An ARC perspective on Special Research Initiative establishment and best practice activities

Prof. Marian Simms
Australian Research Council
Overview

- Good SRI practices from the ARC’s perspective
- Key considerations when establishing a new SRI
- Important administrative matters
- Questions
The ATSIRN:SRI—main objectives

- **Connect** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers across Australian higher education institutes both within and across research disciplines to facilitate collaborative and innovative approaches to planning and undertaking research, and to enrich research training.

- **Build** capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers at all career stages to undertake high quality research and lead research projects through:

- **Encourage** young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to pursue research careers in Australia.

- **Undertake** integrated research programs that build on research conducted by individuals and teams to advance research into Indigenous Knowledge Systems and increase understanding of how Indigenous Knowledge can help address contemporary challenges and bring cultural, social and environmental benefits to Australia.

- **Encourage and facilitate** collaboration with international research groups working in areas of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and/or Indigenous researcher capacity building.

- **Gain repute** in the wider community and serve as a point of interaction among higher education institutions, governments, and the private and community sectors.
Core Objective: Capacity building

- Build capacity...through:
  - encouraging excellent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to draw on their experience and expertise to develop and lead research, research training and career development programs and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research students and early-career researchers;
  - providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research students and early-career researchers to develop their research expertise through structured research and research training programs;
  - supporting a research and research training environment that acknowledges and is sensitive to the needs and cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers; and
  - applying for additional ARC (and other) research support for the Network's activities; first ensuring that this does not duplicate existing ARC or other Commonwealth-funded research.
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<th>Selection Criteria</th>
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<td>Investigators</td>
<td>(30%)</td>
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<td>Program Quality and Innovation</td>
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<td>Feasibility and Benefit</td>
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<td>Governance</td>
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Four year vision

- **Integration** – an SRI is a national entity not independent nodes or the Admin organisation

- **Vision** - Create and share a four year vision and beyond – workshop it to develop staff ownership; including input from partners

- **Plan** - Focus your work
  - strategic plan,
  - business plan
  - internal **milestones are critical**

- **Performance** – establish benchmarks and always strive for excellence
Four year vision

- It’s fine to revise research directions and shift dollars – embed change management practices
- It’s important to manage for success – develop an effective method to filter incoming partnership requests. They can overwhelm.
- People management
- Governance – best practice
- A whole new level of communications and dissemination of results…
Culture trumps Strategy

- Set up a culture of research excellence, collaboration and international standing
- No discipline boundaries to new collaborations
- High quality relationships with collaborating and partner organisations. Manage expectations...
- Research Program integration – Use innovative processes to encourage researchers from retreating back to nodes after budget allocation
Culture trumps Strategy

- Management team – **mentor** research leaders, lead from the front and provide support
  - Node and other leaders may need support initially to manage a large SRI **program**
- **Performance planning and monitoring** – promote excellence through KPIs, research priorities, staff development
Your new SRI....

• Managing your FTE commitment; as rising research stars – everyone will want you to be involved in something (appointments, memberships, other projects). Be strategic in what you accept

• Stars of the future – invest in recruiting and training your postdocs and postgrads. Move them:
  – across nodes,
  – organisations and
  – disciplines with relative ease.
  – Inspire them with inspirational visitors
Your new SRI....

- Recruit the **very best professional and administrative staff** possible. And utilise the Research Office and Tech Transfer staff from your university.
- **Bolt-on projects.** Only if they enhance your research objectives.
- **BUT...** Be adventurous— new partners, new technologies, international developments, new emerging political and government priorities.
“For impact to occur, there needs to be some form of engagement with a user community.”

Achieving impact in research. Ed Pam Denicolo 2014
Milestones and KPIs

Events or milestones fail to give us good performance feedback because they only tell us whether or not we implemented the initiatives we chose to improve performance.

They don’t tell us if those initiatives worked and actually did improve performance.

Stacey Barr
Performance Measure Specialist
Common Bugbears

- Not understanding that outreach is very important
- Not understanding strategic planning and the role of Boards/Committees and partners within KPIs
- Not enough emphasis on mentoring and professional development of students, staff and end users
- Not understanding that capacity building means people (not the profile of the SRI’s research internationally)
Postaward Management

ARC needs to know and/or approve:

- **Change of named staff** - SRI Director Chief and Partner Investigators, Chief Operating Officer or equivalent.
- **Changes to organisations** and/or their fiscal/personnel contributions
- **Major changes to Research Program.**
- **Significant changes to the Budget** – decrease, increase, refocus, changes to major purchasing or infrastructure access problems
- **Budget carryover of funds** – the ARC will allow carry forward of funding from one year to the next with justification (i.e. late start, recruitment delays, equipment or field work delays/issues)
Postaward Management

- **Outreach** – you have obtained large sums of public funding
  - **Outreach KPIs** are very important – engagement with end users and the public
  - **Capacity building** – mentoring your researchers and students to speak with confidence publicly
  - **Your tools** – events, a really great website, speaking publicly (through media or forums), publications including your annual/progress report
  - Media and publications – Protocols on **acknowledgment of ARC**
Future Planning

- Contingency plan and cash – set aside funding for new opportunities or ideas that emerge
- Other funding sources – we expect you to leverage other research dollars
- Self reflection tools – KPIs annual reports, workshops, reviews, and competitive processes for internal funding allocations.
- Reorienting your research activities as the SRI matures - translation/commercialisation if applicable
- After four years – a wind down plan – don’t do this at the last minute.
Australian Government
Australian Research Council

Thank You

Prof. Marian Simms
Australian Research Council