



Department of Planning and Environment

GREENING OUR CITY PROGRAM

Evaluation Management Response

Greening our City Program
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Introduction

About the Greening our City program

The Greening our City program (the program) is an urban greening program that seeks to ameliorate climate extremes by increasing shade and reducing heat across Greater Sydney. The program seeks to improve the city's resilience to climate change, mitigate against the impacts of urban heat and build community awareness and acceptance of the importance of urban greening.

The program aims to:

- contribute to increasing Greater Sydney's average canopy coverage to 40% by 2036
- deliver a range of benefits, including reducing the impacts of climate change on people, communities and infrastructure,
- enhance, monitor and protect Greater Sydney's urban tree canopy, which has significant potential to boost the city's resilience to climate change.

Stage one of the program was delivered between 2018 and 2022 with a \$37.5 million funding allocation from the Climate Change Fund. In 2019, the program was identified as the primary delivery mechanism to achieve the then Premier's Priority to plant one million trees by 2022. This milestone was achieved in November 2022.

Under stage one, the program delivered activities across six work streams:

- Grants: to support tree planting and demonstration projects across Greater Sydney
- Partnerships: to deliver innovative projects in priority areas of Greater Sydney, to test urban greening approaches across public and private land and build community engagement
- Engagement & behaviour change: to identify the barriers to urban tree planting and develop strategies to address these barriers
- Local council capacity building: to support local councils strengthening their strategic approaches to urban greening through the provision of new canopy data, funding and policy support
- Policy & regulatory reform: to support the retention and expansion of urban canopy and green cover
- Government action: to demonstrate leadership in urban greening on government-owned land.

Stage two of the program will be delivered between 2023 and 2030 with a \$60 million allocation from the Climate Change Fund.

Evaluation approach

All programs funded by the Climate Change Fund must be independently evaluated to inform program improvements, support decision-making and share lessons learned. Evaluation of stage one of the program was coordinated by the Strategic Evaluation and Statistics (SES) team at the Department of Planning and Environment (the department). The SES team engaged external consultants to undertake the end-of-program outcome evaluation.

The program team within the Resilience and Urban Sustainability Division of the department was not involved in undertaking the evaluation to maintain independence. The program team provided data and completed surveys and interviews as requested and provided feedback on the draft reports.

Evaluation findings

Overall, the evaluation found the program is on the right trajectory to deliver its long-term goals:

- trees planted are expected to deliver increased canopy cover and ecosystem service benefits of reduced air pollution, and increased carbon sequestration by 2050, and reduced exposure to heat
- tree planting sites are associated with opportunities for psychological restoration and relaxation and support visitors in connecting with nature
- tree planting has facilitated social cohesion and encourages physical activity.

The evaluation concluded that the program makes a significant contribution towards achieving the 40% tree canopy target set for Greater Sydney.

Evaluation limitations

While the evaluation found the program broadly achieved positive outcomes for tree canopy cover and related benefits around urban heat, health and biodiversity, limitations in the methodology resulted in a lack of depth in some of the evaluation findings and recommendations.

The evaluation included in-depth analysis of data from the council tree planting grant program. However, this focus has meant that the contributions of other program elements, such as the strategic partnerships, capacity building efforts and community engagement campaigns, were not as well recognised.

Management response to evaluation findings

This management response outlines the department's assessment of the recommendations, and associated decisions and actions. The department accepts seven recommendations in full and partly accepts four recommendations.

Table 1 Evaluation findings and response

Rec. No.	Recommendation	Response	Action/Explanation	Responsible party	Timing
1.	Regularly review the program activities against the program logic to make sure activities are delivering on immediate and longer-term program outcomes.	Accepted	This will be undertaken throughout stage two of the program. Timing of these reviews will be captured within the evaluation and monitoring plans to be developed.	Director, Greener City	Ongoing
2.	Define specific terms (for example environmental co-benefits, capacity) used in the program logic to support the adaptive management approach and planned evaluation.	Accepted	This will be documented within the stage two evaluation and monitoring plans to be developed.	Director, Greener City	Mid-2024
3.	Develop a clear data collection plan aligned to the program logic (using reliable, regular, consistent and robust data sources) that is sufficiently detailed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) enable adaptive management and planned evaluation across all outcome areas, b) Improve the regular, specific, efficient and timely collection of program data (by the department and others - councils and program industry partners), 	Accepted	This will be documented within the stage two evaluation and monitoring plans to be developed. The department has already taken steps to implement this recommendation and is developing a long-term data strategy to guide future green infrastructure data acquisitions.	Director, Greener City	Mid-2024

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	c) Enable the department to fill data gaps in community sentiment, capacity, ecological connectivity and biodiversity and impacts on social health and wellbeing.				
4.	Expand the program and update the program logic to include 'greening' in addition to trees (i.e. shrubs and groundcovers, green roofs and walls) to reflect the significant efforts in these areas by the department and program partners and to maximise program outcomes across urban cooling, biodiversity and social health and wellbeing.	Accepted	<p>This will be documented within the stage two evaluation and monitoring plans to be developed.</p> <p>The department has already taken steps to support green cover (other than canopy trees) by allowing councils to submit projects that include planting of both canopy trees and green cover in the 2022 Greening our City Grant funding round.</p>	Director, Greener City	Mid-2024
5.	Recognise that not all program activities will address all program outcomes. Target monitoring to collect data against the primary objective as a priority.	Accepted	<p>The program has always recognised not all program activities will address all program outcomes. The program's work streams were designed to complement each other in delivering against all program objectives.</p> <p>The program will define priority outcomes for program streams and projects in stage two delivery. This will be included as part of the stage two monitoring plan.</p>	Director, Greener City	Ongoing
6.	Investigate ways to align or streamline individual tree registrations to ensure as many trees as possible are captured by the program.	Partly accepted	The program is considering alternative approaches to measuring program performance, with a focus on measuring canopy expansion through regular canopy data acquisitions. Alternative approaches may enable greater effort to be placed on mechanisms that incentivise canopy retention and	Director, Greener City	Ongoing

Rec. No.	Recommendation	Response	Action/Explanation	Responsible party	Timing
			planting of more mature trees to deliver heat and health benefits sooner.		
7.	Revise balance of species in the free tree giveaways to best achieve program outcomes.	Partly accepted	The primary goals of the free tree giveaways were to build community interest in planting trees on private land and expand private land canopy. Offering attractive and desirable species was key to achieving these goals. If the department delivers further free tree giveaways, the tree species will be reviewed to ensure all goals are being met.	Director, Greener City	As required
8.	Investigate ways to engage youth (15-24 years) in the program and communicate the benefits of urban trees and greening.	Accepted	<p>The department is delivering the Cooling the Schools program in partnership with Greening Australia, which includes tree planting at primary and high schools and an educational component to students. This program will continue to be delivered as part of stage two of the program.</p> <p>The department is also considering commissioning a social research piece during stage two, to better understand attitudes and barriers towards urban trees. The research will consider targeting a range of age-groups, including youth.</p>	Director, Greener City	Ongoing
9.	<p>Build the capacity of local government to plan for, deliver and maintain a healthy and thriving urban tree canopy and greening projects through:</p> <p>a) long-term grant funding (e.g. as for Metro Greenspace and Environmental Trust programs)</p>	Accepted	<p>The department supports the broad intent of this recommendation and has developed the Greener Neighbourhoods Program to support councils to strengthen their strategic approaches to urban greening through the provision of new canopy data, funding and policy support.</p> <p>a) The department will continue to make grant funding available to local councils for the</p>	Director, Greener City	Ongoing

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) reliable and consistent spatial data relating to urban canopy c) promotion of the data available to local government on urban ecology (threatened species sites, fauna movements, riparian corridors and connectivity), urban heat, health and wellbeing indicators d) development of statutory policy framework for the protection, provision and regulation of urban canopy trees and greening e) maintaining and expanding guidance material for urban trees and greening (e.g. creating biodiverse cities, integrating tree planting and greening with WSUD, behaviour change programs and engagement). 		<p>term of the current program (out to FY2029/30).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) The department has acquired a new 2022 canopy capture for Greater Sydney. A modified version of this dataset will be publicly released on the SEED portal, and the granular dataset will be made available to local and state government through a new user-interface (this component was funded by the Digital Restart Fund). The department intends to provide updated canopy data every two years. c) The department will continue to promote data availability through the Greener Neighbourhoods Program and on the NSW Government SEED portal. d) The department will work to identify improvements to the statutory policy framework to prioritise mature tree retention and support expansion of canopy cover across metropolitan urban areas. <p>The department will build on guidance material already published under the program, including the <i>Greener Neighbourhoods Guide</i> and preparing additional guidance, as needed. The department will also consider ways to make existing and future guidance more accessible to local councils, development proponents and the broader community.</p>		

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10.	<p>In recognition that the program outcomes will be significantly enhanced if quality planting of trees is prioritised so that trees can reach maturity in good health consider support for grant recipients to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Install / design for passive or active irrigation of trees beyond the maintenance period b) Cluster planting for vegetation structure, density and diversity, and to achieve microclimate outcomes. 	Partly accepted	<p>The department has adjusted grant criteria and guidelines following delivery of each grant funding round, responding to feedback from grant recipients and grant administrators. This has included expanding funding criteria to allow green cover projects to be considered for funding in 2022 and prioritising projects that incorporated efficient water supply.</p> <p>Program design for grants needs to balance funding support provided by the grant with a commitment from grant recipients to take responsibility for project delivery. The department will continue to consider these issues when designing future grant funding rounds.</p>	Director, Greener City	Ongoing – in line with future grant funding rounds
11.	To enhance the impact on social health and wellbeing investigate ways the program can link social activation of project sites using social programs (like park runs or play groups) or social infrastructure (signage, trail upgrades, seating).	Partly accepted	<p>As the program is funded under the Climate Change Fund, social activation activities will likely be ineligible for funding in most instances.</p> <p>The department will consider opportunities to link or integrate urban greening projects with other social activation projects or programs if appropriate. Councils and other grant recipients may also pursue or fund these activities as an in-kind contribution to grant projects.</p>	Director, Greener City	As required