



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

**STUDENT EQUITY IN
HIGHER EDUCATION
RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM
2014 Funding Round**

Instructions for Applicants

December 2013

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Advertisement

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)
Curtin University
ABN 99 143 842 569

Student Equity in Higher Education
Research Grants Program

Request for Research Proposals

The NCSEHE invites proposals from high quality researchers to conduct policy-relevant research aimed at supporting and informing policy and practice on student equity in higher education.

Funding for several research projects is available through a competitive selection process. It is anticipated that the majority of grants will be between \$25,000 and \$75,000 per project, although other amounts may be considered. Grants will commence in April 2014 and should be completed in 6-12 months.

Instructions for applicants can be obtained from the NCSEHE website at ncsehe.edu.au/grants/2014-funding-round/ or by contacting Professor John Phillimore on +61 8 9266 2849 or email ncsehe@curtin.edu.au

**Proposals to be submitted by 5pm Western Standard Time
Friday 7 February 2014**

Lodgement details

Key dates

Closing time and date for proposals	5 pm WST on Friday 7 February 2014
Acknowledging receipt of proposals	On submission of proposal via email
Notification of outcomes of selection process	March 2014
Contract negotiations and finalisation	March/April 2014

Submission details

Extensions beyond the above closing date will not be granted under any circumstances. No additional material or information will be accepted after the closing date.

Proposals must be submitted electronically **in PDF and Word document format**, via email, to: ncsehe@curtin.edu.au

NCSEHE will acknowledge receipt of proposals by 14 February 2014. If applicants have not received acknowledgement by this date, they should contact NCSEHE immediately. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure their proposal has been received by NCSEHE.

Proposal template

Proposals **must** be completed using the *Proposal Template* provided with this information kit on the NCSEHE website at ncsehe.edu.au/grants/2014-funding-round/

Please refer to Section 2 of this information kit for guidelines regarding the format and content requirements of the proposal.

Privacy

NCSEHE will take all reasonable measures to ensure that any personal information¹ contained in a proposal will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*.

No applicant shall provide any information, make any statement or issue any document or other written or printed material concerning their application to any of the media without the prior written approval of NCSEHE.

Queries

If you have any questions in relation to these instructions please contact:

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¹ Personal information includes: personal, sensitive and/or health information as defined in the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth).

Section 1: Statement of requirement

1.1 Background

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) is a research and policy centre funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, and based since 2013 at Curtin University. It aims to inform equity policy design, implementation, and institutional practice in Australia to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.

NCSEHE's objectives are to:

- be at the centre of public policy dialogue about equity in higher education, and
- 'close the loop' between equity policy, research and practice by:
 - supporting and informing evaluation of current equity practice with a particular focus on identifying good practice
 - identifying innovative approaches to equity through existing research and the development of a forward research program to fill gaps in knowledge, and
 - translating these learnings into practical advice for decision makers and practitioners alike.

Whilst the Centre's focus is equity in higher education, the work of the Centre will not be limited to the issue of low-SES participation; rather it will focus on equity issues as they relate to a range of marginalised and/or disadvantaged groups in Australia.

The NCSEHE employs its own research staff, but has also decided to operate a competitive research grant program, in order to encourage and build upon the research expertise that already exists across Australia in higher education student equity issues.

1.2 Research Priorities

Proposals are particularly sought on the following issues:

- Cost and related constraints to university attendance by students. We are particularly interested in non-fee based constraints such as living costs, transport, housing, etc. This may vary between school leavers and mature age students, (sub)urban and rural students, etc.
- The impact of increased access and uncapping of places on student applications, admissions, performance (completions and grades) and post-university outcomes. This may be assessed further by geography and socioeconomic status.
- The strengths and weaknesses of ATAR, from an equity viewpoint, as a measure of student achievement and potential at university, and whether there are appropriate alternatives to ATAR for admissions purposes.
- The impact of schools on equity students and their aspirations to achieve entry to university. This could include an examination of issues relating to participation and performance by students from under-represented schools, subject selection at senior school level, and the role of state tertiary admission centres and procedures.
- Indigenous student issues, including pathways, the university experience for indigenous students compared to other students, course selection by indigenous students including participation in science, technology, engineering and maths.
- Technology and the impact of mode of study on access and participation in higher education, including its implications for equity groups.
- Analysis and assessment of access, participation and performance issues of equity students who have not traditionally been targeted, such as refugees, single parents and their children, mature age students, etc.
- Evaluation of equity programs in terms of their effectiveness in relation to student recruitment, retention and performance.

In all cases, we are particularly interested in proposals that do one or more of the following:

- Employ innovative use of existing data sources, or identify and use new data sources, to analyse the issues above.
- Take a comparative approach, internationally, inter-state, or institutionally, to understand the issues identified above.
- Adopt an interdisciplinary and policy-focused approach, and
- Identify the equity group(s) being focused on.

All proposals should be able to identify one or more student equity groups affected by the research. These are listed in the proposal template.

Please note that research funds cannot be used to develop teaching tools or programs, to evaluate courses or to purchase equipment such as computers.

Applicants are encouraged to complete their work within a 6-12 month time period, with a view to publication in late-2014/early-2015.

1.3 Who can submit proposals

NCSEHE invites proposals from suitably qualified and experienced researchers. NCSEHE is keen to encourage collaborative proposals involving researchers from a wide range of disciplines. Proposals are welcome from higher education institutions. Proposals from other research organisations may be considered; interested applicants should contact the Research Program Director in the first instance

Researchers or research teams would be expected to have a mix of skills including:

- A strong understanding and appreciation of the broad policy context in which the Australian higher education sector operates, and its linkages to school, labour market and/or broader social policy issues relating to equity.
- A proven ability to conduct quantitative and/or qualitative research.
- Demonstrated research and analytical expertise in one or more of the social, economic, education or behavioural science disciplines.
- The capacity to use multi-disciplinary approaches to add breadth to analysis where appropriate.
- Ability to disseminate findings to lay audiences.

While the research topic must be framed in an Australian context, suitable international collaboration, expertise and comparative work may be appropriate.

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a contract with Curtin University (host of the NCSEHE) of up to 15 months duration, commencing around April 2014. Researchers must be capable of providing consistent high-quality and timely research services for that period.

Researchers can submit (or be listed on) more than one proposal, but funding a researcher for more than one project at a time will only occur in exceptional circumstances.

NCSEHE is not itself eligible to compete for funds from this funding round.

1.4 Outputs

NCSEHE is seeking from applicants a detailed outline of the research project and outputs proposed, including milestones.

An important aspect of NCSEHE's research program is the dissemination of research findings to appropriate audiences. Outputs from the research project are expected to include a report that can engage stakeholders. A commitment to work with NCSEHE regarding dissemination ideas for the project is required.

1.5 Funding available

Funding for several research projects is available through a competitive selection process. It is anticipated that the majority of grants will be between \$25,000 and \$75,000 per project, although other amounts may also be considered.

Funding allocations will not necessarily be of equal value between each of the successful applicants. NCSEHE reserves the right to negotiate budgets with preferred applicants based on NCSEHE's overall requirements.

1.6 Related research

Applicants should not duplicate existing research. However, they are encouraged to ensure proposals build on the current body of knowledge, including their own current research.

1.7 Timeframe

It is anticipated that the successful applicants will be engaged to provide research services to NCSEHE for between 6 and 12 months, commencing April 2014.

1.8 NCSEHE contracts

Acceptance of a proposal will be subject to negotiation and execution of a contract, a draft copy of which is included as Appendix One.

NCSEHE may accept the whole or part of the proposal offered. The final project will be defined in negotiation with the successful applicants.

1.9 Quality assurance processes

The following is a summary of the range of quality assurance processes undertaken by NCSEHE. These processes should be taken into consideration when planning projects, timelines, outputs and dissemination activities:

- Progress reports and discussion with NCSEHE at negotiated points during the term of the research project will be required, including reporting on specified milestones. The progress reports provide NCSEHE with an opportunity to review and comment on the scope of the research, the methodology and research instruments being used, and any emerging issues.
- Where a research report is a contracted output, NCSEHE will require submission of **edited** draft reports, which will be reviewed by NCSEHE and an independent reviewer of NCSEHE's choice. Written feedback will be given to the researcher to act upon prior to submission of subsequent drafts. Approximately 4 to 6 weeks should be allowed in timeframes for the return of review comments.

- Research reports will be required to be written in an 'easy to read' and accessible manner. A report template will be provided to ensure that NCSEHE house style is followed.
- While many reports are rich in content they often require extensive editing before publication. **NCSEHE requests that researchers arrange for an editor to proof read the final report before submission to NCSEHE.**
- For all projects that are quantitative in focus, researchers must have a system for assuring the quality of the data they report and for **conducting final data checks prior to submission of the report to NCSEHE.** If the program of research involves developing and conducting a survey, researchers are to lodge the final data set to NCSEHE, with a view to making the data available to future researchers.
- NCSEHE requires ongoing dialogue with researchers regarding progress and direction of projects, including discussions about the ways in which the impact of the research can be maximised.
- In negotiation with NCSEHE, researchers may be required to make presentations at seminars, meetings or events. Where NCSEHE has requested this, the researchers may be asked to provide their time and NCSEHE will cover reasonable associated costs.

This list is not exhaustive and NCSEHE reserves the right to negotiate additional requirements where appropriate at the time of contracting.

1.10 Use of data sets

Confidentialised Unit Record Files (CURFs)

Researchers requiring the use of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) CURFs can apply for CURFs through the ABS MiCRO online registration. The [CURF Microdata user guide](#) is available via the ABS website.

Researchers can [apply](#) for CURFs in two ways:

- You can apply for access to a CURF that your organisation has already been approved to use. If your access is approved, there is no cost associated with this access as your organisation has already purchased and gained access to the CURF.
- You can apply to access a CURF that your organisation is not already approved to use. This access will require approval from the Deputy Statistician and, if approved, will incur a cost. See current [CURF pricing](#) available from the ABS website.

Researchers requiring the use of CURFs in their research will need to cost them into their budget if their home institution does not already own them.

No CURF data may be retained by the researcher after the research is completed.

Surveys

Projects are expected to make use of extant data sources wherever possible. A strong case will need to be made for primary data collection via a survey, based on the absence of available data and the methodological soundness of the proposed collection.

Where projects entail a structured survey the contractor will be asked to do two things as part of their contractual obligations with NCSEHE:

1. Provide a survey technical report to NCSEHE on the survey methodology, addressing issues including (as applicable):
 - Scope and coverage of the survey
 - Sampling frame, sample design, response rates, non-response bias, confidence limits and weighting
 - Questionnaire design, including final questionnaires and other relevant documentation (e.g. approach letters to respondents)
 - Data quality, including interviewer training, editing and quality checks, non-sampling errors.

The survey technical report may also contain recommendations for revisions to the methodology where another survey is contemplated in the future.

2. Provide a clean and fully labelled unit record file from the survey to NCSEHE. This file will be in an agreed format (e.g. SPSS or SAS). This file must not include respondents' names and addresses. The file is to be accompanied by a Users' Guide that provides documentation sufficient to enable both NCSEHE staff and external users to work with the data and replicate the results contained in the final report. This guide should contain a weighted and unweighted frequency count for each variable on the file.

The costs of providing these survey technical reports should be included in the budget submitted to NCSEHE.

1.11 Research ethics

Projects undertaken by researchers employed by the higher education sector are guided by the National Health and Medical Research Council/Universities Australia Joint Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice and individual university policy and procedures. Most researchers associated with universities will be required to obtain ethics clearance for projects, and the outcomes of this process will form part of the contract milestones.

State and territory training authorities: Researchers should bear in mind that there may be state/territory protocols that need to be followed when conducting research involving VET institutions in their jurisdictions.

Secondary schools: Researchers should bear in mind that any research involving schools requires the gaining of an ethics approval from the Department of Education in each state and territory before the project can proceed.

1.12 Selection process

NCSEHE has established an Advisory Committee to assist with the selection process. The Advisory Committee includes academics, senior managers and equity practitioners from a range of Australian universities.

Following the closing date, the Advisory Committee will evaluate all proposals against the selection criteria (see paragraph 1.13). Those proposals not satisfying essential selection criterion may be set aside.

Successful applicants will be notified and contract negotiations initiated in March-April 2014.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by mail in March-April 2014.

1.13 Selection criteria

Applicants must address each of the selection criteria and use the guidelines (Section 2) and proposal template provided with this information kit.

In evaluating proposals, the NCSEHE will:

- consider the selection criteria
- assess the overall risk to the NCSEHE of engaging the researchers identified in the proposal. This will include an evaluation of prior or current work undertaken for NCSEHE, with a focus on the quality and timeliness of such work
- consider the extent to which the proposal builds on previous or concurrent research
- take into account the balance of proposals across the research priorities and equity groups.

Selection criteria

<p>a. Proposed research project</p>	<p>a. The overall purpose and scope of the proposed research and the extent to which it will add to the current body of knowledge.</p> <p>b. The alignment and contribution of the research proposal to the Centre’s research priorities.</p>
<p>b. Research questions, methodology and timeframe</p>	<p>a. The quality and suitability of the proposed research methodology against the research questions proposed.</p> <p>b. The approaches are clearly specified and realistic.</p> <p>c. The extent to which the proposal is grounded in theory and previous research.</p> <p>d. The existence of clear and achievable milestones.</p>
<p>c. Research experience, expertise & related research</p>	<p>a. The researcher (s) can collectively demonstrate knowledge and application of proposed analytical techniques and methodologies and an ability to use these to produce quality research.</p> <p>b. The skills and experience of the researcher (s), including allocations of team members’ time and contribution to the project, are clearly identified.</p> <p>c. Evidence of the applicant’s understanding of the key issues and relevant research.</p>
<p>d. Project quality assurance and risk management</p>	<p>a. The existence and effectiveness of project management, quality assurance and risk management processes to ensure production of timely, relevant and high quality research. Proposals will be evaluated on the capacity to adhere to the timelines proposed.</p> <p>b. Demonstrated willingness to work co-operatively with NCSEHE and be pro-active in negotiating the nature of the research and its outputs and dissemination activities.</p> <p>c. A demonstrated capacity to be flexible, and to work collaboratively across sectors and with industry and other key stakeholders.</p>
<p>e. Value for money</p>	<p>a. The total budget will be considered against the overall quality and depth of the research project proposed.</p>
<p>f. Research team composition and skills</p>	<p>a. Research teams would be expected to have a mix of skills and demonstrated research and analytical expertise, therefore cross-disciplinary teams would be considered favourably.</p> <p>b. The composition of the research team provides opportunities for the development of early career or new researchers to the tertiary education sector.</p> <p>c. The capacity to use multi-disciplinary approaches to add breadth to analysis, where appropriate, would be considered favourably.</p> <p>d. The availability of research team members for the project in light of other commitments they may have.</p>

Section 2: Guidelines for proposals

2.1 Proposal format requirements

The *Proposal Template* provided in conjunction with this information kit on the NCSEHE website at <http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/grants/2014-funding-round/> must be used when preparing the proposal.

Note: Failure to strictly follow the template may result in disqualification of the proposal.

The proposals must be presented as follows:

- maximum 10 pages (excluding coversheet and principal researcher/s CVs)
- single space typing
- standard margins (as set in the template)
- 11-point Arial type face
- A4 page size only
- using the coversheet on the proposal template (a covering letter is not required)
- PDF and Word document format.

2.2 Proposal content guidelines

Guidelines for completing each section of your proposal are offered here. It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure proposals meet the requirements for criteria outlined in Section 1 paragraph 1.13 of the information kit.

Proposals must be clear, concise and sufficiently comprehensive to allow full analysis of the proposed research without reference to additional material. The proposal should be written for a broad audience.

All sections must be completed for your proposal to be considered.

Sections 1 – 4: Outline of overall research program and intended purpose and outcomes

This section must cover the overall scope and depth of the proposed research, including:

- A brief abstract of the research project.

- Indication of the specific equity group(s), aspects of engagement and methodology being addressed. Proposals are limited to studies of student equity in Australian higher education, although comparative work with other educational sectors or systems is welcomed. All proposals must be able to identify their relevance in relation to higher education equity groups, aspects of engagement and relevant methodologies. Proposals can nominate multiple options in each of the three options.
- A detailed outline of the proposed research project and outcomes. Highlight the importance of the proposed topic in the context of current student equity practice and/or policy in Australian higher education, and how it relates to the research priorities identified in *Section 1*, paragraph 2.2 above.
- Key research topics and questions to be addressed – ensure your questions relate directly to the project purpose.
- Methodology – describe in detail the methodologies proposed for the research. Projects are expected to make use of extant data sources wherever possible. A strong case will need to be made for:
 - Primary data collection via a survey, based on the absence of available data and the methodological soundness of the proposed collection, or
 - Methodologies that rely heavily on canvassing the views of stakeholders.
- Timeframe – outline a proposed and realistic timeline for the conduct of the project. This should include project milestones which can be reported against in progress reports. The timeframes for the projects will depend on the nature of the research proposed but should not exceed 12 months. Projects that can be delivered in shorter timeframes are welcome. In preparing their proposals, applicants should take into account any potential delays which may be required for ethics approvals.
- Deliverables – describe the proposed products and outputs intended from the project. These will normally include a research report but other materials or presentations are encouraged.

Section 5: Research experience and expertise

Proposals must provide names of individual researchers (including the chief researcher), list their research and analytical skills and their suitability and availability to conduct the research proposed.

Please provide brief details of related research conducted by the applicant and the organisation within the previous three years. Research proposals must not duplicate existing or current research conducted by the applicant or others, although it can build on such research.

A brief resume and referees list (limit one page per each individual) can be provided in an appendix.

Requirements for research teams or consortia

A proposal submitted by a research team from within one university, or a consortium from different organisations, will only be considered if:

- a single point and lead contact for the research team/consortium is specified
- the proposal clearly specifies the details of all members of the research team/consortium
- each member of the consortium signs a declaration permitting the lead contact to act on its behalf (this is to be attached to your proposal in an appendix)
- the proposal clearly specifies that the consortium will, if successful, subsequently enter into a contractual relationship with NCSEHE through one legal entity.

Section 6: Organisation details

Include a brief paragraph outlining the details for each of the major organisations involved.

Section 7: Quality assurance and project management

Provide detail of how project management processes and infrastructure will provide the necessary capacity to deliver a timely well-managed research program with its associated products.

Detail the quality assurance processes that would be in place to ensure research is rigorous and timely.

If the proposal is for a program that includes major quantitative components please identify what steps you will take to check the data.

Section 8: Risk management

A risk management plan should identify major risks associated with the conduct of the research and preparation of outputs. Researchers should consider how other commitments will affect the conduct and completion of NCSEHE funded research. Applicants should also consider how research teams propose to manage internal team arrangements to ensure communication, coordination, mentoring of new researchers, quality assurance and timeliness.

At a minimum, the risks associated with the following key areas must be identified, analysed and strategies detailed to mitigate impact on NCSEHE projects.

- The possible loss of key researchers (including proposed leave or secondment arrangements, other work commitments)
- Project management and coordination (especially important for research teams where members are spread across organisations/states)

- The methodology (survey development/clearance, sample identification and response rates)
- Adherence to timelines

Section 9: Budget

It is anticipated that the majority of grants will be for projects between \$25,000 and \$75,000 (excluding GST), but other amounts may be considered. NCSEHE reserves the right to negotiate differing amounts with preferred applicants based on NCSEHE's overall requirements.

Using the table provided in the template, the detailed budget items must cover:

- Research staff – indicate daily rate and number of days to be spent on the research project. Those stated as principal researchers should contribute a substantial proportion of the time allocated to the research.
- Clerical and other support staff – indicate daily rate and number of days to be spent on the NCSEHE research project (include staff playing coordination/support roles – especially important for research teams across different organisations).
- Specify any quality assurance costs (i.e. editing, proof reading reports). Note, if substantial editing is still required, NCSEHE will withhold funds to cover this expense.
- Data extraction / data gathering costs.
- Costs associated with the survey technical report requirements as outlined in *Section 1* paragraph 1.10 if applicable.

Funds can not be used for the purchase of computers, or for travel (without special permission).

In view of the equity focus of the research, Curtin University has waived normal overhead costs for the NCSEHE and would welcome a similar commitment from applicants.

The budget does not need to include costs for the production and printing associated with research reports.

Goods and services tax (GST)

GST applies to services provided to NCSEHE and NCSEHE will cover the cost of the GST component as long as:

- the contractor has been assigned an Australian Business Number (ABN) and is registered for GST purposes with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), and
- tax invoices are submitted in accordance with the guidelines established by the ATO and clearly identify the GST component of the service.

The ATO has stated that all businesses require an ABN, regardless of whether the business is required to register for GST or not.

It is expected that researchers/research organisations will make contact with the ATO to apply for an ABN, and register for GST.

NCSEHE requires all researchers/research organisations to submit invoices which clearly state their ABN and which clearly identify the GST component of the service provided to NCSEHE. If an ABN is not stated, we are obliged to withhold 46.5% of the payment and remit this to the tax office. For further information visit the ATO website at www.ato.gov.au.

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