



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

NCSEHE Small Grants Research Program

2024 Round: Guidelines

Make tomorrow better.

ncsehe.edu.au

Acknowledgement of Country

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) and Curtin University acknowledge the First Nations people of this country and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

We deeply respect their cultural, spiritual and educational practices and aspire to learn from their ways of working.

Curtin University is honoured and grateful to have the privilege to maintain campuses on Whadjuk and Wungatha Country.

1. The NCSEHE Small Grants Research Program

1.1 Introduction

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) is launching the 2024 Round of the **Small Grants Research Program**.

The Program will fund proposals that address contemporary developments and challenges in higher education equity policy, practice, and evaluation, including but not limited to, issues raised and discussed as part of the Australian Universities Accord Panel's *Review of Higher Education*.

NCSEHE invites proposals from suitably qualified and experienced researchers in issues pertaining to Australian higher education.

Between **8** to **13** projects will be funded in the 2024 Round, with the value of funding per project ranging between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (excluding GST).

Projects will be funded over a twelve-month period, commencing in February 2024.

1.2 Key Dates and Documentation

Applications open	Monday, 21 August 2023
Closing date for proposals	Thursday, 28 September 2023 – 8pm (AWST)
Acknowledging receipt of proposals	On receipt of proposal (via email)
Consideration by the NCSEHE Grants and Fellowships Committee	6 October to 2 November 2023
NCSEHE Advisory Board confirmation of projects	Late November 2023
Notification of outcomes of selection process	Late November 2023
Funding agreement finalisation	February 2024
Project work	February 2024 to February 2025
Project completion and acquittals	March 2025

Proposal Documentation: The *2024 Round Guidelines* (this document) and the *Proposal Template* are available at: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/grants-and-fellowship/small-grants/>

2. Proposal Requirements

2.1 Research Priorities

The Small Grants Research Program will fund proposals that address equity issues across the entire higher education student life cycle. This includes proposals that address contemporary developments and challenges in higher education equity policy, practice, and evaluation, including but not limited to, issues raised and discussed as part of the Australian Universities Accord Panel's *Review of Higher Education*.

Further, there is a particular focus on proposals that do one or more of the following:

- Produce research that can be applied nationally and/or be adopted by universities, including outcomes that are potentially *portable* across institutions and *scalable* across Australian higher education.
- Contribute to the existing research and practice knowledge base on equity issues in Australian higher education, building on previous research undertaken or funded by NCSEHE.
- Examine issues of the cumulative and compounding nature of the effects of disadvantage on access, participation and success in Australian higher education.
- Employ innovative use of existing data sources or identify and use new data sources in program design and evaluation.
- Take a comparative and/or interdisciplinary approach to understand equity issues.

All proposals should be able to identify one or more priority groups who are the focus of the research, as listed in the *Proposal Template*. Proposals are not limited to the stated priority groups listed in the *Proposal Template* and can nominate other groups experiencing forms of disadvantage and/or underrepresentation in higher education, in addition to addressing the issue of compounding disadvantage where relevant.

2.2 Who can submit a proposal?

NCSEHE is committed to encouraging collaborative proposals, particularly from teams involving both researchers and practitioners, from a wide range of disciplines.

Organisation Background

Proposals are welcome from individuals or teams from Australian higher education institutions. Proposals from other research organisations may be considered, in which case interested parties could contact NCSEHE (ncsehe@curtin.edu.au) to discuss their eligibility.

Research Background

NCSEHE will consider suitable proposals from research teams with a track record in higher education equity. Researchers or research teams would be expected to have a mix of skills including:

- A strong understanding and appreciation of the broader policy context in which the Australian higher education sector operates, and its linkages to school, labour market and/or wider social policy issues relating to equity in higher education.
- 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 a wide variety of audiences.

Research Scope and Duration

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

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a contract with Curtin University, the host institution for NCSEHE, of up to 12 months duration, commencing around February 2024. Researchers must be capable of providing consistent high-quality and timely research services for that period.

Multiple Proposals

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.

2.3 Outputs

NCSEHE is seeking proposals that include a detailed outline of the research project and projected outputs.

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 and activities for the project is also required, including the acknowledgement of NCSEHE funding in any subsequent publications and output from the research.

2.4 Funding available

Funding for several research projects is available through a competitive selection process. Grants will be funded for between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (excluding GST) per project. Funding allocations will not necessarily be of equal value between each of the successful applicants. NCSEHE reserves the right to negotiate differing amounts with preferred applicants.

2.5 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 and previous research funded or undertaken by NCSEHE.

2.6 Timeframe

Successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement and contract with NCSEHE for approximately 12 months, commencing around February 2024. Projects must be concluded and acquitted before 7 March 2025.

2.7 NCSEHE contracts

Acceptance of a proposal will be subject to negotiation and execution of the funding agreement and contract. A draft version of this can be made available by NCSEHE upon request.

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

2.8 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.

- Draft reports 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 for the return of review comments.
- Research reports should be written in an 'easy to read' and accessible manner. A report template will be provided to ensure that NCSEHE house style is followed. Reports must contain an Executive Summary which can be converted into a media release. They must also contain Recommendations/ Key Findings and referencing should be consistent with either 'Chicago' or APA style.
- While many reports are rich in content, they often require extensive editing before publication. NCSEHE requests that researchers plan and budget for an editor to proofread 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.
- 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.

2.9 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. 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.

Researchers should bear in mind that projects requiring data collection in other parts of the education system will often require special clearance. There may be State/Territory protocols that need to be followed when conducting research involving VET institutions in their jurisdictions. Further, research involving schools requires the gaining of ethics approval from the Department of Education in the relevant State or Territory before the project can proceed.

3. Selection Process

3.1 NCSEHE Selection Process

NCSEHE has established a Grants and Fellowships Committee to provide oversight for its Grants and Fellowship Programs. The Committee includes academics, senior managers and equity practitioners from a range of Australian universities.

In relation to the Small Grants Research Program, the Grants and Fellowships Committee carries out this function through the *Research Grants Selection Committee*, who evaluate all proposals against the selection criteria, before making recommendations to the Grants and Fellowships Committee, who in turn makes the final recommendation to the NCSEHE Advisory Board.

It is anticipated that all applicants will be notified of the Advisory Board's decision in late November 2023.

3.2 Selection criteria

Applicants must address each of the Selection Criteria, follow the *Guidelines for Proposals* (Section 4), and complete the Small Grants Research Program *Proposal Template* (www.ncsehe.edu.au) as part of the preparation of their submissions.

In evaluating proposals, the NCSEHE will:

- consider the Selection Criteria list below.
- assess the overall risk to NCSEHE of engaging the researchers identified in the proposal. This may include 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.
- consider the balance of proposals across the research priorities and priority groups of interest.

Selection Criteria

Criterion	Detail
Proposed research project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The overall purpose and scope of the proposed research and the extent to which it will add to the current body of knowledge. b. The alignment and contribution of the research proposal to the Centre's broad research priorities (as outlined in Section 2.1). c. The anticipated impact on policy and practice, including the portability and scalability of findings from the research.
Research questions, methodology and timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The quality and suitability of the proposed research methodology against the research questions proposed. b. The approaches are clearly specified and realistic. c. The extent to which the proposal is grounded in theory and previous research. d. The existence of clear and achievable milestones.
Research experience, expertise and related research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. b. The skills and experience of the researcher(s), including allocations of team members' time and contribution to the project, are clearly identified. c. Evidence of the applicant's understanding of the key issues and relevant research.
Project quality assurance and risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. b. Demonstrated willingness to work co-operatively with NCSEHE and be pro-active in negotiating the nature of the research and its outputs, evidence of future application and dissemination activities. c. A demonstrated capacity to be flexible, and to work collaboratively across sectors and with industry and other key stakeholders.
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The total budget will be considered against the overall quality and depth of the research project proposed.
Research team composition and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Research teams are expected to have a mix of skills, demonstrated research and analytical expertise, and practitioner experience. b. The composition of the research team provides opportunities for the development of early career or new researchers to the tertiary education sector. c. The capacity to use multi-disciplinary approaches to add breadth to analysis, where appropriate, would be considered favourably. d. The availability of research team members for the project in light of other commitments they may have.

4. Guidelines for Proposals

4.1 Proposal format requirements

The *Proposal Template* must be used when preparing the proposal. All proposals must be presented as follows:

- **Length:** a maximum of 8 pages (excluding the coversheet and résumés).
- **Spacing:** Single space typing.
- **Margins:** Standard margins (as set in the template).
- **Type face:** 11-point Arial.
- **Page size:** A4 only.
- **Coversheet:** Use the coversheet of the *Proposal Template*. A covering letter is not required.
- **Format:** Word and pdf format.

4.2 Proposal content guidelines

Guidelines for completing each section of the Proposal are offered here. It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure that proposals meet the requirements set out in the *Selection Criteria* (Section 3.2) above.

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.

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.

Completing the Proposal Template

All sections of the *Proposal Template* 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:

- **Abstract:** A brief abstract of the research project.
- **Priority Groups:** Indication of the specific priority 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 priority groups, aspects of engagement and relevant methodologies. Proposals can nominate multiple options in each of the three options.
- **Outline:** 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 the *Research Priorities* (Section 2.1) 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 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 a progress report. The timeframe for the project will depend on the nature of the research proposed but should not exceed 12 months in length. 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. All projects are required to submit a Final Report, but other materials or presentations are also permitted and welcomed.

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, as outlined in Section 2.2 above.

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 résumé (one page per an individual) and contact details for two referees 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 it specifies a:

- **Project lead:** A single point of contact for the research team/consortium.
- **Project team:** The proposal clearly specifies the details of all members of the research team/consortium.
- **Consortium member declarations:** Each member of the consortium signs a declaration permitting the lead contact to act on their behalf. This should be attached to the proposal in an appendix.
- **Single legal entity:** The proposal clearly specifies that the consortium will, if successful, subsequently enter into a contractual relationship with NCSEHE through one legal entity.

Section 6: Research experience and expertise

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

Section 7: Quality assurance and project management

Provide detail on 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. Please refer to *Quality assurance processes* (Section 2.8) in your discussion addressing these issues.

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.

These might include:

- **Team stability:** The possibility of loss of key researchers due to proposed leave or secondment arrangements or other work commitments.
- **Project management:** Risks associated with project management, especially where members are spread across organisations and/or jurisdictions.
- **Project methodology:** Risks associated with project data collection or analysis, including risks associated with survey development, ethics clearance, sample identification and response rates.
- **Adherence to timelines:** Overall risks that may occur in relation to the time requirements and sequencing of tasks associated with the project.

Section 9: Budget

It is anticipated that the majority of grants will be for projects between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (excluding GST), subject to negotiation with NCSEHE.

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:** these include editing and proof-reading costs.
- **Data collection costs:** These include data collection and extraction costs. Reasonable requests to cover travel and accommodation costs for data collection will be considered.
- **Other technical costs:** Costs associated with other technical requirements of the project work or report preparation.

Funds cannot be used for:

- **Computing:** The purchase of computers or software.
- **Overhead costs:** Costs associated with university infrastructure and other institutional overhead costs.

Production and printing costs associated with the Final Report for the project will be funded by NCSEHE.

Goods and Services Tax (GST): GST applies to services provided to NCSEHE. 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.