



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

General Assessor Handbook

A guide for **General** Assessors on the selection and assessment under the
Discovery Program grant opportunities for

Discovery Indigenous – IN27

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1. Overview

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

1. Discovery Indigenous (IN)

This scheme is part of the [Discovery Program](#) of the Australian Research Council's (ARC) [National Competitive Grants Program \(NCGP\)](#).

The Discovery Program's schemes provide support for early, mid-career, senior researchers, and research teams undertaking the highest-quality fundamental and applied research and research training.

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 Grant Opportunity Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#). General Assessors are advised to consult both documents prior to undertaking their assessments.

2. The assessment process

Peer review is the method used to assess all ARC applications and is undertaken by 2 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 ARC Accountable Authority.

[The ARC Board](#) is the Accountable Authority for Discovery Indigenous scheme. The ARC Board will decide which grants to fund, after considering the advice from peer review, any advice from the Due Diligence Committee and alignment with Australian Government priorities (refer to section 8.23 of the *Discovery Program: Discovery Indigenous Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2026 edition)*).

The [Research Management System \(RMS\)](#) is an 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 and Detailed Assessors have different roles in the peer review process. Key aspects of the role of General Assessors are outlined in [Section 2.1](#).

General Assessors' scores and ranks are now available to eligible successful and unsuccessful 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.

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 Accountable Authority.

For each grant opportunity, 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 research community as well as members from research end-user communities such as Industry Experts. SACs may also be divided into panels of different disciplines depending on the scheme under assessment. The SAC for the Discovery Indigenous scheme is constituted as a combined, or single, panel. 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(s) (Other Carriage/s) 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. Other Carriages have 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 and explain what factors drive their difference of opinion to facilitate discussion at the SAC meeting.*

Detailed Assessors are initially 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. Carriage 1 will be asked to select assessors to achieve a gender-balanced and discipline appropriate evaluation of the application.

We ask General Assessors to ensure that multiple assessors from the same organisation are not 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.

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. Hyperlinks provided in the application are not to be accessed by assessors, unless hyperlinks are required to access citations included within the application and are used to ascertain the suitability, quality and relevance of these citations. 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-Carriages to view the scores and to facilitate discussion and ensure that all co-Carriages have 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.

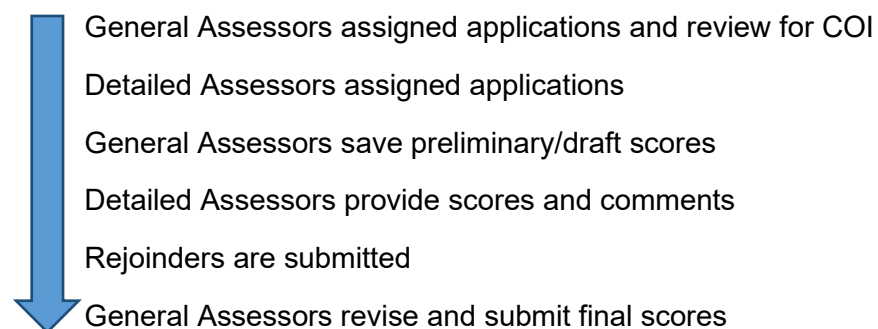
Inappropriate assessments

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 that is not in accordance with the ARC's [Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the ARC's grants programs – 2026](#), 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.

Order of the assessment process

The following diagram provides an overview of the General Assessor's assessment process.

Diagram 1: Overview of the General Assessor Assessment Process



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 they are assessing.

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 by both Detailed and 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.

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 Opportunity Guidelines and the [Appendix](#) of this document.

To reduce duplication, the Application Form for Discovery Indigenous has been streamlined. When a question from the assessment criteria is already covered in multiple sections of the application form, it has been removed as a separate heading in the Project Description question. Assessors should be aware that the 'Investigator/Capability' criteria and 'Feasibility' criteria are no longer separate headings in the Project Description.

In the IN27 Application Form, the 'Investigator/Capability' assessment criteria are captured in Part B Participant Details including ROPE, Questions B3-18 and Part C Project Description, Question C2 – Capability Statement. 'Feasibility' is assessed in ROPE (Questions B3-18); Project Description (Questions C1-C3); and Project Cost (Questions D1-D3).

National Interest Test (NIT)

Applicants must provide a NIT statement, which outlines the national interest of their research proposal. The 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 National Interest Test is available on the [ARC Website](#).

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 opportunities for research. 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.

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 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 those tagged in RMS as 'Discussion Range' and '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 all applications tagged in RMS with the 'Draft Budget' tag, 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 Board 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 Opportunity Guidelines for the relevant grant opportunity
3. The minimum/maximum funding amounts relevant to the specific Grant Opportunity 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 tagged with 'Draft Budget'.
2. Prepare a draft budget figure (\$) for each year of funding of your Carriage 1 applications.
3. In RMS, open specific scheme Meeting Application:

The screenshot shows the 'Meetings' section of the RMS system. It has a table with columns: 'Scheme Round', 'Panel', and 'Actions'. Under 'Scheme Round', there is a row for 'IN26 Round 1'. In the 'Actions' column for this row, there is a button labeled 'Open', which is circled in red.

4. Under 'Carriage' select and filter the Carriage 1 applications and under 'Tags' select 'Draft_Budget'.

The screenshot shows two side-by-side panels. The left panel contains filters for 'Application Id', 'Grant Status', 'Awards' (set to 'All applications'), 'Discipline Groups', and 'Carriage' (set to 'Carriage 1 Applications'). The right panel is titled 'Tags' and lists several tags with checkboxes: 'Benchmark_proposal', 'Discussion_Range', 'Disparate_scores', 'Draft_Budget' (checked), 'Highly_ranked', 'Revisit', and 'ToDiscussBySAC'. Each tag is followed by 'SAC Tag'. At the bottom of the tags panel are buttons for 'Show All Tags', 'Apply', and 'Cancel'.

5. Click on the application to enter the draft budget:

Note: Before entering the draft budget, please check whether the applicant is also applying for a DAATSIA. In the event they are, step (a) below should be followed and you must select whether you support the DAATSIA prior to entering the rest of the draft budget. In the event that the applicant is not applying for a DAATSIA, please proceed directly to step (b).

- a) Before you populate budget click on the hyperlink for the DAATSIA under 'Personnel'.

Personnel	\$134,300	\$0	\$134,300	\$0	\$134,300	\$0
Discovery Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award	\$106,194	\$0	\$106,194	\$0	\$106,194	\$0

- The pop-up window will appear. You must only alter the status on 'Carriage 1 Award Support' to 'Supported/Not supported' the salary for funding. You cannot change the 'Supported Funding as' level.

Applied for
Level 1 starting in year 1

Supported Funding as
Level 1 starting in year 1

Carriage 1 Award Support
Not Supported

Close

- If you selected 'Supported' the Discovery Australian Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Awards (DAATSIA) salary (\$) will be automatically populated into the budget table.

Draft Budget
Save Draft

Editing Instructions:
Before entering a total budget please address the requested award(s)/fellowship(s) by clicking on the hyperlinked name of the requested awardee or fellowship and select either 'Supported' or 'Not Supported'. Please then update for a total draft budget in the Funded field in the Total line (the top line of the budget) for each applicable year. Only enter in whole dollars to total field per year. Note: A red box will appear if you enter more than the requested amount. A blue box will appear if you enter less than the minimum amount of funding required.

Supported \$778,160 / \$1,015,488 (76%) Requested

Description	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded
Total	\$253,575	\$194,540	\$252,837	\$194,540	\$254,538	\$194,540	\$254,538	\$194,540
Personnel	\$241,934	\$194,540	\$243,637	\$194,540	\$245,338	\$194,540	\$245,338	\$194,540

The salary will now populate in the funded cells.

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

Draft Budget
Save Draft

Editing Instructions:
Please enter your draft budget in the Funded field in the Total line (the top line of the budget) for each applicable year. Only enter in whole dollars to total field per year. Note: A red box will appear if you enter more than the requested amount. A blue box will appear if you enter less than the minimum amount of funding required.

Supported \$0 / \$359,997 (0%) Requested

Description	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Year 5	
	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded
Total	\$118,306	\$0	\$117,846	\$0	\$123,845	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Personnel	\$96,681	\$0	\$98,581	\$0	\$100,510	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Enter a total figure for each year in the top line of the budget table, then select 'Save Draft' at the top left of the budget table.

Note:

Draft Budget
Save Draft

Editing Instructions:
Please enter your draft budget in the Funded field in the Total line (the top line of the budget) for each applicable year. Only enter in whole dollars to total field per year. Note: A red box will appear if you enter more than the requested amount. A blue box will appear if you enter less than the minimum amount of funding required.

Supported \$274,000 / \$359,997 (76%) Requested

Description	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded	Requested	Funded
Total	\$118,306	\$100,000	\$117,846	\$125,000	\$123,845	\$0
Unspecified Funding	\$0	\$100,000	\$0	\$125,000	\$0	\$0

Pink highlighting indicates unsaved changes.

A red box indicates you have entered more than the requested amount, you will need to reduce your draft total for this year.

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 Carriages and panel members) and ARC Staff.

The role of the Chair is to:

- lead the committee through the process to make a recommendation on the applications
- call the panel to a vote for applications when necessary and
- ensure the meeting runs in a timely manner

For applications where the Chair is conflicted 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).

All other Carriages and panel members will contribute to discussions and voting on whether an application should be supported or not supported for funding.

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 [ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy 2025](#) 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.

4.2 Policy on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the ARC's grants programs

In 2026, the ARC updated its policy regarding the permissible use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in ARC grants programs. This policy applies to both assessors and applicants. Please note the extract from the [Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the ARC's grants programs](#) (April 2026) with emphasis added:

The ARC permits the use of generative AI tools by assessors, provided that:

- Assessors meet their obligations to provide detailed, high quality and constructive assessments grounded in their own expert judgment. High quality assessments support the peer review process which is core to the ARC's identification of excellent research. Assessors should not use AI to assist

in forming an opinion of the quality of the application they are assessing. Unchecked or irresponsible use of generative AI risks compromising the integrity and trustworthiness of the ARC's peer review process.

- Confidentiality of all application materials is preserved. This includes the ideas (intellectual property) within an application, and the actual content (text, data and images). Inputting any application material into public generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity etc.) is considered by the ARC to constitute a serious breach of confidentiality and is not permitted.
- **Assessors may only use generative AI tools to correct or help with grammar, spelling, formatting and readability of drafted assessments.**

4.3 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).

4.4 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 5 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.

4.5 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.**

4.6 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.

4.7 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) assessments, which consist in allowing one positive or negative aspect of an application 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 with their assumed view (see Royal Society video)
- Affinity bias – favouring researchers or research areas with which you are familiar and may support
- Anchor bias – allowing one (often the first) piece of information you encounter to form the basis of your evaluation.

5. Contact details for queries during the assessment process

For **all** queries relating to assignment and assessment, accessibility enquiries, SAC and SAC meetings, please email ARC-College@arc.gov.au.

Appendix: Discovery Program Scoring Matrix and assessment criteria considerations

Note: Assessors assign a score and do not have to consider the weighting of a criterion as this is applied automatically within RMS.

The table below provides ready access to assessment criteria set out in the *Discovery Program: Discovery Indigenous Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2026 edition)* (available on [GrantConnect](#)) and the Scoring Matrixes outlined in this handbook. General Assessors should use their judgement and experience to assess the appropriate score within the context of the relevant discipline.

Discovery Indigenous (IN27)

Key Dates and Notes

General Assessors

Task	IN27 Dates	Detail
Detailed Assessors Assignment Period	8 September 2026 – 16 September 2026	Carriage 1 to assign 6 Detailed Assessors and 4 Reserves
Assessment Period	8 September 2026 – 1 December 2026	Carriages 1, 2, and 3 Assess applications independently to determine preliminary and provisional scores and ranking.
Rejoinder	18 November 2026 – 1 December 2026	Applicants to read comments from Detailed Assessors and submit a rejoinder.
Review and finalise assessments	2 December 2026 – 14 December 2026	Carriages 1, 2, and 3 Review Detailed assessments and rejoinders. Revise and finalise scores and ranks in RMS.
SAC Selection Meeting	2 February 2027 – 3 February 2027	SAC members discuss shortlist and recommend applications

Grant Opportunity Guidelines

The objectives and assessment criteria below are from the *Discovery Program: Discovery Indigenous Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2026 edition)* which are available on [GrantConnect](#).

Overview

The Discovery Indigenous scheme provides grant funding to support research projects conducted by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers. Discovery Indigenous grants include support for Discovery Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Awards (DAATSIAs) which are fellowships available to eligible Chief Investigators.

Objectives

The objectives of the **Discovery Indigenous** grant opportunity are to:

- support the retention of excellent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers in higher education institutions to expand research capacity in Australia;
- support excellent pure basic, strategic basic and applied research and research training, across all disciplines excluding clinical and other medical research, by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers as individuals and as teams;
- enhance the scale and focus of research in Australian Government priority areas and create economic, commercial, environmental, social and/or cultural benefits for Australia; and
- support national and international research collaboration.

Assessment criteria and Scoring Matrix – Discovery Indigenous

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.
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Assessment criteria and weightings	Assessment criteria details
Investigator(s)/Capability 35%	The: - Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE) including: - record of high-quality research outputs appropriate to the discipline(s) - evidence of excellence in research training, mentoring and supervision (where appropriate); and - the capability of the investigator or team to build collaborations both within Australia and internationally.
Project quality and innovation 40%	The: - contribution to an important gap in knowledge or significant problem; - novelty/originality and innovation of the proposed research (including any new methods, technologies, theories or ideas that will be developed); - clarity of the hypothesis, theories and research questions; - cohesiveness of the project design and implementation plan (including the appropriateness of the aim, conceptual framework, method, data and/or analyses); and - extent to which the research has the potential to enhance international collaboration. Where the project involves Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander research (as defined in the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research 2020) these criteria apply: - 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;

Assessment criteria and weightings	Assessment criteria details
	- the project's level of internal leadership of Indigenous research; - the project's adherence to the Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles (2018); and - the project's understanding of, and proposed strategies to adhere to, the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020 version) and NHMRC's guidelines on Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities (2018 version).
Benefit 15%	The potential benefits including the: - new or advanced knowledge resulting from outcomes of the research; - economic, commercial, environmental, social and/or cultural benefits for Australia and international communities; and - potential contribution to capacity in the Australian Government priority areas.
Feasibility 10%	The: - cost-effectiveness of the research and its value for money; - suitability of the environment for the research team and their project, and for HDR students where appropriate; - availability of the necessary facilities to complete the project; and - extent to which the project's design, participants and requested budget create confidence in the timely and successful completion of the project.

Scoring band for a Discovery Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award (DAATSIA) candidate

Applications that include a proposed DAATSIA candidate require a numerical score (0-100) to be entered. There is a separate field (additional to the above criteria) for a score to be entered for the DAATSIA candidate. This field pertains specifically to the DAATSIA candidate, assessing their strength against the DAATSIA scoring bands.

During the assessment of the DAATSIA, please consider subsections 6.3 and 6.4 of the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

Where an application includes provision for a DAATSIA, the candidate will be assessed according to the following criteria, taking into account research opportunity:

- potential to enhance and expedite a high-quality project;
- location within a suitable research environment that will support the candidate and project;
- record of high-quality research outputs appropriate to the discipline(s);
- evidence of excellence in research training, mentoring and supervision (where appropriate); and
- capability to build collaborations both within Australia and internationally.

The recommendation to award the DAATSIA is made separately from the overall application. If the project is funded but the DAATSIA is not awarded, the researcher will remain as a CI on the project.

The next table shows appropriate ranges for DAATSIA numerical scores depending on the merits of the DAATSIA candidate.

Scoring band	Criteria	Recommendation
91-100	Outstanding: Will benefit, enhance and expedite the Project, ensuring it is of the highest quality and at the forefront of research activity.	Recommended Unconditionally
86-90	Excellent: Will benefit, enhance and expedite the Project, ensuring high quality research.	Strongly support recommendation of funding
76-85	Very Good: Will benefit, enhance and expedite the Project. Interesting, sound and compelling.	Conditionally support recommendation of funding
51-75	Good: Sound but lacks a compelling element.	Unsupportive of recommending for funding
0-50	Uncompetitive: Uncompetitive and has significant weaknesses.	Not recommended for funding