Australian Government

Australian Research Council

General Assessor Handbook

A guide for **General** Assessors on the selection and assessment of applications under the **Linkage Program** grant opportunity for

Linkage Projects – LP26

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Contents

1. Overview

This Handbook provides instructions and advice for **General** Assessors on the assessment process for:

1. Linkage Projects (LP26)

This scheme is a part of the Linkage Program of the Australian Research Council's (ARC) National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP).

The ARC's Linkage funding schemes aim to:

- encourage and extend cooperative approaches to research; and
- improve the use of research outcomes by strengthening links within the innovation system in Australia and internationally.

The Linkage funding schemes aim to encourage and extend cooperative approaches to research and improve the use of research outcomes by strengthening links within the innovation system in Australia and internationally. Schemes under the Program promote national and international research partnerships between researchers and business, industry, community organisations and other publicly funded research agencies.

Through these partnerships, the ARC encourages the transfer of skills, knowledge and ideas as a basis for securing commercial and other benefits of research.

The specific objectives and assessment criteria for the grant opportunity covered in the Handbook is listed in the Appendix, and is also available in the relevant Grant Guidelines on GrantConnect.

2. The assessment process

Peer review is the method used to assess ARC applications and is undertaken by two groups of experts known as General and Detailed Assessors. Experts from each group assess applications against the relevant grant opportunity assessment criteria and contribute to the process of scoring and ranking research applications. Detailed Assessors comments should be useful for both General Assessors and applicants. Detailed Assessors' comments and scores are considered by General Assessors as part of their assessment of applications, while Detailed Assessors' comments are treated in applicants' rejoinders. The objective of the assessment process is to ensure that the highest quality research applications are recommended to the decision maker for funding. In the case of the Linkage Projects scheme, the ARC Board is the final decision maker for funding.
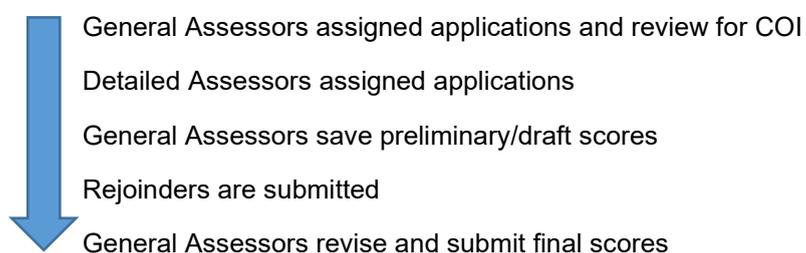
The Research Management System (RMS) is the online system used for the preparation and submission of research applications, assessments and rejoinders for the ARC. The *RMS User Guide for Assessors*, assists **General** and **Detailed** Assessors to navigate the RMS assignment and assessment process. This User Guide is available on the ARC Assessor Resources page. Here, assessors can also find additional information about the peer review process.

General Assessor scores and ranks are now available to eligible applicants once grant outcomes are announced in RMS. General Assessors need to be aware that the scores released to applicants are those submitted by General Assessors prior to the RMS Meeting Application being finalised for the SAC meeting.

Order of the assessment process

The following diagram provides an overview of the assessment process.

Diagram 1: Overview of the General Assessor Assessment Process

General Assessors assigned applications and review for COI

Detailed Assessors assigned applications

General Assessors save preliminary/draft scores

Rejoinders are submitted

General Assessors revise and submit final scores

2.1 General Assessors

RMS profile

It is important that General Assessors ensure that their RMS profile is up-to-date and contains the following details:

1. **Expertise text:** Please outline your expertise briefly. The following format is suggested **"**My major area of research expertise is in a, b, c. I have additional research experience in q, r, s. I would also be able to assess in the areas of x, y, z. The research facilities, techniques and methodologies I use are l, m, n".
2. **Field of Research (FoR-2020) Codes:** Please include between 6 and 10 FoR codes at the 6-digit level that reflect your key areas of expertise.
3. **Employment History:** Please ensure that your employment history is kept up to date, to enable your organisational conflicts of interests to be identified in RMS.
4. **Personal Details:** Please ensure your personal details are up to date, including conflicts of interest and personal material interest declarations.

This information will be used to match assessors with applications and should accurately represent your research expertise.

The Selection Advisory Committee

The Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) is responsible for reviewing applications, Detailed Assessors' assessments, and applicants' rejoinders, and for final deliberations and recommendations to the ARC Board.

For each grant opportunity, ARC Academic Directors select General Assessors to form a SAC. SAC members have a crucial role in the peer review process. SACs may include members from the ARC College of Experts (CoE) and other eminent members of the wider academic community and/or key industry groups. SACs may also be divided into panels of different disciplines depending on the scheme under assessment. SAC members are chosen to provide a combination of relevant expertise and experience to support the objectives of the grant opportunity.

Following the deadline for submission of applications, ARC Academic Directors assign each application to General Assessors. The lead General Assessor (Carriage 1) is usually closely associated with the application's academic field and other General Assessor (Other Carriage) will have supplementary expertise. Carriage 1 has primary responsibility for the application, which will include speaking to the application and its assessments and rejoinder at the SAC meeting. The Other Carriage has a responsibility to assist Carriage 1 in resolving initial recommendations, often through discussions in advance of the SAC meeting, and adding their evaluation to Carriage 1's during the SAC meeting.

> **Note:** General Assessors are not required to agree on or align their scores for an application, but if the scores are disparate, they need to understand why their opinions differ to facilitate discussion at the SAC meeting.

In LP scheme Detailed Assessors are assigned by Carriage 1. The number of Detailed Assessors required to be assigned for each specific grant opportunity, including reserves, is shown on the assignment page in RMS and communicated to General Assessors via email.

If Carriage 1 is required to assign Detailed Assessors, they are asked to select assessors across different genders, academic levels institutions and a variety of types of organisations, nationally and internationally to achieve a balanced and discipline appropriate evaluation of the application.

Please ensure that multiple assessors from the same organisation are <u>not</u> assigned to the same application.

After assigning the required number of assessors in RMS and following the ARC's announcement of assignments, the Carriage 1 may notice that some applications appear to need more assignments. This is due to the previously assigned assessors rejecting the assessment or not responding, but no further action is required from the Carriage 1. The monitoring of assignments, acceptance, rejection and submission is

managed by ARC staff. If the assigned Detailed Assessors and reserves become unavailable, an ARC Academic Director will assign additional Detailed Assessors.

Cross-panel applications

Cross-panel applications are applications with General Assessors on more than one panel assessing the application due to the cross-disciplinary nature of the application. Cross-panel applications undergo the same assignment and assessment process as all other applications. Cross-panel applications are assessed in the Selection Advisory Meeting where the Carriage 1 is assigned.

The LP scheme has just one multi-disciplinary panel, there are no cross-panel applications.

General assessment process

All General Assessors must declare any conflicts of interest (COI) and reject the assignment as soon as possible if a COI exists. This will assist the ARC with the timely re-assignment of applications (see Section 4.1 for further information). If a General Assessor is unsure of whether a COI exists, they must seek advice from the ARC before proceeding with accepting an assignment by emailing ARC-College@arc.gov.au as soon as possible.

When assessing applications General Assessors must rely solely on the information provided within the application including referenced publications and preprints and should not seek additional information from any sources. This includes following any hyperlinks that may have been provided in the application. The inclusion of webpage addresses/URLs and hyperlinks is only permitted under certain circumstances such as publications (including preprints) that are only available online and Letters of Support. Webpage addresses/URLs and hyperlinks should not be used to circumvent page limits, nor should they provide information that is not contained in the application. All information relevant to the application must be contained within the application.

Saving preliminary assessments

Following the assignment process, General Assessors independently read and assess all of their assigned applications against the relevant assessment criteria, based on an A to E Scoring Matrix (although the matrix provides guidance on the expected averages across the entire set of applications, each application must be marked on its own merits). These preliminary assessment scores should be saved as drafts in RMS (**but not submitted**). General Assessors enter scores into RMS; they do not enter text.

In the rejoinder process, applicants receive anonymised Detailed Assessors' comments only without the commensurate scores. The applicant then has an opportunity to provide a rejoinder to address any issues raised by the Detailed Assessors.

After the rejoinder process has closed, General Assessors review the Detailed Assessors' comments and scores and the applicants' rejoinder text. Detailed assessments and rejoinders will inform General Assessors' scores and at this point General Assessors can review and if necessary, revise and save their preliminary scores. General Assessors then ensure that their draft scores are entered in RMS (**but not submitted**) before the preliminary assessment due date determined by the ARC, enabling their co-Carriage to view the scores and to facilitate discussion and ensure that the co-Carriage has an opportunity to understand the reasoning behind any differences in Carriage scores.

Revising and submitting final assessments

For applications that have a difference in scores between the General Assessors, Carriage 1 is responsible for contacting the other Carriage(s) to discuss their scores. General Assessors are not required to agree on or align their scores for an application, but if the scores are disparate, they need to understand why their opinions differ to facilitate discussion at the SAC meeting. Following this discussion, final scores and ranks should be **submitted in RMS** by the required final due date.

When all final scores are submitted, RMS produces a ranked list of all applications (see Section 2.2 for further information). This list is used at the SAC meeting to assist with the identification of applications that are of sufficient quality to be fundable. The ranking of applications on this list is not final and the meeting process provides several opportunities for the SAC to discuss and review all applications, as outlined below.

Inappropriate assessments

If General Assessors are concerned about the appropriateness of any assessment text or comments that do not match scores from Detailed Assessors, or identify a potential COI or potential breach of confidentiality, including but not limited to, the use of generative Artificial Intelligence technology[1], then they **must** contact the ARC by sending an email to ARC-College@arc.gov.au as soon as possible. The ARC will investigate the concerns and decide whether an assessment should be amended by the Detailed Assessor or removed from the process. The latter happens only in rare circumstances and requires ARC Senior Executive approval.

2.2 Scoring and ranking assessments

Scoring

When applying the Scoring Matrix, General Assessors should have regard for the specific grant opportunity objectives as outlined in the Appendix and assessment criteria for the Scheme.

Scoring applications against assessment criteria can be a difficult exercise when Assessors might only look at a small sub-set of applications. Bands within the Scoring Matrix ideally represent a distribution across all applications submitted to a grant opportunity.

Only the very best applications should be recommended. As a guide, approximately 10% should fall into the top scoring band ('A'). These would have been assessed as near flawless applications across all assessment criteria.

A Scoring Matrix for the scores A to E is provided in the Appendix and should guide scoring for General Assessors.

Ranking

Each application must have a unique rank. Although RMS will use the **overall application scores** to automatically rank an Assessor's assessments as these are completed in RMS, if multiple applications have the same **overall application scores** these applications will be flagged and an Assessor must assign a unique rank to differentiate equally scored applications. Differentiation should be based on how you compare the applications in relation to the Scoring Matrix.

Note: RMS will use your scores to automatically rank applications, and then use your rank order to differentiate equally scored applications.

Assessments should be submitted when all applications have been assigned 1) a score and 2) a unique ranking.

2.3 Important factors to consider when assessing

Objectives and assessment criteria

Each grant opportunity has specific objectives and assessment criteria. Assessors must have regard to both the objectives and the assessment criteria as outlined in the relevant Grant Guidelines and the Appendix of this document.

National Interest Test (NIT)

Applicants must provide a NIT statement, which outlines the national interest of their research proposal. This statement is provided with other elements of an application recommended for funding for final consideration by the ARC Board.

The NIT statement provided by the researcher is part of their application. It is required to be certified by the DVCR and will be available to all assessors. It should be considered as part of the assessment of the application. The NIT is to be used with the rest of the information in the application to inform an assessor's assessment of the Assessment Criteria as included in the Appendix.

The ARC will accept the DVCR's certification as final and will not review or make requests for changes to a NIT. Additional information regarding the NIT is available on the ARC website.

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[1] Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the ARCs grants programs 2023.pdf

Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE)

The ROPE assessment criterion requires all Assessors to identify and consider research excellence relative to a researcher's career and life experiences. It aims to ensure that NCGP assessment processes accurately evaluate a researcher's career history relative to their current career stage and consider whether their productivity and contribution is commensurate with the opportunities that have been available to them.

The required elements of ROPE vary according to the objectives of each grant opportunity. All General Assessors should be familiar with the full ROPE statement located on the ARC website.

Please note that for LP26, Partner Investigators are not required to complete the ROPE questions C11 to C15 in the application form. Instead, they upload a CV at question C17.

Interdisciplinary research

The ARC recognises the value of interdisciplinary research and the ARC's commitment to supporting interdisciplinary research is outlined in the *ARC Statement of Support for Interdisciplinary Research*.

Interdisciplinary research can be a distinct mode of research, or a combination of researchers, knowledge and/or approaches from disparate disciplines. Under the NCGP, examples of interdisciplinary research may include researchers from different disciplines working together in a team; researchers collaborating to bring different perspectives to solve a problem; researchers utilising methods normally associated with one or more disciplines to solve problems in another discipline; and one or more researchers translating innovative blue sky or applied research outcomes from one discipline into an entirely different research discipline.

Assessors are required to assess all research on a fair and equal basis, including applications and outputs involving interdisciplinary and collaborative research. To assist with this, the ARC facilitates consideration of applications by relevant General Assessors with interdisciplinary expertise or where not feasible, applications are allocated to General Assessors who have broad disciplinary expertise regardless of discipline grouping. Interdisciplinary applications should be allocated to Detailed Assessors with specific interdisciplinary expertise or to Detailed Assessors from the different disciplines covered in the application.

Preprints or comparable resources

General Assessors should consider the merit of publications including preprints and comparable resources that are listed in the application. Assessors may access hyperlinks and evaluate if a citation included in the application is a crucial part of the research discourse, and evaluate the suitability, quality and relevance of the research output to help them determine the quality and novelty of the proposed research. However, assessors should not use online search engines to identify or evaluate applicants' publications that are not included within the application.

Preprints or comparable resources can be included in any part of an application. This includes within the Research Outputs list and the body of an application. An application will not be deemed to be ineligible for the citing and listing of preprints or comparable resources.

A preprint or comparable resource is a scholarly output that is uploaded by the authors to a recognised publicly accessible archive, repository, or preprint service (such as, but not limited to, arXiv, bioRxiv, medRxiv, ChemRxiv, Peer J Preprints, Zenodo, GitHub, PsyArXiv and publicly available university of government repositories etc.). This will include a range of materials that have been subjected to varying degrees of peer review from none to light and full review. Ideally, a preprint or comparable resource should have a unique identifier or a DOI (digital object identifier). Any citation of a preprint or comparable resource should be explicitly identified as such and listed in the references with a DOI, URL or equivalent, version number and/or date of access, as applicable.

Inclusion of preprints or comparable resources within the body of the application should comply with standard disciplinary practices for the relevant field.

3. General Assessors: Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting preparation

3.1 Roles and responsibilities before the SAC meeting

After the assessment period has closed General Assessors will:

1. be unable to access applications for a short period whilst ARC staff undertake administrative functions to prepare for the SAC meeting.
2. be advised by the ARC when the RMS Meeting Application (App) opens.
3. have access to all applications allocated to their panel in the RMS Meeting App where they do not have a COI.
4. be required to attend a pre-meeting videoconference to be updated on the SAC meeting processes.

Carriage 1: Reviewing applications in the RMS Meeting Application

The RMS meeting application will contain a ranked list of applications. Prior to the SAC meeting, Carriage 1 should review the Detailed and General Assessors' assessments and scores, and the applicant's rejoinder, and consider whether they believe there are any applications that have received an inappropriate ranking.

Particular attention should be given to applications where a ROPE case (see Section 2.3) has been made that has been neglected by Detailed Assessors, where an application has received less than the desired number of detailed assessments, or where an anomalous Detailed assessment may materially affect the ranking of the application. Carriage 1 should identify such applications by emailing ARC-College@arc.gov.au and prepare a recommendation for consideration by the SAC.

ARC staff will also identify applications with 'disparate' scores and will flag these for the attention of SAC members, noting that these applications are not automatically discussed at the selection meeting. SAC members can request these (or any other) applications to be tagged for discussion at the meeting. Carriage 1 will be expected to lead discussion on these applications.

It is recommended that SAC members read the summary of all highly-ranked applications and those tagged in RMS as 'To Discuss by SAC' (accessible through the RMS Meeting App) as they are expected to contribute to discussions for all applications during the meeting.

Carriage 1: Preparing a draft budget recommendation

For highly-ranked applications or applications tagged for discussion in RMS as 'To Discuss by SAC', it is Carriage 1's responsibility to recommend a draft one-line budget amount for each funding year of the application to the SAC. The draft budget recommendation is entered directly into RMS (details are in the section below) prior to the SAC meeting.

The draft budget recommended for each year must not exceed the amount requested in the application. Budget recommendations are discussed by the SAC members and the recommended budget is forwarded to the ARC Accountable Authority as part of the SAC's funding recommendations.

Carriage 1 may need to discuss or justify their budget recommendation at the SAC meeting and should therefore bring their own notes to the meeting on how they arrived at their final recommended funding amount.

To prepare a one-line budget for each year of funding, Carriage 1 should consider the following:

1. The extent to which specific budget items are well-justified
2. Whether the budget items are supported or not supported as outlined in the Grant Guidelines for the relevant grant opportunity
3. The minimum/maximum funding amounts relevant to the specific grant opportunity's Grant Guidelines
4. The costs of any recommended remunerated participants
5. Whether they are satisfied that the project can still be completed with the recommended budget
6. Whether the budget for the application has been considered on merit and at this stage not compared to other applications.

Carriage 1: Entering draft budgets in RMS Meeting Application before the Selection Meeting

Following the ARC email confirming that RMS Meeting Application is opened, Carriage 1 can enter the draft budgets directly in RMS.

1. Prepare draft budgets for your Carriage 1 applications that are highly-ranked or tagged as 'To Discuss by SAC'.
2. Prepare a draft budget figure ($) for each year of funding of your Carriage 1 applications.
3. In RMS, open specific scheme Meeting Application, e.g., DE22.

4. Under 'Carriage' select and filter the Carriage 1 applications, under 'Tags' select 'To Discuss by SAC' and select 'Apply'.
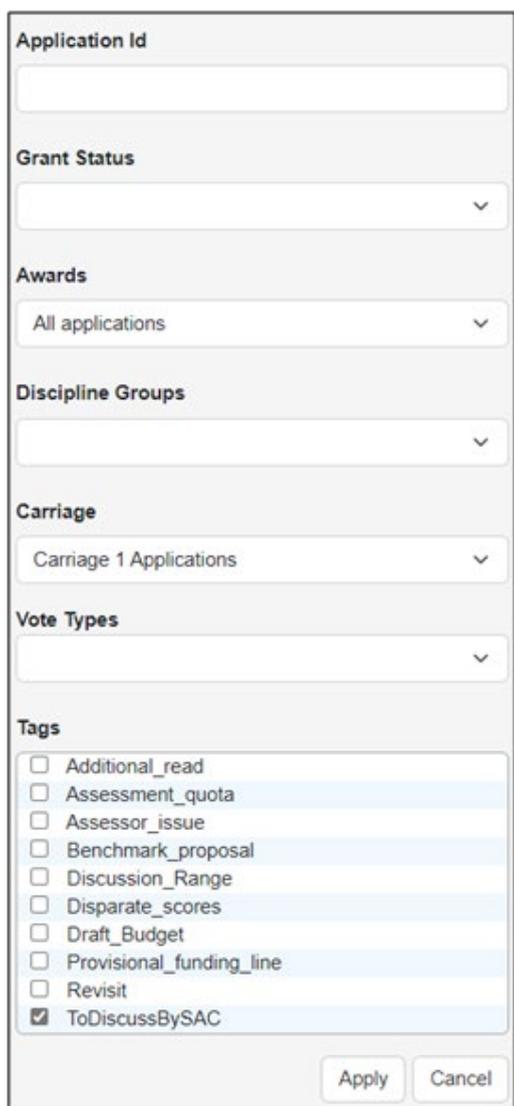
5. Click on the application to enter the draft budget

   a) Enter the draft budget total for each year, then select 'Save Draft'.

Note:

3.2 Roles and responsibilities at the SAC meeting and information on the Selection Meeting

Each SAC meeting will comprise a Chair, Deputy Chair, SAC members (Carriage 1, Other Carriage and panel members) and ARC Staff.

The role of the Chair is to:
1. lead the committee through the process to make a recommendation on the applications
2. call the panel to a vote for applications or where there is dissent and
3. ensure the meeting runs in a timely manner.

For applications where the Chair is conflicted and out of the room or is Carriage on an application, the Deputy Chair will act in the role. Where multiple conflicts arise, other SAC members may be called on to be acting Chair.

When you are Carriage 1 on an application, your role is to:
1. lead discussion for that application giving a brief summary of the strengths and weaknesses, and then making a recommendation to support, not support or vote
2. vote on applications when called by the Chair
3. recommend a one-line budget for applications that are recommended for funding (the draft budget should already be entered in RMS).

The Other Carriage and panel members will:
1. contribute to discussions of whether an application should be supported, not supported or voted on
2. vote on applications when called to do so by the Chair

ARC staff are responsible for:
1. providing secretariat support for meetings
2. providing procedural advice to the SAC
3. ensuring that correct administrative procedures are followed
4. ensuring COIs and any potential inappropriate discussions are managed correctly.

4. Ensuring integrity of process

4.1 Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest (COI)

The *ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy* is designed to ensure that all COIs are managed in a rigorous and transparent way. It aims to prevent individuals from influencing decisions unfairly and to maintain public confidence in the integrity, legitimacy, impartiality and fairness of the peer review process.

Any individual who is reviewing material for the ARC must agree to comply with the confidentiality and COI statement and must clearly disclose any material personal interests that may affect, or might be perceived to affect, their ability to perform their role.

All Assessors must maintain an up-to-date RMS profile, including personal details, current employment details and previous employment history within the past 2 years. This information will assist the ARC with the identification and management of organisational conflicts of interest.

Assessors reviewing ARC grant application who have identified a conflict of interest must reject the grant application assigned in RMS to assist the ARC in the management of conflicts of interest.

Examples of material personal interests that are considered by the ARC to be COIs include holding funding with a named participant within the past 2 years or having been a collaborator or co-author with a named participant on a research output within the last 4 years. For more information on disclosure of COIs, including material personal interest declarations, please refer to the *Identifying and Handling a Conflict of Interest in NCGP processes* document.

Note: In RMS, Assessors will be asked to indicate their willingness to comply with this policy before proceeding to assess. They can do this by selecting the 'Accept' button.

Extract from the ARC Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the ARC's grants programs (July 2023), with emphasis added:

The ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy (2020) requires that all officials and individuals carrying out ARC business, including assessors and peer reviewers, are required to preserve the principles of confidentiality outlined in the policy. **Release of material into generative AI tools constitutes a breach of confidentiality and peer reviewers, including all Detailed and General Assessors, must not use generative AI as part of their assessment activities**.

Assessors are asked to provide detailed high quality, constructive assessments that assist the Selection Advisory Committees to assess the merits of an application. The use of generative AI may compromise the integrity of the ARC's peer review process by, for example, producing text that contains inappropriate content, such as generic comments and restatements of the application.

4.2 Research integrity and research misconduct

If in the course of undertaking an assessment you identify or suspect a potential research integrity breach or research misconduct, please notify the ARC Research Integrity Office (researchintegrity@arc.gov.au) in accordance with Section 5 of the *ARC Research Integrity Policy*. Please do not mention your concerns in any assessment comments.

The ARC Research Integrity Office will consider whether to refer your concerns to the relevant institution for investigation in accordance with the requirements of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)*. You should provide sufficient information to allow the ARC to assess whether there is a basis for referring the matter to the institution and to enable the relevant institution to progress an investigation into the allegation (if required).

4.3 Foreign financial support, foreign affiliations and foreign honorary positions

Participants applying for ARC grants are required to answer questions in their application relating to foreign financial support and foreign affiliations, including current and previous associations. Participants are required to declare:

- foreign financial support (cash or in kind) for research related activities
- current or past associations or affiliations with a foreign sponsored talent program (for the last 10 years)
- current associations or affiliations with a foreign government, foreign political party, foreign state-owned enterprise, foreign military and/or foreign police organisations

If in the course of undertaking an assessment you identify or suspect a potential issue of foreign interference, please send an email highlighting your concerns to the ARC via ARC-College@arc.gov.au as soon as possible.

> **Note:** In RMS, Assessors will be asked to indicate their willingness to comply with this policy before proceeding to assess. They can do this by selecting the 'Accept' button.

4.4 Applications outside the General Assessor's area of expertise

The ARC receives applications from many scholarly fields. Occasionally you will be asked to assess an application that does not appear to correspond closely with your area of expertise. As a General Assessor, your views are valuable as they are being sought on the entire application, drawing on your expert knowledge as a researcher. If you are concerned about a particular application's research area and your ability to provide a robust assessment, **please contact the ARC via** ARC-College@arc.gov.au **before rejecting the assignment**.

4.5 Eligibility

If, while assessing an application, you have concerns about eligibility, ethics or other issues associated with an application, **you must not include this information in your assessment**. Please send an email highlighting your concerns to **the relevant scheme team via** ARC-College@arc.gov.au as soon as possible. The ARC is responsible for investigating and making decisions on these matters, and Assessors should not conduct investigations at any point. Please complete your assessment based on the merits of the application **without** giving consideration to the potential eligibility issue.

4.6 Unconscious bias

The ARC is committed to ensuring that applicants to NCGP schemes are not disadvantaged due to unconscious bias in the assessment process. We ask assessors to make every effort to slow down the pace of their automatic judgements and model instead the reflective quality involved in good decision making.

The Royal Society video explaining unconscious bias is available at the following link and we ask all assessors to view it prior to undertaking their assessments: Understanding unconscious bias | The Royal Society.

Examples of unconscious bias include:

- Basing assessment on the gender, age, name or background of the researcher without regard to carefully evaluating the research program proposed
- Halo (positive) and Horns (negative) - allowing one positive or negative quality to drive an entire assessment
- Confirmation bias – picking out information that matches your (low/high) views and expectations
- Conformity bias – changing a view to match that of another group, even when you don't agree (see Royal Society video)
- Affinity bias – favouring researchers or research areas with which you are familiar and may support Anchor bias – allowing one (often first) piece of information to form the basis of your decision making.

5. Contact details for queries during the assessment process

For **all** queries relating to assignment and assessment, accessibility, SAC and SAC meetings, please send an email to ARC-College@arc.gov.au with a reference to the scheme round (e.g. Linkage Projects 2026).

Appendix: Linkage Projects Scoring Matrix and assessment criteria considerations

Assessors assign a score and do not have to consider the weighting of a criterion as this is applied automatically within RMS. The tables below provide ready access to assessment criteria set out in the *Linkage Program Grant Guidelines (2024 edition - Variation 1): Linkage Projects* (available on GrantConnect) and the Scoring Matrixes outlined in this handbook. Assessors should use their judgement and experience to assess the appropriate score within the context of the relevant discipline.

Linkage Projects (LP26)
Key Dates and Notes

Task	LP26 Dates	Detail
Detailed Assessor Assignment Period	25 March 2026 – 31 March 2026	**Carriage 1** Assign eight Detailed Assessors and four reserves.
Assessment Period	25 March 2026 – 10 June 2026	**Carriages 1 and 2** Assess applications independently to determine preliminary and provisional scores and ranking.
Rejoinder	27 May 2026 – 10 June 2026	Applicants to read comments from Detailed Assessors and submit a rejoinder.
Review and finalise assessments	11 June 2026 – 6 July 2026	**Carriages 1 and 2** Review Detailed assessments and rejoinders. Revise and finalise scores and ranks in RMS.
SAC Selection Meeting	27 July 2026 – 31 July 2026	SAC members discuss uncertainty band and applications flagged for discussion by the SAC and recommend applications.

Grant Guidelines

The objectives and assessment criteria below are from the *Linkage Program Grant Guidelines (2024 edition - Variation 1): Linkage Projects* which are available on GrantConnect.

Overview

The LP scheme is an integral part of the ARC's Linkage Program which promotes national and international collaboration and research partnerships between key stakeholders in research and innovation, including higher education providers, government, business, industry and end users. Through these partnerships, the ARC encourages the transfer of skills, knowledge and ideas as a basis for securing commercial and other benefits of research.

Objectives

The **LP scheme** objectives are to:

    a) support internationally competitive research projects and teams on challenges or opportunities of relevance to research end-users;

b) foster the establishment and strengthening of research alliances between higher education organisations and research end-users;

c) enhance the scale and focus of research, including in Australian Government priority areas.

Scoring Matrix

Assessment criterion	(A) Outstanding Of the highest quality and at the forefront of research in the field. Approximately 10% of Applications should receive scores in this band.	(B) Excellent Of high quality and strongly competitive. Approximately 15% of Applications should receive scores in this band.	(C) Very Good Interesting, sound and compelling. Approximately 20% of Applications should receive scores in this band.	(D) Good Sound, but lacks a compelling element. Approximately 35% of Applications are likely to fall into this band.	(E) Uncompetitive Has significant weaknesses. Approximately 20% of Applications are likely to fall into this band.

Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria and weightings	Assessment criteria details
Project Quality and Innovation 30%	− significance and innovativeness of the research in the context of previous research in the area; − robustness and appropriateness of the conceptual framework, design, methods and analyses; − the adequacy and appropriateness of the budget, including cash and in-kind contributions pledged by the participating organisations, and value for money considerations. If the project involves Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander research, additional criteria include: − The project's level of collaboration, engagement, relationship building and benefit sharing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and First Nations Organisations and Communities; − The project's strategy and mechanisms for Indigenous research capacity building within the project; − The project's level of internal leadership of Indigenous research; − The project's adherence to the Australian Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles; and − The project's understanding of, and proposed strategies to adhere to, the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and NHMRC's guidelines on Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.
Impact 20%	− demonstration of the mutual benefit for participating organisations now and into the future;

Assessment criteria and weightings	Assessment criteria details
	− evidence of how the research will advance/address Partner Organisation(s)'s core strategy; − potential contribution to Australian Government priority areas; − potential economic, commercial, environmental, social and/or cultural benefits for Australia; and − appropriateness of strategies for adoption, commercialisation, promotion, and/or dissemination of research outcomes, including IP management arrangements.
Investigator(s)' capability and quality of team 20%	− quality of the named participant(s)' skills and experience, relative to opportunity, including evidence of potential to engage in collaborative research; − experience in research training, mentoring and supervision; − capability and capacity of the team to undertake and manage the project; and − evidence of previous history of successful collaboration between the named participant(s) and this or other Partner Organisation(s).
Strength of the proposed research alliance 30%	− extent and nature of commitment to the project, including provision of research environment, facilities and personnel (where relevant), relative to the scale of the project and the capacity of the participating organisations; − extent and appropriateness of proposed governance, structures and processes to support the project; − capacity and intent of Partner Organisations to use the outcomes of the research; and − potential of partnership to lead to long-term collaborations.