



Australian Government

Australian Research Council

ARC Special Research Initiatives Seed Funding for Research Networks

**Selection Report for Funding
Commencing in 2003**

ARC Special Research Initiatives

Seed Funding for Research Networks

1. Introduction

This report describes the selection process and outcomes for the ARC's Special Research Initiatives program to provide seed funding for planning ARC Research Networks.

ARC Research Networks will fund Australia's researchers to build new linkages and critical mass in emerging fields of research. They will emphasise research across a broad range of disciplines, and encourage vigorous participation by early-career researchers. An important objective of the program is to build the international profile of Australian research in emerging areas.

Planning and preparation of proposals for research networks will require significant intellectual and time commitments. To support the effort of preparing proposals, the ARC is providing seed funding from its Special Research Initiatives Program.

2. Objectives

The Special Research Initiatives (SRI) scheme aims to support specific activities which:

- encourage greater collaboration among Australian researchers, including the development of international research linkages; and
- encourage the co-operative development of a high-quality research capacity in innovative areas; and
- enhance the scale and focus of research in National Research Priority Areas.

The selection criteria for the SRI program are:

- the likelihood that the activity will meet the Scheme's objectives and the objectives of the specific initiative;
- the range of collaboration involved;
- financial and in-kind contributions to be made by the participating organisations; where appropriate, funding from other sources; and
- the expected results of the activity.

Under the SRI program, the ARC solicits proposals. The solicitation for the seed-funding SRI stated that funding may be provided for any or all of the following purposes:

- Preparing and attending meetings and workshops, with a special emphasis on supporting the participation of young investigators and research students. Reasonable costs of an experienced planning facilitator may be supported;
- Short-term visits between researchers, potential end-users and relevant policy makers;
- Bibliometric surveys and other measures of research strengths and opportunities; and
- Research assistance and professional writers to help in preparing a report for web publication.

Recipients of seed funding must publish a stand-alone, structured report on the World Wide Web that describes the proposed network and the research portfolio associated with it.

3. Selection process

3.1. Proposals

In August 2003 the Australian Research Council (ARC) invited qualified organisations to apply for seed funding under the SRI program. Applications closed on 22 September 2003.

3.2. Assessments

Members of the ARC's Expert Advisory Committees (EACs) assessed the proposals. Up to four members were assigned to each proposal. The assessors ranked and commented on proposals against the selection criteria. There was a high return rate from the EAC assessors, and on average each proposal received 3.4 assessments.

3.3. Selection Committee

At a selection meeting held in Canberra on 31 October 2003, the selection committee discussed proposals and assessments, and formulated funding recommendations. The ARC applied strict procedures for declaring potential conflicts of interest during the meeting. Members withdrew during consideration of particular proposals.

4. Summary of outcomes

4.1. Proposals submitted

Table 1 shows selected statistics for seed funding proposals submitted to the ARC.

Table 1. **Statistics of proposals submitted**

Number of proposals	291
Total funds requested	\$13.7 million
Available funding	\$2.5 million
Average requested funding	\$47,000
Number of higher education institutions submitting proposals	34
Number of other institutions submitting proposals	8
Median number of participants per proposal	27
Total number of participants	4,863
From Australian universities	3,774
From other Australian institutions	665
From overseas	424
Median number of ARC grants held per proposal	14
Median number of organisations participating per proposal	12

4.2. Recommended proposals

A total of 147 proposals (50.5 % of all proposals) are recommended for funding. These proposals requested support totalling \$7,051,376. The recommended ARC funding for these proposals totals \$2,505,000.

4.3. Uncompetitive proposals

A total of 144 proposals (49.5%) were considered uncompetitive in the field, and were not selected for funding. The Selection Committee viewed many of these proposals as having considerable merit as components of larger networks. The ARC may advise some applicants further about the committee's views.

4.4. National Research Priorities

A total of 266 out of 291 (91%) of proposals selected one of the national research priority areas. The assessors examined the claims of applicants against the priority areas and confirmed that few, if any, of the claims were not sustained. Proposals in priority areas represented 92% of all funded projects. Table 2 lists the breakdown by priority area.

Proposals nominating a priority area received \$2,285,000 of the total recommended funding of \$2,505,000.

Table 2. Numbers of proposals by National Research Priority

National research priority area	Proposals received	Proposals recommended	Funding recommended
An Environmentally Sustainable Australia	63	31	\$450,000
Promoting and Maintaining Good Health	46	21	\$380,000
Frontier Technologies for Building and Transforming Australian Industries	121	68	\$1,115,000
Safeguarding Australia	36	16	\$340,000
No area	25	11	\$220,000
Total priority proposals	266	136	\$2,285,000
Priority proposals as % of total	91.4%	92.5%	

4.5. Linking across organisational boundaries

ARC Research Networks aims to link researchers across disciplinary, geographical and administrative boundaries. To illustrate the degree of linkage across organisational and geographical boundaries, Table 3 lists a number of indicators of the degree to which different people from different organisations have participated in seed funding proposals.

To interpret Table 3, consider the first row which refers to the Australian Catholic University (ACU). The row shows that a total of 8 people from ACU participated in 6 different seed funding proposals. The total funding requested in these proposals is \$292,877 and the total funding recommended for these proposals is \$50,000.

Table 3. Linkages between participants' organisations

Institution	Number of participants	Number of proposals	Requested funding	Recommended funding
Australian Catholic University	8	6	\$292,877	\$50,000
Charles Sturt University	28	21	\$1,046,939	\$250,000
Southern Cross University	15	14	\$674,623	\$80,000
Macquarie University	87	61	\$2,868,465	\$630,000
The University of New England	64	38	\$1,856,855	\$550,000
The University of New South Wales	306	166	\$7,878,848	\$1,770,000
The University of Newcastle	105	71	\$3,340,826	\$730,000
The University of Sydney	289	163	\$7,793,201	\$1,580,000
University of Technology, Sydney	91	72	\$3,398,408	\$650,000
University of Western Sydney	49	36	\$1,769,988	\$290,000
University of Wollongong	106	68	\$3,263,371	\$500,000
University of Ballarat	14	12	\$586,510	\$120,000
Deakin University	73	45	\$2,222,192	\$590,000
La Trobe University	84	65	\$3,068,672	\$660,000
Monash University	192	123	\$5,853,982	\$1,290,000
RMIT University	71	56	\$2,666,199	\$540,000
Swinburne University of Technology	39	33	\$1,585,822	\$430,000
The University of Melbourne	358	175	\$8,483,257	\$1,830,000
Victoria University of Technology	25	26	\$1,216,396	\$220,000
Griffith University	82	63	\$3,028,616	\$640,000
James Cook University	40	31	\$1,515,845	\$250,000
Queensland University of Technology	83	63	\$2,967,595	\$630,000
Central Queensland University	19	15	\$730,593	\$110,000
University of Southern Queensland	21	17	\$828,581	\$150,000
The University of Queensland	318	172	\$8,233,541	\$1,680,000
Curtin University of Technology	76	63	\$2,961,014	\$630,000
Edith Cowan University	36	28	\$1,377,053	\$340,000
Murdoch University	58	52	\$2,475,766	\$530,000
The University of Western Australia	171	111	\$5,331,152	\$1,080,000
Flinders University	79	56	\$2,657,763	\$580,000
The University of Adelaide	144	106	\$5,088,851	\$1,010,000

University of South Australia	79	64	\$3,040,537	\$620,000
University of Tasmania	106	68	\$3,320,670	\$610,000
Batchelor Institution	1	2	\$100,000	\$30,000
Charles Darwin University	17	18	\$868,615	\$190,000
Australian Maritime College	2	3	\$150,000	\$20,000
The Australian National University	379	169	\$8,065,028	\$1,680,000
University of Canberra	28	25	\$1,200,434	\$380,000
Bond University	3	3	\$127,000	\$60,000
University of Notre Dame Australia	1	1	\$49,100	\$20,000
University of the Sunshine Coast	7	6	\$287,400	\$70,000
Other - Overseas	407	103	\$4,883,783	\$990,000
Other – Australia	658	198	\$9,455,206	\$2,060,000

4.6. Administering organisations

Table 4 shows the number of proposals in which each higher education institution was the administering organisation. It also shows the total requested and recommended funding to the proposals from each administering organisation.

Table 4. Administering organisations

Institution	Number of proposals	Requested funding	Recommended funding
Australian Catholic University	1	\$45,262	\$10,000
Charles Sturt University	0	\$0	\$0
Southern Cross University	0	\$0	\$0
Macquarie University	8	\$388,724	\$120,000
The University of New England	9	\$422,812	\$40,000
The University of New South Wales	18	\$855,127	\$170,000
The University of Newcastle	2	\$99,655	\$30,000
The University of Sydney	24	\$1,182,244	\$295,000
University of Technology, Sydney	7	\$348,483	\$80,000
University of Western Sydney	5	\$134,810	\$30,000
University of Wollongong	9	\$369,447	\$30,000
University of Ballarat	1	\$42,260	\$0
Deakin University	6	\$277,757	\$40,000
La Trobe University	3	\$141,617	\$30,000
Monash University	9	\$406,324	\$50,000
RMIT University	4	\$184,662	\$20,000

Swinburne University of Technology	3	\$96,950	\$0
The University of Melbourne	33	\$1,516,430	\$260,000
Victoria University of Technology	0	\$0	\$0
Griffith University	5	\$248,174	\$110,000
James Cook University	2	\$100,000	\$20,000
Queensland University of Technology	6	\$284,459	\$30,000
Central Queensland University	2	\$92,372	\$0
University of Southern Queensland	3	\$130,720	\$10,000
The University of Queensland	27	\$1,286,166	\$320,000
Curtin University of Technology	3	\$147,000	\$20,000
Edith Cowan University	3	\$92,050	\$0
Murdoch University	3	\$142,826	\$30,000
The University of Western Australia	9	\$445,510	\$50,000
The Flinders University of South Australia	7	\$333,081	\$80,000
The University of Adelaide	12	\$570,850	\$120,000
University of South Australia	8	\$391,680	\$60,000
University of Tasmania	12	\$574,800	\$40,000
Batchelor Institution	0	\$0	\$0
Charles Darwin University	1	\$29,836	\$0
Australian Maritime College	0	\$0	\$0
The Australian National University	36	\$1,760,196	\$400,000
University of Canberra	1	\$50,000	\$10,000
Bond University	1	\$18,000	\$0
The University of Notre Dame Australia	0	\$0	\$0
University of the Sunshine Coast	0	\$0	\$0
Other - Overseas	0	\$0	\$0
Other - Australia	8	\$348,002	\$0

4.7. Organisational participation

Table 5 illustrates the distribution among the proposals of the number of different organisations represented by the participants. Proposals with a small number (say, fewer than 10) of organisations represented by participants have only a modest success rate.

Table 5. **Project proposals, recommended projects, and success rates by no. of participating organisations.**

Number of organisations involved	Proposals received	Proposals recommended	Success rate %
1	2	0	0.0
2	8	0	0.0
3	4	1	25.0
4	10	1	10.0
5	9	1	11.1
6	9	2	22.2
7	15	2	13.3
8	9	4	44.4
9	22	16	72.7
10	24	10	41.6
11	25	16	64.0
12	15	4	26.7
13	25	15	60.0
14	23	18	78.2
15	18	13	72.2
16	14	7	50.0
17	20	13	65.0
18	11	7	63.6
19	9	7	77.8
20	10	5	50.0
21	4	2	50.0
22	2	1	50.0
23	1	0	0.0
27	1	1	100.0
29	1	1	100.0

4.8. Linkages within and between States/Territories

Table 6 provides the breakdown of seed funding proposals and funding, listed by the State/Territory of the Administering Institution. To interpret the Table, consider the first row. From the state of NSW, there are 1140 people participating in 273 proposals of which 82 are administered by organisations in NSW. The total funding requested for these proposals is \$12.7 million, and the recommended funding is \$2.715 million. Participants from NSW are involved in proposals involving people from 7 (i.e. all) other States/Territories. The ARC notes that there is a very high level of cross-state/territory engagement in proposals.

Table 6. All and recommended proposals by State/Territory

State/ Territory	Number of participants	Number of proposals	Number of administered proposals	Requested funding	Recommended funding	Number of other States/ Territories
NSW	1140	273	82	\$12,752,443	\$2,715,000	7
Vic	856	240	59	\$11,270,273	\$2,405,000	7
Qld	573	215	46	\$10,139,099	\$2,095,000	7
WA	342	181	18	\$8,607,103	\$1,845,000	7
SA	302	163	27	\$7,780,589	\$1,775,000	6
Tas	108	67	12	\$3,146,096	\$660,000	7
NT	18	18	1	\$829,211	\$130,000	2
ACT	407	176	37	\$8,322,403	\$1,865,000	7
Multi	8	5	9	\$250,000	\$80,000	

4.9. Unsuccessful seed-funding proposals

The following clauses have been developed to provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants regarding the reason for the Selection Committees' recommendation. For a significant proportion of unsuccessful applications, more than one reason might have been applicable, although a single one has been selected.

1. The scope and scale of the research activities outlined in the seed-funding proposal are uncompetitive (too limited)
2. The scope and scale of the research activities outlined in the seed funding proposal are uncompetitive (too diffuse)
3. The number and breadth of current ARC research projects being undertaken by the applicants is uncompetitive with other seed-funding proposals.
4. The seed-funding proposal is uncompetitive in the field, owing to the absence of diversity in disciplinary and/or institutional engagement.
5. The seed funding proposal is poorly structured, and/or does not explain how it would meet the principal objectives of the seed-funding program.
6. The networking activities as described in the seed-funding proposal appear to describe a research project rather than a research network.\
7. The potential benefits from the networking activities described in the seed-funding proposal are not as convincing as those described in other proposals.

The number distribution of the use of these clauses in the 144 unsuccessful applications is shown in Table 7

Table 7. **Distribution of reasons for not recommending funding**

Clause Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frequency	32	5	45	9	10	2	41