

REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA



Ride High Country Fund – Round 2

Guidelines for applicants



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1. Context

Tourism is one of five essential 'super-growth' sectors, driving jobs and growth in regional economies over the next decade. In the year ending March 2019, Victoria's High Country received over 3.6 million visitors, spending over \$1.3 billion. Visitor numbers are forecast to increase to 5.2 million visitors by 2025.

The region currently receives 103,000 cycle tourists per year, spending \$50 million in the region – more than any other regional destination in Australia. Cycle tourism visitor growth is forecast to continue, with the conservative scenario projecting 255,000 visitors participating in cycling in Victoria's High Country by 2025.

The region's entrepreneurial community will further help drive this growth by developing new and innovative visitor experiences.

The Victorian Government invites applicants to the Ride High Country Fund Round 2 (RHCFR2) Fund. Applicants will be from the following five categories:

- Accommodation
- Bike Hubs and services
- Food and beverage operators
- Tour operators
- Other enabling projects.

Objectives

The Victorian Government has recently invested \$12 million towards a 10-year plan to help build on the region's cycling strengths and make it the premier cycling tourism destination in Australia, funding specific initiatives including:

- Enhancements to the existing Murray to Mountains Rail Trail
- Extension of the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail by linking Beechworth and Yackandandah
- Trail enhancements such as better signage, community hubs, and digital interpretations
- A significant marketing campaign to both local and international audiences
- Promoting private sector investment in complementary products and experiences.

Who can apply?

The RHCFR2 is primarily a regional business development program. Individuals are not eligible to apply under this program. Applications will only be considered from private sector businesses. **(Trusts, please see note page 5)*

Core criteria

The RHCFR2 aims to assist growth and realise the potential of North East Victoria's High Country cycle, offering to strengthen the local economy through increased visitors. The RHCFR2 objectives are to:

- Enhance the Ride High Country consumer value proposition by offering unique, innovative and enhanced cycle visitor experiences.
- Provide social, environmental and economic benefit to the region, including job creation and increased visitation.
- Ensure cycle tourism is established and managed in an environmentally sustainable manner, minimising impacts on the environment.
- Have operators with the experience, qualifications and financial capability to develop, deliver and operate the proposed development or experience in a commercially viable manner.

Projects that can substantially increase cycle visitation to the region will be highly regarded.

2. Funding criteria

Only projects that can demonstrate an active link to cycle tourism by providing services that address a current gap in cycle visitor needs will be considered.

Program applicants must demonstrate how their project will provide social, environmental and economic benefit to the region, particularly, increased visitation and job creation.

Projects/activities that will be considered

- **Accommodation**:** Experiential accommodation, eco-pods, bike hotels, contemporary backpackers' accommodation, extensive integrated resort facilities and hotels.
- **Bike Hubs and services:** Expansion of existing businesses or the creation of new businesses to enhance the cycle tourism experience and create an active precinct where cyclists gather.
- **Food and beverage operators:** New or expanded food and beverage offerings, that are cyclist-friendly and located at strategic sites, to enhance the cycle visitor experience, e.g. along rail trails, at trailheads or at bike hubs.
- **Tour operators:** Bike hire and bike shuttle companies that enhance the cycle visitor experience by improving existing and/or providing new cycling-related services; tour operators focus on increasing interstate and international visitation through partnerships with local businesses.

***Accommodation projects that add increased bed numbers to the region will have preference over projects that are refurbishment of existing room stock.*

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Activities that won't be funded

- Development of new tracks and trails.
- Requests for retrospective funding where projects have commenced (i.e. equipment purchased, contracts entered into or construction commenced), or those projects which are completed before receiving funding approval.
- Projects requiring ongoing funding from the Victorian Government.
- Ongoing operating costs or salary subsidies.
- Private sector projects are undertaken as a result of a government contract.
- Projects where funding is typically provided by another state, Commonwealth or local government sources.
- Projects primarily created to meet regulatory requirements.
- Purchase of land.
- Successful applicants as part of Ride High Country Fund will be excluded from submitting applications to the Ride High Country Fund Round 2 (RHCFR2)

Project feasibility and delivery

Applications should clearly demonstrate:

- that all legal, land tenure, planning and environmental issues have been identified and resolved or satisfactory resolution strategies are in place to ensure that the proposed activities can operate lawfully
- access to suitable project management in both the developmental and operational phases of the project
- that project risks have been identified, and strategies are in place to manage them
- financial modelling/budgeting for proposed projects.

Maximising value to the state

Applications should demonstrate and provide evidence of how the project maximises value to the state, including leveraging funding from various sources, including Commonwealth and local government, community, private sector, and regional organisations. Applicants must demonstrate how the return on the state's investment will increase visitation and economic activity.

Financial viability of proponent

Applicants must provide copies of annual reports and audited financial statements covering the last three years with their application to enable Regional Development Victoria (RDV) to assess their financial viability and ability to manage and complete the project.

Social and environmental benefits

Applications should demonstrate how the proposed project:

- provides adequate social returns and benefits to the community
- is consistent with environmentally sustainable development and results in verifiable environmental benefits
- builds on identified regional strengths.

3. Application and assessment process

To ensure the suitability of projects, all applicants will need to go through the following four-step process.

Step 1: Prior to application

Prior to applying, applicants are advised to:

- read the application guidelines carefully
- discuss the application with the RDV Hume team

Applicants should note that projects may not proceed to the assessment process where the project:

- can be implemented through another government funding program, and if appropriate, prospective applicants may be referred to this funding program;
- does not demonstrate substantial economic benefits and alignment with criteria
- is not ready for implementation.

RDV will assist applicants to understand the guidelines, and what constitutes a strong business case before an application form is completed.

Step 2: Prepare an application

Applicants should use the application to clearly and succinctly describe the project by detailing: the challenge or opportunity it is looking to address; the objectives; the desired outcomes; the outputs to be delivered; and any resource requirements.

Documentation to support the project, such as a feasibility study, business plan, and preliminary designs, should be attached to the application.

Step 3: Assessment process

The application will proceed to the Ride High Country Assessment Committee (RHCAC) for assessment prior to consideration by the Minister for Regional Development.

The RHCAC will make a recommendation to the Minister after considering a range of matters, including the project's fit with the core criteria, alignment with government policy and the availability of funding. The RHCAC is chaired by RDV and includes representatives from Visit Victoria, Tourism North East, RRV and RDV.

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Projects may be recommended to receive full or partial funding of their application request as part of the assessment process.

Step 4: Approval process

The Minister for Regional Development will consider the advice received from the RHCAC, along with other appropriate departments and external organisations.

Applicants will be advised of the decision relating to their application in writing. Successful applicants will receive a letter of offer from the Minister for Regional Development. The letter of offer will outline the funding obligations associated with the offer of funding.

4. Conditions of funding

Funding agreements

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement with RDV detailing all funding obligations and conditions.

The funding agreement is a legally enforceable document that clearly defines the obligations of both parties. The funding agreement aims to protect the government's interests and ensure the efficient and effective use of public money while also ensuring appropriate recognition of Victorian Government support on project-related publications, media releases, and promotional material.

Funding agreements must be signed by the organisation's Chief Executive Officer (or equivalent person with authority to bind the organisation) before payment of a grant instalment and will:

- describe the purpose for which the funding must be used
- set out any requirements or conditions that must be met prior to the payment of a grant instalment
- outline agreed to milestones and project outcomes that must be achieved.

Once the funding agreement has been executed, the applicant will be required to actively manage and deliver the project and provide progress reports to RDV. During the project, RDV may conduct site visits as necessary.

Successful applicants must commence the project within one year from the date of the offer of the funding. If a project does not commence within this timeframe, the grant will be reviewed by RDV.

Funding ratio and limits

Applicants are expected to make a financial contribution and/or third party-source funding. The RHCFR2 allows for a minimum of 2:1 funding, \$2 Victorian Government to \$1 of applicant contribution. Contributed funds may be from a variety of sources. Examples include funds from individual or groups, associations, local government authorities, community/regional organisations or the Commonwealth Government. 'In-kind' contributions are not accepted as part of the funding contribution. Applicants must provide a detailed project budget with their application, which outlines their investment as well as funds sourced/secured from other parties. Funding will be to a maximum of \$500,000 per application

GST

Applicants should note that all project costs included in the application must be exclusive of GST. Applicant must have an Australian Business Number (ABN) and be registered for GST or provide written advice from the Australian Taxation Office that no withholding tax is required to be withheld from the grant payment.

Changes to milestones

Any proposed changes to, or difficulty meeting, milestone dates and/or obligations after the funding agreement has commenced must be identified to the program manager immediately. Variations to the agreement are only accepted with the written agreement of both parties.

Evaluation and reporting

Successful applicants will be required to cooperate fully with an evaluation which is undertaken either during or after completion of the project. Successful applicants will also generally be required to submit progress and completion reporting, assess the progress of the project against milestones, outputs and outcomes, and provide evidence of project completion. After completion of the project, applicants must submit annual evaluation reports assessing the project's success in meeting its stated objectives, outputs and outcomes. These evaluation reports may be required for up to three years following completion of the funded project.

Successful applicants may be required to contribute information on project outcomes, including longer-term impacts beyond project completion, for use in program evaluation reviews and RDV marketing materials. It is the responsibility of successful applicants to put in place adequate collection arrangements to capture the appropriate data concerning outputs and outcomes. These arrangements will assist RDV to undertake a robust evaluation.

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Competitive neutrality

Privacy

Any personal information about you or a third party in your application will be collected by RDV, a statutory body within the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) for the purpose of grant administration. This information may be provided to other Victorian Government agencies for the purposes of assessing your application. If you intend to include personal information about third parties in your application, please ensure they are aware of the contents of this privacy statement and the contents of the DJPR Privacy Policy available from the Privacy Officer (details below).

Any personal information about you or a third party in your correspondence will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic), Health Records Act 2001(Vic) and other applicable laws. DJPR is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. The Department's privacy policy is available from:

Privacy Officer

Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
GPO Box 2392
Melbourne, VIC, 3001, AUS
Email: privacy@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Enquiries about access to information about you held by DJPR should be directed to:

Freedom of Information Manager

Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
GPO Box 2392
Melbourne, VIC, 3001, AUS
Email: foi@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Acknowledgement

Successful applicants need to acknowledge the Victorian Government's support through the provision of a grant from the RHCFR2. The funding agreement includes a requirement that all activities acknowledge Victorian Government support through logo presentation on any activity-related publications, media releases and promotional material following DJPR guidelines.

Successful applicants must liaise with RDV to coordinate any events or announcements related to the activity. Successful applicants may be required to contribute information on activity outcomes for the state to use in communication materials.

5. Submission

Applicants will be invited to complete an RHCFR2 application online. Only online applications will be accepted. The closing date for all applications is **COB, 10 June 2021**

For more information, please contact the Wodonga RDV office on (02) 6059 0200 or email information.wodonga@rdv.vic.gov.au.

Hard copies faxed and/or handwritten applications will not be accepted.

6. Information only

These Guidelines and any discussions you may have with an RDV representative are for information only, and do not constitute advice. Applicants should seek independent advice before making an application or entering into a funding agreement.

Applications are at the cost of the applicant.

RDV makes no representation that a grant of funds will be made to any applicant and reserves the right to make no funds available from the RHCFR2.

*TRUSTS

If the trustee is a company, it must have an ACN issued by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC).

If a Trustee receives a Grant, they must complete a Trustee Declaration form.

If the department is to contract with a company or person in their capacity as trustee, the applicant will need to provide written confirmation from the company's/person's solicitor or accountant that the company/person is:

- authorised to enter into the contract with the department, and acting within their powers under the trust deed; and
- can be indemnified from the assets of the trust.

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