ACSES Large Grants Research Program

2024-25 Round – Expression of Interest (EOI) Proposals: Guidelines

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) 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 2024-25 Large Grants Research Program

1.1 Introduction

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) is launching the 2024-25 Round of the **Large Grants Research Program**.

The Program will fund proposals that address developments and challenges in Australian domestic higher education equity policy, practice, and evaluation.

ACSES will prioritise proposals that are led by First Nations Australian researchers and that address First Nations topics in higher education. The 2024-25 Round will consider proposals that outline projects in relation to the following three research priorities:

1) Alternative pathways to university and impact on academic outcomes

2) Student wellbeing for success

3) Collaboration for student equity and success – intra-sectoral (institutions within higher education) and inter-sectoral (institutions across higher, vocational, and secondary education)

Project Funding: $150,000 (excluding GST) per project, with up to **three projects** to be funded.

Duration: 12 months. Duration may vary depending on the contractual agreement. Projects and contract negotiations are expected to commence in **July 2024**, with projects to be finalised in July 2025, with completion and acquittal taking place in August 2025.

Proposal Process: Proposals are sought via a two-stage process, with this Expression of Interest (EOI) stage followed by a second stage where successful EOI applicants are invited to submit full detailed proposals for consideration. Both stages will be overseen by the ACSES Grants & Fellowships Committee (G&FC).

Expressions of Interest: The EOI Stage opens on Thursday, 7 March 2024.

Due Date: EOIs are due at **4pm (AWST) on Wednesday, 27 March 2024.**

1.2 Contact and Submission Details

Professor Ian Li
Director – Research Program
Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success
Curtin University
GPO Box U1987 PERTH WA 6845

Email: acses@curtin.edu.au.
Web: acses.edu.au

1.3   Key Dates and Documentation

Stage 1: EOI Proposals	
Proposals open	Thursday, 7 March 2024
Closing date for EOI proposals	**Wednesday, 27 March 2024 – 4pm (AWST)***
Consideration by the Grants and Fellowships Committee (G&FC)	28 March to 12 April 2024
Notification of EOI outcomes	Monday, 15 April 2024
Stage 2: Invited Proposals	
Request for Invited Proposals	Monday, 15 April 2024
Closing date for Invited Proposals	**Friday, 17 May 2024 – 4pm (AWST)***
Consideration by the G&FC	20 May to 5 June 2024
ACSES Advisory Board confirmation	Friday, 14 June 2024
Notification of Invited Proposal outcomes	Wednesday, 19 June 2024
Funding agreement negotiation	Mid-June 2024
Project work	July 2024 to July 2025
Project completion and acquittals	August 2025

* Acknowledgement of proposals will occur via email upon receipt.

Proposal Documentation: The *EOI Guidelines* (this document) and the *EOI Proposal Template* are available [on our website](#).

2. Proposal Requirements

2.1 Research Priorities

The ACSES Large Grants Research Program will fund proposals that address research topics of importance to contemporary developments and challenges in higher education equity policy, practice, and evaluation, across the following priorities:

1) Alternative pathways to university and impact on academic outcomes

2) Student wellbeing for success

3) Collaboration for student equity and success – intra-sectoral (within higher education) and inter-sectoral (higher, vocational, and secondary education)

There will be 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, with strong demonstrated potential for the translation of outcomes into equity policy or practice.
- Contribute to the existing research and practice knowledge base on equity issues in Australian higher education, building on previous research undertaken or funded by ACSES (formerly known as 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.

Unless a priority specifies a priority (equity) group, all proposals should be able to identify one or more priority groups as the focus of the research –First Nations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Australian Students; Low SES Students; Students with Disability; and Students from Regional and Remote Australia -- as listed in the *EOI Proposal Template.* However, proposals are not limited to the stated priority groups listed in the *EOI 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?

ACSES is committed to encouraging collaborative proposals, particularly from teams involving both researchers and practitioners, from a wide range of disciplines, and from researchers with lived experience of equity status, for instance, researchers with disability. As indicated above, ACSES will prioritise competitive proposals from First Nations researchers, and that address First Nations topics in higher education.

Organisation Background

Proposals from individuals or teams should be led by researchers from universities listed in Table A of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* ("Table A providers").

Research Background

ACSES will consider suitable proposals from teams with a track record in higher education equity. Researchers **and** practitioners on 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 an area of relevant expertise (including Social Sciences, Social Work, Education, Economics, Behavioural Sciences, and Psychology).
- The capacity to use multi-disciplinary approaches to add breadth to analysis where appropriate, and to translate outcomes into equity policy and practice.
- 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 ACSES, of up to 12 months duration, commencing in July 2024. Researchers must be capable of providing consistent high-quality and timely research services for that period.

Multiple EOI Proposals

Researchers can submit, or be listed on, more than one EOI proposal. However, funding across multiple projects for a single researcher will only occur in exceptional circumstances.

2.3 Outputs

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

An important aspect of ACSES's research program is the dissemination of research findings to appropriate audiences. Outputs from the research project must include a report and other research dissemination formats that can engage stakeholders.

A commitment to work with ACSES regarding dissemination ideas and activities for the project is also required, including the acknowledgement of ACSES 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 up to $150,000 (excluding GST) per project. ACSES will not fund institutional infrastructure or overhead charges. Funding allocations will not necessarily be of equal value between each of the successful applicants. ACSES 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 ACSES.

2.6 Timeframe

Successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement and contract with ACSES for approximately 12 months, commencing in July 2024. Projects must be concluded and acquitted in August 2025.

2.7 ACSES 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 ACSES upon request at the EOI stage, and to all invited applicants thereafter.

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

2.8   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 Australian Department of Education in the relevant State or Territory before the project can proceed.

3. Selection Process

3.1 ACSES Selection Process

ACSES has established the Grants and Fellowships Committee (G&FC) 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 Large Research Grants Program, the Committee carries out this function though the *Research Grants Selection Committee*, which will evaluate all proposals, including EOI proposals, against the selection criteria, before making recommendations to the G&FC, which in turn makes the final recommendation to the ACSES Advisory Board.

It is anticipated that all applicants will be notified of the outcomes of the Large Research Grants in mid-June 2024.

3.2 Selection Criteria

Applicants must address each of the Selection Criteria, follow the *Guidelines for Proposals* (see: Section 4 below), and complete the Large Grants Research Program *EOI Proposal Template* ([available online)](available online) as part of the preparation of their submissions.

In evaluating proposals, the ACSES will:

- consider the Selection Criteria listed below.
- assess the efficacy of engaging the researchers identified in the proposal. This may include evaluation of prior or current work undertaken for ACSES, 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 in relation to the identified research themes and priority groups of interest.

Selection Criteria

Criterion	Detail
Proposed research project	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 its the research priorities identified in Section 2.1. c. The anticipated quality of the project outputs and potential impact on policy and practice, including the portability and scalability of findings from the research, with strong demonstrated potential for the translation of outcomes into equity policy or practice.
Research questions, methodology and timeframe	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 the literature. d. The existence of clear and achievable milestones.
Research experience, expertise and related research	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 applicants' understanding of the key issues and relevant research. d. The composition of the team includes a mix of skills and demonstrated in terms of research and practice, and allows for multi-disciplinary approaches, the translation of outcomes into equity policy and practice, and/or opportunities for the development of early career researchers e. The team can confirm availability for the duration of the project.
Project quality assurance and risk management	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 ACSES 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	a. The total budget will be considered against the overall quality and depth of the research project proposed.

4. Guidelines for EOI Proposals

4.1   Proposal Format Requirements

The *EOI Proposal Template* must be used when preparing the proposal.

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

ACSES 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 proposal to any of the media without the prior written approval of ACSES.

Completing the EOI Proposal Template

All sections of the *EOI 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:

- **Title:** A project title.
- **Abstract:** A brief abstract of the research project. (160 words).
- **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.

- **Research Approach:** Proposals can indicate where a project will involve a research approach that either involves the use of innovative data sources, comparative or interdisciplinary approaches, and/or accounts for cumulative disadvantage.
- **Outline:** An 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. (350 words)
- **Key research topics and questions to be addressed:** Ensure your questions relate directly to the project purpose. (150 words)
- **Methodology**: Describe in broad terms the methodologies proposed for the research. Projects are encouraged to make use of extant data sources wherever possible. (300 words).
- **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. (half a page)
- **Deliverables and dissemination plan**: 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. (half a page)

Section 5: Research Experience and Expertise

This section should outline how this team is qualified and well-positioned to carry out the research project in relation to the requirements of the Large Grants Program. (300 words)

Section 6: Funding Request

Proposals should complete the budget table provide and indicated in-kind contributions separately. (up to one page)

This should include a costing structure that allows for budget items such as:

- **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 ACSES 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.
- **Travel costs:** Costs associated with travel for fieldwork or dissemination activities such as conferences should be specified.

Funds cannot be used for:

- **Computing:** The purchase of computers or software.

- **Institutional and Infrastructure 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 ACSES.

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

ACSES 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 ACSES. 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.