



ARC RESEARCH NETWORKS

Invitation for Seed-Funding Proposals
under
ARC Special Research Initiatives
for funding to commence in 2003

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL

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1. Summary

The ARC plans to establish a new program, to be known as ARC Research Networks. Building on a platform of excellent research already selected for funding under the ARC's Discovery and Linkage programs, ARC Research Networks will establish an environment supporting highly creative, inter-disciplinary research that is not averse to risk-taking. ARC Research Networks will help to move a field forward and to explore new research themes.

The ARC Research Network program has several novel aspects compared with traditional research funding programs in Australia. Planning and preparation of proposals for supporting innovative, exciting and inter-disciplinary research will require significant intellectual and time commitments. To support the effort of preparing proposals, the ARC will provide *Seed Funding* from its *Special Research Initiatives for funding to commence in 2002 and 2003* (SRI) program.

Under the SRI program, the ARC takes a proactive role in identifying initiatives. It therefore invites applications from Qualified Organizations (see below) to apply for SRI seed funding to assist the preparation of proposals for ARC Research Networks. Successful applicants for seed funding must publish a report on the World Wide Web.

The report may be referenced within a subsequent Full Application for an ARC Research Network. It is not a requirement that successful proposals under the seed-funding Initiative are taken to the Full Application stage. The ARC does not intend to require that all Full Applications are preceded by a successful seed funding proposal. The ARC intends to permit Full Applications to reference a web site that has been created without seed funding.

Applications for SRI seed funding must be submitted using a form prepared in the ARC's on-line Grant Applications Management System. Applications must be submitted in GAMS, and as a paper original and one paper copy. Members of the ARC's Expert Advisory Committees will assess the proposals against the criteria listed in the *Guidelines for Special Research Initiatives 2002-2003*. Applicants will be notified about the outcome of their application by post, following the Minister's determination.

2. Background

In December 2002, the Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard, MP announced four national research priorities for Commonwealth-funded research. The objectives of national research priorities are to:

- identify and address areas of strength, opportunity or need where an increase in research effort – including collaboration, coordination or investment – would make a significant contribution to national wealth and/or well-being; and
- determine what shift in research effort is needed, what new or improved research activities are required, and how the targeting of research effort can best be achieved.

On 4 December 2002, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson, MP issued a formal direction to the ARC that it take account of national research priorities

in performing its functions under the *Australian Research Council Act 2001*, including with respect to making recommendations to the Minister for funding proposals under the National Competitive Grants Program.

As part of its response to this direction, the ARC proposes to fund a new ARC Research Networks program. This program will assist groups of researchers to coordinate and communicate their research activities across disciplinary, organisational, institutional and geographical boundaries. The program will encourage and fund open exchange of information and sharing of resources, development and implementation of coherent and integrated research plans among researchers working independently on topics of common interest, and efforts to nurture the careers of young investigators and research students by promoting a sense of community and strong, effective mentoring.

ARC Research Networks may address research priorities from a variety of perspectives and within a wide range of contexts and settings. The ARC encourages the establishment of Research Networks that bridge between university-based researchers and teams who are eligible to receive ARC funding assistance, and researchers working in, or supported by, other research bodies and research funding bodies. To support this, the ARC is eager to engage in discussions with other research bodies or research funding bodies regarding opportunities for co-funding or otherwise jointly supporting Research Networks.

3. Seed Funding

The ARC plans to release Funding Rules for ARC Research Networks in November, 2003. In anticipation of this release, to assist in the preparation of policy advice for Government, and as a contribution to the cooperative development of high quality research capacity in innovative areas (especially within the national research priorities) the ARC invites applications for seed funding under the ARC Special Research Initiative (SRI) program.

The funding assistance will support planning activities that (a) review Australia's current research capacity and emerging opportunities in the fields of the proposed Network, and (b) outline the contribution to be made by the proposed Network in the development of research capacity and programs in the field. Recipients of seed funding must publish a report as described below.

The maximum payment for a proposal under this Invitation will be \$50,000. The ARC may partially fund competitive proposals, and may encourage collaborative and/or complementary development of reports. Seed 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 the report (see below) for web publication.

Seed funding must be used only for purposes that are consistent with the program Guidelines, this Invitation, and the Funding Agreement.

Funding assistance under the ARC Research Network program will commence in 2004, and is thus subject to the Minister's direction of December 2002. The application form invites applicants to nominate Priorities selected from the list announced by the Prime Minister in December 2002 (Appendix 3 of the ARC's SRI Guidelines for Initiatives commencing in 2002 and 2003).

4. Web-enabled report

Recipients of seed funding must publish a stand-alone *report* on the World Wide Web. The report will be prepared in an attractively illustrated form that is readily understandable by educated, non-expert viewers. It must be conveniently accessible to the community, using common web browsers. It must include the following elements:

- A description of the context of the report (i.e., the scope, aims and structure of the proposed Network and the research portfolio associated with it);
- A survey of the current state and probable directions of development of research activity internationally within the areas covered by the report;
- An audit of Australian research capacity in the areas covered by the report, identifying strengths and potential opportunities for development;
- A set of annotated hyperlinks to relevant national and international web sites;
- An outline of proposed research directions and the desirable Network configurations, infrastructure and facilities to support this research;
- The probable national benefits from the proposed research, and mechanisms for capturing these benefits.

The home-page URL and a complete copy on CD-ROM of the web site must be provided to the ARC by Monday 9 February 2004. The ARC may build links to the home page of the web site. The web site must remain available until at least 1 July 2004. Reports prepared with SRI seed-funding assistance may build on existing web sites. The home page of the report must acknowledge ARC funding assistance, and must contain the ARC logo linked to the ARC home page.

The ARC stresses that the primary purpose of seed funding is to support meetings, visits and studies directed towards the formation of Research Networks. It encourages successful seed-funding applicants to focus expenditure of ARC funding assistance on these matters, rather than the production and appearance of the Report.

5. Eligibility and application process

The ARC solicits seed-funding applications from qualified Australian organizations, including

- Higher Education Institutions or their controlled entities;
- National ICT Australia, National Stem Cell Centre, and the Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics;
- Organizations funded wholly or partially by the Commonwealth and/or State Governments primarily to undertake research, including CSIRO, DSTO, ANSTO, AIMS and Geoscience Australia;
- Organizations established to fund research activities, such as the Rural Research and Development Corporations, Government Departments and Agencies, and philanthropic organizations;
- Professional institutions or societies, including the four Learned Academies; and
- Any other organization that can demonstrate in a competitive assessment process its capacity to sustain the Initiative described in its proposal.

Note that Australian Higher Education Institutions will be the eligible Administering Institutions for ARC Research Networks.

Applications will be received and considered by the ARC under the Special Research Initiative Guidelines 2002-2003.

6. Closing dates, assessment process and notification of outcomes

Applications close at 1700 (AEST) on **Monday 22 September 2003**.

Applications for seed funding will be assessed by the ARC's Expert Advisory Committees, in accordance with the SRI Guidelines.

The ARC anticipates that the outcome of the assessment process will be announced by October, 2003. All applicants will be informed of the outcome in writing.

Notwithstanding the confidentiality provisions of the Guidelines, the ARC may publish the name of the administering organization, the project title, participants' names and institutions, all or part of the project summary, the amount of any awarded funding, and the URL of the report.

Reports must be published on the web by 1700 AEST on **Monday 9 February 2004**. Earlier publication is encouraged. A copy of the entire Web site must be submitted on CD-ROM to the ARC at that time. Failure to meet this deadline will be regarded as a failure to comply with the obligations of the Funding Agreement.