



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

A collage of images representing various scientific and natural fields: a night sky with a white observatory dome, ancient rock art, a large baobab tree, a dragonfly, and a microscopic view of green plant cells. A teal diagonal banner is overlaid on the collage.

ARC

CORPORATE PLAN
2021-22

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CEO INTRODUCTION



Professor Sue Thomas, ARC CEO

As the accountable authority of the Australian Research Council (ARC), I am pleased to present the *Australian Research Council Corporate Plan 2021–22*, prepared for the 2021–22 reporting period and covering the period 2021–22 to 2024–25, as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act).

The corporate plan is the ARC's key planning document that details how we intend to deliver on our purpose, including the key activities we will undertake and the measures that will determine how well we perform over the next 4 years. This plan, alongside the portfolio budget statements and annual report, illustrates the ARC strategic direction and performance framework for 2021–22 and beyond.

2021 marks 20 years since the ARC was established as an independent body under the *Australian Research Council Act 2001*. It comes after an extraordinary year in which the COVID-19 pandemic created a uniquely challenging and unprecedented environment across the world, with significant impacts for the ARC, and the Australian and international research communities.

Despite these challenges, we continued to deliver our grant schemes to the research sector with over a thousand new projects commencing in 2021 and supporting research across all disciplines at universities around Australia, on all scales, from fellowships and blue-sky basic research to large multi-university industry-focused collaborations¹. The ARC provided approximately \$807 million in research funding through the National

Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) in 2020–21, representing approximately 6.8 per cent of the Australian Government's \$11.9 billion investment in research and development. In 2021–22 the ARC will deliver over \$814 million in NCGP funding to the research sector.

As part of the ARC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have put in place various support measures, such as extending application and eligibility timeframes for applicants, allowing grant recipients greater flexibility with post-award variations and allowing extensions to reporting deadlines. We are running grant selection meetings using videoconferencing, and most of our other outreach activities with external stakeholders have also shifted to an online format, with video messages recorded for opening events, and webinars held in lieu of our Research Administrators' Seminar and induction forums.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our community of peer reviewers who continue to provide their expertise, time, and commitment to ensure the continuity of our robust peer review process which underpins the NCGP. Each year, these reviewers submit around 20,000 assessments providing an outstanding service to the ARC and greater research community. We also understand the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on the research sector and we commit to monitoring the ongoing impact and making further modifications as required to support our peer reviewers.

Recognising once again, the potential for foreign interference in relation to ARC grants, we have strengthened our due diligence across our grant application processes, administration of existing ARC projects and appointment of ARC committee members. We will continue to engage with other government agencies and universities in relation to those arrangements.

¹Noting the ARC does not support pre-clinical and clinical health and medical research, which is primarily supported by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Another initiative introduced last year by the ARC was the provision of a grants administration service offered to other Australian Government entities focused on managing grant programs for the university and research sector. As a specialist provider of research-based grants management services, we offer our bespoke Research Management System (RMS) to enable streamlined, consistent grants administration and management of its peer review assessment processes, achieving efficiencies for government, and drawing on the technical capability, experience, and expertise of the ARC to help ensure that the best research and researchers are funded. Research Grants Services will be further expanded to continue to support the identification and administration of excellent research funded by the broader Commonwealth.


The ARC has an important role in advancing diversity and inclusion in Australia's research workforce, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Through the research workforce policy framework, the ARC uses eligibility and assessment criteria to facilitate equitable access to the NCGP for eligible researchers, particularly those in under-represented groups, including women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. The ARC's commitment to equity and diversity encompasses all ARC business activities. This year we are pleased to note that the membership of the ARC College of Experts (College) is approaching gender parity, increasing from 28.7 per cent women in 2016 to 48 per cent in 2021. College members, who are experts of international standing, have a key role in identifying research excellence through the ARC's peer review processes. Through these processes the ARC funds the highest quality researchers, and it is significant to note that under most NCGP schemes the success rates for women are comparable to, or exceed, the success rates for men, despite the appreciable disparity in participation rates.

The ARC has recently released an updated Gender Equality Statement, which sets out the ARC's commitment to supporting gender equality in the Australian research sector. This includes an overview of mechanisms available under the NCGP to support women's participation in ARC schemes; engagement in the research sector by the ARC, and by ARC supported researchers, to support gender equality; and a range of gender data insights, analysis and reporting, including participation and success rates under the NCGP and across the sector.

The ARC remains committed to improving the way our data can be viewed and used. Building on the success of our data visualisation for the NCGP, ERA National Report and the Gender and the Research Workforce Report in the past year, the ARC will further develop interactive data displays and other data products to improve accessibility for internal and external users. Currently data trends, available on the ARC website, can be explored through visualisations powered by Microsoft Power BI.

Another significant project for the ARC in 2021–22 will be implementing the outcomes from the review of *Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA)* and *Engagement and Impact (EI)*. The review made 22 recommendations to improve the value of ERA and EI, streamline the evaluation processes and ensure they continue to reflect world's best practice in research assessment. The next round of ERA will be in 2023 with EI in 2024, and the ARC will focus on working with universities to implement the changes that will take place for these rounds as well as the subsequent assessments.

As we look ahead, the ARC will continue to navigate through the challenging and rapidly changing environment, and fund research that is contributing to the benefit of Australians. The ARC will support the Australian research community through its competitive grant opportunities, supporting thousands of research careers, funding the latest equipment and infrastructure, and developing policies that ensure Australia remains a world leader in research excellence and innovation.



Professor Sue Thomas

Chief Executive Officer

ARC SNAPSHOT

Vision: Research for a creative, innovative and productive Australia

The ARC administered

6.8%



of the Australian Government's 2020–21 investment in **RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

22

Recommendations to be implemented from the **REVIEW OF ERA AND EI**



1,909

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS (including industry) participating in new and ongoing research projects in 2020–21

Supporting

12,339

RESEARCHERS on new and ongoing NCGP grants

The ARC receives and processes

6,000+

APPLICATIONS each year



172

new and ongoing **INDIGENOUS-RELATED** research projects funded in 2020–21

1,100+

new research projects funded each year



\$807

million to **BASIC AND APPLIED RESEARCH** in 2020–21 (for new and ongoing projects)

The ARC's Research Management System (RMS) supports over

115,500

ACTIVE USERS



The ERA 2018 assessment included

506,294

RESEARCH OUTPUTS from 76,261 researchers



7,398 ASSESSORS taking part in peer review processes, providing

20,050 assessments

PURPOSE

To grow knowledge and innovation for the benefit of the Australian community by funding the highest quality research, assessing the quality, engagement and impact of research, and providing advice on research matters.

The ARC is a non-corporate Commonwealth entity established under the *Australian Research Council Act 2001*, located within the Australian Government's Education portfolio, and reporting to the Minister for Education and Youth. The ARC is responsible for administering the NCGP, assessing the quality, engagement and impact of research and providing advice and support on research matters. The ARC is committed to achieving efficiencies for Government and as such, is now also providing specialist research-based grants administration services to other Australian Government agencies that is standardised, efficient and supports the Government's Streamlining Government Grants Administration initiative.

Funding the highest quality research

The NCGP funds fundamental and applied research and research training to eligible organisations in all fields across the science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines, as well as the humanities, arts and social sciences disciplines. The NCGP comprises 13 schemes under 2 programs: the Discovery Program, which focuses on supporting individuals and small teams to undertake fundamental research; and the Linkage Program, which creates links between university researchers, industry partners and other community organisations to undertake applied research. Funding under the NCGP is awarded based on competitive peer review processes involving Australian and international assessors.

Assessing the quality, engagement and impact of research

The ARC administers two evaluation processes to assess the quality, engagement and impact of research.

ERA provides a comprehensive assessment of the quality of research produced by Australian universities against international benchmarks. In 2018 the ARC conducted its fourth ERA assessment following the 2010, 2012 and 2015 rounds. The next ERA round will take place in 2023.

The ARC is also responsible for administering the EI assessment of university research. EI assesses the engagement of researchers with research end users and illustrates how universities are translating their research into economic, social, environmental, cultural and other impacts. The ARC conducted the inaugural EI assessment in 2018. The next round of EI will be in 2024.

In 2020–21 the ARC completed a review of ERA and EI to ensure they continue to reflect world's best practice in research assessment and respond to the ongoing needs of university, industry, community and government stakeholders. The ERA EI Review Advisory Committee made 22 recommendations to the ARC to improve ERA and EI. The ARC has accepted all of the recommendations and will work with universities and other stakeholders to deliver these improvements in future ERA and EI rounds.

OVERVIEW

FIGURE 1: Mapping the ARC Programs, Activities and Capabilities to the ARC Purpose



ENVIRONMENT

Australian research groups have contributed to the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating the strength of the sector, and its ability to respond with innovations during an unprecedented global crisis. ARC funding, while typically excluding pre-clinical and clinical health and medical research, has nonetheless supported some of this important fundamental research related to COVID-19. For instance, at the outset of the pandemic, ARC Laureate Fellow, Professor Edward Holmes at The University of Sydney was the first scientist in the world to publish the genomic sequence of the COVID-19 virus, while a research team at the *ARC Centre of Excellence in Advanced Molecular Imaging* used the Australian Synchrotron to characterise COVID-19 proteins at the molecular level in 3D.

ARC funding support is an inspiration for many research groups and researchers at a time when Australian universities are managing the impacts of COVID-19 including a sharp decline in international students. Australian researchers are still braving many changes to the research environment, such as COVID-related travel restrictions which are hampering fieldwork and international travel. The ARC continues to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on the research sector and will continue to modify systems and processes to support funding during this difficult time.

The ARC depends on the research community for its capability to deliver the NCGP and the ERA and EI assessments, as all rely upon the ARC's peer review processes, in which subject matter experts within the research community provide comprehensive advice on complex and highly specialised research topics. The ARC also draws deeply from the expertise in the university sector and from a range of Australian research and innovation sector stakeholders when consulting on the development and delivery of our policies. The ARC will continue to find ways to support this important work, for example, through continual improvements to its online systems, the use of videoconferencing, and streamlining processes to minimise the burden for applicants and assessors.

Since 2020 the ARC has continued to enhance its customised research management system and to expand its capacity in the offering of Research Grants Services, providing research grants administration for other government entities. Research Grants Services is consistent with whole-of-Australian Government grants administration initiatives and positions the ARC as a leader in the delivery of research grant programs in Australia, providing increased efficiency and assurance for users of the service, and for grant recipients.

In an environment where there is much global uncertainty, the ARC continues to support international research collaboration as it provides Australia with access to the best research and researchers in the world. In doing so, the ARC has introduced measures to enhance the transparency of interests of researchers involved in ARC funded projects and other ARC activities. The ARC will continue to work closely with the research sector and with its government counterparts to support the implementation of the *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian Higher Education Sector*, developed by the University Foreign Interference Taskforce.

In the current environment, the ARC is especially aware of its reliance on a healthy research sector to deliver its core purpose. In return, the ARC is committed to providing Australia's research community with the support it needs to remain as a significant player in the world's innovation system, and power Australia's industries and the community with the knowledge and expertise that is necessary to remain competitive internationally.

ACTIVITIES

NCCGP – Funding Excellent Basic and Applied Research and Research Training

Program 1.1 Discovery – Research and Research Training

Program 1.2 Linkage – Cross Sector Research Partnerships

Policy and Strategy	Program Implementation and Management	Assurance	Relationships, Networks and Engagement	Evaluation and Analysis
<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use an evidence-based approach to developing policies and decision making • provide high quality advice to the Minister on research matters • participate in Australian Government policy development on research, innovation and science • ensure ARC policies reflect Australian Government policies and priorities • protect the integrity of publicly funded research through appropriate policies and processes • support the development of a diverse and sustainable research workforce through policies and communications. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fund the highest quality basic and applied research across all disciplines, selected through competitive peer review, to build the scale of Australian research • support a sustainable and diverse research workforce • maintain funding mechanisms that build capacity in, and foster efficient responses to, emerging research areas and Australian Government priorities. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support a robust peer review system • review the ARC's assurance framework and implement recommendations • undertake post-award compliance activities of the NCCGP, in accordance with the assurance framework • cultivate a system-wide culture of research integrity • introduce and monitor safeguards that address the risk that the benefits of Australian funded research do not accrue to Australia. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage national and international research partnerships between universities and government, industry and not-for-profit organisations • improve stakeholder awareness of ARC programs and policies • engage stakeholders in policy development activities • engage in collaborative consultations across the higher education and research sectors • support peer reviewers through strengthened communication, recognition, and training. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor and evaluate program delivery outcomes • manage stakeholder requests for ARC data • ensure the ARC has rigorous data collection systems • assess the efficiency of assessment processes using ARC data • engage internationally to consider different ways of administering grants • maintain the public availability of grant data via the ARC data portal • increase access to ARC grant data with an improved data visualisation function.

Assessing the Quality, Engagement and Impact of Research

Program 1.3 – Excellence in Research for Australia

Policy and Strategy	Program Implementation and Management	Assurance	Relationships, Networks and Engagement	Evaluation and Analysis
<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitor and contribute to international developments in research activity and research evaluation provide strategic policy advice on research quality, engagement and impact use ERA program data to inform Australian Government policies. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement the outcomes of the review of ERA and EI to ensure they are streamlined, remain at the forefront of research assessment and maintain ongoing stakeholder support deliver ERA and EI programs that are rigorous, minimise reporting burden and meet Australian Government objectives. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> support a robust peer review system maintain robust ARC governance frameworks to ensure legislative and financial compliance regularly review and report on ARC risks. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engage with stakeholders on ERA and EI processes and outcomes promote the understanding of and use of ERA and EI data to benefit university, industry, community and government stakeholders foster engagement and impact within and beyond the research sector promote the benefits and value of Australian university research. 	<p>The ARC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitor and evaluate program delivery outcomes use data on university research activity, quality, and university research engagement and impact to inform policy advice to the Australian Government maintain the public availability of a wide range of Australian university research data via the ARC data portal.

CAPABILITIES

The achievement of the ARC purpose and activities is dependent on our strong and effective organisational capability. The ARC maintains and builds its capabilities by investing in its people, processes, and systems. All ARC capabilities are regularly reviewed and evaluated to help maintain reliability, resilience and capacity to respond to current and emerging needs. This approach ensures our people, processes, structures and systems are dependable, responsive to change and aligned to our purpose at all times.

Governance

The ARC maintains high-quality governance structures that include strategies and frameworks for decision-making, performance measurement and reporting, audit, evaluation, and risk management. These frameworks are supported by internal policies, plans and targeted staff training.

All ARC activities are supported by a range of governance and management committees, including the Senior Management Group, ARC Audit Committee, Planning and Reporting Committee and the Information Governance Committee. The ARC regularly utilises recommendations from its audits and other evaluation actions to continually improve business practices and maintain high standards of ethical conduct in relation to ARC policies and processes.

The ARC evidence-based decision-making capability is enhanced by embracing new technologies, such as advanced data visualisation.

FIGURE 2: ARC Capabilities



Finance

The ARC is committed to financial sustainability, sound financial governance and effective budget management. The use and management of public resources at the ARC is governed by the *Commonwealth Resource Management Framework* which is underpinned by the PGPA Act, *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* and supporting directions and guidance. These requirements are embedded in our own internal financial policies, guidelines and controls, which ensures the ARC achieves its purpose and fulfils the expectations of the Minister and stakeholders.

2021–22 will see the introduction of a new financial management information system to improve and fundamentally change the way the ARC manages its finances. The system will give staff the ability to access their own financial information, enable electronic workflows/approvals and provide a centralised repository for financial information.

People and Culture

A highly-skilled workforce which understands the ARC's purpose is central to achieving our desired outcomes. Established policies are in place to support the development of a workforce that is aligned with the key activities and can respond flexibly to shifting priorities. Workforce planning processes are focused on identifying capability requirements, both current and emerging, and the development of skill sets that are well prepared to meet future capability needs. Strong leadership is also an enduring theme at the ARC and its leaders are supported to steer a high performing culture that aims to be innovative and collaborative. The ARC values the retention of corporate knowledge and expertise and although its overall staffing numbers are small, it maximises opportunities for all staff through formal and informal development opportunities. A range of policies and strategies are in place to ensure that the ARC workplace is inclusive and diverse and facilitates flexible, people-centred working arrangements.

Communication

The ARC plays an important role in promoting the benefits of research that the Australian Government supports through the funding schemes of the NCGP – as well as the high quality of research occurring right across all Australian universities – to the wider Australian and international communities. The agency engages with its stakeholders through strategic communication and targeted outreach activities to ensure the highest quality performance in the delivery of our program responsibilities. The ARC's communication strategies increase our ability as an agency to effectively engage with stakeholders to develop and implement policies and programs that serve the Australian research sector and benefit the wider community. Our internal communication is also premised on ensuring that consistent, effective and efficient communications are maintained to promote continued growth of a dynamic, supportive and productive workplace. Some examples of our key communication activities include our website, research sector messaging, publications and social media, while outreach engagement activities carried out by the ARC include consultations, panels, workshops, round tables and surveys conducted before or after outreach for feedback on activities.

Technology

The ARC's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems are fundamental to the productivity of its staff and effective delivery of the NCGP, ERA and EI programs. ICT services provide modern workspaces to support flexibility and mobility within the workforce, and efficient and effective business systems to support business processes. This is all underpinned by robust and reliable infrastructure. The ARC plans to focus on ensuring the continuity of existing ICT services while building foundational capability for the future. Business systems will be enhanced to provide further efficiencies to the research sector and support whole-of-government initiatives. The ARC's RMS has already been and will continue to be, expanded to support Research Grants Services.

The ARC is investing in the creation of business intelligence solutions to monitor, measure and improve our work practices. We are strengthening our capabilities in artificial intelligence and emerging technologies to deliver smart digital solutions for the ARC. We continue to streamline the ICT delivery capability based on stakeholders' requirements and priorities.

The ARC will also continue to adopt cloud-based services, where possible, to maximise the ARC's efficiencies in delivering its ICT services. The infrastructure service will be modernised to reduce the physical footprint and utilise contemporary technologies to provide reliable end user services.

The ARC will focus on maintaining its security stance within an evolving hazardous landscape. To adapt to the changing landscape in technology and how we use and access data in our ICT systems, the ARC has a robust information security policy and framework to guide access and use of ARC systems.

Data and Analytics

The ARC values data as a strategic asset and collects a range of NCGP, ERA and EI program and administrative data as well as information on Australia's research and innovation systems. The ongoing collection of NCGP data is used to gain a comprehensive picture of ARC's research funding and to monitor trends over time for NCGP schemes. It contributes to internal evidence-based decision-making, ARC performance reporting and evaluation, and informs policy development and implementation. This resource is utilised by a diverse range of external stakeholders including universities, researchers, policy makers and the broader community. The ARC is committed to promoting the outcomes of the research it funds, and ensuring that non-sensitive data is made publicly available to extend the value and use of ARC-funded research. One of the ways we meet the challenge of balancing the demands from stakeholders for access to data, against the requirements of legislation and the resources of the agency, is by optimising the functionality of ARC data.

The ARC is extending its data visualisation capability, including development of dynamic data displays and other data products, allowing stakeholders to access NCGP data in new ways beyond the static spreadsheets, tables and lists currently available on the ARC website. Data trends from 2002 can be explored and interacted with through the application of filters for funding commencement year, scheme, research discipline and more. The ARC also provides access to ERA and EI data and outcomes through its data portal, and trend data and other interactive data visualisations through the ERA National Report and the Gender and the Research Workforce Report.

In 2021–22 and future years, the ARC will implement ERA EI Review recommendations to improve access to ERA and EI data and promote greater insights from this data, especially for government and end user stakeholders.

Research Grants Services

The ARC provides grants administration services to other Australian Government entities who are managing grant programs focused on the research sector. This research grants administration, which utilises our RMS, is called Research Grants Services.

As a specialist provider of research-based grants management services, Research Grants Services provides other entities with reliable access to the ARC's systems and experts through streamlined grants administration processes to assist with the management of their grants – achieving efficiencies for government, and drawing on the technical capability, experience and expertise of the ARC to help ensure the best research and researchers are funded in line with policy expectations.

The RMS is a flexible, robust, stable, innovative platform for administering research grants. Through Research Grants Services, the ARC can make RMS instances available to funding entities, for the submission, management and assessment of applications, offer and establishment of grant agreements, and to all post-award grant management activities.

COOPERATION

The ARC's purpose to grow knowledge and innovation for the benefit of the Australian community is enabled by our stakeholders, particularly those in the Australian research sector who are the immediate beneficiaries of our grant schemes, often in research partnerships with industry, government, the not-for-profit sector, and international organisations.

A broad range of strategies and activities are used to support engagement with stakeholders to improve awareness and understanding of ARC programs and policies, and to effectively consult and collaborate across the higher education and research sectors. The ARC's external communications strategy provides an overarching framework for engaging effectively with our external stakeholders – promoting the value of Australian research through communicating the outcomes and benefits of ARC-funded research; improving stakeholder awareness about the ARC's programs, policies and activities; and effectively consulting and collaborating with stakeholders. The ARC strives to be adaptive, proactive and innovative as we engage with our stakeholders and the broader community.

In the day-to-day running of the NCGP, and our research evaluation exercises, we work with researchers and research administrators in Australian universities. The effective running of our peer review processes depends heavily on the efforts of thousands of individuals who are drawn from the Australian and international research communities: from higher education, industry and public sector research organisations.

The ARC meets regularly with other Government agencies in the coordination of policy matters which extend over the policy and program space of multiple research fields. For example, for researchers who may apply to both the ARC and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), we have worked collaboratively to reduce duplication in applications and improve information sharing between our agencies. The ARC and NHMRC have previously collaborated in the running of our annual Research Administrators' Seminar. We also work together to promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity in research, through the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (co-authored with Universities Australia), the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (co-authored with Universities Australia), and the *Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes* (co-authored with Universities Australia and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation). The ARC and NHMRC also operate the Australian Research Integrity Committee.

Beginning in 2020, the ARC has provided grants administration services to other Australian Government entities who are managing research grant programs. These funding entities remain responsible for the program policy and funding of the grant programs and are supported by the ARC through the relevant parts of the grants lifecycle. In 2020–21, the ARC commenced grants services for 3 agencies: Department of Education, Skills and Employment; the Office of National Intelligence; and the Department of Defence.

In June 2021, the ARC released the outcomes of the ERA EI Review. The ARC consulted with a wide range of government and non-government stakeholders throughout the course of the review, including through the expert ERA EI Review Advisory Committee. Having accepted all recommendations of the review, the ARC will work with universities to finalise the technical details of implementation of the recommendations, and with government and end user stakeholders to improve the value of ERA and EI data.

The ARC has introduced safeguards to manage the potential national security risk posed to ARC grant activities. As a result of a revised *Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy*, the ARC introduced measures to enhance the transparency of interests of researchers involved in ARC-funded projects and other ARC activities. The ARC will continue to work closely with the research sector and with its government counterparts to support the implementation of the *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian Higher Education Sector*, developed by the University Foreign Interference Taskforce.

FIGURE 3: ARC Stakeholders



RISK OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT

The ARC's comprehensive Risk Management Framework (the framework) has been designed in accordance with section 16 of the PGPA Act, for the management and oversight of the ARC's risks and controls. The framework complies with the *Commonwealth Risk Management Policy* and meets the needs of the ARC's unique context and functions.

The framework is underpinned by the ARC Risk Management Policy (the policy) and Risk Management Plan and Toolkit (the plan). These documents define the ARC's approach to risk management, the organisation's appetite, and tolerance to risk plus key accountabilities and responsibilities for managing risk across the agency. Together, the policy and plan support all other elements of the framework including strategic, operational, project and fraud risk registers. The ARC also has a risk champions network to ensure that risk management is widely communicated, embedded in our culture and that risks are proactively managed in all areas of business.

The ARC recognises the potential impact of several of its risks could be significant. Considering the ARC's role as a key funding agency, the ARC is vigilant in the management of financial risks as well as having a low tolerance for risks that damage the ARC's reputation or impact on the safety of its staff and stakeholders.

The ARC's risk culture is built upon the understanding that risk is everyone's responsibility with operational risks regularly reviewed, escalated and reported on as required. Risk is also an integral part of planning, performance and decision-making, helping the ARC to identify threats and also opportunities. The ARC uses a centralised risk management system to record, manage, and share risk information across the agency.

The ARC continues to build capacity, awareness, and expertise in risk management through formal risk management training, provision of guidance materials, and systems training. The ARC reviews the framework on an annual basis to ensure it is operating effectively and adheres to leading practice.

The framework played an important role in assisting the agency through the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continues to do so, allowing the ARC to take a risk-based approach to the pandemic to ensure the agency can continue to deliver on its objectives. This includes working closely with our stakeholders, who have also been affected by the pandemic, to manage our shared risks, and continual improvements to our business continuity and disaster recovery planning to ensure the agency is resilient in times of disruption.

FIGURE 4: Risk at the ARC



The ARC has 5 strategic risks which are managed through its Risk Management Framework as outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1: ARC Strategic Risks

Strategic Risk	Mitigation
The ARC is perceived to not be funding the best research	The ARC has a mature framework of policies and processes to support its grants administration and peer review systems. This includes a range of oversight, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure this risk is being continually managed.
Outcomes from ERA and EI do not meet the needs of the Government and/or Stakeholders	The ARC has a range of policies and protocols in place to ensure the outcomes from ERA and EI meet the needs of the Government and its stakeholders. This includes extensive communication and consultation with stakeholders.
The ARC is not engaging effectively with its stakeholders (including across Government and with the research sector)	The ARC has a number of communication and outreach policies in place, works closely across Government, and undertakes regular outreach with the research sector through a range of mechanisms and approaches.
The ARC fails to comply with its legislative requirements	The agency has well-established governance and financial processes for ensuring compliance with legislative requirements. The ARC also undertakes regular staff training, participates in cross-government groups and has a dedicated Legal Counsel.
ARC-funded research is compromised through foreign interference	The ARC has responded to this emerging risk through reviewing related policies, clearly communicating conflict and compliance requirements with the research sector and works closely with other Government agencies.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

The ARC's performance measures are an integral component of the ARC Performance Cycle (Figure 5) and are designed to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of the ARC's work in funding the highest quality research, assessing the quality, engagement and impact of research and providing advice on research matters. The ARC recognises the importance of reliable and relevant performance information, designed to illustrate the agency's success in achieving its purpose of contributing to the growth of knowledge and innovation for the benefit of Australia.

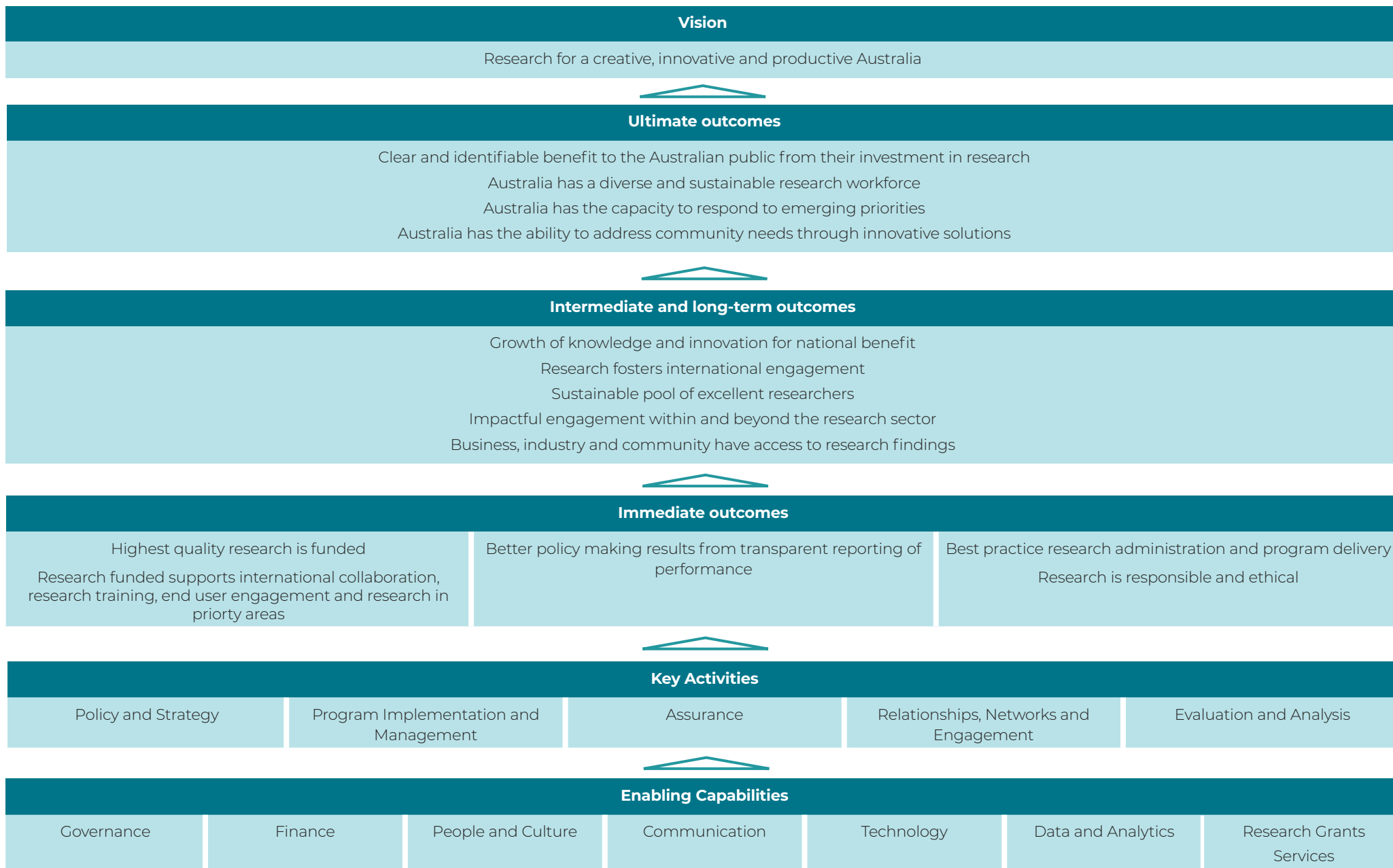
The underpinning logic of the ARC's performance measurement framework is represented at Figure 6. This figure outlines the relationship between the ARC's capabilities, activities and outcomes, and captures the organisational logic underpinning the development of the ARC's performance measures. The ARC's performance outcomes may be influenced by factors beyond its control which are considered in its risk management strategies.

The corporate plan also includes relevant performance indicators that have been valuable for tracking activities in areas such as the composition of the research workforce. The ARC supports and encourages a diverse workforce with indicators used to provide trend data across multiple years and contributing to informing policy changes.

FIGURE 5: The ARC Performance Cycle



FIGURE 6: Performance Measurement Framework



NCGP – Funding Excellent Basic and Applied Research and Research Training

Program 1.1 Discovery – Research and research training

Program 1.2 Linkage – Cross sector research partnerships

Performance Indicators 2021–22

Indicator	Metric	Methodology/Data Source
ARC-funded research supports the sustainability of Australia's research workforce		
A	Number of researchers (unique individuals) on ARC-funded research projects	Total number of unique chief investigators (CIs) on all research projects awarded within the reporting period <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>
B	Proportion of researchers (unique individuals) on ARC-funded research projects who are women	The percentage of unique CIs who identified as female Number of CIs who identify as female to total number of unique individuals including those who do not identify and those who identify as other, as indicated on the application form <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>
C	Proportion of researchers (unique individuals) on ARC-funded research projects who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	The percentage of unique CIs who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Number of CIs who self-identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander to total number of unique individuals <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>
D	Proportion of researchers (unique individuals) on ARC-funded research projects who are early career researchers (ECR)	The percentage of unique CIs who are early career researchers Number of new and ongoing ECRs, to total number of unique individuals ECR status is defined as 0-5 years post-PhD at close of scheme round and is calculated on the basis of PhD data provided by individual researchers <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>

Indicator	Metric	Methodology/Data Source
ARC-funded research supports the sustainability of Australia's research workforce		
E	Number of researchers on ARC-funded research projects who are fellows or awardees	Total number of researchers who are awarded DECRA, Future Fellowships, Laureate Fellowships or Discovery Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award (supported in Discovery Indigenous) within the reporting period Each unique individual researcher is counted only once for total NCGP <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>
F	Proportion of Linkage Program funding to support industrial research training under the Industrial Transformation Training Centres (ITTC) scheme	The percentage of Linkage Program funding dedicated to ITTC grants Total funding for new and ongoing funding for ITTC scheme to the total funding allocated for the Linkage Program within the reporting period. <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>

Performance Measures for 2021–25

Process

Measure	Metric/Outcome	Methodology/Data Source	Target				
			2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	
ARC has an efficient competitive process which is transparent, fair and equitable							
1.1	NCGP applications and assessment processes are conducted in a timely manner	Immediate Recommendations are made to the Minister within 6 months of scheme round closing dates for Linkage Projects and within 8 months for all other schemes except for ARC Centres of Excellence	Quantitative The percentage of scheme rounds where the recommendations are made to the minister within the given time frame The length of the process is measured from scheme round application closing date to date relevant funding outcome brief lodged with Minister <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%

Measure	Metric/Outcome	Methodology/Data Source	Target				
			2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
ARC has an efficient competitive process which is transparent, fair and equitable							
1.2	ARC meets Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines requirements to publish information about grant opportunities and grant awards	Immediate ARC publishes all NCGP Grant Opportunities and Grant Awards on GrantConnect within 21 days	Quantitative Data extracts checked for compliance – breach verified when time of payload created to upload exceeds 21 days <i>Data sources: GrantConnect and ARC NCGP administrative database</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%
1.3	ARC manages equitable expert assessment of NCGP applications	Immediate Minimum of 2 detailed assessments are received per application across all NCGP schemes with the exception of Special Research Initiatives (SRIs)	Quantitative Percentage of applications with two or more detailed assessments to all applications for NCGP, excluding SRIs Note: SRIs are excluded as SRI assessment processes may vary from standard ARC processes <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%
1.4	ARC reviews completed final grant reports in a timely manner	Immediate Final reports are reviewed within 3 months	Quantitative Percentage of final reports processed within the reporting period i.e. finalised (approved / waived) or de-submitted back to the Research Office for action Three months calculated from the last date of submission <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>	90%	90%	90%	90%

Measure	Metric/Outcome	Methodology/Data Source	Target				
			2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
ARC has an efficient competitive process which is transparent, fair and equitable							
1.5	ARC reviews submitted End of Year Reports, Progress / Annual Reports in a timely manner	Immediate Reports are reviewed within 3 months	Quantitative Percentage of reports processed within the reporting period i.e. finalised (approved / waived) or de-submitted back to the Research Office for action Three months calculated from the last date of submission <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>	90%	90%	90%	90%
1.6	ARC manages NCGP application and assessment processes fairly and in accordance with Grant Guidelines	Immediate The percentage of upheld appeals against administrative processes is very low compared to applications submitted	Quantitative The number of upheld appeals against administrative processes to total number of submitted applications displayed as a percentage <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i>	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

Research Outcome

ARC supports collaboration to enable high quality research							
1.7	Proportion of ARC-funded research projects that involved international collaboration	Immediate/Intermediate The percentage of projects which involved international collaboration	Quantitative The number of research projects indicating actual international collaboration divided by the total number of research projects displayed as a percentage <i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database (Final reports)</i>	70%	70%	70%	70%

Measure	Metric/Outcome	Methodology/Data Source	Target				
			2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
ARC supports collaboration to enable high quality research							
1.8	Maintain or increase the level of co-funding from partner organisations involved in ARC-funded research (Linkage Projects scheme)	<p>Immediate</p> <p>The proportion of co-funding from partner organisations involved in ARC-funded research for every \$1 of ARC's funding</p>	<p>Quantitative</p> <p>Total partner organisation contribution (cash and in-kind funding) divided by total ARC funding for the same scheme round</p> <p><i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i></p>	≥ \$1 for every ARC dollar	≥ \$1 for every ARC dollar	≥ \$1 for every ARC dollar	≥ \$1 for every ARC dollar
1.9	Proportion of participating organisations satisfied with the research partnership supported through the Linkage Program (Linkage Projects scheme)	<p>Long term</p> <p>The percentage of partner organisations who acknowledged the research partnership experience as beneficial or very beneficial</p>	<p>Quantitative</p> <p>The number of partner organisations who found the experience beneficial or very beneficial to the total responses received from partner organisations displayed as a percentage</p> <p><i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database (Final reports)</i></p>	90%	90%	90%	90%
ARC funding grows Australia's research knowledge and innovation							
1.10	Proportion of ARC-funded research projects that indicate their research will involve research in one of the Australian Government's National Science and Research Priority areas	<p>Immediate / Intermediate</p> <p>The percentage of ARC-funded projects contributing to the Australian Government's National Science and Research Priority areas</p>	<p>Quantitative</p> <p>The total number of projects indicating their research is in a National Science and Research Priority area to the total number of projects administered in the reporting period displayed as a percentage</p> <p><i>Data source: ARC NCGP administrative database</i></p>	60%	60%	60%	60%

Assessing the Quality, Engagement and Impact of Research

Program 1.3 – Excellence in Research Australia

Performance Measures 2021–25

Measure	Metric/Outcome	Methodology/Data Source	Target	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	
ERA provides assurance of the quality of research in Australia								
2.1	Review outcomes are implemented through revised methodology, where required	Immediate/ Intermediate <i>Data source: ARC records and published material</i>	Qualitative <i>Data source: ARC records and published material</i>	Publication of ERA 2023 submission and assessment documentation	Met	Met	n/a	n/a
2.2	Research quality of participating universities is assessed and reported on	Intermediate <i>Data source: ARC data records</i>	Quantitative <i>Data source: ARC data records</i>	100% of eligible submissions are assessed in accordance with relevant criteria and results are published	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a
2.3	Use of ERA program data to assist in the development of Australian Government policies	Immediate/ Intermediate <i>Data source: information gathering – ongoing activity</i>	Qualitative <i>Data source: information gathering – ongoing activity</i>	ERA program reports and activities inform Australian Government policy	Met	Met	Met	Met
ERA encourages excellent, internationally competitive research								
2.4	Use of ERA program data to inform the strategic planning of Australian universities	Immediate/ Intermediate <i>Data source: survey and analysis of Australian university planning and reporting documents</i>	Quantitative/Qualitative <i>Data source: survey and analysis of Australian university planning and reporting documents</i>	ERA program reports and activities inform strategic planning at eligible Australian universities	Met	Met	Met	Met

Measure	Metric/Outcome	Methodology/Data Source	Target	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
The EI Assessment encourages impactful engagement within and beyond the research sector							
2.5	Review outcomes are implemented through revised methodology, where required	Immediate/ Intermediate <i>Data source: ARC records and published material</i>	Qualitative Publication of EI 2024 submission and assessment documentation	Met	Met	n/a	n/a
2.6	Engagement and impact of the research of participating universities is assessed and reported on	Intermediate <i>Data source: ARC data records</i>	Quantitative 100% of eligible submissions are assessed in accordance with relevant criteria and results are published	n/a	n/a	n/a	100%

APPENDIX: ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

Acronyms

ARC	Australian Research Council
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CI	Chief Investigator
DECRA	Discovery Early Career Researcher Award
ECR	Early Career Researcher
EI	Engagement and Impact
ERA	Excellence in Research for Australia
HASS	Humanities and Social Sciences
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ITTC	Industrial Transformation Training Centre
NCGP	National Competitive Grants Program
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
PGPA Act	<i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i>
RMS	Research Management System
SRIs	Special Research Initiatives
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Glossary

Activities	What the ARC does with its resources to fulfil its purpose
Applied research	Research that aims to address real-world problems by applying existing research theories or practices in a novel or innovative way
Basic research	Research that contributes to understanding the world through discoveries and the creation of new knowledge, theories and practices
College of Experts	Qualified and experienced individuals who possess extensive peer review experience
Early career researcher	Researchers who have held a PhD or equivalent qualification for a period less than or equal to 5 years at the time of their application
GrantConnect	Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, http://www.grants.gov.au/
National Science and Research Priorities	Nine research priority areas identified by the Australian Government which are Food, Soil and Water, Transport, Cybersecurity, Energy, Resources, Advanced Manufacturing, Environmental Change and Health. Each priority has a number of practical challenges
Outcomes	Benefits or changes to individuals or populations resulting from ARC activities
Outputs	Direct products of ARC activities, for example, grants
Partner Organisations	National or international organisations that satisfy the eligibility criteria for partner organisations under the NCGP including business, industry, not-for-profit, government and international higher education organisations
Peer review	Evaluation of research applications by experts, usually in the same research discipline
Purpose	The strategic objective(s) that the agency intends to pursue over the reporting period
Success rates	The number of awards made per gender group in a year or funding round as a percentage of the total number of applications for the relevant gender group. Withdrawn applications are excluded.
Unique individuals	A single, named researcher participating on an NCGP grant

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Image: The Gwion Gwion paintings were created by the ancestors of the Balanggarra people. Credit: Mark Jones

Image: One of the iconic boab trees with a carving in the Kimberley, WA. Credit: Jane Balme.

Image: A kelp forest. Credit: Camille Pagniello, California Sea Grant, Scripps Institution of Oceanography UC San Diego.

Image: Diamond silk fibres are electrospun to form porous membranes, shown in bluish green colour, with the golden-brown colour representing the skin cell growth on the membrane. Credit: colour enhanced image treatment by Daniel Oldfield.

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