

Grant applications for infrastructure projects can be significantly more complex than for a participation program so it's critical to research and prepare to prevent budget blow-outs, approval hold-ups and other unforeseen challenges.

The following questions should be considered as part of your infrastructure project planning and resolved in advance of lodging any grant application.

Who is the Land Owner?

Generally, the land owner is the local Council and regardless of whether you hire on a seasonal basis or have a Licence/Lease Agreement, you will likely be required to have their **written** consent for the project.

Never take a shortcut and say you have land owner consent if you don't; or you may find yourself in the embarrassing situation of having to return the grant funding.

Always talk to Council to gain their consent before submitting your application. Who knows, you may even discover during that conversation that the land is actually Crown Land that Council manage under an agreement. In that case, getting owner consent may be far more challenging than you expected.

What Planning Consents are Required?

Many infrastructure projects will require some kind of building or planning permit (e.g. a Development Application). Others may not due to clauses in some state planning legislation providing exemptions for sporting facilities in certain circumstances. Either way, this is advice and confirmation that should come, **in writing**, from your Council.

Never assume that your project is exempt from planning requirements, or rely on information found online unless it is from a reputable source (i.e. a government website) and it is explicitly clear that it applies to your project.

If a grant program requires you to be "shovel-ready" this means that you must have all necessary building or planning consents approved; not just have your application lodged. Due to the timeline for these processes, if you do need a permit then you will need to apply for this well before any applicable grant program is advertised.

So plan ahead, apply early and work hand in hand with your Council to ensure you know what permits are required and you can obtain these well ahead of time. Then sit back and wait for the right grant program to launch!

Are there any Planning or Site Restrictions?

For most infrastructure projects, it's important to have a good understanding of your whole facility and any restrictions that may exist along with any plans that may impact on the site into the future.

Using aerial imaging to determine the location of new infrastructure is not sufficient planning for this purpose. Instead, you should consult with your Council at the beginning of your planning phase. By following this non-exhaustive list of questions in that discussion you'll ensure you get the best understanding of what is or isn't possible at your ground and how your choices can impact your overall budget:

- **Are there any future masterplans or upgrades Council or the State Government is considering that will impact the site?**
If so, this could mean your project is already on a Council funding list, or your preferred location will be absorbed during future road widening, for example.
- **Are there any pockets of land on the site owned by a different party?**
This may mean that part of the land is best avoided due to more complicated ownership approvals.
- **Are there any heritage considerations or areas of indigenous significance to be aware of?**
This may mean that part of the land is off-limits or certain activities or inclusions are prohibited.
- **Are there any easements on the land?**
- **When was the last “Before you Dig” service location plan done?**
- **Are there any major services (like town water mains) that run through the site, and if so, where are they?**
These generally cannot be built over with permanent structures so may change your layout.
- **Do they have a map of any irrigation services and where these lines run?**
Again, these will be something you can’t build over so may have to relocate instead should they impact on your project location.
- **Where does power currently run from/to? Does it need to be relocated or extended?**
Both these outcomes will have budget impacts so you may want to reconsider your location in order to minimise these costs.
- **Are there known areas of asbestos on the site?**
While these may be capped and safe, disturbing this soil will add costs for remediation to your budget if Council even approve the use of that location.
- **Are there known areas of landfill on the site?**
Depending on your project, geotech studies may be required to determine if the ground at your preferred location is suitable for the project and/or if additional measures (resulting in additional costs) are required prevent subsidence and to ensure safety.
- **What are the flooding impacts on the site?**
As many sports fields are designed to act as detention basins for the local area in heavy rain events, you may need to consider avoiding certain areas of the site so as not to impede these flooding models or add unnecessary repair and maintenance costs to your project.

What Other Project Impacts Might I Need to Consider?

Beyond just understanding the nuances of your site, your Council can also be a valuable ally to help you navigate some of the other things that may impact on your project and your budget.

Some other useful questions to ask them during your planning phase are:

- **What is the current power supply to the site?**
Sports field lighting upgrades may require an upgraded supply to your site and the installation of a new switchboard in order to ensure they can function now and into the future. These are additional costs you would need to budget for.
- **Is there an applicable Australian Standard or other legislation that my project design will need to meet?** For example, must a path be a certain width to comply with accessibility requirements?
To get your plans and budget accurate you'll need to make sure you are designing to meet relevant codes and regulations.
- **Is there a requirement for any certain method of installation?**
As an example, if installing spectator bench seating you may be required to lay a concrete pad underneath for ease of maintenance (mowing) and ongoing safety (no worn, even ground forming trip hazards). You would then need to add the concrete cost to your budget.
- **Is there a requirement for a particular type of material?**
Generally, a commercial grade material will be required for public place installations for safety and security purposes and should be budgeted for accordingly (e.g. fencing, sheds).
- **If the project is to upgrade or expand an existing piece of infrastructure, what is the current condition of that item? Is it suitable to be used as part of an upgrade or will it need to be replaced entirely?**
A common example of a mistake made here is a project to upgrade diamond lighting to LED. These fittings are often heavier than existing metal halide ones so you may need to factor purchasing new poles into an upgrade project, not just the fittings.
- **Can anyone quote for the project, or do they have to be from an approved Council contractor list as per their procurement process?**
This could impact the ability to use sponsors or companies connected to your club offering special pricing.

Do I Need to Future-Proof My Project?

If your project is for an initial phase of a larger project, consider what structural requirements you should include now to support those future stages.

Example 1: The project is for a new building that will have a storeroom and changerooms built on ground level as phase 1, with a club room added as a second story in future years. To future-proof this project, the concrete slab constructed in phase 1 must be reinforced such that it can be certified by a structural engineer as capable of taking the weight of a second story in future phases.

Example 2: The project is for new diamond lighting that will initially be installed as 500 lux with the view to upgrading this to 1500 lux in phase 2. To future-proof this project, the poles and cross arms used in phase 1 must be capable of supporting the installation of additional fittings to increase the lux levels in phase 2

Is My Budget Clear and Robust?

A well-structured budget is crucial for infrastructure grants in order to prevent budget blow-outs. Things you should consider to ensure your project budget is as accurate as possible are:

- **Obtain Multiple Quotes:** Have at least 2 quotations to ensure you are getting good value for money.
- **Only Use Valid Quotes:** Make sure the quotations are still valid or received no longer than 3 months ago. Pricing within construction can fluctuate greatly and be heavily influenced by global material shortages and shipping delays; so never use an old quote as a basis for your budget or you could be out by up to 30% when it comes time to start.
- **Specifications:** Ensure that the specifications required by legislation or your Council (e.g. materials) are included in the quotations and budget.
- **Maintenance:** Even if maintenance of your asset is not something that will be covered by the grant application, you'll still need to consider this ongoing cost in your assessment of the financial impact on your club.

Your Council might agree to accept responsibility for all repairs and general maintenance of the new infrastructure (e.g. a grandstand) but if they don't, you need to carefully consider what could be the ongoing maintenance cost to your club for things like seat replacement, rust removal or replacement of railings that may be maliciously damaged or simply wear and tear over time? If you can't afford to keep your new asset in a good and safe condition, can you afford to install it?

- **Future-Proofing:** If your project is for an initial phase of a larger project, what financial advantages should you consider taking now in order to reduce the costs of future stages? For example, if you're installing new lighting and planning to increase the lux in the future, you might want to consider running the additional cables now. By laying them during the original conduit installation rather than retrofitting them, it could save you upwards of \$10,000.
- **Contingency:** Always include a contingency line in construction project budgets. 10-15% is recommended to provide a comfortable buffer for the "hidden" costs that inevitably pop-up during delivery.

Conclusion

While the questions in this document may make the thought of an infrastructure project seem daunting, in reality it should be viewed as the opposite. These questions create your toolkit, allowing you to plan for success and prevent those nasty surprises from derailing your project and hard work.

The best advice is to always plan early, plan thoroughly and seek expert advice and support.