Small Grants Research
Program

2025-26 Round: Guidelines

# Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) acknowledges Indigenous peoples across Australia as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the nation’s campuses are situated. With a history spanning more than 60,000 years as the original educators, Indigenous peoples hold a unique place in our nation. We recognise the importance of their knowledge and culture, and reflect the principles of participation, equity, and cultural respect in our work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future, and consider it an honour to learn from our Indigenous colleagues, partners, and friends.

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# Small Grants Research Program: 2025-26 Round

## Introduction

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) has launched the 2025-26 Round of the Small Grants Research Program.

The Small Grants Program funds proposals that address developments and challenges in Australian domestic higher education equity policy, practice, and evaluation. Priority will be given to proposals led by First Nations (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) Australian researchers and that address First Nations Australian topics in higher education.

**Project Funding:** $50,000 (excluding GST) per project, with around 10 projects to be funded.

**Duration:** 12 months. Duration may vary depending on the contractual agreement. Projects are expected to commence in January 2026, with projects to be finalised in January 2027, with completion and acquittal taking place thereafter.

**Proposal Process:** All proposals should be completed using the *Small Grants Research Program 2025-26 Proposal Template* (available [on the ACSES website](https://www.acses.edu.au/grants-fellowship/small-grants-2025/)) and submitted on time. Proposals will be evaluated by the ACSES Grants and Fellowships Committee (G&FC).

**Due Date:** Proposals are due at **4pm (AWST) on Wednesday, 2 July 2025**.

## Contact and submission details

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

**Email:** acses@curtin.edu.au (**Subject:** 2025-26 Small Grants Proposal)
**Web:** [acses.edu.au](http://www.acses.edu.au/)

## Key dates

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Milestone**  | **Date** |
| Request for Proposals | Wednesday, 14 May 2025 |
| **Closing date for Proposals** | **Wednesday, 2 July 2025 – 4pm (AWST)\*** |
| Consideration by the Grants and Fellowships Committee | 7 July to 17 September 2025 |
| Notification of outcomes | Early-October 2025  |
| Funding agreement negotiation | October 2025 to Mid-December 2025 |
| Project work | January 2026 to January 2027 |
| Project completion and acquittals | February to March 2027 |

\* Acknowledgement of proposals will occur via email upon receipt.

 **Proposal Documentation:** The *Small Grants Research Program 2025-26 Guidelines* (this document) and the *Small Grants Research Program 2025-26 Proposal Template* are available [on the ACSES website](https://www.acses.edu.au/grants-fellowship/small-grants-2025/).

#  Proposal requirements

## Research focus

The 2025-26 Round of the ACSES Small 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.

While this funding round does not have a prescribed set of research focus areas, there will be a particular emphasis 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 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 body of knowledge on research and practice in relation to equity issues in Australian higher education, building on previous research undertaken or funded by ACSES (and formerly 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.

All proposals should identify one or more priority (equity) groups who are the focus of the research – First Nations Australian Students; Low SES Students; Students with Disability; and Students from Regional and Remote Australia – as listed in the *Proposal Template.*

However, 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.

It should be noted that ACSES’s [Trials and Evaluation Program](https://www.acses.edu.au/trials-evaluation/) funds randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in Australian higher education and all proposals involving RCTs should be directed to the Trials and Evaluation team, care of the ACSES mailbox (as per Section 1.2).

## Structure of the proposal

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

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 January 2026. Lead Researchers and project team members must be capable of providing consistent high-quality and timely research services for that period.

## 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 and be translated into equity policy and practice.

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.

## Funding available

Funding for several research projects is available through a competitive selection process. Grants will be funded for up to $50,000 (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.

## Related research

Proposals should not seek to duplicate existing research. However, proposals must build on the current body of knowledge in area of research focus, as well as related research in student equity and learning and teaching in higher education. This should include the team’s own current research and previous research funded or undertaken by ACSES (and formerly as NCSEHE).

## Timeframe

Successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement and contract with ACSES for approximately 12 months, commencing in January 2026. Projects must be concluded by January 2027 and acquitted over February and March 2027.

## 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.

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

## Research ethics

Projects undertaken by researchers employed by the higher education sector are guided by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)/Universities Australia *Joint Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* and individual university policy and procedures. Lead Researchers and project teams 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.

Applicants 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 vocational education and training (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.

# Selection process

## Eligibility and application process

ACSES has established the G&FC to provide oversight for its nationally competitive grants and fellowship program. The G&FC includes academics, senior managers, and equity practitioners from a range of Australian universities.

In relation to the Small Grants Research Program, the G&FC will evaluate all proposals against the selection criteria.

It is anticipated that all applicants will be notified of the outcomes by mid-December 2024.

## Selection criteria

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

In evaluating proposals, ACSES will:

* Consider the Selection Criteria listed below.
* Assess the efficacy of engaging the project team identified in the proposal. This will be informed by a clear explanation of the role and tasks assigned to each member. This may include an evaluation of prior or current work undertaken for ACSES (and formerly as 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 in relation to the identified area(s) of research focus and priority groups of interest.

Selection Criteria

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Criterion | Detail |
| **Proposed research project** | 1. Importance for equity policy and practice of the research questions to be addressed.
2. The overall purpose and scope of the proposed research and the extent to which it will add to the current body of knowledge.
3. 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** | 1. The quality and suitability of the proposed research methodology against the research questions proposed.
2. The approaches are clearly specified and realistic.
3. The extent to which the proposal is grounded in theory and the literature.
4. The existence of clear and achievable milestones.
 |
| **Research experience, expertise and related****research** | 1. The applicant(s) can collectively demonstrate knowledge and application of proposed analytical techniques and methodologies and an ability to use these to produce quality research.
2. The skills and experience of the project team, including allocations of project team members’ time and contribution of each team member to the project, are clearly identified.
3. Evidence from the applicant(s) of their understanding of the key issues and relevant research.
4. The composition of the project 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
5. The project team can confirm availability for the duration of the project.
 |
| **Project quality assurance and risk management** | 1. 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.
2. 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.
3. A demonstrated capacity to be flexible, and to work collaboratively across sectors and with industry and other key stakeholders.
 |
| **Value for money**  | 1. The total budget will be considered against the overall quality and depth of the research project proposed.
 |

# Guidelines for proposals

## Proposal format requirements

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

### Accessibility

ACSES is committed to continuous improvement in all published work—including accessibility. We continuously strive to provide an inclusive experience to make our content accessible to users of all abilities, including those with disabilities.

To ensure your submission is accessible, please run an accessibility checker on your work before submitting it and resolve any identified issues. For further guidance on creating accessible materials please see Disability Gateway — ["Create accessible materials – print and digital documents"](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.disabilitygateway.gov.au%2Fprint-digital-document&data=05%7C02%7Cmiriam.fisher%40curtin.edu.au%7C6dc0a48d674b4c120a4508dc9a29fe88%7C5a740cd757684d09ae13f706b09fa22c%7C0%7C0%7C638554752362380404%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=CvoJT%2F%2FQMG4xiwnyeqv3FACq7LOmpiNiKGqoSrtoeq0%3D&reserved=0).

Please include a short statement confirming you have undertaken an accessibility review of your application and addressed any issues arising and commit to incorporating principles of accessibility in your research and practice.

## Proposal content guidelines

Guidelines for completing each section of the *Proposal Template* 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](#_Selection_Criteria_1)) 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. ACSES encourages proposal writers to utilise strengths-based framing and language in describing their projects, rather than deficit discourse and narratives.

## Privacy

ACSES will take all reasonable measures to ensure that any personal information 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 *Proposal Template*

All sections of the *Proposal Template* must be completed for it to be considered.

### Cover Page

* **Proposal title:** A project title.
* **2025-26 Small Grants Research Focus:**
* **Organisation details:** Please provide details for the Lead Institution. This must be a Table A Provider university that can act as the “Lead Institution”. Non-Lead Institution project team members should endorse the Lead Institution’s intent to act on their behalf by signing the statement in Appendix B.
* **Contact officer for research contracts:** Please indicate the Lead Institution contact for research and contract approval. The nominee and institution’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic (or equivalent) will have to sign off on the proposal in Appendix A.
* **Applicant(s)** – Name and organisation: The Lead Researcher and (if applicable) project team members must be listed, with one-page résumés included in Appendix C.
* **Lead Researcher** – First Nations (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) Australian: Where the Lead Researcher for an application has identified as a First Nations (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) Australian, evidence for confirmation of First Nations Australian identity is required. This should be included in Appendix E.
* **Funding requested (excluding GST):** Include total funding request.
* **Is this project part of any other program or initiative for which you have received funding?** If “Yes”, provide details of other relevant funding sources.
* **Is this project a resubmission of an unsuccessful proposal to a previous ACSES funding round?** If “Yes”, Please provide details.
* **Australian Business Number (ABN).**
* **Is this organisation registered for GST?**

### Sections 1 – 3: Outline of overall research program and intended purpose and outcomes

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

* **Project abstract:** A brief abstract of the research project. (160 words).
* **Priority student groups:** Indication of the specific priority group(s), aspects of engagement, and methodology being addressed. Proposals are limited to studies of student equity relating to domestic students 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 focus:** Proposals can indicate where a project will involve a research focus that either involves the use of innovative data sources, comparative or interdisciplinary approaches, and/or accounts for cumulative disadvantage. How the project will address the identified research focus should be addressed.
* **Outline research project and intended purpose and outcomes:** Provide 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. This section should include due reference to the extant body of knowledge (contemporary evidence- and research-based literature) informing the project and identify clearly the gaps in research and/or practice that the project proposes to address. Where the proposal builds on a previous submission to an ACSES funding round, differences in the project focus and outline should be noted. (One page)

### Section 4: Research project details

This section should provide details on:

* **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. (Two pages)
* **Timeframe:** Outline a proposed and realistic timeline for the conduct of the project. This should include project milestones that 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, the applicant(s) should consider any potential delays that may be required for ethics approvals. (One 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, especially dissemination formats that can engage stakeholders and be translated into equity policy and practice. (One page)

### Section 5: Research experience and expertise

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

One-page résumés for all project team members should be included in Appendix C.

### Section 6: Funding request

Proposals should complete the budget table provide and indicated in-kind contributions separately. (One page). This should include a costing structure that allows for budget items such as:

* **Lead Researcher and other project team members:** Indicate daily rate and number of days to be spent on the research project. Those identified as Lead Researcher and other project team members 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).
* **Quality assurance costs:** These include editing and proof-reading costs.
* **Output assurance costs:** While ACSES’s website can serve as a repository for reports and related written materials, teams should indicate where other outputs (for example, audiovisual outputs, webpages, external outputs) are to be created and indicate any costs associated with maintaining these outputs post-project.
* **Qualitative and consultation data collection costs:** In addition to data collection costs (see below), budgeting for qualitative research activities must also include appropriate levels of compensation for students, community members, and First Nations Elders, for their participation in consultative components of project work. This may include funding for travel and accommodation where this is justified and feasible.
	+ A general guide on this issue is available from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC): [Payment of participants in research: information for researchers, HRECs and other ethics review bodies](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/attachments/publications/Payment-of-participants-in-research.pdf)*.*
	+ The Queensland Government provides guidance on a recommended payment rate for services for First Nations Elders and persons involved in research in advisory and/or participative capacity: [First Nations Payment Guide](https://www.detsi.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/361087/first-nations-payment-guide.pdf).
* **Data** **collection costs:** These include data collection and extraction costs. Reasonable requests to cover travel and accommodation costs for data collection by researchers 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 (non-dated related) fieldwork or dissemination activities such as conferences should be specified.
* **Copyediting cost for final report:** All proposals should budget for $2,000 for copyediting of the project’s final report.
* **Other costs:** All other costs, except for purposes specified below.

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

**In-kind contributions:** In-kind contributions can be demonstration but must not include aspects, resources, or attributes of the team for which resourcing is being sought in direct connection to the delivery of the project (for example, expertise and/or experience to undertake funded work).

**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](http://www.ato.gov.au).

### Section 7: Funding justification

This section should provide a justification for each line item in the requested budget in terms of proposed use of the funds, activities, how costings were derived, and in-kind contributions.

In addition, a statement on the respective roles and tasks of all team members (CIs and non-CIs) should be included. It is expected that this will include all persons/positions who are expected to make substantive contributions to the project. (One page)

### Section 8: 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. (Half a page)

### Section 9: Risk management

A risk management plan should identify major risks associated with the conduct of the research and preparation of outputs. The Lead Researcher and project team members should consider how other commitments will affect the conduct and completion of ACSES-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 ACSES projects. (One page)

### Section 10: References

Include any references cited in the submission. (One or two pages as required).

### Appendices

*Appendix A: Details and signature of senior institutional officers (Lead Institution)*

* Please provide the details and signatures for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic (or equivalent), Director of the Research Office(or equivalent), and *Institutional Contact Officer* *for Research Contracts* in the *Lead Institution***.**
* The *Contact Officer for Research Contracts* can be Head of the institution’s research office or a senior research manager who is key contact for contract negotiations with ACSES.

*Appendix B: Consortium declaration (where required)*

* Multi-institution bids should identify a *Lead Institution* for this project, which in most cases will be the home institution of the Lead Researcher. All non-lead institution project team members should sign the consortium declaration permitting the Lead Researcher and Lead Institution to act on their behalf.

*Appendix C: One-page résumé for each project team member*

* A one-page résumé should be provided for each project team member.

*Appendix D: Priority group status of project team members*

* The Lead Researcher and other project team members can declare First Nations Australian and/or equity group status.

*Appendix E: Confirmation of First Nations Australian identity – Lead Researcher (where required)*

* Where the Lead Researcher for an application has identified as a First Nations (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) Australian, evidence for confirmation of First Nations Australian identity is required.
* The Lead Researcher should be able to confirm that they:
	+ Are of First Nations (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) Australian descent.
	+ Identify as a First Nations Australian person.
	+ Are accepted by a First Nations Australian community as a First Nations Australian, where confirmation can be provided by:
		- An official letter from a Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC).
		- An official letter of Confirmation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Heritage from a registered Aboriginal community organisation.
* Where an official letter of confirmation is not available, applicants can provide a statutory declaration outlining the circumstances under which they cannot provide evidence from a LALC or registered Aboriginal community organisation, and in turn, provide evidence and examples for confirmation of First Nations Australian status.

*Appendix F: Conflict of interest register*

* The Lead Researcher and other project team members should report any potential conflicts of interest (COI) in relation to proposed activities or aspects of their project which may be impacted by their associations with:
	1. [ACSES staff](https://www.acses.edu.au/about/acses-staff/), the [ACSES Advisory Board](https://www.acses.edu.au/about/advisory-board/), and/or the [Grants & Fellowships Committee](https://www.acses.edu.au/about/our-committees/).
	2. Organisations or individuals who are the subject of the proposed research, including proposed host universities, current employers, or related community groups.