

Evaluation of the Local Sport Grant Program

Office of Sport

21 January 2026



Nous Group acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders past and present, who maintain their culture, Country and spiritual connection to the land, sea and community.

This artwork was developed by Marcus Lee Design to reflect Nous Group's Reconciliation Action Plan and our aspirations for respectful and productive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

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1 Executive Summary

The Office of Sport engaged Nous Group (Nous) to undertake a process and outcomes evaluation of the 2022–23 and 2023–24 rounds of the Local Sport Grant Program (LSGP). The evaluation explored two core questions:

- **Process:** Was the program’s design, promotion, administration, assessment, and reporting effective in supporting applicants, ensuring transparency, and reaching underrepresented groups?
- **Outcomes:** To what extent did the program achieve its intended outcomes, as well as any unintended impacts?

The LSGP is seen as a well-designed and managed program with minor areas for process refinement.

Design improvements prior to the 2023-24 funding rounds have strengthened governance, increased demand, and reduced underspend. Application and administration processes are generally well-regarded, with strong praise for the support provided by the Office of Sport. However, challenges persist in ensuring consistent assessment, improving transparency, and measuring long-term outcomes. Opportunities for refinement include clarifying timeframes, reconsidering partial funding approaches, and reducing duplication in application and acquittal templates.

The LSGP can improve the consistency and transparency of the assessment process.

While the assessment criteria are clearly defined, issues remain with their application. Inconsistencies in assessment across electorates and assessors raise concerns about objectivity and alignment with best practice. The high number of assessors also creates a significant administrative burden for the Office of Sport.

Best practice in grant programs supports a fully independent, centralised assessment model to ensure fairness, transparency, and merit-based decision-making. Recognising the political and operational constraints that may prevent such a model.

Recommendation: *The Office of Sport should conduct all merit assessments, with MPs/delegates retaining responsibility for final recommendations.*

This approach would introduce consistency and impartiality while preserving local input. Any departures from the merit assessment would require justification aligned with program guidelines, offering a pragmatic way to improve integrity and rigour without fully centralising the process.

The LSGP is a high-impact initiative that is delivering tangible benefits to grassroots sport across NSW.

Sporting clubs consistently describe the LSGP as one of the most accessible and impactful sources of government support, particularly for small, volunteer-led organisations. Grants have enabled essential facility upgrades, equipment purchases, and participation-focused initiatives that otherwise would not have occurred. The program has demonstrated strong alignment with its goals, delivering tangible outcomes such as increased participation, improved safety and inclusivity, and enhanced sporting experiences.

The LSGP can better support long-term outcomes for grassroots sport in NSW.

The program’s long-term impact is constrained by structural limitations. Its annual budget of approximately \$4.6 million has remained unchanged since inception, diminishing in real value over time. The small size of individual grants restricts grantees’ ability to drive sustained change, while they continue to report unmet demand and persistent structural barriers—particularly related to access, equity, and ageing infrastructure.

Recommendation: *Use the current political and public policy environment to showcase the value of the LSGP and advocate for a modest uplift in the overall funding envelope.*

Even a small increase in funding could significantly enhance the program’s capacity to address the long-term sustainability needs of grassroots sport across NSW.

2 Program snapshot

SECTION OVERVIEW

This section provides the background of the LSGP, outlining the program's purpose and design, changes to the program over time, the key program outputs and the program delivery process.

2.1 Program purpose and design

The LSGP is designed to increase regular and on-going participation opportunities in sport in NSW. The NSW Government allocates up to \$4,650,000 for this program. Funding of up to \$50,000 per electorate is allocated to all 93 electorates throughout NSW. The key objectives of the LSGP are to:

- Increase regular and on-going participation in sport.
- Increase participation opportunities for under-represented groups including women and girls, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disability, First Nations peoples and LGBTQIA+ people.
- Reduce barriers and improve access to participation in sport.
- Assist sport clubs to provide quality experiences to their members and meet community needs.
- Increase financial sustainability and improve facilities of community level sporting clubs.

To be eligible for the LSGP, applicants must be incorporated, not-for-profit grassroots sport clubs or associations whose primary focus is organising sporting activities. The LSGP supports a wide range of projects, which can broadly be categorised as those that deliver on the key objectives listed above. Examples of eligible projects include coach training programs, purchase of sporting equipment, hosting of sporting events and facility improvements such as upgrading bathrooms or canteens.

2.1.1 Program evolution

The design of the LSGP has progressively evolved over the 2021–22, 2022–23 and 2023–24 funding rounds to improve accessibility, equity and alignment with strategic priorities, and better support outcomes for the sports community.

Key changes across the three funding rounds include:

- **Removal of project types and simplification of the application model (2022–23):** In 2021–22, the program operated with four distinct project types - Sport Development, Sport Event, Sport Access, and Sport Facility - each with its own funding cap. Organisations could apply for one application per project type, with a total funding cap of \$20,000. In 2022–23, these categories were removed to simplify the application process and consolidate all applications under a single stream.
- **Adjustment of funding thresholds (2022–23 and 2023–24):** In 2022–23, the minimum grant amount was increased from \$500 to \$2,000. However, the maximum grant per application was reduced to \$10,000, and the total cap per organisation was also lowered to \$10,000. In 2023–24, the maximum grant amount was increased to \$20,000 per application, reinstating the higher funding ceiling available in earlier rounds.
- **Greater weighting to projects benefiting underrepresented groups (2022–23):** The 2022–23 round introduced changes to the merit assessment criteria, increasing the weighting for projects that benefit underrepresented groups. This included initiatives supporting women and girls, people with disability, First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) which align to the Office of Sport's strategies and action plans for these groups. The 2023–24 round introduced the addition of LGBTQIA+ people to the list of underrepresented groups. These changes were designed to better align the program with the Office of Sport's strategic objectives and action plans for inclusion and diversity.

2.2 Program delivery process

The LSGP follows a typical grant process that includes application, assessment, final approval, award and acquittal. What each stage entails and who is involved is outlined further in Figure 1.

Figure 1 | LSGP delivery process



2.3 Program outputs

Figure 2 and Figure 3 below provide a comprehensive snapshot of the Local Sports Grant Program, highlighting key data and insights from the 2022-23 and 2023-24 funding rounds. It outlines the total funding allocated and the number of submissions received among other things to provide an overview of the outputs of the program.

Figure 2 | 2023-24 program outputs

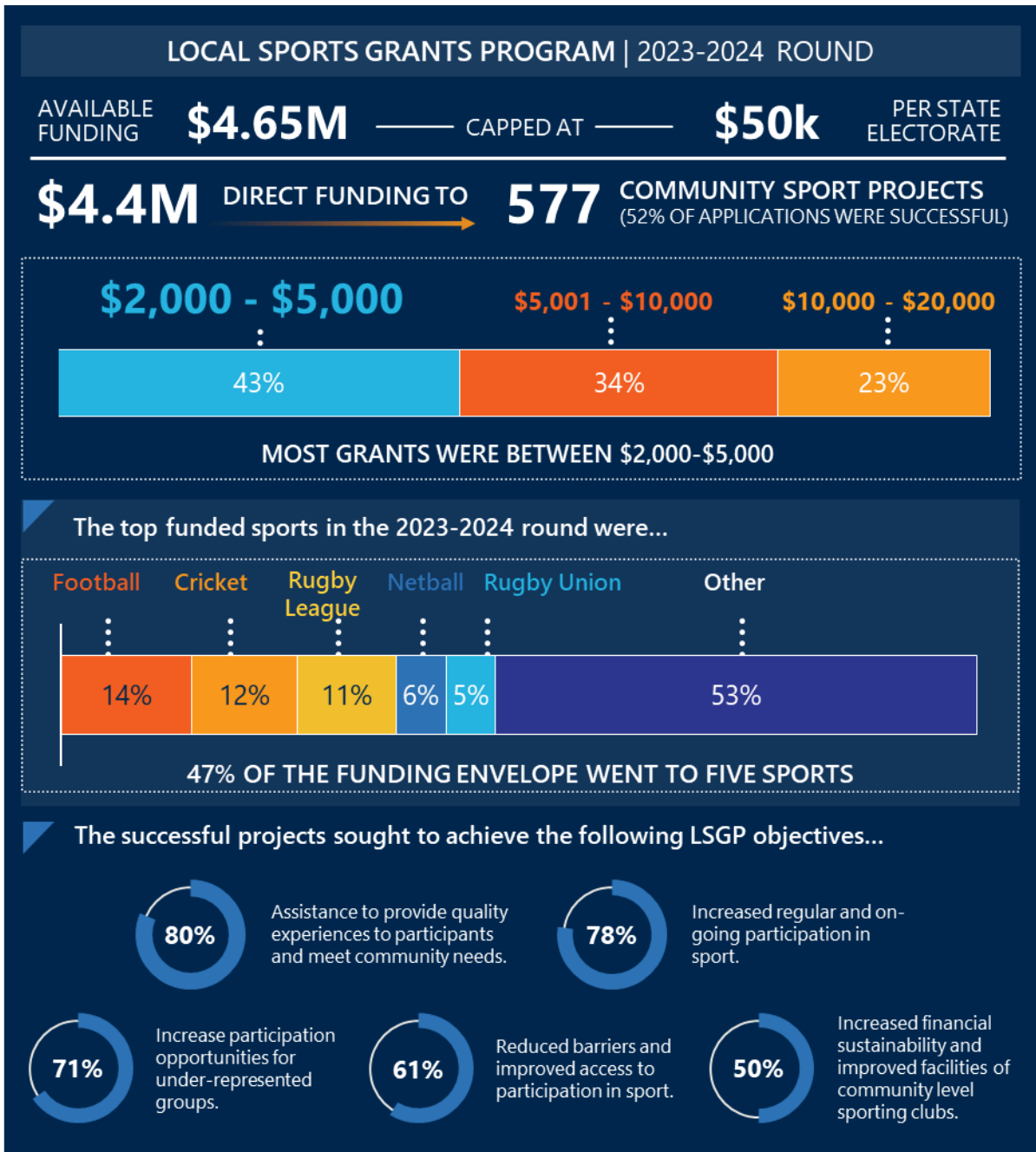
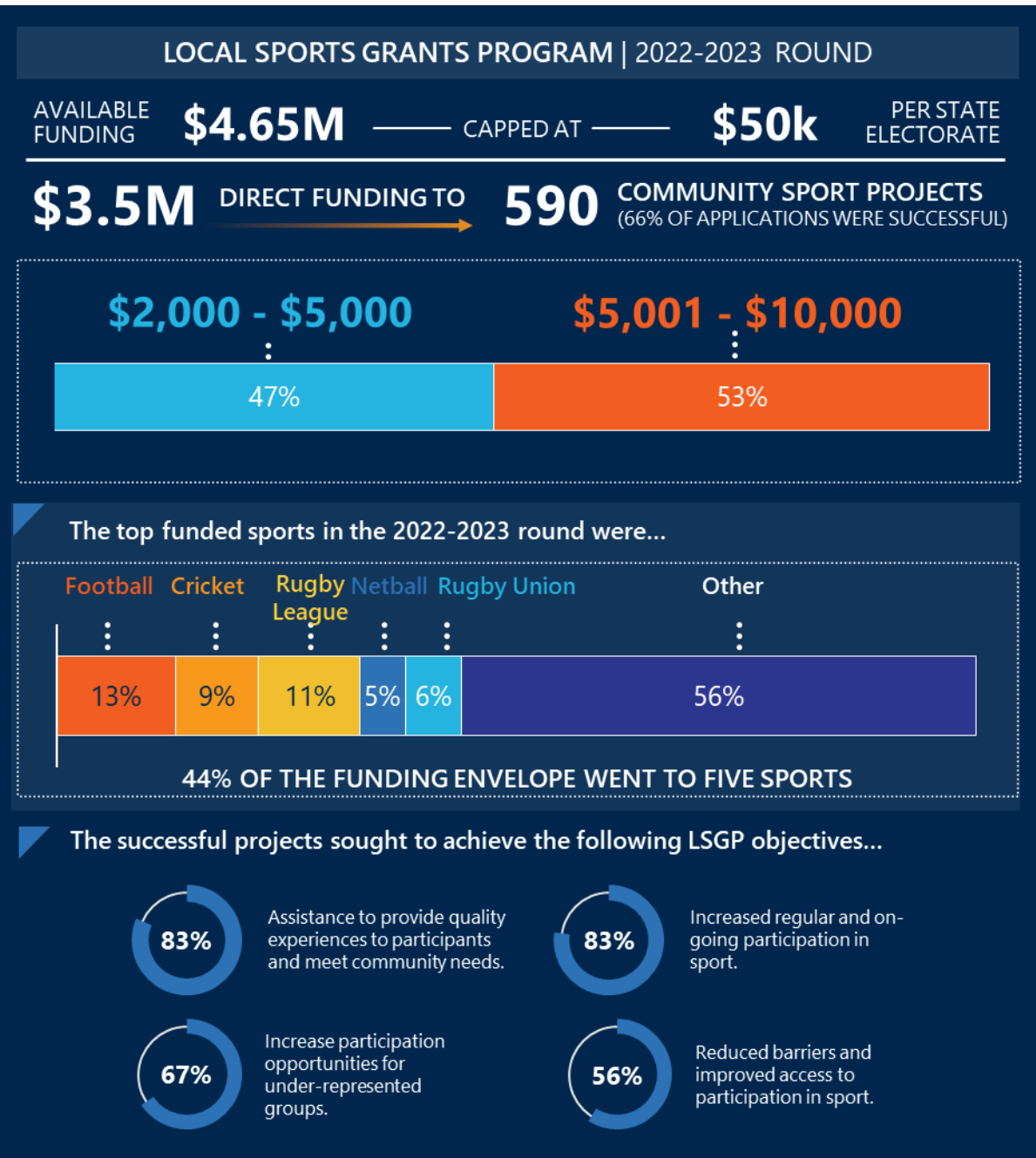


Figure 3 | 2022-23 program outputs



3 Evaluation purpose and process

SECTION OVERVIEW

This section explains the evaluation purpose and objectives and provides a high-level overview of the evaluation methodology. Appendix A Key evaluation questions and Appendix B Data collection approach presents further detail about the evaluation methodology.

3.1 Purpose of the evaluation

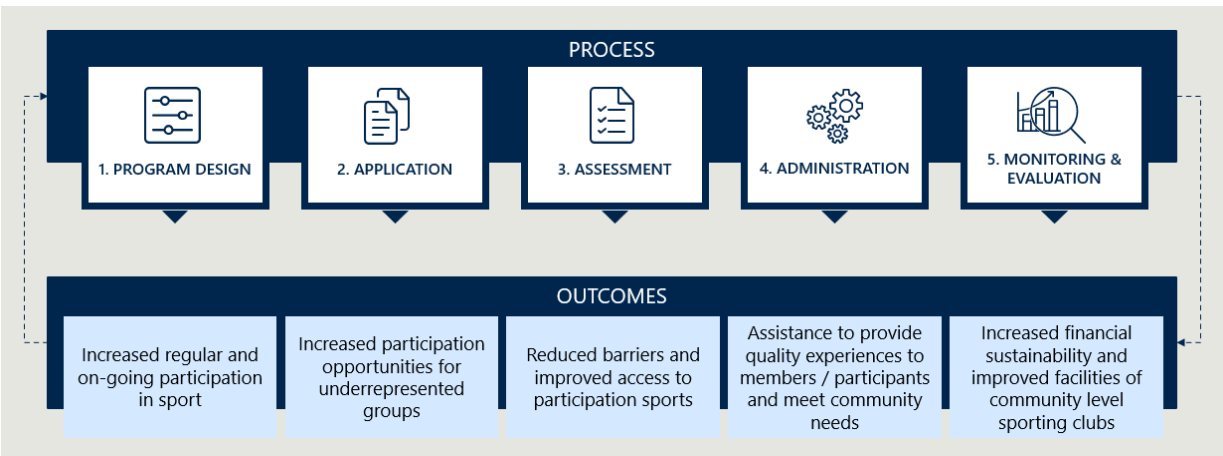
The Office of Sport has engaged Nous to deliver a process and outcomes evaluation of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 rounds of the LSGP. The purpose of this evaluation is to understand:

- **Process evaluation** - Was the program’s design, promotion, administration, assessment and reporting effective in supporting applicants, ensuring transparency and reaching underrepresented groups?
- **Outcomes evaluation** - To what extent did the program achieve intended outcomes (increase participation in sport, reduce barriers, improve access to facilities and enhance the sustainability of grassroots sports clubs and unintended outcomes?

3.2 Key evaluation questions

The focus of the evaluation was guided by the 'process' and 'outcomes' domains outlined in Figure 4 below. Detailed key evaluation questions (KEQs) are provided in Appendix A. Nous' evaluation approach recognises that strong performance across the process domains supports the achievement of intended outcomes, which in turn inform future program design.

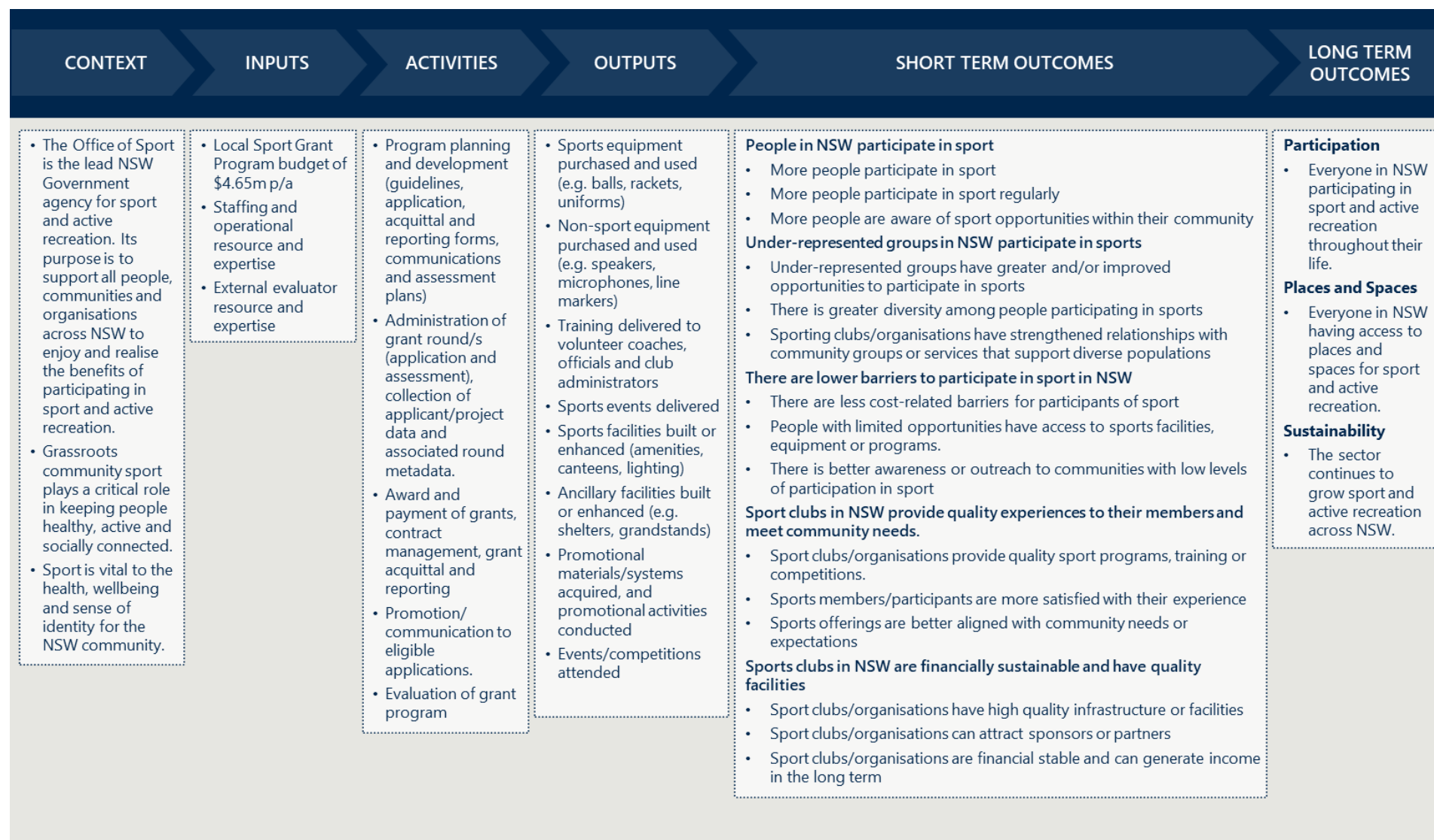
Figure 4 | Evaluation domains



3.3 Program logic

The evaluation was underpinned by a program logic (Figure 5). The program logic sets out the context for the LSGP and presents a logical model for the flow of program inputs, activities, outputs and short- to long-term impact. The evaluation used the program logic to understand whether, and to what extent, intended activities had been delivered, and whether these had led to the expected outputs.

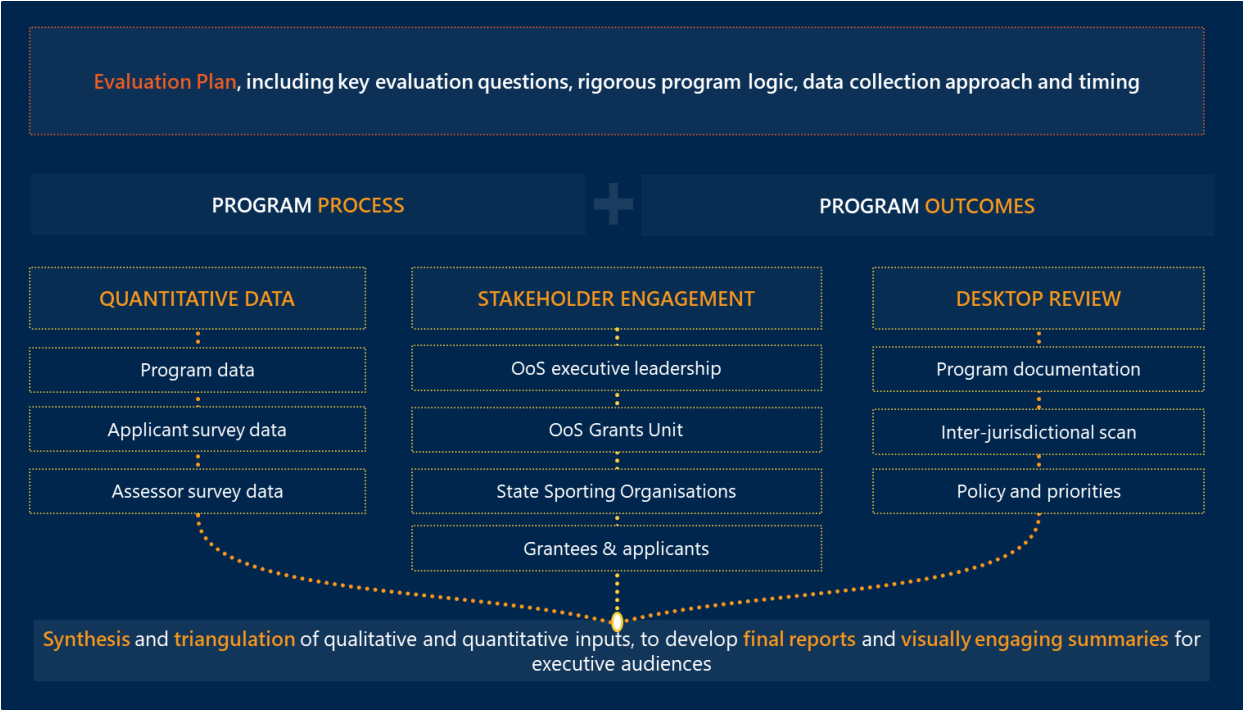
Figure 5 | Program logic



3.4 Data collection for the evaluation

The evaluation collected data under three streams: quantitative data, stakeholder engagement, desktop review (Figure 6). Further details on the evaluation method are presented in Appendix B Data collection approach.

Figure 6 | Summary of data collection activities for the evaluation



As part of the quantitative and stakeholder engagement streams, the evaluation included a survey and a series of focus groups:

- The applicant survey received responses from 470 applicants from the 2023-24 and 2022-23 grant rounds
- The assessor survey received 42 responses from MPs and assessors
- Nous conducted 8 focus groups and spoke to 37 applicants and 4 SSO representatives

A key limitation is the reliability of grantees' quantitative data from applications and acquittals, particularly regarding sports participation and club membership. As a result, quantitative outcomes data has been used cautiously in the evaluation.

4 Process evaluation (2023-24)

SECTION OVERVIEW

This section presents process evaluation findings, organised by stage of the grant process (i.e. program design, application, program assessment, administration and monitoring and evaluation).

This section summarises key insights from the process evaluation of the LSGP, structured across five key domains: program design, application, assessment, administration and monitoring/evaluation.

Overall, the LSGP is viewed as a well-managed program that delivers valued support to a broad range of community sport organisations. Design changes have improved governance and may have contributed to reduced underspend. Further, the application and administration processes are generally well-regarded. However, challenges remain in achieving consistency in assessment, improving transparency, and enhancing the ability to measure outcomes.

Figure 7 | Summary of Insights from 'Process' evaluation

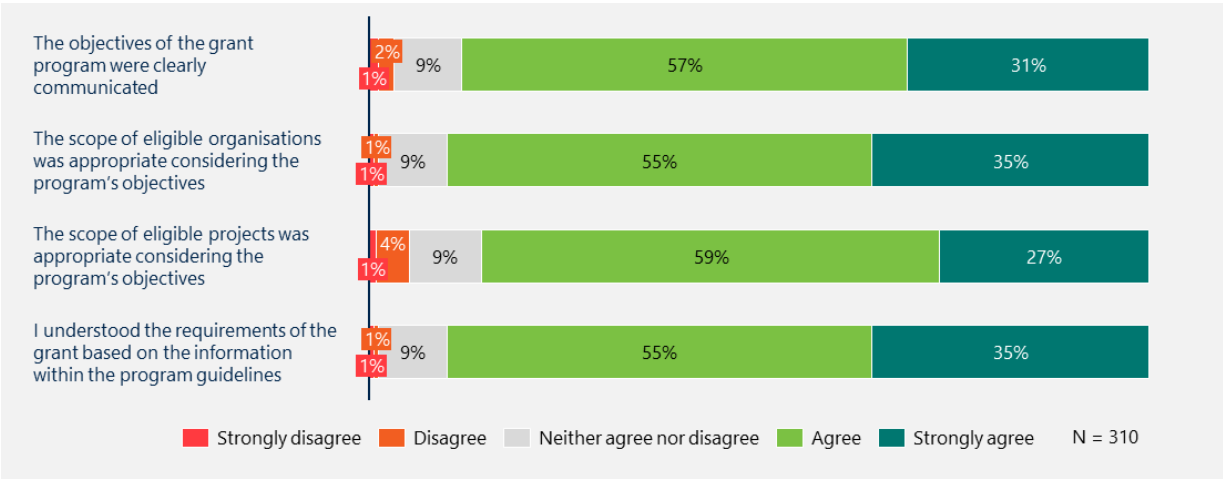
Program design	STRENGTHS: The program supported a broad range of sports and clubs improve participation in sport and recent design changes successfully reduced the underspend of funding. CHALLENGES: Total Program funding is unchanged for over a decade, lead time between application and award creates planning and procurement challenges and managing eligibility is an ongoing challenge.
Application	STRENGTHS: The application template is easy to navigate, well structured, and proportionate to the grant size. Many felt governance has improved over time, with a clearer structure and guidance. CHALLENGES: Observed repetition in application questions and complexities for clubs applying for multiple funding streams at once.
Assessment	STRENGTHS: The assessment process was clear and proportionate to the size of the grants. Assessment criteria were clear and aligned to program goals. CHALLENGES: Assessors did not conduct merit assessment consistently. There were instances observed where merit assessment was likely not conducted objectively. There is a lack of transparency in why projects were successful or not successful.
Administration	STRENGTHS: Stakeholders were highly satisfied with administration of the Program, particularly with the support provided of Office of Sport staff. The administrative effort required to deliver the Program is within expectations for a program of this size and scope. CHALLENGES: Some grantees need a more flexible acquittal timeline, as their project outcomes may not yet have been realised.
Monitoring / Evaluation	STRENGTHS: The reporting requirements for the grant program align with the NSW Grants Guidelines. The OoS has collected extensive qualitative and quantitative data regarding the outcomes achieved by projects. CHALLENGES: Grantees find it difficult to quantify outcomes directly linked to their projects.

4.1 Design: The LSGP design meets community need and is well-received despite some challenges

The LSGP objectives and scope are appropriate and clear

The LSGP has supported a broad range of local sporting organisations and improved participation in sport generally and for underrepresented groups (explored further in Section 5 Outcomes evaluation). Over 85 per cent of applicants surveyed agree or strongly agree that the objectives of the program were clearly communicated, the scope of eligible organisations and projects was appropriate considering the program's objectives and that they understood the requirements of the grant based on the information within the program guidelines, as shown in Figure 8. In addition, applicants in focus groups did not express any challenges relating to the clarity of the program objectives or the eligibility criteria.

Figure 8 | Applicant satisfaction with program design (2023-24)



The current funding arrangements are not optimal for the program

The program has a relatively small allocation of funding which has not grown over time

Since its inception, the LSGP has had a consistent annual allocation of \$4.65 million. However, between 2015 and 2024¹, the cost of goods and services increased by 29 per cent, effectively reducing the grant’s purchasing power by 22 per cent. This erosion in value has limited the program’s capacity to fund additional projects and deliver greater outcomes for the sporting clubs and organisations that rely on it. It may also constrain opportunities to expand the program’s scope to include a broader range of eligible applicants.

The increase in maximum funding from 2022-23 to 2023-24 resulted may have contributed to increased demand for both applications and grant value requested

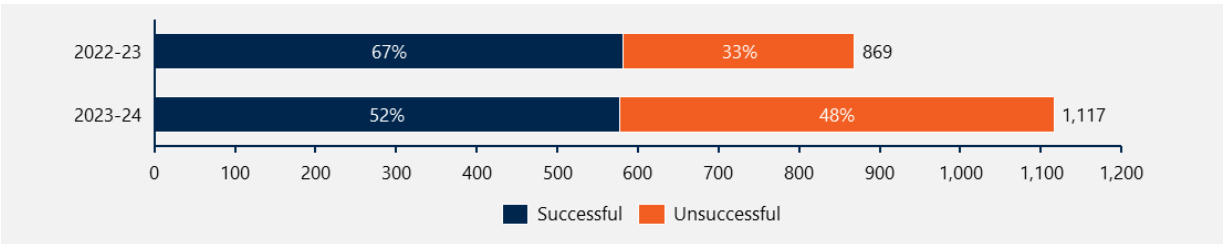
A key change in program design for 2023-24 was the increase in maximum grant amount per applicant from \$10K to \$20k.

Since implementing this change:

- Total applications increased from 869 in 2022-23 to 1,117 in 2023-24 (Figure 9)
- The total cost of proposed projects increased from ~\$6.2M to ~\$13.1M (Figure 10)
- The total amount requested increased from ~\$3.7M to ~\$11.1M (Figure 10)
- The average project cost, amount requested and amount awarded increased correspondingly (Figure 11)

This demonstrates that both the number and value of projects increased in 2023-24 which may reflect latent demand for higher value projects from grassroots sporting clubs which supports the need for additional funding. However, the number of applications was consistently higher prior to the initial removal of project types and maximum funding limit of \$10,000 imposed in the 2022-23 round.

Figure 9 | Total LSGP applications 2022-23 and 2023-24



¹ RBA, Inflation Calculator

Figure 10 | Application project cost, grant value requested and grant value awarded (\$M)

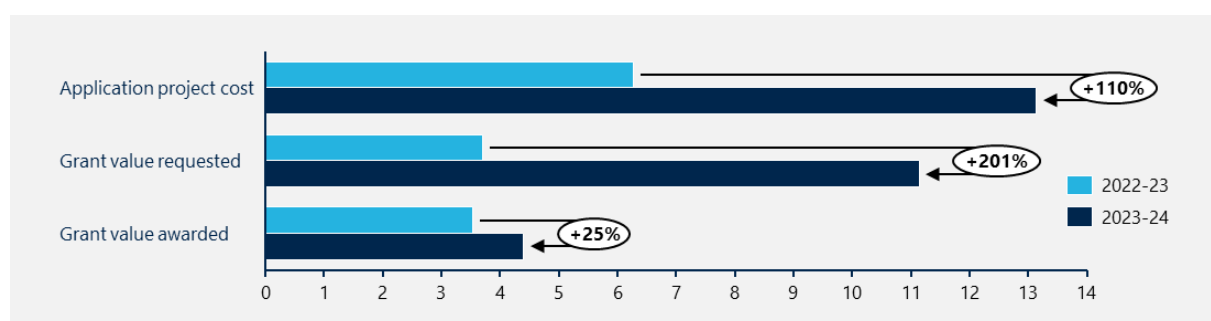
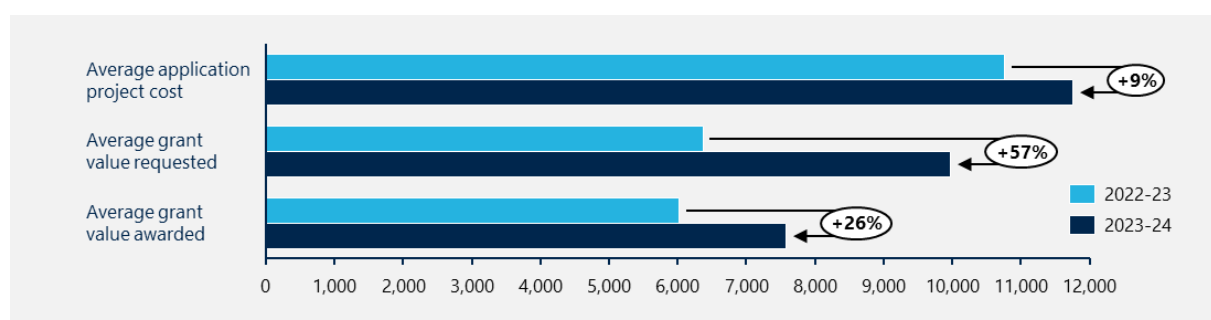


Figure 11 | Average application project cost, average grant value requested and average grant value awarded in 2022-23 and 2023-24



The funding underspend was significantly less in 2023-24 as a result of increased demand for the program

\$4.65M of funding is available each year to support sporting clubs and associations across NSW. In 2022-23, the total awarded amount was ~\$3.53M which represents a \$1.12M program underspend. The 2023-24 underspend was \$244k, representing a significant improvement from the previous year.

Partial funding creates further challenges that reinforce the suboptimal funding arrangement

In the 2023-24 program, nine electorates recommended partial funding for over 50 per cent of applications.

“ We received only a partial grant, and it was not clear why we did not receive the full amount that we applied for. It made the delivery of the program much harder.

Grantee

Clubs who received partial funding reported challenges delivering their projects. This forced them to acquire funding for the project at short notice or forfeit the grant which, is difficult for clubs who mostly operate on tight margins, with limited cash reserves.

The LSGP eligibility criteria and unclear timelines create confusion for some applicants

The eligibility criteria for sports subdisciplines, disability sports and organisations whose primary purpose is anything other than sports is an ongoing challenge for program design

Although the LSGP eligibility criteria are aligned with the NSW Grants Guidelines and clearly outlined in program materials, they have raised concerns among some applicants.

“ There are sub-disciplines under sports but there is less clarity on what is or isn't eligible [in the guidelines].

System stakeholder

Currently, subdisciplines are eligible only if recognised by the State Sporting Organisation (SSO) of the parent sport. The Office of Sport reported difficulties in verifying eligibility for certain subdisciplines such as pickleball, futsal, and BMX, which required direct liaison with SSOs to confirm recognition status. This added complexity to the assessment process and caused confusion among applicants.

Eligibility challenges were also evident for disability sports, where alignment with the recognised list of sports proved difficult.

Additionally, eligibility is limited to organisations whose primary purpose is sport. This excludes community organisations that deliver sporting programs aligned with LS GP objectives but whose primary focus lies elsewhere. Determining an organisation's primary purpose often requires the Office of Sport to conduct a detailed review of its constitution, creating further administrative burden.

However, stakeholders including SSOs and applicants, expressed concern that broadening access could dilute the program's focus and available funding on grassroots sport. There were also concerns that expanding eligibility would increase application volumes, including from organisations lacking the governance structures necessary to deliver safe and effective sporting experiences. This could significantly increase the administrative workload required to assess eligibility and program alignment.

The lead time between application and award creates planning and procurement challenges

Grantees reported that the lack of clarity in the funding announcement and award date has made it more difficult for them to plan their projects effectively. The 2023-24 grant guidelines stated that outcomes would be advised "April 2024 onwards". As such, they would appreciate greater specificity on the program timeline. While this level of precision may be a challenge for the Office of Sport as the timeline ultimately depends on the Minister of Sport, clearer guidelines would provide certainty for applicants.

In addition, many grantees reported that in the six months between the application and award stages of the program, their original quotes had expired, and new quotes were more expensive.

This put their club in a situation where they must decide whether and how to self-fund the increase in costs or to forfeit the grant which was a particularly tough decision for clubs who do not have sufficient cash reserves. Some applicants accounted for this risk by including contingency allowances in their budgets. Others did not, indicating varying levels of awareness or experience in managing cost changes. As one grantee noted: *"We've had [cost change] issues in the past with larger grants, especially around construction. Because we've been burnt before, we now include a 10 per cent contingency as a buffer - you don't want to be out of pocket on those things."*

“ A clearer indication of when it is assessed and what date and timeframe there is for advice on [whether an application has] succeeded or not succeeded would be useful.

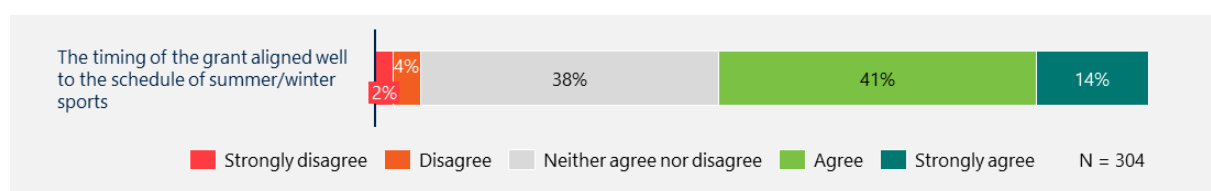
Applicant

There is no timing for the LS GP that will suit all clubs and sports

In the 2023-24 grant round, funding was awarded in April/May, coinciding with the end of the summer sport season and the beginning of the winter sport season. Just over half of surveyed applicants (55 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that the timing aligned well with the seasonal schedule of their sport, as shown in Figure 12. However, this represents a relatively low level of satisfaction compared to other aspects of the program.

This sentiment was echoed by focus group participants. Grantees from both summer and winter sports clubs faced timing issues with their grants. Some summer sports clubs reported that their season had ended before they received their funding, delaying the benefits of their project until the following year. Similarly, winter sports clubs experienced challenges because their project completion occurred after their season had begun, when uniforms and equipment were already needed. While no single timing will suit all clubs and sports, the results suggest that the current schedule do not align well with a portion of applicants.

Figure 12 | Applicant satisfaction with program timing (2023-24)



Under the electorate funding model, associations face limitations in delivering strategic programs across clubs

The current approach demands localised applications at the electorate level, hindering the ability to implement cohesive strategies across electorates. Cross-electorate events are often viewed unfavourably by electoral assessors, further limiting their viability. Associations face distinct challenges when aiming to address broader strategic needs. The requirement to submit separate applications for each electorate has led to increased administrative burden and fragmentation of efforts. Consequently, this hampers the ability to achieve consistent and impactful outcomes across their clubs. Addressing these flaws in the funding model could pave the way for more effective and unified program delivery.

Some grantees face challenges in supporting under-represented groups

“Very few people with disability do triathlons, and we don’t live in an area with many first nations people.”

Applicant

Grantees expressed concern that not all clubs and projects have the capacity to directly benefit under-represented groups, particularly in rural and remote areas, where limited cultural and demographic diversity makes it challenging to design targeted programs. This may result in otherwise well-aligned projects missing out on funding or potential applicants being discouraged from applying due to the additional weighting applied to projects that benefit under-represented groups.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT (PD)

1. **Explore ways to reduce the lead time between the application and award stages** | Shorten lead times by potentially reducing the administrative requirements for lower value grants and announcing them earlier.
2. **Reconsider approach to partial funding** | Consider implementing rules to minimise the recommendation for partial funding at the merit assessment stage.

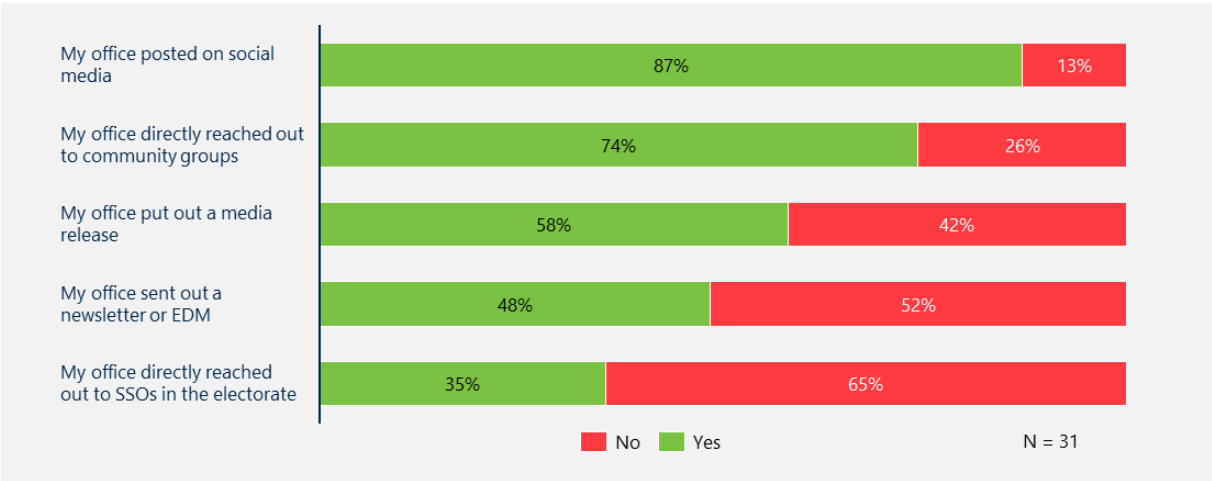
See Section 6.2.1 and Section 6.2.2 for suggestions relating to increasing the overall funding envelope and revising eligibility criteria respectively.

4.2 Application: A relatively straightforward and easy to navigate process for most applicants

The Office of Sport, MPs and SSOs promoted the LSGP effectively

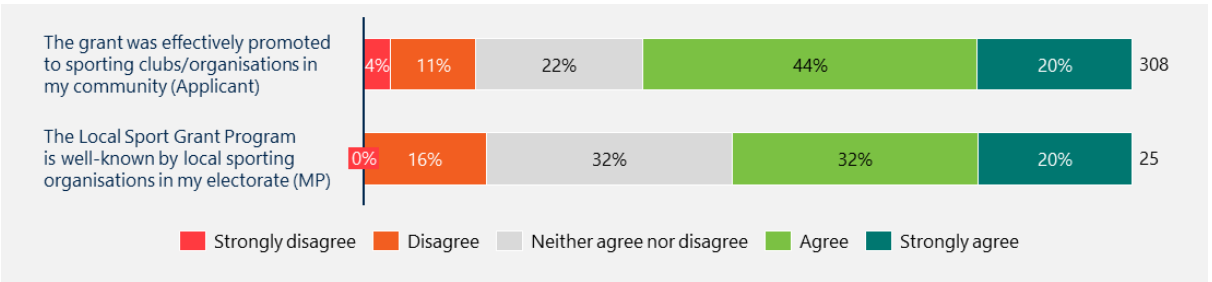
The Office of Sport directly promoted the program through email and the Office of Sport website. They were supported by SSOs (e.g. Cricket NSW, Football NSW etc.) who notified their member clubs about the LSGP via email or their newsletter. Stakeholders also reported that MPs played a major role in the promotion of the grant. Social media, outreach to community groups and media releases were the key methods for promoting the program used by MPs as outlined in Figure 13. Applicants reported in focus groups that being part of established networks or having direct communication with MPs improved their club’s engagement with the LSGP, which was often how they first learned about the grant.

Figure 13 | Promotional activities undertaken by electorate offices (2023-24)



Applicants were mostly satisfied with the promotion of the grant as outlined in Figure 14. MPs were less confident about promotion effectiveness and the reach of the program as approximately half of MPs agree or strongly agree that the LSGP is well known by sporting organisations in their electorate. It is important to note that the evaluation only engaged stakeholders who were aware of the LSGP. A more accurate assessment of the promotion and reach of the LSGP would include input from a random sample of sporting organisations in NSW.

Figure 14 | Applicant and MP sentiment on grant promotion

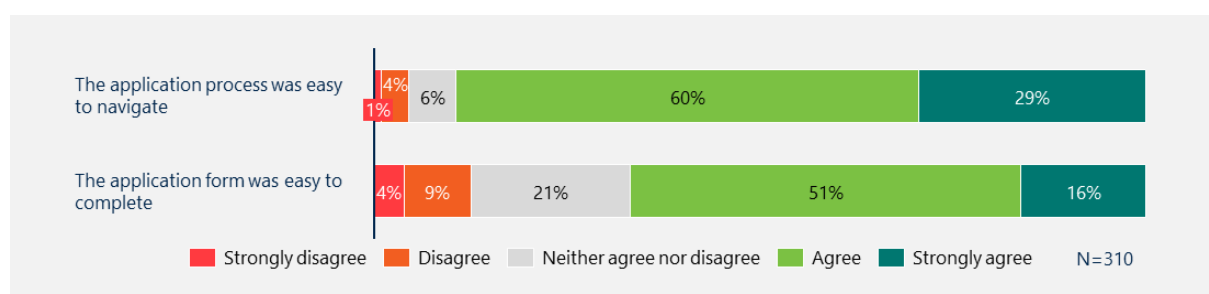


SSOs also expressed a desire for more visibility into which clubs are applying and what they are applying for, to better tailor support and strategic planning. Local clubs did not share this view – they believe SSOs should proactively engage and understand needs independently, rather than relying on visibility through the grant process.

The application template is easy to navigate, well structured, and proportionate to the grant size

The application process allows applicants to easily submit their applications, with 67 per cent of survey respondents who agree or strongly agree that the grant application is simple and straightforward to complete (Figure 15). Feedback from applicants indicates a high level of satisfaction with the navigation and usability of the grant application form. Applicants also emphasised the intuitive format of the application. Figure 15 illustrates this sentiment, showing that 89 per cent of surveyed applicants agree that the application process was easy to navigate. Satisfaction was lower for unsuccessful applicants however even so, more than half of unsuccessful applicants agree or strongly agree (62 per cent) that the application process was easy to navigate.

Figure 15 | Applicant satisfaction with the application process (2023-24)



The application system offered applicants flexibility to navigate back and forth within the form and save their progress. This functionality permits applicants to complete their applications at their own pace, ensuring they can provide thoughtful and comprehensive responses without time constraints. Such features were reported to be highly valued by participants of focus groups, contributing to the positive reception of the application process overall.

“ For the amount you’re requested in LSGP it’s the right amount of detail required, and it’s quite a simple process.

Applicant

The application process was found to include a carefully balanced set of questions that were proportional to the size and scope of the grant being applied for. This approach facilitates robust governance while ensuring that the detail required does not overwhelm applicants. Focus group participants agreed that the application framework is appropriate given the requested grant size, characterising it as both simple and adequate.

A variety of support resources were also available to assist applicants in crafting compelling applications. These resources include webinars, links to the Office of Sport Strategic Plan, descriptions of previously funded projects, and other relevant documents. Applicants in focus groups reported that they particularly appreciated the webinars, which provided valuable guidance.

Despite its simplicity, certain aspects of the application process present challenges and complexities for applicants

Repetitive questions and design and system limitations of the application form has made the application process more challenging for applicants. Figure 15 indicates that 13 per cent of applicants disagree or strongly disagree that the application form was easy to complete.

A key concern among applicants was the presence of repetitive application questions.

In approximately half of the focus groups, applicant and SSO stakeholders raised that some questions in the application form were repetitive. Some applicants in focus groups attributed this to insufficient skip logic that required responses to questions less relevant to their projects. For example, projects aimed at improving access for one under-represented group were asked to provide datapoints about other under-represented groups that were not part of their project's target audience. Many applicants noted that the application form included the same questions worded in slightly different ways, which contributed to a perception of redundancy and length in the form. Simplifying and streamlining the form would address these concerns.

Limitations of the application form made completing and submitting applications difficult for some applicants.

The application form presents difficulties for clubs seeking multiple funding streams simultaneously, such as those for facilities and equipment, which often require distinct submissions despite their interconnected nature. This creates tension between applicants and the Office of Sport's view that each project should be separately submitted. Additionally, specific submission requirements such as obtaining landowners' consent for facility upgrades, and difficulties with the address locator function for clubs without a defined address, further complicate the process and impacted submission accuracy. Reviewing these elements can ensure that

the form facilitates a streamlined relevant, and strategic application experience for clubs, and ensure that all data collected is relevant and fit for purpose.

Improved functionality could support collaborative grant writing processes.

Given that grant writing is inherently collaborative, involving directors, grants officers and committee members, adjustments to form functionality were raised as a potential improvement. While PDF downloads are available, the option to download the application into Word may facilitate easier coordination among clubs, streamlining the process and reducing time spent on converting forms.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AP)

1. **Remove or reframe repetitive questions** | Amend the set of questions in the application form so that it only includes questions that elicit new information from the applicant e.g. removing the question “how will the project address barriers to participation in sport?” if the question “How the project will increase regular and ongoing participation in sport within your community?” is retained. To support this, incorporate survey logic so that applicants only answer questions about the outcomes they elected that their project would contribute to.
1. **Remove mandatory quantitative outcomes data collection in the application form** | Review the accuracy and reliability of expected outcomes data collected through the application form and remove questions that are not likely to elicit reliable data.
2. **Explore options to enable the application form to be downloaded as a word document** | The word document would provide more options for applicants and their organisations to collaborate on their grant application.

4.3 Assessment: Clarity in process, with inconsistent scoring

The LSGP assessment model diverges from standard public sector grant practice

While MPs play an important role in representing community interests, their direct involvement in assessing grant applications, such as in the Local Sport Grant Program, raises concerns around best practice in public sector grant administration. The NSW Grants Administration Guide underscores the importance of transparency, fairness, and the avoidance of both actual and perceived conflicts of interest in grant processes². In most NSW and Commonwealth grant programs (e.g. NSW Environmental Trust Grants, Australian Research Council Grants), assessments are typically conducted by independent panels or qualified public servants to ensure decisions are based on merit and clearly defined criteria. Maintaining a clear separation between political roles and administrative functions helps uphold public confidence in the integrity of grant funding decisions.

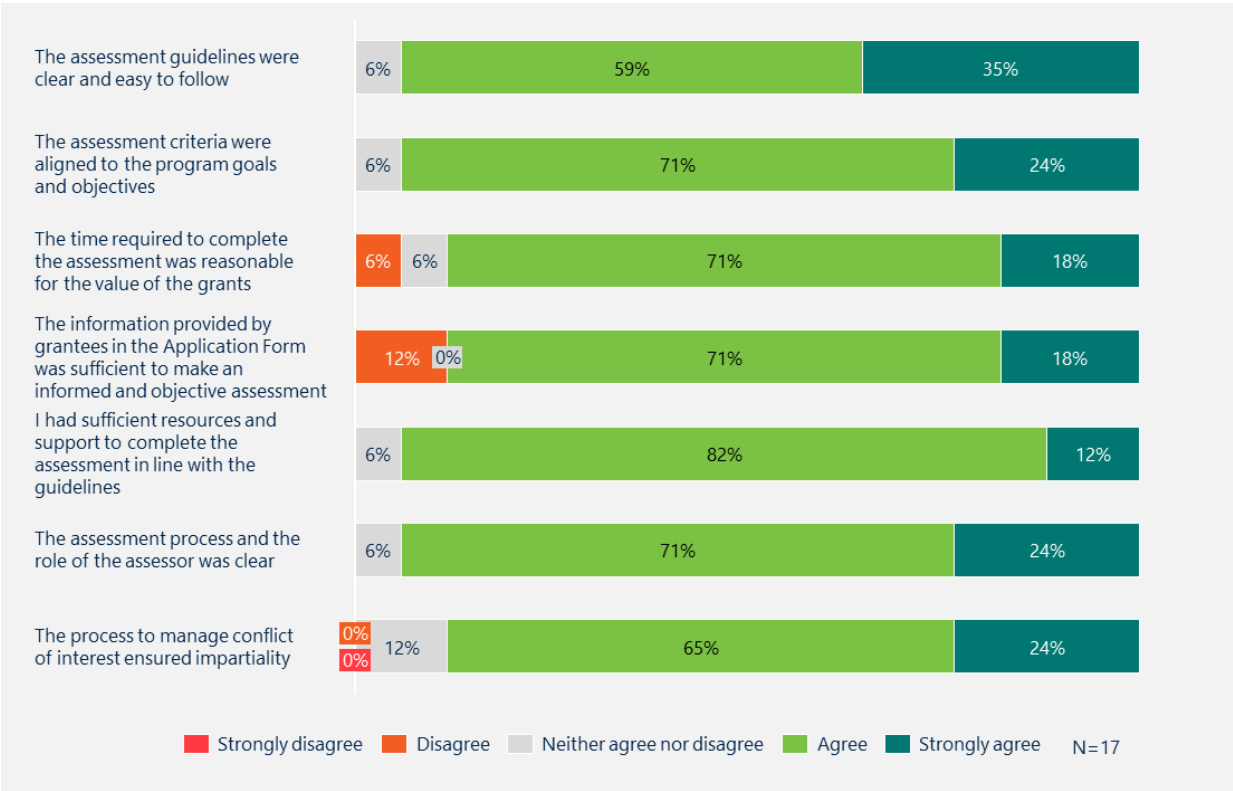
LSGP assessors are satisfied with the current process

Members of Parliament (MPs) and their delegates were highly satisfied with the assessment process with at least 88 per cent of MP or delegate respondents selecting agree or strongly agree to all statements in the Assessor Survey (Figure 16) indicating that:

- **Alignment with program intent:** The assessment criteria were appropriate and well-aligned with the program’s goals and objectives.
- **Clarity of guidance:** The assessment guidelines were seen as clear, accessible, and easy to apply.
- **Proportionality of effort:** The time required to complete assessments was considered reasonable and appropriate given the scale and value of the grants.

² NSW Government, Grant Administration Guide

Figure 16 | Member of Parliament (MP) and delegate satisfaction with the assessment process (2023-24)

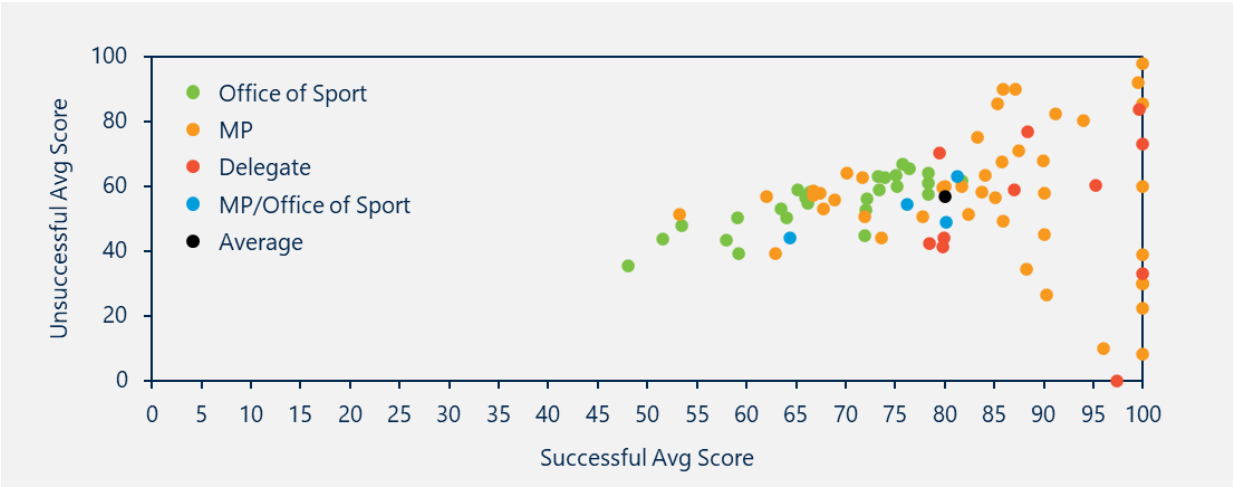


The LSGP assessment process presents consistency and equity challenges

Assessors did not conduct merit assessments consistently

There is significant variation in scores across different assessor groups, suggesting an inconsistent application of assessment criteria by assessors. This was particularly the case for MPs and delegates as demonstrated in Figure 17. The LSGP had 96 individual assessors in 2023-24 and no measures in place to moderate merit assessment scores, which has likely contributed to the inconsistent assessment of grant applications.

Figure 17 | Average score for applicants by electorate by assessor group (2023-24)



There were instances observed where merit assessment was likely not conducted objectively

There were several instances where the merit assessments were clearly not conducted objectively as outlined below:

- In 10 electorates all successful applications received a merit score of 100
- In 13 electorates all successful applications received an identical merit assessment score
- In two electorates, all unsuccessful applications received a merit score of zero
- In seven electorates, all unsuccessful applications received the same score
- 22 projects who reported that they could not proceed without full funding were recommended partial funding. In most cases (13), this was due to ineligible scope in projects or inclusion of GST in the application. No reason was provided for nine projects.

The assessment plan enabled the Office of Sport to override decisions made by MPs or delegates where partial funding was inappropriately awarded or when merit assessments were conducted improperly (e.g. providing the same score for all applications). The LS GP would benefit from more measures to ensure that the merit assessment process is holistically consistent and objective.

Applicants have concerns around transparency due to limited feedback



My project didn't get funded but another project got a coffee machine.

Applicant

Some unsuccessful applicants expressed disappointment that their projects were not funded, particularly when other selected projects appeared less critical or less aligned with the program's objectives. They also reported receiving a generic notification email with limited feedback, which left them frustrated. This lack of transparency and support made the process feel unfair and did little to help them improve their future grant applications.

The merit assessment process is currently a significant administrative burden even though the Office of Sport only conduct a fraction of the merit assessments.

In 2023-24, 974 applications were eligible for the LS GP and the Office of Sport conducted merit assessments for 285 applications (29 per cent). The merit assessment currently requires significant administrative effort from the Office of Sport and accounts for 22 per cent of total estimated administrative costs. In addition, effort to manage external assessors (MPs/delegates) accounts for 17 per cent of total costs resulting in 39 per cent of administrative costs being dedicated to the merit assessment process. As such, delivering substantial training and support to assessors across all electorates in addition to existing responsibilities would place a considerable and ongoing resource burden on the office of sport.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

See Section 6.1 for suggestions relating to improving the consistency and transparency of the assessment process.

4.4 Administration: Efficient and effective administration by the Office of Sport

Administration covers the end-to-end process for the LS GP. Insights about application, assessment and acquittal are outlined in Section 4.2, Section 4.3 and Section 4.5 respectively. This section outlines feedback from stakeholders about ongoing support provided by the Office of Sport and insights about the administrative effort required to deliver this end-to-end process.

Applicants were highly satisfied with administration of the LS GP, particularly with the support provided of Office of Sport staff

The majority of applicants agree that they were notified of the outcome of their application in line with what was communicated and that they received payment in a timely manner, as outlined in Figure 18.

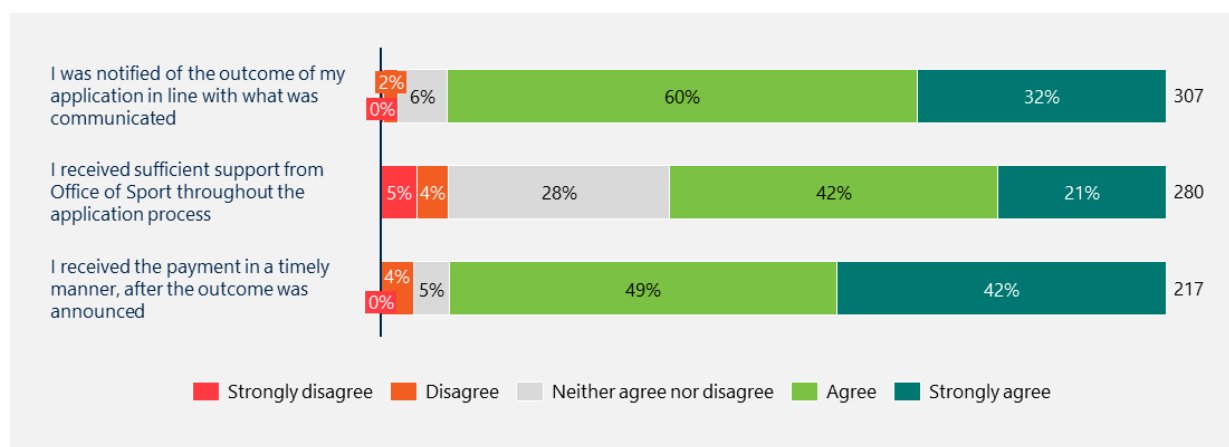
“ They have been extremely helpful and it is a pleasure to seek their assistance.

Applicant

Qualitatively, applicants unanimously reported that the Office of Sport provided exceptional support to them throughout the grant process. Support staff were said to be knowledgeable, responsive, patient and helped applicants and grantees to navigate the complexities of the application and acquittal form (e.g. the inclusion of in-kind contributions, GST etc.).

While a lower proportion of respondents agree or strongly agree that they received sufficient support from the Office of Sport throughout the application process, this can likely be attributed to some applicants not requiring support, which explains the significantly larger proportion of respondents who neither agree nor disagree (28 per cent) with the statement. However, it is also notable that around 9 per cent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed a higher level of dissatisfaction compared to other statements.

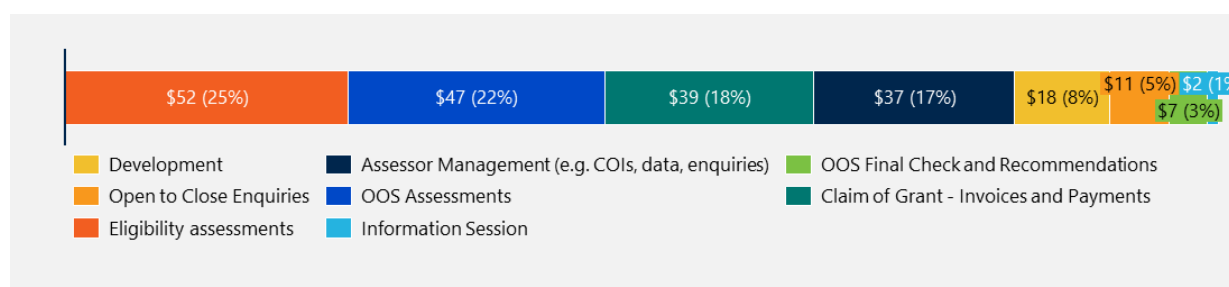
Figure 18 | Applicant satisfaction with program administration (2023-24)



The administrative effort required to deliver the LSGP is within expectations for a program of this size and scope

The total estimated cost from program development to claim of grant is \$232,678.99 which is five per cent of the total allocated grant amount. 47 per cent of administrative effort is spent conducting eligibility assessments (25 per cent) and conducting merit assessments (22 per cent), as outlined in Figure 19. This is in line with expectations with these activities being the core ongoing administration activities of the LSGP.

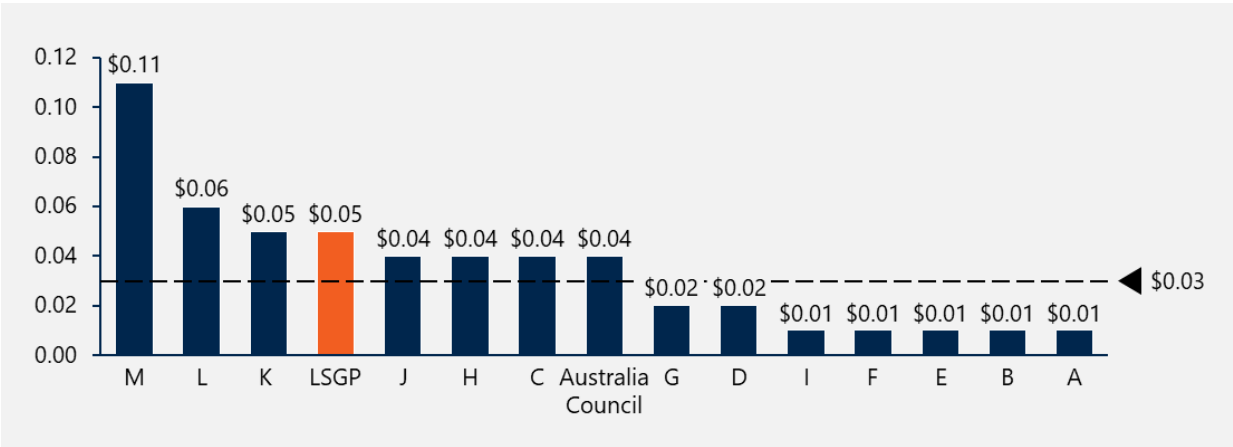
Figure 19 | Proportion of administrative effort at each stage of the 2023-24 program (000s) ³



According to a study conducted by the Australian National Audit Office in 2017, the cost of administering \$1 of funding for the LSGP is aligned to similar organisations that deliver grants programs (see Figure 20). It is important to note that while this study uses appropriate comparator entities to the Office of Sport (State and Commonwealth departments), the study does not make considerations for the size of the grants administered by each comparator. Smaller grant programs like the LSGP are less well placed to benefit from economies of scale and as such, would be expected to have a higher administrative cost per unit of funding.

³ Office of Sport estimate. The figure excludes the effort for the acquittal stage as this process is currently ongoing

Figure 20 | Costs of administering \$1 of funding for various grant delivery organisations⁴



4.5 Monitoring and evaluation: Reporting requirements are reasonable with an opportunity to improve outcome reporting

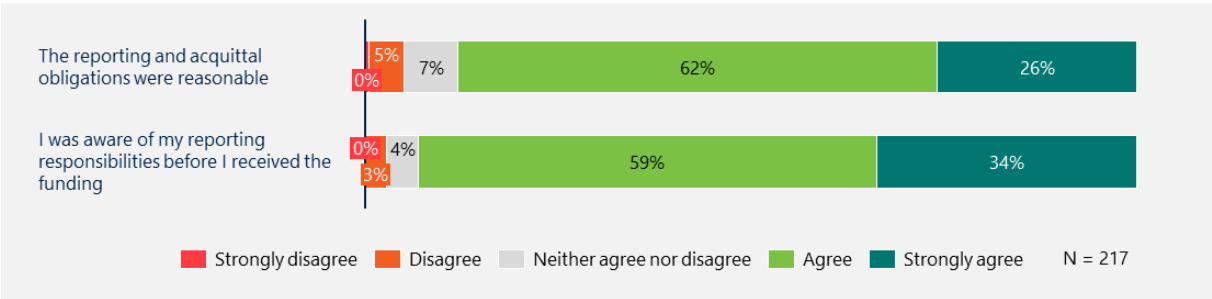
The current processes for data collection and reporting on project outcomes are appropriate given the size of the program, but timing and data collection can be refined to enhance accuracy.

The reporting requirements for the grant program align with the NSW Grants Guidelines

The NSW Grant Administration Guidelines state that the volume, detail, and frequency of reporting should be proportional to the program’s risks and intended outcomes. Program acquittal reporting aligns with the NSW Grant Administration Guidelines, including requirements for timely submission of financial acquittals, provision of supporting expenditure evidence, and dual office bearer certification confirming appropriate use of funds. These expectations are consistent with the LSGP size and complexity.

Most grantees agree or strongly agree that the reporting and acquittal obligations were reasonable and that they were aware of their reporting responsibilities before they received the funding as shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21 | Grantee satisfaction with reporting requirements (2023-24)



“ I am happy to validate the expense. I would want anyone who was getting the money to do the same thing.

Grantee

The recent rounds of the LSGP have seen increased scrutiny in the acquittal process as compared to previous rounds. Grantees had noted the requirement to add more detailed documentation, such as receipts for all purchases. While this has added to the administrative load on volunteers, many grantees still found the process fair and transparent.

⁴ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), Efficiency of the Australia Council’s Administration of Grants (2017)

Timing poses a challenge in the acquittals process for grantees

Delays in acquittal closure have complicated grantee compliance. Requests from the Office of Sport for additional information have been reported up to six months after initial submission, often requiring grantees to retrieve receipts or records from several years prior. One grantee noted receiving acquittal closure confirmation for the 2022-23 LSGP round in early 2025, highlighting the extended timeframes and administrative burden.

Similarly, while acquittals coincide with project completion, this timing may not align with when outcomes can be fully recorded, and grantees can only acquit based on the information they have available.

This suggests that separating the outcomes reporting from the acquittals process may better enable better collection of outcomes data, ensuring more accurate and meaningful evaluation.

“Typically, you spend all the money [at completion] but you know more about the outcomes later.”

Grantees find it difficult to quantify outcomes directly linked to their projects

Attribution challenges in data collection make it difficult for grantees to quantify project outcomes with confidence. A common issue is the reliance on metrics like increased membership, which may not accurately reflect broader participation objectives. As one grantee noted, “When you are in a sport, it is really hard to pin down when people come and go. It doesn’t always clearly convert to members of clubs.” This makes tracking new members particularly challenging, especially when improvements in facilities or experiences do not directly translate into registrations.

Attribution becomes even more complex when outcomes could be linked to multiple project elements or concurrent initiatives. Grantees commonly reported relying on broad estimates, with some acknowledging that the numbers are often “a bit of making it up.” These limitations point to the need for more nuanced and sophisticated data collection approaches, including the integration of qualitative insights, to better capture the true impact of funded projects.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT (ME)

1. **Provide more opportunities for grantees to provide qualitative data on their project outcomes where quantitative data is not available** | The approach may involve outlining several preferred options for providing outcomes data and an option to answer qualitatively if quantitative measures are unavailable. There is also an opportunity to administer a separate survey including questions regarding grantees’ perception of the impact of their project (including Likert-scale and open ended questions) to capture qualitative outcomes data. This may be sent one year after the completion of their project and should be managed by the senior evaluation lead to unburden the grants team.
2. **Explore options to expedite project acquittal** | Once the deadline for project acquittal has passed, explore ways to ensure that any follow-ups for additional information from grantees can be done while documents and data are still readily available.

5 Outcomes evaluation

SECTION OVERVIEW

This section presents outcomes evaluation findings, organised by the stated outcome of the LSGP. The section commences with broad insights relating to the outcomes of the LSGP and then detailed findings about each target outcome.

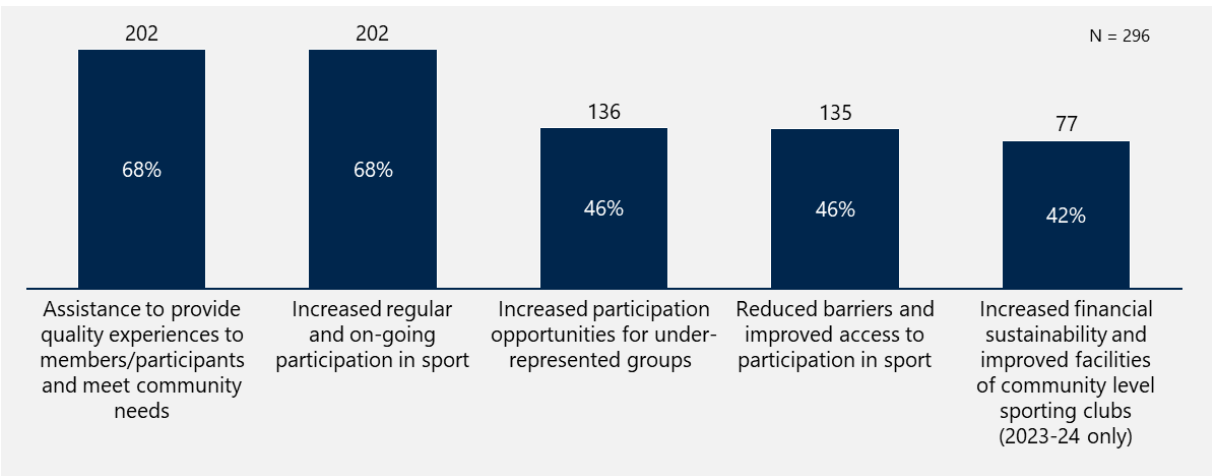
Findings are informed by consultations with key stakeholders and analysis of documents, program data and survey data over the course of the evaluation.

5.1 The LSGP creates meaningful outcomes in grassroots sport, though increased investment will strengthen sustainability

Grantees have indicated project outcomes are contributing to the objectives of the LSGP

Survey data reflects outcomes were met across all grant objectives, with the highest outcome areas by total proportion of surveyed projects being increased regular and ongoing participation in sport (68 per cent) and assistance in providing quality experiences to members and meeting community needs (68 per cent). The proportion of projects reported to have meet each objective are outline in Figure 22.

Figure 22 | Proportion of projects reported to have meet each objective (self-reported by grantees) (2022-23 and 2023-24)



The LSGP is reported as essential for the operations of grantees

Quotes from grantees highlight the considerable impact funded projects have on the ongoing survival of clubs. While subsequent sections will delve into the outcomes of the grant by each high-level objective, Figure 23 compiles quotes that illustrate the varied impact of the grant on grantees.

Figure 23 | Collection of quotes from grantees reflecting the grant’s impact

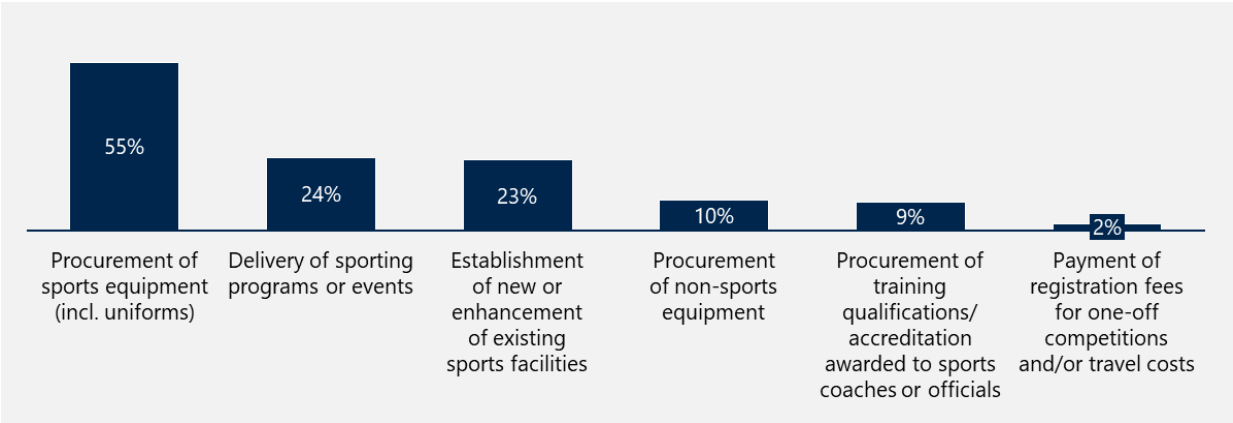


However, available funding may not support longer-term sustainability for grassroots community sport

In examining the extent to which each objective’s sub-objectives were met, some areas, such as increasing participation among under-represented groups (46 per cent) and enhancing financial sustainability and improving facilities in sporting clubs (42 per cent), show that available funding may not support longer-term sustainable change. Notably, just 23 per cent of projects focused on establishing new or enhancing existing sporting facilities—activities more likely to deliver lasting impact (see Figure 24).

There are mixed views within the Office of Sport regarding whether the grant is intended to drive long-term sustainability or primarily address immediate needs. This issue is further explored in 5.6, providing insight into the grant’s role in supporting point-in-time requirements versus fostering enduring development for clubs.

Figure 24 | Proportion of respondents’ projects by type

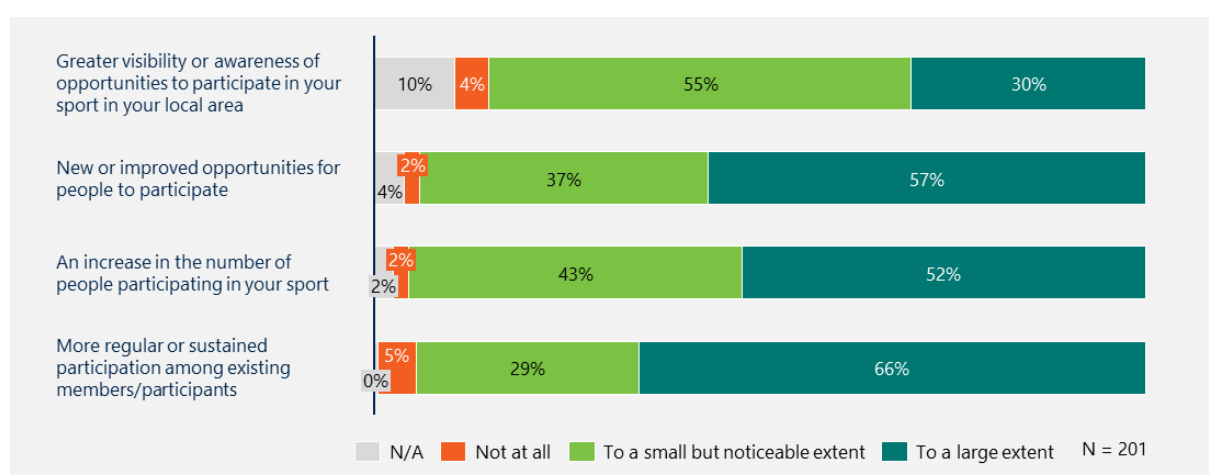


5.2 The LSGP supported regular and on-going participation in sport across NSW by attracting new members and increasing frequency of sports participation

Participants report that the LSGP was successful in increasing regular and ongoing participation in sport

Targeted projects have significantly enhanced sports participation by addressing financial barriers, increasing community interest, and improving access to facilities and equipment. A significant portion (68 per cent) of surveyed LSGP-funded projects successfully increased regular and ongoing participation in sport. Of these, 95 per cent of respondents saw regular or sustained participation among existing participants, and saw an increase in the number of people participating in their sport.

Figure 25 | Proportion of grantees who achieved participation objectives by sub-objective



The LSGP funds a diverse range of projects required for sustaining and increasing participation

Clubs used the LSGP to fund different types of projects that increased or sustained participation in three main ways:

- **Projects reduced participation costs to lower barriers to entry.** Grants have been strategically utilised to acquire essential equipment, hire coaches, and secure venues, crucial elements in decreasing participation costs.
- **Projects created greater visibility or awareness of participation opportunities through community events.** A rugby club effectively used grant funding to host a "come and try" event for girls, leading to the formation of an additional girls' rugby team, showcasing how community events act as catalysts for introducing sports to new participants and encouraging sports involvement. According to Figure 24, 24 per cent of surveyed projects either supported these community events or delivered programs designed to increase participation.
- **Projects expanded participation for current members through infrastructure and equipment upgrades.** One club shared that training equipment indoors encouraged participation from women in a triathlon club, as they may feel less safe training on public roads. The outcomes of infrastructure and facility upgrades are discussed in more detail in Section 5.6.

The LSGP supported clubs to participate in sport more frequently

Sustained participation often involves more frequent engagement rather than merely attracting new members. For example, by funding improvements such as lighting installations for sports to operate at night,

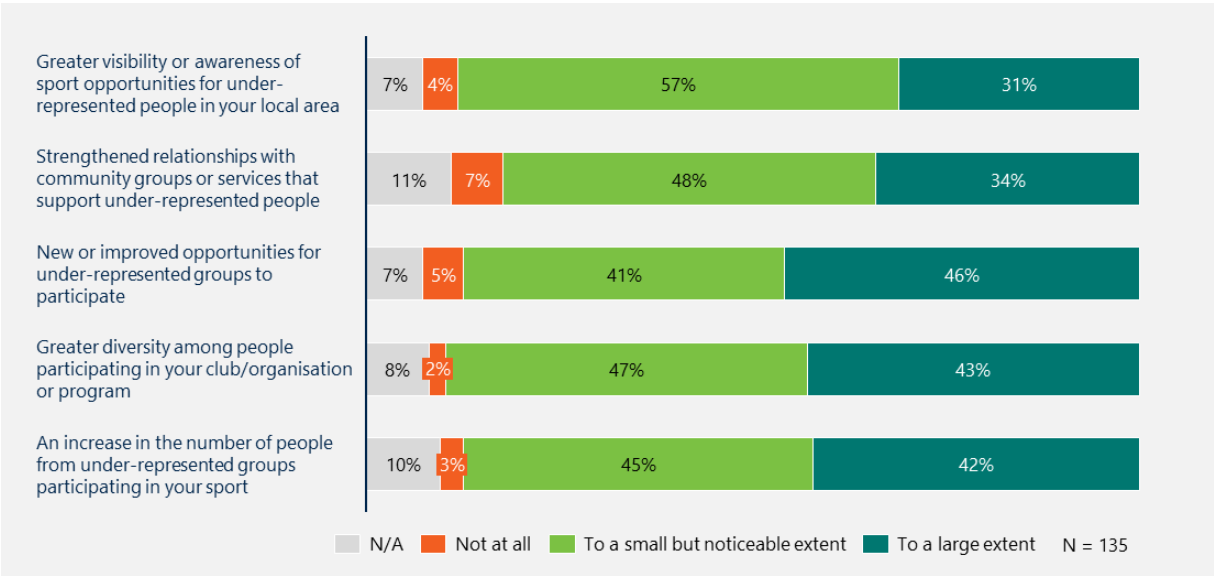
the grant has expanded opportunities for individuals who work during the day, allowing them to engage in sports more frequently. Additionally, acquiring equipment like super soppers has enabled clubs to maintain activities despite weather disruptions, illustrating the importance of these investments in ensuring consistent participation in community sports.

It is critical to note that simply reporting on membership increases may not directly reflect this outcome, as outlined in Section 4.5. Due to data limitations, current membership data is inadequate for accurately assessing the impact of grants on membership numbers.

5.3 The LSGP was successful in increasing participation in sport for select under-represented groups, particularly women and girls

Almost half (46 per cent) of all LSGP-funded projects successfully increased participation among under-represented groups. Of these, over 80 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree to achieving all listed sub-objectives, as seen in Figure 26.

Figure 26 | Proportion of projects targeting under-represented groups, by relevant objectives



A significant number of grantees reported positive outcomes:

- 89 per cent increased the visibility or awareness of sport opportunities for under-represented people in their local area
- 87 per cent delivered new or enhanced opportunities for under-represented groups to participate
- 90 per cent observed greater diversity among participants

These results highlight the program’s impact in fostering inclusion and broadening access to sport.

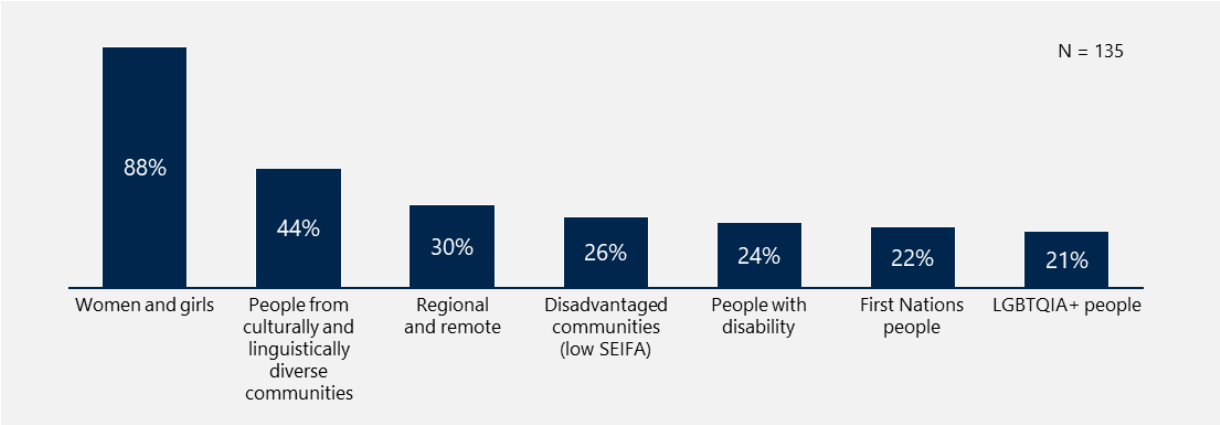
Most projects focused on women and girls, with additional attention to CALD communities and regional areas

The majority of projects achieving this objective focused on increasing participation among women and girls. Attention was also given to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations and regional and remote communities.

Although smaller percentages of grants targeted individuals with a disability, First Nations people, and LGBTQIA+ communities, these figures still represent a significant emphasis on these groups, reflecting a larger proportion than their overall representation within the NSW population. This approach highlights the

program's commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity in sport participation. Figure 27 reflects the distribution across identified priority cohorts.

Figure 27 | Proportion of projects enhancing access for under-represented groups, categorised by projects identified target groups



Projects employed various strategies to support increased participation in sport for under-represented groups

Clubs used the LSGP to support under-represented groups by:

- **Projects hosted inclusive sports events and programs which helped encourage participation and ongoing attendance.** While explored elsewhere, these initiatives created welcoming environments and encouraged participation from groups who may face social or cultural barriers.
- **Projects purchased essential equipment which enabled clubs to deliver tailored sports opportunities for under-represented participants.** Funding enabled clubs to acquire equipment tailored to the needs of under-represented participants, these included appropriate equipment for children with disabilities to participate in a holiday ice skating program. This grantee highlighted the transformative impact the grant played (see quote).
- **Projects covered costs such as registration fees and uniforms.** This helped to ensure that sport remained accessible to all. Several clubs with memberships predominantly comprising under-represented populations received grant funding, such as sports clubs for people with a disability and women’s sports. For example, 64 clubs with over 80 per cent female participation received funding.

“ We started with 20 [members], and we have reached up to 500 people from different ages and different disabilities. ”
Grantee from an organisation targeting people with disabilities

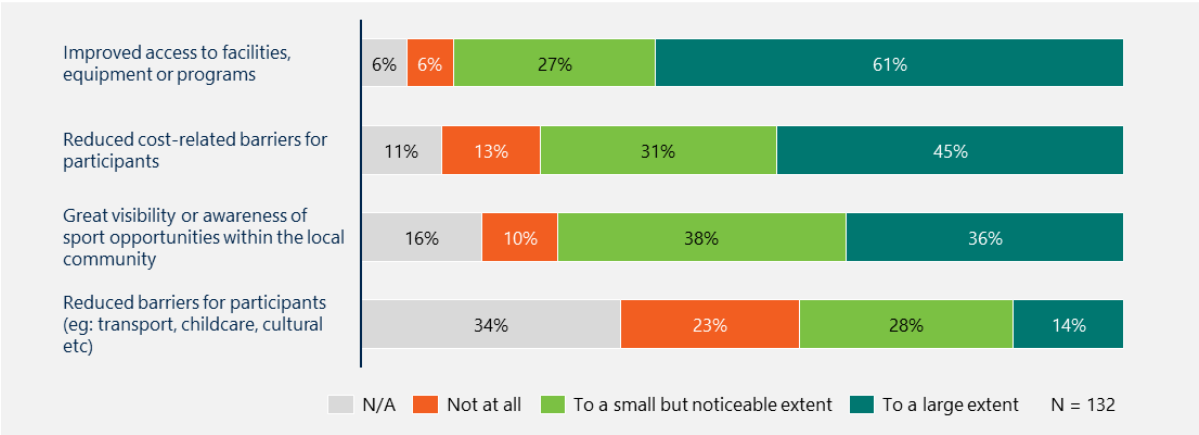
These comprehensive strategies underscore the proactive approach taken to enhance sports participation for under-represented groups.

5.4 The LSQP reduced cost-related barriers to participation, though smaller impact was realised on addressing cultural and structural barriers to sport

LSQP-funded projects have been largely successful in reducing cost-related barriers and improving access to facilities and visibility within communities

Almost half (46 per cent) of all LSQP-funded projects successfully reduced barriers and improved access to participation in sport. Among these projects, 76 per cent of grantees reported a decrease in cost-related barriers for participants, although 13 per cent noted that their efforts did not achieve this outcome.

Figure 28 | Proportion of projects reducing barriers and improving access to participation



Projects employed an array of strategies that aimed to increase participation, such as:

- **Projects reduced cost-related barriers to participation.** Grants were used to subsidise costs such as registration fees, uniforms, and venue hire. For example, the purchase of uniforms was a common strategy that not only reduced expenses but also removed structural barriers by fostering team identity and inclusion.

“ The uniforms unified our club. We have better visibility in the community now.”
Grantee
- **Projects implemented inclusive, community-focused initiatives.** A regional NSW organisation supporting First Nations communities provided uniforms on loan and required only a minimal registration contribution. The project also offered club roles to families unable to afford fees, promoting financial independence and deeper community engagement. This initiative benefited teams across multiple sports, particularly those with strong representation of First Nations women with young children.

“ Through our grant, we removed the barriers of uniforms, transport and equipment.”
Grantee

Efforts to address non-cost barriers remain challenging although key projects have strategically addressed both cost-related and logistical barriers

While financial support is crucial in increasing sports participation, there is a need for more comprehensive strategies to tackle other obstacles that prevent broader access, such as logistical or structural barriers. Some projects did address non-cost barriers such as transport, childcare, and cultural considerations (42 per cent). However, 23 per cent indicated limited or no success, highlighting the need for more comprehensive and targeted approaches.

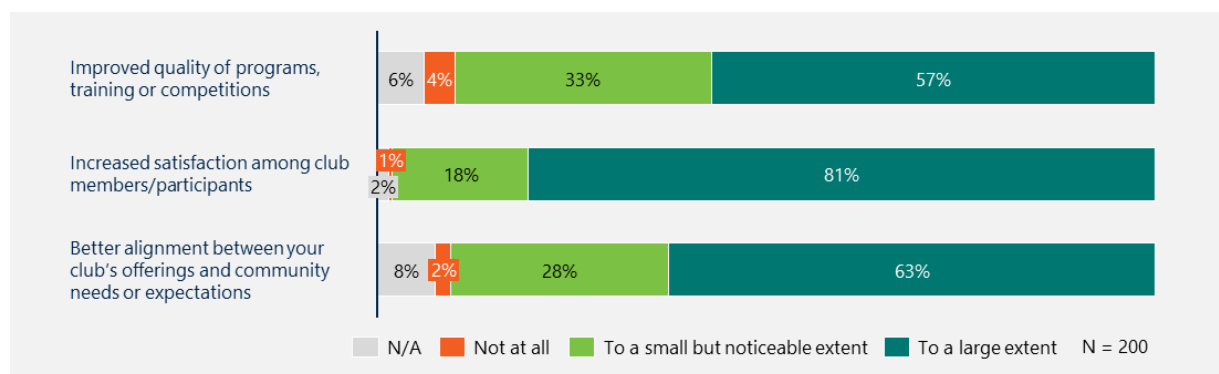
This project underscores the potential impact of LSQP funding when comprehensive strategies are employed to address diverse challenges in sports participation.

5.5 The LSGP enabled clubs to provide quality experiences to members and meet community needs

Grantees report that the LSGP enabled them to successfully provide quality experiences to members and meet community needs

A significant portion (68 per cent) of all LSGP-funded projects were reported by grantees to have successfully provided quality experiences to members and met community needs.

Figure 29 | Proportion of projects providing quality experiences to members and meeting community needs, by relevant objectives



The implementation of various sports projects has significantly enhanced the quality of sports experiences for participants

Projects funded under the LSGP have enriched the social and training environments, leading to a more enjoyable and safe sporting experience for participants, coaches and the community. As illustrated in Figure 29, respondents noted that their projects have improved the quality of equipment, with 90 per cent meeting this goal, while 98 per cent saw an increase in member satisfaction and 91 per cent saw better alignment of club offerings with community needs. The implementation of various sports projects has resulted in diverse benefits, these included:

- **Projects promoted social engagement and community connection.** For example, one club received funding for a new club room, which now serves as a multifunctional social space, strengthening member interaction and fostering a sense of community.
- **Projects provided a wider variety of equipment to meet diverse needs.** The purchase of inclusive and varied equipment allowed clubs to cater to different skill levels and participant groups, broadening activity options and promoting inclusivity.
- **Projects provided training and development for coaches and volunteers.** Nine per cent of total projects focused on upskilling coaches and volunteers. Grantees reported improved coaching quality and volunteer retention, which in turn supported participant engagement and club sustainability.

These projects have fostered a safer and more comfortable environment for sports activities, ultimately benefiting clubs and their members

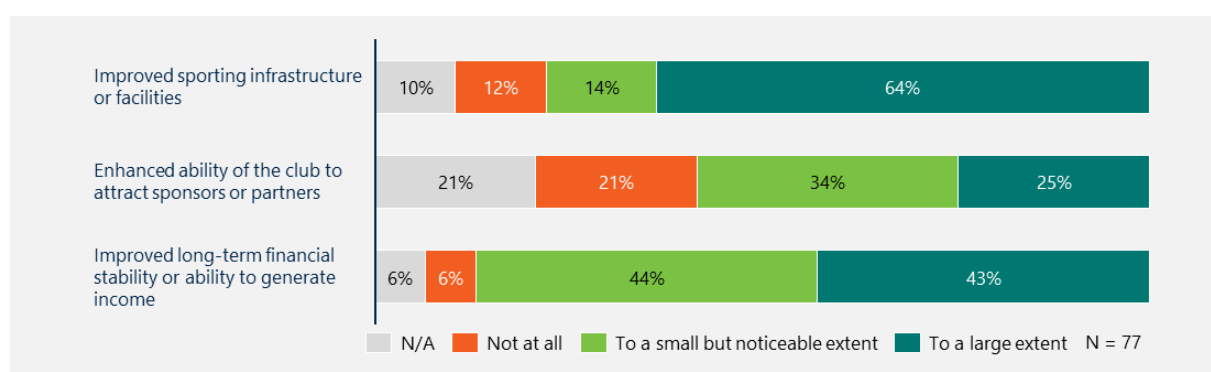
Projects have also increased safety within sports environments. For example, one project noted increased safety mats had significantly reduced the risk of injuries during bowling activities, ensuring participants can engage in sports with greater confidence and security. The installation of sunshades also marked an improvement in player comfort, providing protection from excessive sun exposure for an outdoor sport with a composition of elderly participants. Additionally, the replacement of muddy grass with concrete pathways for one club facilitated a more enjoyable experience and improved safety and accessibility for diverse members. These enhancements contribute to safer and more comfortable sports settings, ultimately benefiting clubs and their members by fostering more inclusive and enjoyable participation.

5.6 The LSGP supported the financial survival of clubs, but facility improvements were small in scale

Grantees report that the LSGP enabled them to improve facilities, although the extent to which is limited

42 per cent of all LSGP-funded projects were reported by grantees to have improved facilities and enhance financial sustainability as outlined in Figure 22. Despite limitations of the grant amount, 23 per cent of surveyed projects focused on upgrading or establishing new facilities, underscoring a commitment to enhancing physical infrastructure, according to Figure 30.

Figure 30 | Proportion of projects driving financial sustainability and improving facilities



Survey respondents who successfully implemented projects that contributed to improved facilities and financial outcomes achieved this through:

- **Enhanced quality and accessibility of sports infrastructure.** 78 per cent of survey respondents with successful projects reported improvements to sporting infrastructure. While the grant size limited the ability to significantly expand venue capacity, shared upgrades, such as lighting and amenities, benefited multiple clubs using the same facilities, supporting broader community participation.
- **Improved long-term financial sustainability and income generation.** 87 per cent of survey respondents with successful projects reported improved financial stability. This was achieved through initiatives such as implementing digital tools to streamline membership processes and enhancing websites and social media presence, with the purpose of attracting and retaining members. These improvements contributed to consistent membership growth and stronger economic viability.

The grant size limits the ability to significantly increase venue capacity or the number of venues

While the LSGP has enabled valuable facility improvements, the size of individual grants limits clubs' ability to significantly expand venue capacity or develop entirely new infrastructure. This limitation is particularly evident in areas with growing demand for sports facilities, such as regional NSW. Some SSOs noted opportunities to use LSGP funding in partnership with local councils such as extending pool operating hours to increase year-round access and participation. However, the grant size constrains the potential for major capacity increases or substantial infrastructure upgrades. It is important to note that such outcomes are not the current intent of the LSGP. Although there is no recurrent program administered by the Office of Sport specifically for this purpose, other Office of Sport and/or NSW Government initiatives over the past five years, such as the Greater Cities Sport Facility Fund⁵, have contributed to addressing these broader infrastructure needs.

⁵ Office of Sport, Greater Cities Sport Facility Fund

Grantees report less success enhancing club partnerships and sponsorships

According to survey results of successful grantees, projects have had a harder time attracting sponsorship and partners attributed to their projects. However, those that had (59 per cent) reported that these enhanced partnerships have fostered broader community ties, contributing to a more stable and engaged sporting environment. Upgraded digital presence and engagement have further boosted reputation and financial prospects.

6 Strategic recommendations

6.1 The LSGP can improve the consistency and transparency of the assessment process

As discussed in Section 4.3, the LSGP faces several key challenges during the assessment process:

- Inconsistent application of assessment criteria across different assessor groups and electorates.
- Concerns around objectivity and best practice
- Administrative burden for the Office of Sport to manage the large number of assessors for the LSGP

There are several strategies to address these challenges, summarised in Figure 31. These strategies range from centralisation of the assessment to enhance governance and support within the existing model. Within this spectrum, there are also opportunities to rethink ownership of assessment elements and potential moderation options. Each strategy, the options for implementing them and their key considerations are discussed further below.

Figure 31 | Strategies to enhance the consistency and transparency of the assessment process



6.1.1 Centralise assessment

In this option, shift full responsibility for assessment to a centralised and independent assessor, either the Office of Sport or a third-party provider, with optional input from MPs. This option will increase the level of independence, standardisation and consistency in merit assessment and significantly reduce the likelihood of conflict of interest. In this option, MP involvement could include:

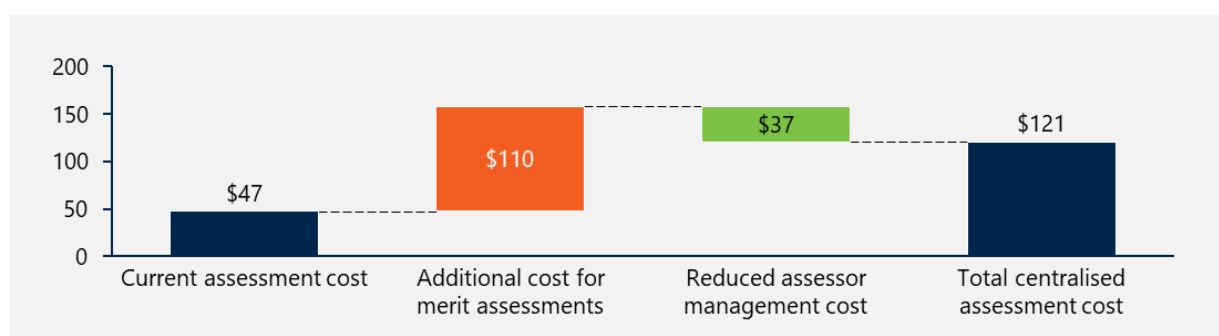
- **MPs/delegates provide their input by indicating “Support” or “No support”** for the projects in their electorate prior as an input to the merit assessment process – This option would retain some input from MPs/electorates which would reduce their pushback for this strategy.
- **The role of MPs/delegates will be limited to grant promotion and announcement** of successful applications – This option ensures that the merit assessment process remains completely impartial however will elicit significant pushback from MP stakeholders.

Key considerations include:

Increased resourcing and cost to assess 900+ applications.

The Office of Sport incurred an approximate cost of \$47,000 to administer assessments for the 2023–24 grant round. If the Office were to manage all assessments internally, the total cost would be approximately \$162,000 (based on the proportion of assessments conducted in the previous round), offset by \$37,000 currently spent on external assessor management. This would result in a net increase of \$78,000, as shown in Figure 32. This cost would also likely reduce as centralising the assessment process is expected to streamline the effort needed for eligibility assessments, although this benefit is not quantified in the current analysis.

Figure 32 | Impact on administration costs of the Office of Sport conducting all merit assessments (000s)



MPs may be less supportive of having reduced involvement.

A significant change to the current model is likely to encounter a degree of resistance. The LS GP is popular among MPs as it provides a direct mechanism to support grassroots organisations in their electorates, often enhancing local visibility and engagement. Reducing or removing their role in funding decisions may be perceived as limiting their ability to advocate for community needs and deliver tangible local benefits. Any reform in this direction would need to be carefully managed, with options for continued MP engagement to maintain political support for the LS GP.

6.1.2 Strengthen processes through a range of delegation responsibility

To enhance the integrity and consistency of the assessment process while preserving a role of elected representatives, a series of graduated options could be considered that distribute assessment responsibilities between the Office of Sport and MPs or their delegates. These models aim to strike a balance between robust, merit-based evaluation and local insight, with varying implications for administrative effort, transparency, and political acceptability:

- **Split criteria-based assessment:** Allocate responsibility for specific criteria to different assessors—e.g. the Office of Sport assesses Value for Money and Project Deliverability (Criteria 3 and 4), while MPs/delegates assess Strategic Justification and Scope (Criteria 1 and 2). This would enable the Office of Sport to play a more active role in ensuring merit-based assessment, while MPs/delegates retain ability to offer more informed understanding of local electorate needs.
- **Office of Sport conducts all merit assessments; MPs/delegates make final recommendations:** Under this model, the Office of Sport would independently assess all applications against the criteria, while MPs/delegates would retain authority to recommend which applications are funded. This would ensure consistency in scoring and justification of funding decisions but retains some challenges in managing probity in recommendations.
- **Office of Sport filters applications based on minimum scores; MPs/delegates select from shortlist:** In this option, only applications that meet a minimum quality threshold would progress to MPs/delegates for final recommendation. This would ensure that all funded projects clearly align with program objectives while preserving electorate input.
- **Embedded moderation panels:** A small panel (inclusive of MPs) could be convened to review and moderate assessments for electorates where the merit assessment scores are outliers. While this model would increase the accountability MPs have for their assessment scores, it could highlight a lack of rigour in the assessment process. It would also require clear governance structures and transparency to protect the credibility of decisions.

6.1.3 Enhance enabling support

Improvements can be made by strengthening the governance and support structures around the existing model. These enhancements would aim to improve consistency, fairness, and transparency while retaining the

role of MPs/delegates in the process. These actions are not mutually exclusive and could be pursued in parallel:

- **Provide enhanced education and training for assessors:** Delivering clearer guidance and structured training would support MPs and their delegates to apply the assessment criteria more consistently and understand how peers across electorates are interpreting the merit components. This could also reinforce the link between criteria and policy objectives, helping to reduce unintended variation.
- **Require assessors to submit more detailed feedback for all applicants:** Mandating commentary or justification for both successful and unsuccessful applications would improve transparency and accountability. It would also provide valuable insights to applicants to help strengthen future submissions and build grant writing capacity across community sport.
- **Introduce a feedback mechanism for anomalous scoring:** Where assessments result in unusually high, low or non-differentiated scores, a light-touch moderation process could be introduced to clarify rationale with the assessor or adding an internal review layer within the Office of Sport. Such a mechanism would reduce instances where criteria may have been misunderstood or inconsistently applied.

Collectively, these governance enhancements could preserve the intent and local insight embedded in the current assessment model, while bolstering credibility, fairness and administrative integrity.

RECOMMENDATION

Best practice in grant program design is to implement a fully independent and centralised assessment process. This model maximises fairness, consistency, and transparency, and helps ensure that funding decisions are based on merit and alignment with program objectives.

However, acknowledging the low likelihood of this model being adopted due to political and operational considerations, Nous recommend strengthened delegation processes. This approach would materially improve the integrity and transparency of the assessment process, while still retaining meaningful involvement from MPs and their delegates.

Key recommendation:

- **Office of Sport conducts all merit assessments; MPs/delegates make final recommendations.** Under this model, all applications are assessed against the published criteria ensuring consistency and alignment with the program Guidelines. MPs/delegates would retain final recommendation responsibilities, preserving their ownership of the process and ability to reflect local knowledge. However, any variations from the merit assessment would need to be clearly justified in line with the program's objectives and criteria. This approach introduces an additional layer of accountability, ensuring that deviations from the assessed merit are transparent and evidence-based, without applying undue restriction on MPs' discretion.

If this recommendation is not feasible, two enabling actions should be implemented to improve current processes:

- **Require assessors to submit more detailed feedback for all applicants**
- **Introduce a feedback mechanism for anomalous scoring**

Additionally, the Office of Sport can consider **embedding a moderation panel** that includes input from MPs to review electorates with outlier merit assessment scores and determine which projects from oversubscribed electorates receive remaining funding from undersubscribed electorates.

Together, these changes offer a pragmatic pathway to improving the fairness and rigour of the LSGP assessment process without requiring a full shift to independent assessment.

6.2 Support long term outcomes for grassroots sport in NSW

The LSGP is consistently described by clubs as one of the most accessible and impactful sources of government funding, particularly for small, volunteer-run organisations. It plays a vital role in supporting essential operational improvements, including critical facility upgrades, equipment purchases, and targeted participation initiatives. For many clubs, these grants have enabled activities that would not have been possible otherwise.

The LSGP has also demonstrated strong alignment with its intended objectives. Successful applicants frequently report tangible outcomes such as increased participation, improved safety and inclusivity, and higher-quality sporting experiences. These outcomes are particularly significant given the modest size of individual grants.

However, several structural challenges limit the program's ability to deliver sustained, long-term impact:

- **Static funding over time:** The program's annual funding allocation of ~\$4.6 million has remained unchanged for over a decade. In real terms, this represents a gradual erosion in value due to inflation and rising costs across the sport and community sectors.
- **Limits to scale and sustainability:** The relatively small size of individual grants means that support is often limited to one-off, point-in-time improvements. While helpful, these grants are rarely sufficient to address the underlying sustainability challenges faced by community sport organisations.
- **Unmet demand and persistent structural issues:** Clubs and stakeholders consistently highlight that, while valued, the funding is not enough to address deeper, systemic challenges such as inequitable access to sport, ageing infrastructure, or the lack of capacity to meet growing community demand.

To strengthen the long-term impact of the LSGP, two complementary strategies are proposed: increasing the overall funding envelope and revisiting program eligibility to better align with broader government priorities.

6.2.1 Increase the overall funding envelope to accelerate impact

A more ambitious funding commitment would significantly expand the scale and depth of the program's impact. The current investment is modest compared to other areas of government sport funding, despite strong evidence that this program delivers highly valued, grassroots-level outcomes. A larger funding pool would enable the program to move beyond one-off fixes and support longer-term sustainability and participation growth.

Key considerations include:

- Budget constraints and strong competition for limited public sector resources.
- A compelling value proposition will be essential, highlighting the program's demonstrated success, cost-effectiveness, and alignment with government goals
- An uplift in funding may require stronger outcome measurement and reporting frameworks to support accountability.

6.2.2 Revisit eligibility criteria to better align with government priorities

Broader eligibility could open access to other community-based organisations that support physical activity outcomes, not just traditional sporting clubs. Outstanding questions remain about whether local grassroots

sporting organisations are best placed to deliver programs for targeted groups, given that much of the sporting governance is Anglo-centric. Broadening eligibility criteria may enable more diverse community sectors to achieve outcomes relating to under-represented groups and providing quality experiences to meet community needs. Reviewing and refining eligibility could improve alignment with broader social and participation goals, e.g., by targeting specific cohorts (women and girls, CALD communities, people with disability).

Key considerations include:

- Strong stakeholder sentiment from SSOs and clubs that this grant should remain dedicated to grassroots sport.
- A shift in eligibility may create additional administrative complexity in assessment, oversight on safety and conducting accurate acquittals, especially in attributing outcomes to sport-specific activities.
- Clarity of program objectives and consistent communication would be essential to manage stakeholder expectations and maintain trust.

RECOMMENDATION

The current political and public policy climate presents an opportunity to strengthen the case for increased investment in grassroots sport. The LSGP has consistently demonstrated its value particularly for small, volunteer-run clubs and a modest uplift in the overall funding envelope could significantly enhance its impact.

Key recommendation:

Use this moment to showcase the value of the LSGP to grassroots sport and advocate for a modest increase in the LSGP funding envelope. Even a relatively small uplift would enable the LSGP to move beyond one-off improvements and begin addressing the long-term sustainability challenges facing community sport.

Regarding eligibility:

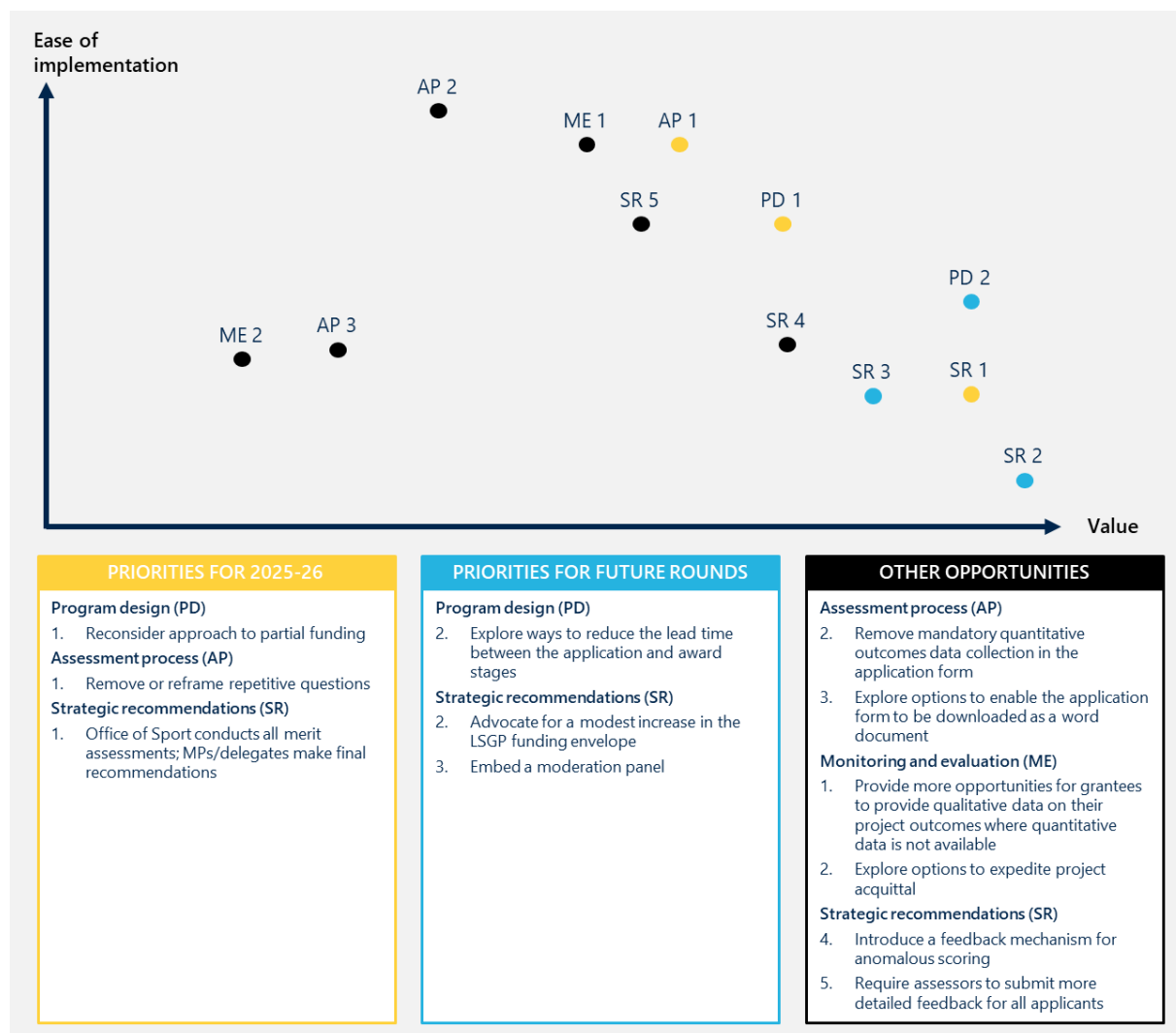
Revisiting eligibility criteria to broaden access should only be considered after an increase in the overall funding envelope. Expanding eligibility without additional funding risks diluting the impact for grassroots clubs. It would also require greater investment in governance, compliance (especially around child safety), and administrative support.

7 Implementation and next steps

7.1 Timing and considerations

To make a judgment on the appropriate timing and prioritisation of the recommendations outlined by the evaluation, each recommendation was assessed according to its value to stakeholders and its ease to implement. The results of this assessment are outlined in Figure 33 below.

Figure 33 | Value and ease of implementation of evaluation recommendations



According to the assessment, the recommendations were divided into three categories for prioritisation:

- **Priorities for 2025-26:** These recommendations are not complex, will not require significant resources and will deliver notable benefits to the LSGP. The Office of Sport should consider focussing on achieving these in preparation for the 2025-2026 program.
- **Priorities for future rounds:** These recommendations are relatively complex because they may require buy-in from stakeholders across the system and/or additional resources to deliver them. They have the potential to have a significant impact on the outcomes of the LSGP and should be priorities over the longer term.

- **Other opportunities:** These recommendations will support the continuous improvement of the LSGP however are not as impactful or simple to implement as the priorities outlined earlier. They should be considered if the Office of Sport has capacity to further improve the program.

Areas for further exploration

Several areas fell outside the scope of this evaluation but may be valuable to investigate further, including:

- **The extent to which the electoral funding model is appropriate:** It is possible that funding by electorate is not the ideal way to ensure an equitable distribution of funding. It was noted that some electorates encapsulate far more LGAs than others. It is also likely that some LGAs have a higher density of sporting clubs and by extension, have a higher demand for the program. In addition, sports associations typically span across multiple electorates which would make them ineligible for the program or make the application process more challenging to complete.
- **The extent to which the program should support sports associations:** Associations are likely better placed to deliver more strategic projects that have a broader impact on sports in NSW. They would however likely require more funding to achieve these outcomes which would result in less funding for grassroots sports clubs.

These topics will be relevant to the LSGP when existing strategic challenges have been addressed.

8 Case studies

To inform future improvements to the Local Sport Grant Program (LSGP), a series of case studies (Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3) have been developed to highlight approaches from comparable Australian grant programs. These case studies showcase diverse models of grant design, delivery, and assessment that align with the LSGP's strategic objectives.

Table 1 | Case study 1

ActiveKIT ⁶ – Queensland	
Description ActiveKIT (Active Knowledge Innovation Technology) is a Queensland Government initiative under the Activate! Queensland 2019–2029 strategy. It funds innovative solutions that increase physical activity participation and improve the capability of the sport and recreation sector. The program supports collaborations between the Active Industry, start-ups, SMEs, and tertiary institutions to trial new systems, products, or services.	Key highlights • Strategic alignment with innovation and inclusion goals: ActiveKIT targets barriers to participation among underrepresented groups (e.g. women, people with disability, regional communities) and supports scalable, innovative solutions that address these challenges. • Robust assessment and moderation model: The Department includes subject matter experts (SMEs) and technical specialists in the assessment and moderation process to ensure high-quality projects are selected. • Innovative application processes: The program introduced an Expression of Interest (EOI) stage and video submissions to reduce applicant burden and encourage creativity. • Support for sustainability and scaling: Over 70% of funded projects continued after the grant period, with many becoming self-sustaining or securing additional funding.

Table 2 | Case study 2

Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF) ⁷ – Western Australia	
Description The CSRFF supports the development of sustainable sport and recreation infrastructure across WA. It uses a structured, merit-based assessment process to ensure fairness and alignment with strategic priorities.	Key highlights • Centralised merit assessment: All applications are assessed by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. • Local government endorsement: Applications must be prioritised and endorsed by local councils, ensuring alignment with community needs. • Moderation process: A state-level panel reviews and moderates scores to ensure consistency across regions.

Table 3 | Case study 3

Move It AUS ⁸ - Australia	
Description Funded by Sport Australia, the Move It AUS – Better Ageing initiative aimed to increase physical activity among Australians aged 65 and over.	Key highlights • Targeted support for under-represented groups: Focused on older Australians, aligning with LSGP's emphasis on inclusion. • Evidence-based design: Program was co-designed with health experts and tailored to the physical needs of older adults. • Outcomes-focused reporting: Tracked participation, health outcomes, and social engagement, supporting long-term impact measurement

⁶ Queensland Government, ActiveKIT

⁷ Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund

⁸ Australian Sports Commission, Move it Aus Grant Programs

Appendix A Key evaluation questions

SECTION OVERVIEW

This section outlines the key lines of enquiry for the evaluation.

KEQs are split across five domains for the process evaluation (Table 4) and seven domains for the outcomes evaluation (Table 5).

The process evaluation KEQs will explore the extent to which the program was designed to achieve its intended outcomes and how effectively the grant administration process was delivered.

Table 4 | Process Evaluation KEQs

Key Evaluation Domains	Key Evaluation Questions
PROGRAM DESIGN	• To what extent did the program parameters (e.g. funding envelope, timeframe, eligibility) align with the intended objectives and outcomes? • To what extent was the design of the program sufficiently flexible to allow for the redistribution of funding according to the level of demand in each electorate? • To what extent did the design of the program support equitable access to funding across NSW, including in rural and regional areas? • To what extent have design changes improved the program's ability to deliver intended outcomes over time? • To what extent were the roles and responsibilities of MPs, electorate offices, and the Office of Sport clearly defined and consistently understood?
APPLICATION	• How effectively was the program promoted and communicated to ensure broad awareness? • To what extent were the application guidelines and assessment criteria clear, accessible and aligned with the NSW Grants Guidelines? • To what extent did applicants find the application process simple and straightforward to complete? • To what extent was the level of effort required to complete the application appropriate for the size of the grant being sought? • Were there any barriers that limited participation in the application process, particularly for under-represented groups?
ASSESSMENT	• To what extent were the merit-based assessment criteria clear and easy to interpret? • To what extent were assessment processes applied consistently and in line with the published guidelines? • How did the role of MPs as assessors influence perceptions of fairness, transparency and local relevance? • To what extent were conflict of interest protocols sufficient and consistently followed? • To what extent were appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure equity and integrity in the assessment process?
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION	• To what extent did the program timeframe support appropriate and timely delivery of each grant stage (e.g. assessment, payments, acquittals)? • To what extent was the program team adequately resourced to meet the administration needs? • To what extent are current governance arrangements scalable or sustainable in future rounds?

Key Evaluation Domains	Key Evaluation Questions
	- To what extent did administrative costs align with the program administration budget? - What aspects of the administrative process could be improved?
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	- To what extent were the reporting requirements for grantees proportionate to the risk and value of their programs? - To what extent are the reporting requirements likely to enable an effective outcomes evaluation?

The outcomes evaluation KEQs will explore the extent to which the program has achieved its intended outcomes.

Table 5 | Outcomes Evaluation KEQs

Key Evaluation Domains	Key Evaluation Questions
OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM	- What were the characteristics of the funded projects? (e.g., how many, what type, for what value) - What were the characteristics of the grantees? - To what extent was funding used in accordance with the funding deed agreements and in line with the intended program objectives and outcomes?
REGULAR AND ON-GOING PARTICIPATION IN SPORT	- To what extent did the program support more people to participate in sport? - To what extent did the program support more regular participation in sport? - To what extent did the program support greater visibility or awareness of sport opportunities?
PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS	- To what extent did the program support under-represented groups to participate in sport? - To what extent did the program support greater diversity within sporting clubs or programs? - To what extent did the program help build relationships between sporting clubs/organisations and community groups or services that support diverse populations?
REDUCED BARRIERS AND IMPROVED ACCESS TO PARTICIPATION IN SPORT.	- To what extent did the program reduce cost-related barriers to sport for participants? - To what extent did the program improve access to facilities, equipment or programs for people with limited opportunities? - To what extent did the program support better awareness or outreach to communities with low levels of participation in sport?
ASSISTANCE TO PROVIDE QUALITY EXPERIENCES TO MEMBERS AND MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS.	- To what extent did the program improve the quality of sport programs, training or competitions? - To what extent did the program improve the experience of members/participants at their clubs/organisations? - To what extent did the program support sporting clubs/organisations to better align their offerings with community needs or expectations?
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPROVED FACILITIES OF COMMUNITY LEVEL SPORTING CLUBS	- To what extent did the program improve sporting infrastructure or facilities? - To what extent did the program enhance the ability of sporting clubs/organisations to attract sponsors or partners?

Key Evaluation Domains	Key Evaluation Questions
	To what extent did the program improve the long-term financial stability or ability to generate income for grassroots sporting clubs/organisations?
EFFECTIVENESS	- To what extent has there been unintended positive or negative impacts? - What would have happened in the absence of the funding? (e.g., would projects not proceed, be delayed or proceed with a reduced scope) - What strategies or approaches did grantees use to sustain or enhance the outcomes of their project?

Appendix B Data collection approach

SECTION OVERVIEW

This section outlines how data was collected to answer the key lines of enquiry for the evaluation, including how stakeholders were engaged.

The evaluation will adopt a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis, incorporating both primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data. This approach will support the triangulation of findings and insights across multiple data sources. The key data to be collected and analysed is outlined below.

- **Program documentation** – Documentation held by the Office of Sport including but not limited to program guidelines, plans, probity reports, assessment/eligibility criteria, forms and publicly available documents (e.g. the Grants Administration Guide).
- **Program data** – Application, acquittal and other reporting data outlining the funding amount, applicant/grantee characteristics and objectives and outcomes for projects/applications of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 funding rounds.
- **Internal interviews** - Nous engaged the Office of Sport Grant Team and other leaders within the Office of Sport (including the acting and former CEO).
- **Applicant and recipient interviews** - Nous engaged in interviews with a sample of local sporting organisation applicants and grantees, aiming for representation across successful and unsuccessful applications, organisation size, grant size, project objectives, type of sport, geography and service of under-represented groups. Nous conducted eight focus groups with 37 attendees.
- **State Sporting Organisation interviews (SSOs)** – Nous will engaged in interviews with SSOs that represent a cross section of communities, sporting codes and participants, recommended by the Office of Sport. Nous conducted two focus groups with four attendees.
- **Applicant and recipient interviews survey** – A survey consisting of a mix of single choice, multiple choice, Likert scale and free text questions will be administered to grant applicants. Nous received responses from 470 applicants. This represents a 31 per cent response rate to the survey for applicants of the 2023-24 grant round and a 22 per cent response rate for recipients of the 2022-23 grant round.
- **Assessor survey** - A survey consisting of a mix of single choice, multiple choice, Likert scale and free text questions will be administered to grant assessors including MPs, their delegates and assesses from the Office of Sport. Nous received responses from 42 MPs and assessors.

To ensure that the KEQs are answered thoroughly, different data sources will reinforce the evaluation findings and capture nuances that will support a more holistic evaluation of the program. In addition, it will be critical to consider the findings of the process and outcomes together to determine whether the management of the programs have contributed to the program outcomes. Figure 34 and Figure 35 describes the data sources to be used to answer each KEQ domain.

Figure 34 | Mapping of KEQ domains to sources for process evaluation

PROCESS EVALUATION	PROGRAM DOCUMENTATION		INTERNAL INTERVIEWS		SSO INTERVIEWS		ASSESSOR SURVEY	
	PROGRAM DATA		APPLICANT AND RECIPIENT INTERVIEWS		APPLICANT AND RECIPIENT SURVEY			
Program Design								
Application								
Assessment								
Program administration								
Monitoring and evaluation								

Figure 35 | Mapping of KEQ domains to sources for outcomes evaluation

OUTCOMES EVALUATION	PROGRAM DOCUMENTATION		INTERNAL INTERVIEWS		SSO INTERVIEWS				ASSESSOR SURVEY	
			PROGRAM DATA		APPLICANT AND RECIPIENT INTERVIEWS			APPLICANT AND RECIPIENT SURVEY		
Overview of program										
Participation in sport										
Participation for under-represented groups										
Reduced barriers to sport										
Quality experiences										
Financial sustainability										
Effectiveness										

B.1 Stakeholder engagement plan

Table 6 outlines the stakeholder engagement plan for the process and outcomes evaluation of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 rounds of the program.

Table 6 | Stakeholder engagement plan

Stakeholder	Purpose	Engagement approach
Office of Sport CEO	Understand the strategic and political context underlying the program	1 x 60-minute interview
Office of Sport Grants Unit	Understand the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the program's processes, including design, application process, finding recommendations, scheduling, resourcing, reach and reporting and monitoring	1 x 60-minute small group interview
Program assessors	Understand the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the merit assessment process	Online survey
State sporting organisations and peak bodies	Understand the purpose and impact of the program for their sporting communities	2 X 60-minute small group interviews
Grantees and Club Members / End users	Understand outcomes the program has achieved for local clubs and communities and sport in NSW, as well as barriers to participation that need to be overcome	6 x 60-minute small group interviews
		Online survey
Office of Sport Grants Unit	Test and refine evaluation recommendations for 2025-26 round, including alignment with the Office's Strategic Plan 2024-2028	1 x 2-hour working session
Office of Sport Grants Unit	Review new acquittal data and discuss its implications on the Final Evaluation Report	1 x 2-hour working session