

Geophysics and Drilling Collaborations program: Adapting for outcomes

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Introduction

The \$4 million Geophysics and Drilling Collaborations (GDC) program is a flagship component of the Northern Territory (NT) Government aimed at accelerating geoscientific exploration and resource development across the Territory. Funded under the broader \$9.5 million *Resourcing the Territory* program and administered by the Northern Territory Geological Survey (NTGS), the GDC program provides competitive co-funding to eligible industry proponents for exploration activities that fill knowledge gaps and generate high-value geological data.

The core objective of the GDC program is to advance exploration activity, address geoscientific knowledge gaps and support resource discovery and development in both underexplored regions and areas of known prospectivity in the NT. Through co-funding targeted projects, the program generates new data that improve geological understanding, enhance exploration targeting and support economic growth. High-resolution geoscientific data reduce exploration risk and underpin informed decision-making. Projects that test new techniques or ideas are actively encouraged, with all data made publicly available within six months of acquisition.

Adapting over time

Funded continuously since 2008, the GDC program has evolved to deliver stronger exploration outcomes across the full exploration lifecycle. Initially focused on greenfields diamond drilling and regional geophysics, the program now co-funds first-pass, non-diamond drilling; brownfields diamond drilling; innovative target testing; re-analysis of existing samples; early-stage metallurgical testwork; and ore characterisation; thereby, supporting projects from initial discovery through to understanding processing pathways.

By sharing the risk with industry to test new ideas, high-risk concepts and key geological questions, the GDC continues to generate substantial open-file geoscience data; build a Territory-wide drill core collection; support development of brownfields areas; test new techniques and ideas acting as a proof of concept for other explorers; and identify new areas of prospectivity. These outcomes strengthen the NT geological knowledge base, attract further private exploration investment, and increase the potential for discoveries and resource development.

Rounds 1–17 supported 201 co-funded exploration programs, including 112 drilling programs completing 534 drillholes for ~96 000 m (~69 000 m drill core); 89 geophysics programs delivering approximately 400 000 km of magnetic and radiometric flightlines; 335 000 km flightlines of airborne electromagnetics (AEM);

and 40 000 ground gravity station readings. Innovative techniques trialled include 2D/3D induced polarisation, ambient noise tomography, and sub-audio magnetics, generating significant new geoscience data to support exploration across the NT. Industry reports and data can be accessed through the Geoscience Exploration and Mining Information System (GEMIS).

Adding more value

In addition to digital data and reports, drill core accepted from the GDC program can be viewed and sampled by researchers in industry, government and research organisations. More information is available by visiting the Access the drill core library webpage. All sampling must be accompanied by core sampling reports, which provide valuable additional data and insights from work undertaken on GDC drill core. Access reports and data on GEMIS by searching Core Sampling reports.

At times, drillcore may be temporarily unavailable for viewing or sampling while undergoing scanning through the HyLogger, as a half drill core is required as a minimum for this process. For more information on NTGS core facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs, contact core.facility@nt.gov.au.

As a part of the ongoing priority to add value to the program, select GDC drill core undergoes additional data collection including rock property data, specific gravity, magnetic susceptibility and sonic velocity which becomes available via STRIKE and DIP013. HyLogger data and reports from selected GDC drill core are available via GEMIS Hylogger Data and on STRIKE by selecting the 'HyLogged Drillholes' layer checkbox.

In addition, an annual summary report will be delivered at the conclusion of the final open file date each year. The Round 17 summary report can be downloaded through GEMIS.

For the first time in 2026, an annual GDC drill core workshop will be hosted at AGES 2026. It will be a hands-on approach showcasing GDC co-funded and donated drill core from the three major NT gold provinces: the Pine Creek Orogen, the Tanami Region and the Warramunga Province. These areas host contrasting gold systems, including structurally controlled orogenic gold deposits in the Pine Creek Orogen and Tanami Region, and ironstone-hosted copper–gold–bismuth mineralisation in the Tennant Creek Mineral Field in the Warramunga Province. Participants will have the opportunity to view drill core that highlights the diversity of the gold-hosting systems across the Territory and join discussions on how similarities and differences in stratigraphic relationships and structural settings between the regions can inform ongoing exploration.

Key stratigraphic units from the Pine Creek Orogen will also be on display, with their defining features discussed to help understand the broader stratigraphic framework and highlight how this informs the evolving geological understanding of the Pine Creek Orogen.

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Round 18 state of play

Round 18 awarded co-funding to 38 projects involving 30 companies across the NT, including 14 greenfields drilling programs, six brownfields diamond drilling programs, 10 regional-scale geophysics programs, seven innovative targeting programs and one advancing critical minerals program (now referred to as ‘mineral characterisation and testwork’ (see **Figure 1**: GDC projects rounds 1–18).

As of March 2026, approximately 70 per cent of programs had been completed or were awaiting completion, with the remaining 30 per cent withdrawn or at risk due to a variety of external factors. This is consistent with the long-term average

completion rate of the program. The Round 18 summary report will be available after 1 August 2026 through GEMIS.

Round 19 enhancements

Round 19 of the GDC program covers the 2026–2027 funding cycle. This abstract outlines the objectives, funding categories, eligibility criteria and tips for a successful application. It is intended as an accompaniment to the Northern Territory Geological Survey (NTGS) *Geophysics and Drilling Collaborations Program GUIDELINES Round 19 2026–2027* (Round 19 guidelines), which provide full details of the program and how to apply.

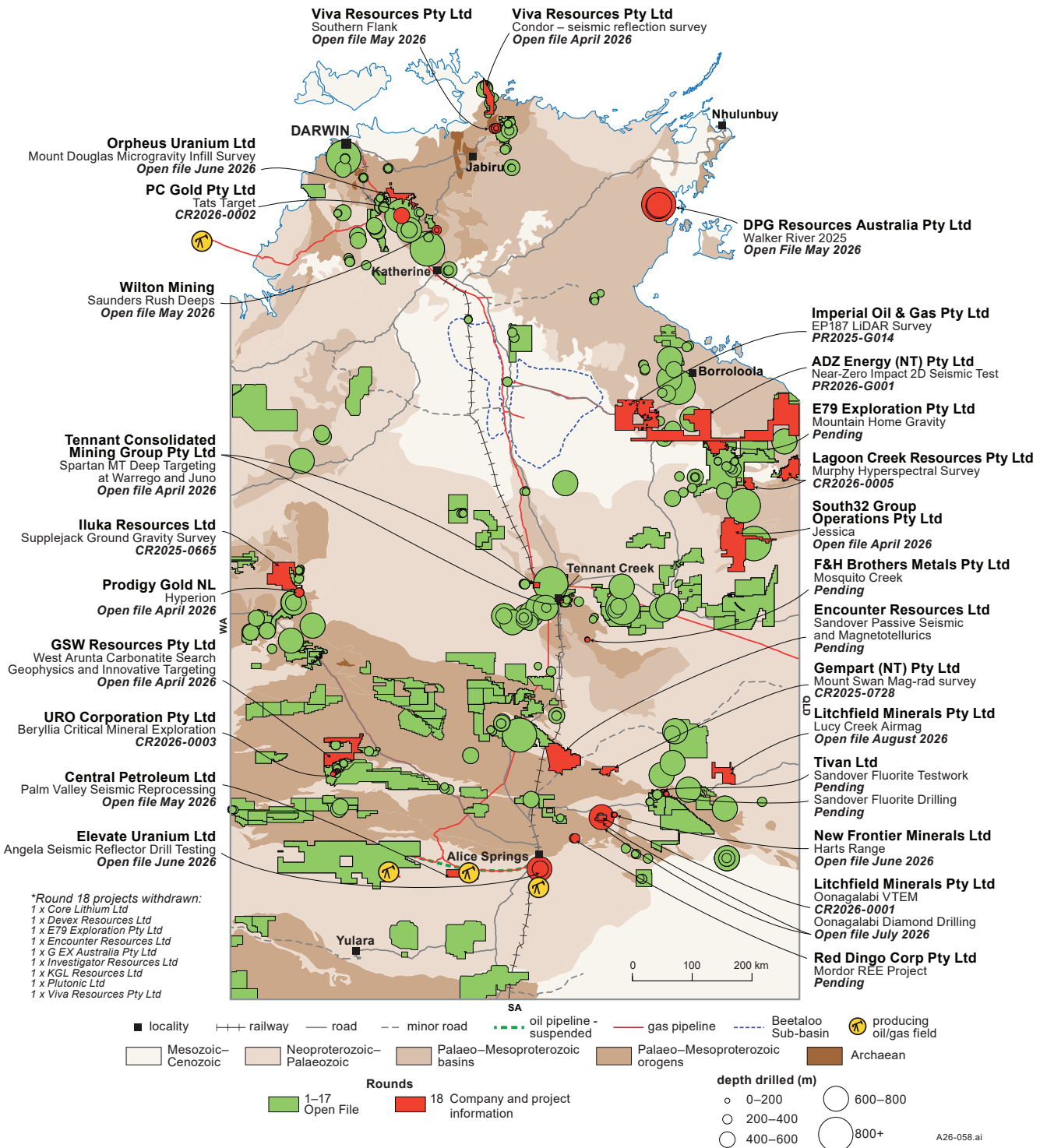


Figure 1. GDC projects rounds 1–18.

Round 19 introduces key enhancements to broaden support and continue delivering more outcomes. Note that all amounts given are inclusive of GST:

- **Increased total co-funding:** from \$3 million to \$4 million.
- **Expanded eligible costs:** geological analyses, including geochemistry, geochronology, petrography and more – now claimable if data quality standards are met.
- **Higher funding for mineral characterisation:** funding doubled to \$100 000 per project for early-stage metallurgical testwork and ore characterisation.
- **Higher funding for the Territory Supplier Incentive (TSI) scheme:** TSI increased to \$15 000 for projects engaging NT enterprises.
- **Optimised payment schedules:** Proponents can receive up to 80 per cent of approved funding after completing fieldwork, enabling quicker reinvestment in further exploration.
- **Flexibility to complete fieldwork:** Fieldwork should occur from June to December 2026. For projects not completed by January 2027, monthly check-ins will take place to enable compliance with the funding agreement. Final reports, all associated geological and geophysical data, any remaining third-party invoices, and all drill core and sample submissions are due three months after fieldwork completion, or by 1 June 2027 – whichever comes first. To ensure timely review and payments, no extensions will be granted.

These adjustments reflect government priorities and industry feedback, with the program committed to ongoing improvement to stay responsive to evolving needs.

Project categories and funding

Round 19 supports a range of exploration activities classified into the following project categories. Each category has specific technical aims, eligibility criteria and capped funding amounts.

Greenfields drilling programs

Greenfields drilling which targets deep or undercover areas, resolves stratigraphic uncertainties, and explores underexplored terranes with little or no historical drilling. Projects must be located away from known deposits and demonstrate the potential to deliver meaningful new geological data.

Funding under this category is capped as follows:

- **\$200 000** for a single, deep diamond drilling program
- **\$150 000** for a multi-hole diamond drilling program
- **\$100 000** for non-diamond drilling programs – eg reverse core (RC), aircore, sonic, rotary air blast (RAB).

Priority is given to drilling that significantly increases data density, particularly at depth, in underexplored areas and delivers suitable additional analytical data.

Brownfields diamond drilling

Brownfields drilling supports programs focused on conceptual targets adjacent to, or below, known deposits that have not been adequately tested by existing drilling. Diamond drilling in this category must penetrate significant depths beyond previous work and target geological concepts with potential to advance resource growth or discovery.

- **\$150 000** maximum funding per project

This category excludes drilling programs aimed solely at resource definition, infill or shallow drill testing.

Regional-scale geophysics

Regional-scale acquisition aims to significantly improve the resolution, coverage, or quality of existing geophysical datasets over large areas. Eligible activity includes airborne magnetics, radiometrics, electromagnetic and gravity surveys; ground gravity, hyperspectral, passive seismic, or seismic reflection surveys.

- **\$150 000** maximum co-funding per program.

To be eligible, surveys must cover a minimum contiguous area of 350 km² or traverse lengths greater than 25 km. Seismic reflection surveys can be less than 25 km in length.

Innovative targeting

This category promotes exploration innovation by supporting acquisition of prospect-scale or camp-scale geophysics and/or geochemistry using techniques not previously tested in the project area. Eligible projects can propose multi-dataset integration and novel approaches to target generation.

- **\$100 000** maximum co-funding per program.

Seismic reflection re-processing, where no adequate prior processing has occurred, is also supported under this category.

Mineral characterisation and testwork

This category replaces the previous ‘Advancing Critical Minerals’, broadening the scope to include a variety of analytical and early-stage metallurgical studies aimed at understanding mineral endowment or recoverability; particularly but not exclusively, for critical minerals. Eligible activities must generate new analytical data, address identified technical uncertainties or test novel approaches to processing.

- **\$50 000** for re-analysis of existing sample sets or mine waste
- **\$100 000** for early-stage metallurgical testwork or ore characterisation.

This category is designed to support projects at the stages of scoping study and pre-feasibility study (PFS). Therefore, projects must not have undertaken substantial prior metallurgical testwork to be eligible.

Eligibility and essential requirements

To be considered for co-funding, projects must meet the following essential eligibility conditions:

- Applicants must be an NT tenement holder or an operator, or a *demonstrably related party*. If an entity is applying on behalf of a tenement holder or operator, the application must be submitted in the name of the tenement holder or operator.
- Applicants must commit cash co-contributions toward project costs, in-kind contributions are not eligible.
- Applicants must have a minimum of \$20 million in public liability insurance.
- All fieldwork must be completed within specified timeframes, and deliverables must be submitted in compliance with program requirements.

Detailed assessment criteria for each category are provided in the guideline appendices, highlighting both technical merit and the potential benefit to the NT. For the first time, scoring guides are included to help applicants prepare stronger, higher quality proposals that clearly align with program objectives.

Tips for high-quality and high-scoring proposals

To score highly, proposals should demonstrate strong geological understanding, clearly articulating the conceptual model or target being proposed. Programs should resolve a geological problem, improve the understanding of regional stratigraphy, or test novel concepts or techniques. High-quality proposals include detailed technical descriptions, realistic work programs, and comprehensive geological, geophysical and/or geochemical data.

Visual presentation is crucial: proposals should include clear, easy-to-read maps and cross-sections showing proposed and existing drill locations, targets, and known mineralisation or resource block models in context. Geographic Information System (GIS) files for proposed drill locations, survey boundaries, or project outlines must be submitted and properly named with project and company details.

Timing and feasibility are important – fieldwork should be scheduled between June and December 2026, with realistic timeframes supported by confirmed land access, environmental (mining) licence approvals, heritage clearances, and contractor availability. Applicants should demonstrate financial capacity to complete projects and ensure any previous co-funding obligations have been met. Budgets should be well supported. Where contractor quotes

are not provided, the assessment panel may use average industry costs to adjust budgets.

Finally, applicants should plan program timelines carefully. Projects unlikely to start before May 2027 may be better suited to a subsequent round, particularly for drilling programs. Late submissions or minor delays, such as seasonal weather or internal company changes, will not be accepted as valid grounds for an exemption to re-apply in the next round.

Application process

Applications must be submitted via GrantsNT by 22 April 2026. Templates must be fully completed with detailed technical descriptions, realistic work programs, budgets, and supporting information demonstrating eligibility and alignment with category criteria. Assessment combines weighted and non-weighted criteria, balancing technical quality, geological potential, and alignment with NT strategic objectives. Successful applicants will be notified by June 2026, with funding agreements executed before fieldwork can commence. The Round 19 guidelines contain additional details on the application and assessment process, including the assessment criteria and scoring guides.

Reporting requirements

All data are subject to open-file requirements. Final reports, datasets, drillcore/samples, and analytical results become publicly available within six months of fieldwork or by 1 September 2027, whichever comes first. This ensures industry-wide benefits and supports broader exploration across the NT. The Round 19 guidelines provide full program and reporting requirements.

Conclusion

Round 19 of the GDC program represents a significant opportunity for NT explorers to receive co-funding for technically robust projects that generate high-value geological data across the Northern Territory. Over time, the program has evolved to better support exploration outcomes. By expanding funding limits, broadening eligible activities and refining program parameters, the GDC fosters innovation, reduces exploration risk and stimulates investment in exploration.

Successful applicants benefit directly from co-funding support to test priority exploration targets and advance their projects. Importantly, the open-file geoscientific data generated through the program also strengthens the shared geological knowledge base; consequently, supporting future exploration, attracting investment and increasing the potential for new discoveries and long-term resource development in the Northern Territory.

For further information, visit the Exploration Grants webpage.