

Nail your application to the Low Emission Vehicles Contestable Fund

By Camilla Cochrane, Transport Funds Lead

The Low Emission Vehicles Contestable Fund (LEVCF) is highly competitive – about a quarter of all applications succeed.

We want your project to have the best shot at success, so here are our top tips for building a strong application.

1. Develop your project with the fund's purpose, scope and investment focus in mind. These are all non-negotiable, and all on our website – <http://www.eeca.govt.nz/LEVCF>.
2. Find an innovative or unique angle. For example you could:
 - a. focus on regions where low emissions vehicles (LEVs) are still unproven or unfamiliar
 - b. test an LEV on new routes or in new work processes such as long-haul truck routes,
 - c. delivery services, specialist trucks
 - d. trial a small number of vehicles as a prelude to converting your whole fleet
 - e. demonstrate new technologies that could develop the service market
 - f. build a partnership to co-invest and share knowledge, such as a regional partnership
 - g. between territorial authorities and the electricity sector.

Consider your proposal in light of previously approved LEVCF projects; projects that are similar or the same as previous projects will need to demonstrate a high level of innovation, advancement of the objective and public benefit to score highly. Talk to us if you're unsure.

3. Plan your project well. You should be able to answer these questions:
 - a. What is your project?
 - What is involved, how much will it cost, what's the timeframe, who will deliver it?
 - What will it deliver, what results do you expect? How will you judge success?
 - What is the next step after the project completes? For example will you convert your whole fleet, publish results, change your business model?
 - b. How does it fit with the investment focus?
 - The fund objectives are very clear – if your project doesn't tick boxes, it won't fly.
 - Check your organisation and project are eligible. For example, you can't combine co-funding with other Central Government funding, not all vehicles are eligible, and pure research or marketing doesn't qualify.
 - c. How will the public benefit?
 - Put yourself in the Government's shoes – what benefit does your project offer to NZ? This might not be the same as the benefit you'll get from the project.
 - What are you demonstrating? Who will learn from this? Will you save carbon or reduce air pollution, and by how much? Will there be free access to the public?

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- How will you tell your story? How can others learn from your project? What effect will it have on others? The benefit needs to go beyond your organisation.
 - Does it offer better value for Government money than other projects? For example will it reduce carbon emissions more effectively, or benefit a wider community?
- d. Do you *need* co-funding?
- If the project would be done anyway, you won't get co-funding.
4. Do your homework; the market is constantly shifting. Check where chargers already are or who is already using similar vehicles before applying, to ensure you're not asking for support for a project that's already been done. See summaries of more than 130 co-funded projects and case studies on our website (www.eeca.govt.nz/LEVCF).
 5. Limit your proposal to the electrification aspects of your project. For example if you are planning to replace diesel vans with electric, we won't co-fund the whole project because this would amount to a subsidy. Instead, apply for the increased cost of the van and the charging equipment.
 6. Apply only for enough co-funding to get your project off the ground. While you can request up to 50% of the project's total cost, showing better value for money could make a significant difference.
 7. Sharing results and learnings widely across New Zealand is vital to the success of the fund. Spell out how you'll do that. As a minimum, successful applicants are expected to work with EECA to share their story and results.
 8. Once you're clear on your project, distil it down to a few key points. We're not looking for screeds of information – just the guts of why your project deserves co-funding. Aim to summarise in one paragraph what your project is and how it fits with fund objectives. And – we can't say it enough – be crystal clear on why the New Zealand Government should invest.
 9. Check your costings. Have supplier quotes where needed. We've seen a number of projects delayed by supply issues, or that have had to re-cost project components. Once approved, we cannot provide additional funds if your project costs increase. If you're not absolutely ready, it might be better to wait for the next funding round.
 10. Only bring ready-to-go projects. Projects that are ready to go and will deliver quickly are preferred over those in the planning stage.
 11. Have all internal and Board approvals in the bag before you apply, or soon after. Applicants who still require project or budget approvals risk being invited to reapply again in future rounds.
 12. Make it easy for the Assessment Panel. The people who judge the applications are not the same people you talk to at EECA – they're reading them for the first time. Another reason to keep your proposal clear and to the point.
 13. Get help if you need it. For general advice you can email us at LEVFund@eeca.govt.nz.
 14. If at first you don't succeed... Each proposal is judged on its own merits and against those of other applications. If your project misses out, you can reapply in the next round, taking into account feedback and any market changes.

If you want to talk to EECA about your proposal, give me a call or email me, on 027 457 0205 or 04 470 2229; LEVFund@eeca.govt.nz.