Australian Government
Australian Research Council

Indigenous excellence – November 2026 Consultation

About Indigenous Excellence

The ARC is developing the Indigenous Excellence scheme, a dedicated grant opportunity under the revitalised National Competitive Grant Program (NCGP).

The scheme is intended to provide dedicated opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers within the NCGP, enhancing participation, capability and success. This opportunity is in addition to the variety of opportunities and roles available across new schemes under the revitalised NCGP. You can find out more about other NCGP schemes on the ARC website. Indigenous Excellence is anticipated to launch in late 2027.

Indigenous Excellence may be demonstrated in different ways across career stages, disciplines, methodologies, communities and research contexts. The scheme aims to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and sustain the Indigenous research workforce across all disciplines, not only those directly connected to Indigenous knowledges, communities or topics.

Your Say - Developing Indigenous Excellence

The ARC is seeking feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander researchers on the design of the Indigenous Excellence scheme. The scheme objectives, application and assessment process are outlined below.

The ARC is also seeking views from universities on how they can support the policy objectives of the scheme.

Feedback received through this consultation will inform the next stage of development. A refined model will then be developed, tested and finalised prior to implementation.

Scheme Objectives

The objectives of the scheme include:

a) **Excellence:** Support excellent and innovative research that addresses a significant problem or advances knowledge.

b) **Benefit:** Support research that provides value for money and serves the national interest in diverse ways, including fundamental knowledge creation; commercial, cultural, economic, environmental, or social benefits; and/or alignment with Australian government priority areas.

c) **Capacity:** Strengthen and sustain the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce across career stages and disciplines through research leadership, capability, mentoring, career development and generational continuity .

d) **Collaboration:** Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to establish and lead mutually beneficial local, national and/or international collaborations where these strengthen the research and are appropriate to the project.

Scheme Elements

The proposed role and eligibility requirements are outlined below. Named investigator roles (including Chief Investigators and Partner Investigators) will be restricted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers who meet the AIATSIS definition of Indigenous identity. Eligibility would be certified by the Eligible Organisation as part of the application process.

- **Roles and salary:** Full salaries would be available for early-career and mid-career researchers as part of a project budget.
- **Senior researchers and mentoring:** Senior researchers (15+ years post-PhD) may participate as named co-Chief Investigators without salary support. Their role would include mentoring, leadership development, knowledge transfer and cultural guidance.
- **Eligibility:** named investigator roles (both Chief Investigators and Partner Investigators) are restricted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. Non-Indigenous researchers may participate as collaborators but not named investigators.
- **Hybrid assessment:** The ARC is considering a hybrid assessment approach that brings together peer review expertise and Indigenous cultural expertise.
- **Enhanced institutional settings:** The ARC is exploring what enhanced institutional settings the scheme could comprise including:
    - Mentoring
    - Research and Workload support
    - Leadership development
    - Succession planning
    - Other mechanisms that contribute to long-term success

Proposed roles

- **Chief Investigators (CI):** the Chief Investigator is a researcher formally named as a principal investigator on an ARC grant application or funded project. The CI must be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researcher as per the AIATSIS definition and certified by the organisation's DVC-R
- **Salaried Chief Investigators (SCI):** A Salaried Chief Investigator (SCI) is a new investigator role being introduced under the ARC's revitalised NCGP. It is designed to allow eligible early-career researchers to receive salary funding from the ARC grant

itself, while participating as a Chief Investigator.

- **Partner Investigators (PI) and other collaborators:** Non-CI roles such as Partner Investigators (PI) are participants in a project who does not meet the eligibility requirements to be a Chief Investigator (CI) under that scheme. PIs must be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person or organisation. Non-Indigenous researchers cannot be a named PI, but can be listed as a non-named collaborator on the project.

Applying for Indigenous Excellence

The proposed application process for Indigenous Excellence is as follows:

- include at least one Chief Investigator (CI) or Salaried Chief Investigator (SCI) (the first named CI on the application will be the Project Leader).
- Include certification from the eligible organisation's DVC-R that that named Indigenous participants meet the AIATSIS definition regarding participant(s) eligibility.
- request a minimum level of funding of $50,000 per year in project costs (in addition to any SCI salary, if requested).

Assessment for Indigenous Excellence – how will grants be chosen?

Indigenous Excellence applications would be assessed similarly to other revitalised NCGP schemes using the ARC's Why, How and Who assessment model.

For Indigenous Excellence, the assessment model is proposed to incorporate assessment criteria that assess:

Why - What are the aims and potential benefits of your proposed research?

How - How are you going to deliver your proposed research?

Who - Why are you the right individual or team to deliver the proposed research?

Hybrid Assessment for Indigenous Excellence

Recognising the unique intent of Indigenous Excellence, assessment requires both disciplinary expertise and Indigenous cultural expertise. These forms of expertise are complementary but not interchangeable. Assessment would consider Indigenous leadership, researcher development, workforce capability and the demonstration of Indigenous Excellence.

Additional matters such as community benefit, Indigenous knowledges, cultural authority and Indigenous data sovereignty would be considered by the Indigenous cultural expertise where relevant to the proposed research.

The ARC is considering a hybrid model for Indigenous Excellence. Assessment by expert assessors would precede selection by a First Nations-led expert panel.

Expert assessors provide advice on the quality, feasibility and potential contribution of the proposed research, while a First Nations-led expert panel applies an Indigenous cultural lens and determines which applications best demonstrate Indigenous Excellence.

Assessment would be conducted by 3 expert assessors per proposal while selection is conducted by panels led by established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. Discipline and non-academic experts would be engaged to assist as required.