

Grant making

Groundswell

Acknowledgement of country

Groundswell acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the traditional custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We pay our respect to the Elders past, present, and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions and culture.

Acknowledgement of reparations

Groundswell acknowledges the deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and understands the devastating impact colonisation has had on their communities. We believe in reparations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as an act of sovereignty. We encourage First Nations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to join Groundswell as members, and provide honorariums for their time and knowledge, to uphold our responsibility to ensure those most affected by the climate crisis, and already leading within their communities, are at the forefront of decision making around climate advocacy funding and solutions.

Acknowledgement of activism

Groundswell acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as custodians who look after and managed the land. We stand in solidarity with all community members and Indigenous led organisations.

Groundswell

Vision

A healthy, just and sustainable Australia powered by a well-funded, well-connected and community supported climate movement

Mission

To grow a culture of climate giving in Australia.

Values

We respect the leadership of First Nations people.

We support just and sustainable solutions and transitions.

We are grounded in climate science.

We are strategic.

We are political, but not partisan.

We lead with courage and hope.

Our Grantmaking

Each grant round, the Groundswell community decides together which organisations receive our climate action grants through a shortlisting process and a democratic vote.

Shortlisting: A rotating grant-making committee of Groundswell members, including two First Nations members, reviews all applications and creates a shortlist. They're supported by our ongoing advisory committee, who offer insights and answer questions. First Nations members are paid honorariums for their time and knowledge shared through the process.

Voting: Once the shortlist is ready, all Groundswell members vote via a SurveyMonkey poll to decide which organisations will receive funding. Voting stays open for around 10 days before we announce the recipients.

Shortlisting committee process:

1. First meeting: Introductions and welcome, followed by a discussion of the scorecard and criteria for evaluating applications. The group also discusses the current political context, challenges and opportunities and priorities across the climate movement.

2. Application review: Committee members have two weeks to read and assess all applications, then submit their completed scorecards to Groundswell.

3. Second meeting: Scores are collated and used to guide a discussion led by committee members to determine the shortlist. If needed, a vote is held.

Grantmaking decision process

Number	Step	Decision maker
1	Commence a new grant round by promoting the funding opportunity to community groups and individuals across the country via email, social media, and word of mouth.	Groundswell team, advisors and consultants
2	Collate grant applications and conduct high-level research and due diligence on applicants.	Groundswell team + advisory committee
3	Shortlisting of grant applications: Involves two meetings, plus 8 hours of independent reading and evaluation.	Grant-making committee and advisory committee
4	Due diligence on shortlisted applications	Groundswell team & Australian Communities Foundation
5	Endorsement of shortlisted applications and coordination of the member vote	Groundswell team & grant-making committee
6	Vote for grant recipients	All Groundswell members
7	Endorsement of successful grant applicants and recommendations to ACF	Groundswell team
8	Management of reporting and acquittals process	Groundswell team
9	Review acquittal reports and manage any other grant-related issues.	Groundswell team & grant-making committee
10	Communications – sharing stories and outcomes from our grant recipients to our members	Groundswell team

Our grant types

Core (unrestricted) funding: Also known as general operating support, this type of funding gives grant recipients the flexibility to use funds where they're most needed. This is considered best practice in philanthropy – especially when funding advocacy, where the landscape can shift quickly and a project that made sense in January may be outdated by June.

Project funding: Project grants support specific activities like events, campaigns, reports, polling, research or communications tactics such as advertising. At Groundswell, we include project funding as part of our donors' learning journey – it's a tangible, accessible way to understand how climate advocacy works in action.

Our legal structure

Groundswell Giving is an endorsed DGR1 charitable organisation (ABN: 86660758985). All donations are 100% tax deductible and can be made directly to our DGR1 fund:

Conflicts of Interest

All committee and advisory members must disclose any conflicts of interest at both the shortlisting and voting stages. If a conflict arises during shortlisting, the group will collectively decide whether the member in question should participate in discussions or voting on the relevant application.

When a conflict involves a First Nations-led applicant and a First Nations member of the shortlisting committee, we encourage the member to share their perspective. We recognise the value of their insights and the importance of ensuring that lived experience and cultural knowledge inform our collective decision-making – especially as we work toward climate justice.

Why give unrestricted core funding?

We allow organisations to be responsive to opportunity.

We fund in a way that allows organisations to stay responsive to opportunity. Climate advocacy is inherently political – and in Australia, that political context can shift overnight. One day’s promising avenue for influence might close the next, while new opportunities can emerge just as quickly.

That’s why we support unrestricted funding wherever possible. The Centre for Trust-Based Philanthropy calls it “essential for creating healthy, adaptive, effective organisations,” noting that it “encourages risk taking, creativity, innovation, and emergent action instead of sticking to proposal outcomes that may become outdated.”

We maximise time spent on impact work, not paperwork.

“Project funding” comes from sectors like the arts or social services, where work naturally fits into discrete deliverables. But climate advocacy doesn’t work like that – especially the kind that drives systemic change.

Strategy-led advocacy is rarely a series of standalone projects. It’s long-term, integrated work that combines political engagement, community organising, communications and partnerships. It relies on skilled people navigating shifting political and media landscapes.

Forcing that work into a “project” framework – like isolating an ad campaign or a report – takes time and energy away from the work itself. Writing those applications becomes an exercise in mental gymnastics.

The more time organisations spend shaping strategy into neat boxes, the less time they have to drive real change. And in the climate crisis, time is precious. And in the climate crisis, time is everything.

We reduce the stress levels of the organisations’ leadership

Climate advocacy organisations operate on shoestring budgets – nowhere near what’s needed to meet the scale of the crisis. When most funding is tied to specific projects, leaders are left with little flexibility to respond to urgent needs. That kind of pressure keeps them up at night, juggling budgets instead of focusing on impact.

Burnout and overwork are widespread in the climate movement. As funders, anything we can do to ease that pressure – by providing flexible funding and signalling trust – helps sustain the skilled, strategic leadership the movement needs to make progress.

Why we fund climate advocacy

“It may sound frightening, but the scientific evidence is that if we have not taken dramatic action within the next decade, we could face irreversible damage to the natural world and the collapse of our societies.”

- Sir David Attenborough

The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat – it’s here and it’s personal. In Australia we’re already feeling the impacts with longer, hotter summers, more intense floods and fires, rising cost of living and ecosystems under pressure.

The good news is that we have all the climate solutions we need. Clean energy, First Nations leadership, low-emissions transport and ecosystem restoration are all advancing. What we need now isn’t more innovation – it’s the political will to match the pace of change.

This is our moment. If we act now – together – we can protect what we love, unlock healthier communities, and create a future that’s not just safer, but fairer and more vibrant for all.



Did you know
environmental and
climate advocacy
receives less than 4%
of all charitable giving
in Australia?

Framework for action



What we fund

Our framework for action reflects the interconnected conditions needed to accelerate a fast, fair and lasting climate transition. We support initiatives that build community power, strengthen accountability, shift public narratives and elevate frontline leadership – recognising that meaningful change requires multiple strategies working together and that many organisations will contribute across more than one funding stream.

1 **Community power & just transition**

Supporting community leadership to accelerate the transition to a clean economy by building durable public support for a fast, fair and resilient clean energy future. This may include:

- Community organising and advocacy
- Increasing access to clean energy and transition co-benefits
- Place-based resilience and adaptation initiatives
- Engaging diverse constituencies & broadening base of support

2 **Fossil fuel opposition & accountability**

Supporting community leadership to constrain fossil fuel expansion and shift political, legal and financial systems away from extraction. This may include:

- Community organising and advocacy
- Place based resistance to fossil fuel projects
- Community led use of accountability & legal tools
- International and multilateral advocacy related to fossil fuel phase-out

3 **Social licence & narrative change**

Supporting the stories, media systems and cultural interventions that make ambitious climate action possible, popular and durable. This may include:

- Strengthening independent and public-interest media
- Countering climate disinformation
- Strategic digital and social media interventions
- Cultural and narrative campaigns

4 **Climate justice & frontline leadership**

Supporting movements and communities most impacted by climate change and systemic inequality to lead climate solutions. This may include:

- First Nations-led climate initiatives
- Pacific-led advocacy, diplomacy and organising
- Feminist climate leadership and gender justice
- Long-term movement infrastructure and power-building, including education

How we evaluate strategic climate advocacy

We encourage you to be guided by the following criteria when evaluating grant applications.

 **Well reasoned theory of change:** Why this, why now, and why us. Funding the right interventions at the right time can have outsized impact.

 **Scale of impact:** How much potential do they have to make an impact on one or a number of our focus areas – community power and a just transition; climate justice and frontline leadership; social license and narrative change; fossil fuel opposition and accountability.

 **Strategic or political opportunity:** Is there a viable political opening or opportunity for success for this organisation? Is success within the realms of possibility given the current political and economic circumstances? Is their strategy winnable over time, with the right support?

 **Organisational capacity to deliver:** Is this the right organisation to carry out this work? Are they directly connected to the community or communities they are organising? Does the organisation have the right people with the right skills to succeed at what they are pitching to do?

 **Vision, mission and values:** Does the application directly address climate advocacy in line with Groundswells' mission? Does the organisation support the knowledge and leadership of First Nations people? Does the organisation support just and sustainable solutions and transitions?

 **Funding impact:** Do they have a convincing budget? Will our grant make a substantial impact on their organisation?

Together we can, together we will.

Groundswell



Groundswell Giving is a sub-fund of Australian Communities Foundation.
Australian Communities Foundation Fund is a tax deductible Trust Fund.
The Australian Communities Foundation holds and manages our funds, and makes grants on our instruction to charitable organisations endorsed by the ATO as having item 1 DGR (Deductible Gift Recipient) status on our behalf.