

Funding Guidelines

Background & Purpose

The Waikato River Authority (WRA) is an independent statutory body established in 2010¹ to restore and protect the health and well-being of the Waikato and Waipā rivers for the benefit of future generations.

The Authority is the sole trustee of the Waikato River Clean-up Trust which administers and distributes funds to projects that help achieve Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato, and the priorities set out in key strategy documents².

Each year, the Waikato River Authority holds an annual contestable funding round and calls for suitable applications. Around \$6M is normally allocated each year to projects that help restore, protect, and enhance the health and wellbeing of the Waikato and Waipā river systems.

Key information and dates

- **Funding round opens: Tuesday 2nd June 2026**
- **Funding round closes: Monday 27 July 2026**
- Funding decisions communicated: Late October 2026
- Deeds of Funding (DOF) agreed and executed, before funded activities begin³

Eligibility criteria

Who is eligible?

- Any legal entity, for example;
 - Iwi, hapuu and marae organisations
 - Individuals e.g. Landowners
 - Groups e.g. Catchment groups
 - Agencies e.g. Local Government
 - Industry organisations e.g. Beef and Lamb
 - Education or research entities e.g. Kohanga, University, Earth Sciences

Eligible entities must have a bank account in their name and the ability to issue invoices. For projects where the total costs are \$60,000 or more in any one year, the entity must be GST registered.

All applicants must understand their health and safety obligations in relation to the work for which they are seeking funding. Successful applicants will be required to provide project-related health and safety documentation prior to being issued a Deed of Funding.

¹ via Treaty settlements with Waikato-Tainui and other Waikato River iwi

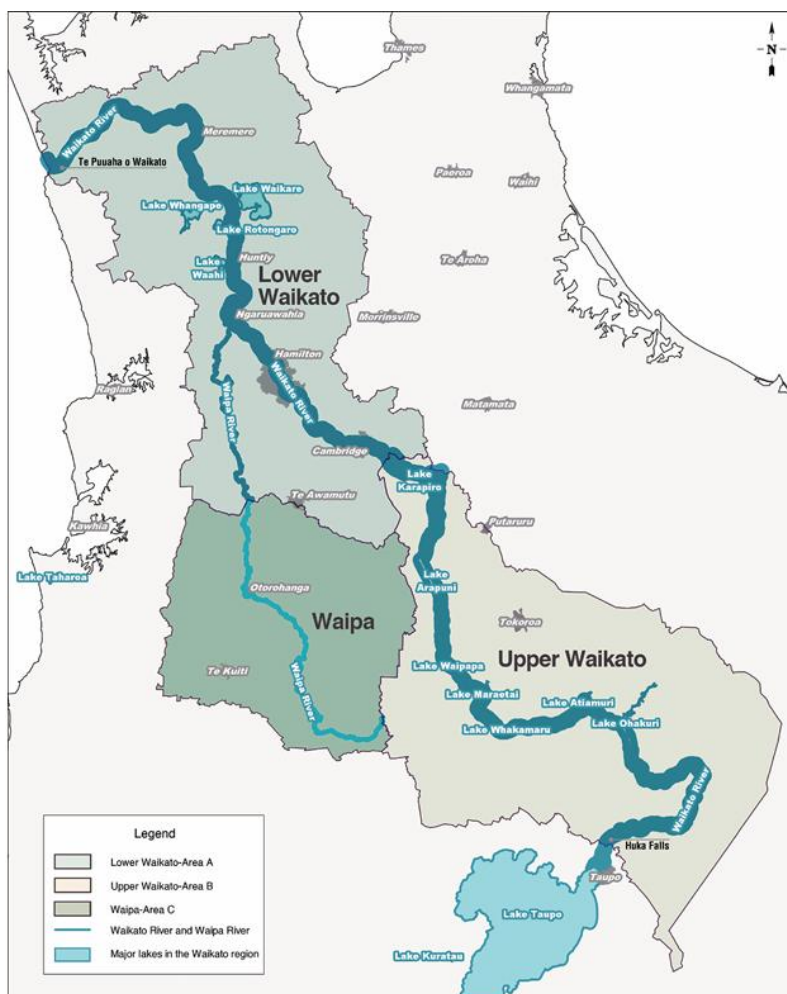
² including the Waikato River Scoping Study, the Waikato and Waipā River Restoration Strategy, and the WRA Funding Strategy

³ The WRA will not fund activities undertaken prior to the DOF being signed.

What projects are eligible?

Projects located in the Waikato and Waipā River catchments that:

- Are consistent with the priorities set out in the [WRA Funding Strategy](#)
- Contribute to the restoration and protection of the health and wellbeing of the Waikato and Waipā Rivers, and help achieve Te Ture Whaimana ([link](#))
- Advance the priorities set out in the Waikato and Waipā River Restoration Strategy. ([link](#))
- Align with iwi environmental plans:
 - [Waikato-Tainui Environmental Management Plan](#) – Tai Tumu, Tai Pari, Tai Ao
 - [Maniapoto-Environmental-Management-Plan](#) – Ko Ta Maniapoto Mahere Taiao (applicable to Upper Waipa catchment- Catchment C applications only).
 - [Te Arawa River Iwi Trust Environmental Plan](#) - Whakamarohitia ngā wai o Waikato
 - [Raukawa-Environmental-Management-Plan](#) - Te Rautaki Taiao a Raukawa
 - [Ngāti Tūwharetoa Environmental Iwi Management Plan](#)
- Have appropriate co-funding - More information regarding co-funding can be found in section 4 of this guide (below), and in the [WRA Funding Strategy](#)
- Projects that are technically achievable and deliver practical outcomes, that do not require ongoing funding from the WRA once completed.



Map of the Waikato & Waipā River catchment boundaries

Exclusions (who and what is not eligible)

- Commercial activities, including but not limited to: new developments, tourism ventures, required work for a commercial organisation, and profit-generating activities for private gain.
- Projects or activities that are required under legislation, resource consent conditions, or to achieve regulatory compliance.
- Applicants that are registered as bankrupt or insolvent.
- Capital works & purchases of capital items
- Salaries, insurance costs, accountant costs, business administration e.g. time spent undertaking GST returns or annual returns to the Companies Office
- Costs associated with covenanting land e.g. survey and legal costs
- Pest animal control not directly linked to freshwater or riparian restoration
- Projects that are the responsibility of another party (e.g. biosecurity incursion response)
- Research projects that don't have direct, tangible on-the-ground outcomes
- Routine maintenance unrelated to restoration outcomes
- Building and maintenance of digital technology platforms and systems
- Nursery set-up and running costs
- Projects to address contamination or discharges that are the responsibility of the entity that created them (unless the Trust can be satisfied that there is significant public benefit in funding them).
- Large water infrastructure projects (e.g. water storage)
- Establishment of exotic forest
- Retrospective costs

Preparing to Apply

- Create a registration/log-in for SmartyGrants portal ([Link](#)), if you don't have one
- Preview the 2026 Application Form to familiarise yourself with the information that is required ([Link](#))
- Review the Evaluation Criteria and their weightings – in the [WRA Funding Strategy](#)
- Obtain landowner permission/s
- Consult with iwi - Applicants are required to consult local iwi on the project and provide proof of consultation or iwi support to accompany their application. For contact details see section 2.4 of the [WRA Funding Strategy](#)
- Source co-funding - The WRA prefers to support projects with c.50% co-funding, including a cash component. However, there are exceptions for river-iwi led projects as set out on Page 10 of the [WRA Funding Strategy](#). In-kind funding includes non-monetary contributions such as volunteer time, or provision of services, venues or facilities. Other potential sources of funding are listed [here](#).
- Consult with Council – applicants may want to discuss their proposed project with local and/or regional council prior to applying.
- Create a project plan and project budget using WRA templates, [Cost Guidelines](#) and other relevant documents ([link](#))

How to Apply

All applications for funding must be completed using the online SmartyGrants application portal available on the Waikato River Authority's website - [Funding Applications](#)

Applicants can preview the form before starting their application in Smarty Grants

Under the 'funding applications' section of the website there is a series of videos to help you through the application process. These include:

1. An introduction to WRA funding
2. How to make a funding application
3. Tips for your project plan

Assessment Process

Applications are assessed by an independent evaluation panel against the weighted criteria⁴ set out on page 20 of the [WRA Funding Strategy](#). Waikato River Iwi Authorities are involved in the evaluation of criteria 12 and 15, and advising whether projects implement Iwi priorities.

Application Outcome

- Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application by the end of October 2026
- Successful applicants will need to provide their Health and Safety information via SmartyGrants
- Once Health and Safety has been received and approved the Deed of Funding will be prepared. Projects commence after the Deed of Funding is fully executed.
- Project reports and invoices with supporting documentation to be submitted at least every 6 months.

Terms & Conditions

- Funding must be used solely for the approved project purpose as outlined in a Deed of Funding agreement.
- Recipients must comply with all relevant legislation, including health and safety, environmental, and employment obligations. Recipients will be required to provide documentation and evidence of these requirements if successful.
- Projects must commence and be completed within the approved timeframes.
- Detailed progress and financial reports are provided at least every 6 months.
- The funding body reserves the right to audit project expenditure and delivery.
- Any unspent or misused funds must be returned.
- Funding may be withdrawn if conditions are not met.

⁴ including specific criteria required by enabling legislation.