations.

There are separate methods for the three activity types:

1. Hazard Reduction Activities – Applications must be submitted online through Guardian via the Activity Management dashboard
2. Fire Trail Works – Coordinated through RFS via Area Command and Fire Trails Implementation Team. Fire Trail works must be nominated through the structured assessment process led by the Fire Trails Implementation Team. Land management agencies must coordinate with their local Area Command Fire Trail Officer, who will confirm eligibility, assess BFMC and Area Command priorities, and liaise with the Fire Trails Implementation Team. These projects are not submitted independently.
3. Community Resilience Projects – Applications must be submitted online through Guardian via the Independent Grant Application (IGA) within the Activity Management dashboard.

An agency must not submit an application unless it realistically expects to complete the works by the end of the financial year. All details of the application and representations made are the responsibility of the applicant organisation.

Your application will be assessed against a data set held by the RFS based on the information provided in the proposal.

Any application found to contain incorrect, misleading or untruthful information will not be considered for funding. If provision of false or misleading information is discovered, the matter may be referred for further investigation by the RFS and / or external bodies established to deal with such matters.

If you require any assistance preparing or applying, please contact either the local RFS District, Bush Fire Support Program or Fire Trails Implementation Team (see Part 10 of this guide for details).

6. Assessment criteria

The RFS Commissioner or delegate will determine the allocation of funds to submitted applications. Any applications to be funded from other State or Commonwealth funding sources may require Ministerial approval. Funds will be allocated to maximise the outcomes and benefits for the community.

In determining funding approvals, the RFS Commissioner or delegate has regard to:

- BFCC Policy 1/2011 – Allocation Principles for Funding of Bush Fire Mitigation Works;
- The aim and intent of other State or Commonwealth funding programs;
- Bush Fire Risk Management Plans and advice on local priorities as identified by BFMC's;
- BFMC Fire Access and Fire Trail Plan (FAFT).
- BFMC FAFT Plan Treatment Register
- Annual Works Plans (where available)
- The assessment criteria outlined in this guide

The allocation of funding will take into account the Bush Fire Risk Management Plans (BFRMP), FAFT Plan, FAFT Plan Treatment Register and Annual Works Plan (where available) for an area, as these documents effectively identify works that are most important for the protection of the community and its assets.

Where funding is to be provided to support hazard reduction burning by RFS Brigades, the additional benefits of giving volunteers opportunities to be involved with live fire in a planned and controlled environment, is also considered.

HR applications that are not linked to the BFRMP must have a Risk Assessment Sheet completed and attached to the Guardian Funding Request.

Applications for fire trail funding will go through a review process established by the Fire Trails Implementation Team and managed with the assistance of the Area Commands Fire Trail Officers. This will include reviewing the treatment registers, determining eligibility and priorities and seeking advice where necessary from BFMCs to determine local priorities for fire trail works.

In determining funding approvals, consideration will also be given to the past performance of applicants in complying with conditions of grant funding and completion of funded works.

Community Resilience Project applications will be evaluated on their merits. Applications must have sufficient detail to allow a proper assessment. Details provided must be clear, concise, detailed and well justified to allow consideration for funding.

6.1. Hazard Reduction (HR)

The following criteria applies to HR funding applications:

- The proposal **must** relate to the BFRMP
- The proposal **must** be listed in the BFMC AWP (where available)
- The application **must** be for a single cohesive activity
- All costs **must** be eligible for funding as per Part 3 and 4 of this guide (costs should exclude GST)
- The costs are considered reasonable for the proposed scope of works (applications >\$50,000 require a scope of works and photos)
- The works must be spatially identified and scheduled for the relevant financial year in Guardian
- The proposed works must be bona fide hazard reduction.

6.1.1. Bush Fire Risk Management Plans BFRMP

Linking hazard reduction applications to the BFRMP is important as it provides a risk rating which will assist in the prioritisation and allocation of funding. Preference will be given to applications that are directly related to assets and treatments identified in the BFRMP. Applications that do not link with the BFRMP will be given a lower priority and may not be funded.

– Post-2023 BFRMP

For areas and activities that have a certified Post 2023 BFRMP you will need to link your hazard reduction application to the treatments listed in the Post 2023 BFRMP.

In addition, these applications will also need to be listed in the BFMCs Annual Works Plan (AWP). Applications that do not directly link to the Post 2023 BFRMP and the AWP may not be funded.

Treatments from the FY25 AWP that are not completed at the end of August are automatically added to the new FY26 AWP. As such an activity scheduled for 2026 but still attached to an AWP from 2025 can be submitted as a new funding request for 2026.

Activities that will be using the Bulk APZ Maintenance feature within Guardian will need to manually update the APZ assets in Guardian OCA to reflect the Post 2023 BFRMP. This will need to be undertaken prior to the creation of the new APZ management record. Step by Step documents on how to complete this are available in the Documents & Help tab within Guardian.

For all other hazard reduction activities (Burns and Mechanical) you will need to check and ensure that the activity you are seeking funding for relates to the Post-2023 BFRMP and the mapping is correct.

– Pre-2023 BFRMP

For areas that are yet to have their Post-2023 BFRMP certified you will need to use the current approved BFRMP for your area to link to your hazard reduction application. The treatments and assets of these plans will be available for selection and linking to your hazard reduction application within Guardian.

– Risk Assessment Sheets

Please note it is acknowledged that there may be instances where activities may not link to an approved BFRMP in Guardian particularly for those areas with Pre-2023 BFRMPs. As such a risk assessment sheet must be completed and attached to the funding request. These applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Applications that do not link with the BFRMP will be given a lower priority and may not be funded.

6.1.2. Guardian HR Mapping

– Single Cohesive Activity

A single cohesive hazard reduction activity involves mapped activities that are located within a 5km diameter circle with individual treatment areas not separated by more than 1km. In addition, all methods within a hazard reduction application should protect assets with the same risk rating. Hazard reduction activities that are widely dispersed are not eligible for funding.

– Overlapping and inaccurate spatial data

Mapping contained in Guardian records must be a reasonably accurate representation of the proposed works. Overlapping or inaccurate spatial data may be referred back to the applicant for rectification, which will delay the assessment for the funding application and may not be approved.

6.1.3. “Bulk” Asset Protection Zone Maintenance

The ‘bulk’ APZ maintenance feature in Guardian allows, in some circumstances, for the recording and request for funding for maintenance of existing Asset Protection Zones (APZ) in a simplified “bulk” process. This maintenance for APZ are for those that are maintained in a systematic basis and have been for some time. This does not include Strategic or Transport Corridor Fire Breaks.

The criteria for HR applications also applies to this type of funding application. Applications for “bulk” APZ maintenance must clearly demonstrate that each APZ within the record provides protection to assets identified in the BFRMP.

The single cohesive activity test for HR will also be applied to the “bulk” APZ maintenance activity.

Any APZ activity within the bulk request that does not meet the criteria within this guide are ineligible for funding and will be excluded from any approvals issued.

APZ works should comply with the standards for APZs and the Bushfire Protection for Existing Dwellings (BPED) framework. Any works that extend beyond that maximum allowable distance permitted under BPED may be excluded from funding.

6.1.4. Linear and Transport Corridor Fire Breaks

Fire Breaks are linear fuel reduced features within a landscape that are designed to assist in the management of bush fires. The criteria for hazard reduction applications also applies to this type of activity.

Applications for Linear and Transport Corridor Fire Breaks must clearly demonstrate that the works provide protection to assets identified in the BFRMP. They should be placed in strategic locations in places like Focus Areas and particular assets at risk that will assist in mitigating the impact of traditional or known fire paths in the area. In addition, the proposed works must be outside of the maintenance of road sides / transport corridors and be of a sufficient width to reduce the risk of fire spread ie applications must ensure that any proposed works for funding are outside the relevant clear zones.

An application must involve only a single fire break and as a general rule, proposals should be limited to a length of not more than 50 kilometres. If you have multiple fire breaks in an area for which you wish to seek funding, a separate application must be submitted for each individual activity.

An Agency or Council must not submit an application for works if they have received funding from other funding programs to undertake works along the Transport Corridor.

Due to the complex nature of these works further information maybe required during the assessment phase, the applicant may submit additional information addressing the issues raised.

6.2. Fire Trails

Strategic Fire Trail projects may be nominated for funding consideration where they are identified in the Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) Plan and included in the FAFT Plan's Treatment Register for FY26.

All Strategic Fire Trail works must be coordinated through the RFS Fire Trails Implementation Team, with support from Area Command Fire Trail Officers. This structured process ensures funding priorities are aligned with bush fire risk mitigation planning and that all works meet the operational and compliance standards of the RFS.

Funding consideration will only be given to projects that meet the following criteria:

- The project involves a **single** Strategic Fire Trail listed in the BFMC FAFT Plan and Treatment Register.
- The works must bring the entire trail to compliance with the RFS Fire Trail Standards. In exceptional cases, partial works may be considered where there is a clearly demonstrated operational benefit.
- Eligible costs may include scoping and quoting, environmental approvals, and specialist engineering design works (e.g. bridges, drainage), provided they directly support the delivery of works to standard.
- The trail is accurately mapped and identified in the FAFT Plan.
- Nominated works demonstrate value for money and support fire management capability.
- Supporting documentation must include:
 - A detailed scope of works and quote,
 - Evidence of alignment with the *RFS Fire Trail Standards* and any environmental requirements,
 - Confirmation of other planning consideration approvals.
- For trails crossing private tenure, confirmation of Private Landholder Agreements must be provided in accordance with Section 62M of the Rural Fires Act 1997.

Direct applications from agencies for Fire Trail funding will not be accepted. All funding for Fire Trail works must be coordinated through the RFS Area Command Fire Trail Officer. This ensures that projects are assessed against BFMC priorities, operational relevance, and FAFT compliance before being nominated for funding.

Note – Proposals that do not strictly comply with the above requirements can still be considered for funding on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the RFS.

6.2.1. Critical Fire Trail Maintenance

Funding for critical maintenance on non-certified strategic fire trails may be considered however these are for minor works required to ensure it remains operational for fire management purposes.

These will only be considered on a case-by-case basis where it has been demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist, and approval will be dependent on availability of funds.

Maintenance of certified fire trails on private land may be considered for funding.

7. Feedback

RFS will provide all agencies with advice as to the outcome of their application as soon as practical.

The funding status of the submitted funding application will be available for viewing in Guardian. The Activity Management dashboard will show the status and other information relating to the application.

Informal monthly updates will be conducted in relation to how activities are tracking, so please ensure that Guardian records are up to date with the current status.

Half yearly updates will be requested on the progress of activities in relation to those that have not been completed and funding which has been spent to enable accurate forward planning of funding allocation.

For applications that have not been approved or require further information, the applicant may submit additional information addressing the issues raised in the feedback. After reviewing the additional information provided, and when the RFS is of the view that the relevant assessment criteria has been addressed, the decision may be overturned with an approval issued for the works.

8. Approval Process

Terms and conditions for the funding will be provided with the approval advice and will include requirements for reporting, payment claims, record keeping, auditing and variation requests.

This will be managed outside of Guardian.

9. Variation of Approved Works

Variations to the approved amount may be requested. At this stage, the variation process is managed outside of Guardian. Please contact Bush Fire Support Program Team for further details.

The terms and conditions issued with your approval will detail the requirements on how and what can be varied in your approval.

Any approvals issued that vary the amount of funding approved will not be displayed in Guardian. These details will be provided to the applicant outside of Guardian from the Bush Fire Support Program Team.

10. Contacts

For any enquiries regarding the *Bush Fire Risk Mitigation and Resilience Support Program*, please contact Bush Fire Support Program Team on bushfiregrantprogrammes@rfs.nsw.gov.au or (02) 8741 5493.

For any enquiries regarding the *FAFT Funding Applications*, please contact the RFS Fire Trails Implementation Team on firetrails.implementation@rfs.nsw.gov.au or the Area Command Fire Trail Officer for your Area:

Greater Sydney areacommandgreatersydney@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Hunter areacommandhunter@rfs.nsw.gov.au

North Eastern areacommandnortheastern@rfs.nsw.gov.au

North Western	areacommandnortheastern@rfs.nsw.gov.au
South Eastern	areacommandsoutheastern@rfs.nsw.gov.au
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For any enquiries regarding accessing Guardian or system issues, please contact the RFS on service.desk@rfs.nsw.gov.au