

Economic Diversification Fund 2026-2027



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Guidelines

The Economic Diversification Fund supports businesses and organisations to collaborate on projects that strengthen and diversify the Queenstown Lakes economy – and align with the objectives of the Economic Diversification Plan. You can view the full plan [here](#).

Fund priorities

The fund aims to:

- **Support new industries:** Foster niche industries that create new career and business opportunities for local people.
- **Remove barriers to growth:** Identify and address constraints limiting the growth of local export-orientated businesses.
- **Improve efficiency and amplify impact:** Support businesses and organisations already contributing to economic diversification to reduce costs and increase impact by working together (e.g. shared services, use of AI).

How the fund can be used

The fund can be used to support a wide range of activities, including:

- Project delivery
- Pilot initiatives
- Feasibility or scoping work
- Collaboration with other businesses and organisations

We're particularly interested in supporting activities that deliver clear local benefits and go beyond business-as-usual.

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Eligibility criteria

To be considered for the Economic Diversification Fund, your project will need to meet the following requirements:

1. Be a collaboration between two or more businesses or organisations, with at least one project partner based locally in Queenstown Lakes. This could include regional, national or international partners, as long as the project delivers clear benefits to the district.
2. All partners should contribute resources to the project. This could include volunteer time, donated materials or services, funding, or access to networks, facilities, or expertise. Organisations that are paid to deliver services are not considered collaborating partners, unless they contribute additional value beyond their contracted work.¹
3. Projects may run until 30 December 2027, but the Fund expects projects to be at least half delivered by 30 June 2027, with a short progress report at that point. Please reflect this in your proposed milestones and budget.
4. A Queenstown Lakes-based legal entity (such as a company, trust, or incorporated society) will need to receive the funding on behalf of the project partners and take responsibility for reporting on outcomes.
5. Project partners must have no outstanding debts or unresolved reporting obligations from previous QLDC funding.
6. Your project will need to comply with all relevant QLDC regulatory and statutory requirements, including securing any necessary permits or consents.

Applications will need to clearly show why the project is needed, how organisations will work together, what local benefits will be created, how the project will be delivered, and how success will be measured.

Assessment criteria

The independent panel will consider eligible applications using the following criteria; .

¹ Organisations can be paid to help deliver the project. However, being paid for a service does not make an organisation a collaborating partner. To be counted as a collaborating partner, they must also contribute something beyond the paid work, such as resources, expertise, funding, or access to networks. This must be clearly explained in the application. For example, a web developer paid to build a website is a supplier. If that web developer also donates extra time, shares tools, helps design the wider project, or contributes to project governance, they may be considered a collaborating partner.

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1. **Aligns with the Economic Diversification Plan:** The project helps deliver one or more plans outcomes.
2. **Identifies the target audience and the need:** Who will benefit and the needs or gaps the project is addressing.
3. **Creates benefit beyond the project partners:** The benefits must extend beyond participating businesses or organisations
4. **Collaboration quality:** Provides detail on what each partnering business or organisation will contribute, and how you will collaborate (e.g. roles, decision-making processes, and approaches to data or intellectual property management).
5. **Project viability:** Assesses the strength and experience of the project team, along with a realistic implementation plan, budget, objectives, and timeline.
6. **Measurable outcomes:** Show how the outcomes will be measured. Any training or upskilling projects should focus on actions that will result from your initiatives.

Application and funding process

31 July 2026 – Fund opens for Expressions of Interest (EOI) (optional)

The Economic Futures team is happy to be contacted by anyone considering applying (up until the funding deadline). We can offer feedback on how well your idea aligns with the diversification plan, suggest others who might be interested in working with you, or point towards similar projects that could help inform your plans.

*The Economic Futures team is available to help strengthen applications – **final funding decisions are made by an independent panel.***

31 July 2026 – Fund opens for Applications.

30 Aug 2026 - Expression of interest deadline (optional): We encourage you to complete a simple EOI online prior to applying. This will help our Economic Futures team identify any potential synergies or contacts that could strengthen your application. Although we recommend groups share their ideas via an EOI, it is an optional step.

7 Sept 2026 - Feedback on EOI submissions shared by the Economic Futures team on or before this date.

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30 Sept 2026 – Application deadline: Submissions must be made online through the SmartyGrants portal. You must attach a project budget along with your application. There are instructions in the form on how to attach these documents to your application. Please label all documents clearly with the name of your project. You may also wish to attach supporting documents (e.g. letters of support, evidence of previous projects, or organisational achievements).

01- 31 October 2026 – Review and funding decisions: An independent review panel will assess your application. The panel may request additional information before making its final funding decision.

02 Nov 2026 (indicative) – Applicants will be notified of funding decision: the Economic Futures team will then work with successful applicants to complete funding agreements, which will detail the funding granted, conditions, and reporting expectations.

Got questions?

We're here to help. Send us an email at economicfutures@qldc.govt.nz or get in touch with either Peter or Bex.

Peter Harris Economic Futures Manager peter.harris@qldc.govt.nz 027 230 9971	Bex Woollard Economic Advisor - Diversification bex.woollard@qldc.govt.nz 022 534 1231
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Terms and conditions

Applicants must:

- Disclose any other funding, grants, or sponsorships whether confirmed or pending.
- Avoid any actions that could improperly influence QLDC funding decisions.
- Refrain from seeking or using non-public QLDC information to gain an unfair advantage.

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- Consent to QLDC conducting due diligence on partner organisations and their personnel.
- Consent to QLDC contacting third parties and provide references as requested.
- Agree to acknowledge Economic Futures/QLDC funding and support in all promotional materials and provide regular project updates.
- QLDC reserves the right to share application details with all departments of Council and consult with QLDC staff on all applications.

Reporting Requirements

- Recipients will be required to provide progress updates and a final report. Reporting will require recipients to outline activities delivered, costs, outcomes achieved, lessons learned, and the effectiveness of the collaboration.
- Recipients may also be asked to provide supporting evidence, such as receipts, budgets, photographs, participant feedback, data, or examples of project outputs.

What can't be funded

The Economic Diversification Fund is intended to support future project activity and cannot be used for business-as-usual costs or costs that have already been incurred.

For example:

- Costs incurred before a funding agreement has been signed by all parties.
- Debt repayment.
- Legal fees.
- Religious or political activities.
- Construction, capital purchases, or rental costs.
- Alcohol purchases.

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Conflicts of interest

Organisations connected in any way to QLDC elected members or employees are still welcome to apply for funding. However, to ensure transparency, you'll need to let us know about any actual or perceived conflicts of interest in your application. This helps us take the right steps to manage them fairly.

There is a section in the application form where you can easily declare any conflicts of interest.