Research Impact Grants Program

2027–28 Round: Guidelines

Universities For All

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ACSES Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success

Curtin University

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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1. The 2027–28 Research Impact Grants Program

1.1 Introduction

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) has launched the 2027–28 Research Impact Grants Program.

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

Research priorities: The 2027–28 Round will consider proposals that outline projects in relation to the following research areas:

1. equitable tertiary pathways and harmonisation (including early offers, in-school enabling initiatives, and VET pathways)
2. student financing, student participation, and/or outcomes
3. generative artificial intelligence (AI) and student equity
4. translating equity evidence into practice
5. evidence to support First Nations higher education funding and success.

The funding round will also prioritise proposals that use a quasi-experimental design (QED) methodology, such as non-equivalent control group design, regression discontinuity, and interrupted time-series, to evaluate the effects of an intervention, program, policy, or practice. Proposals should clearly identify the intervention and comparison conditions, explain the proposed QED methodology and demonstrate how the research design will support credible conclusions about impact.

It should be noted that ACSES's Trials and Evaluation Program 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).

Project funding: Up to $120,000 (excluding GST) per project, with a total of $360,000 of funding available.

Duration: 12 months. Project duration may vary depending on the contractual agreement. Projects are expected to commence in late May 2027, with outputs to be finalised in May 2028, and acquittal taking place in June 2028.

Application process: Applications are sought from teams submitting a full, detailed proposal for consideration by ACSES.

Due date: Proposals are due at **4pm (AWST) on Wednesday, 10 February 2027**.

1.2 Contact and submission details

Professor Ian Li
Director – Research and Policy Program
Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success
Curtin University

GPO Box U1987
PERTH WA 6845

Email: acses@curtin.edu.au (**Subject:** 2027–28 Research Impact Grants Proposal)
Web: acses.edu.au

1.3 Key dates

Milestone	Date
Request for Proposals	Wednesday, 4 November 2026
Closing date for Proposals	**Wednesday, 10 February 2027 – 4pm (AWST)***
Assessment of proposals by ACSES and the external Expert Advisory Panel	15 February to 17 March 2027
Notification of proposal outcomes	23 March 2027
Funding agreement negotiation & execution	Late-March 2027 to Late-May 2027
Project work	May 2027 – May 2028
Project completion & financial acquittals	May 2028 – June 2028

* Acknowledgement of proposals will occur via email upon receipt. In fairness to all applicants, late proposals will not be accepted.

Proposal documentation: The *Research Impact Grants Program 2027–28 Guidelines* (this document) and the *Research Impact Grants Program 2027–28 Proposal Template* are available on the ACSES website.

2. Proposal requirements

2.1 Research priorities

The 2027–28 ACSES Research Impact Grants Program will fund proposals that address research topics of importance to contemporary developments and challenges in Australian higher education equity policy, practice, and evaluation.

Proposals must address one of the following research focus areas:

1. **Equitable tertiary pathways and harmonisation:** Equity aspects and outcomes across different entry pathways, including early university offers, in-school enabling initiatives, alternative entry programs, and pathways between VET and higher education.
2. **Student financing, financial pressures, and equity:** The effects of HECS-HELP, other student-financing arrangements, housing, transport, and living costs on students' participation, wellbeing, and success.
3. **Generative AI and student equity:** The implications of generative AI for the access, participation, and success of priority equity group students.
4. **Translating equity evidence into practice:** Identifying and demonstrating effective approaches to embedding existing equity evidence into institutional policy and practice.
5. **Evidence to support First Nations higher education funding and success:** Research examining funding, data and evidence relating to First Nations students' participation, experiences and success in Australian higher education.

Proposals should demonstrate how the project's activities will accomplish 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 (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.
- Construct or utilise existing data sources that extend beyond single institutions, with the analysis of multi-institution or national data strongly favoured.
- Take a comparative and/or interdisciplinary approach to understand equity issues.

All proposals should be able to identify one or more priority (equity) groups who are the focus of the research—First Nations Australian students; students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds; 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.* Proposals may also identify other groups experiencing disadvantage and/or underrepresentation in higher education, including where multiple forms of disadvantage intersect or compound.

The funding round will also prioritise proposals that use a **quasi-experimental design (QED)** methodology, such as non-equivalent control group design, regression discontinuity, and interrupted time-series, to evaluate the effects of an intervention, program, policy, or practice. Proposals should clearly identify the intervention and comparison conditions, explain the proposed QED methodology, and demonstrate how the research design will support credible conclusions about impact.

It should be noted that ACSES's Trials and Evaluation Program 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).

2.2 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 May 2027. Lead researchers and project team members must be capable of providing consistent, high-quality, and timely research services for that period, in addition to consulting with ACSES on the dissemination of key results and transferrable knowledge. ACSES has allowed two months from the date of notification of successful outcomes for the contractual execution process. In cases where the contract is not executed within two months, ACSES reserves the right to terminate the offer of funding.

2.3 Outputs

ACSES is seeking proposals that provide a detailed outline of the research project, anticipated outputs, and intended outcomes, including a clear and credible pathway

from research to action. Proposals should identify the intended users and beneficiaries of the research and explain how the findings will be used, by whom, and to support what change in higher education equity policy or practice.

All projects must produce a final report and other practical and accessible outputs (such as, implementation modules, guidelines, seminars, other disseminated products) designed to support the adoption or implementation of the findings. This may include policy guidance, a practice framework, an implementation resource, an evaluation tool, an institutional action plan, or another output agreed with ACSES. Proposed dissemination and knowledge-translation activities should be appropriate to the intended audiences and extend beyond the communication of findings alone.

Successful project teams must work collaboratively with ACSES to develop and undertake dissemination and knowledge-translation activities, including engagement with relevant stakeholders throughout the project where appropriate. ACSES funding must be acknowledged in all publications and other outputs arising from the research.

2.4 Funding available

Funding for up to three research projects is available through a competitive selection process. Grants will be funded for up to $120,000 (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 (or formerly as NCSEHE).

2.6 Timeframe

Successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement and contract with ACSES for approximately 12 months, commencing in May 2027. Projects must be concluded by May 2028 and acquitted by June 2028.

2.7 ACSES contracts

Acceptance of a proposal is subject to the negotiation and execution of a funding agreement and contract. A draft agreement can be made available by ACSES upon request.

ACSES may accept all or part of a proposal. The final scope and requirements of the project will be determined through negotiation with the successful applicant. ACSES reserves the right to withdraw the funding offer and cancel the proposed project if a funding agreement and contract are not executed within two months of the draft agreement being issued.

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. 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 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.

2.9 Use of generative AI

Project teams remain fully responsible for the integrity, accuracy, originality, and appropriate referencing of all work produced with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (generative AI) tools.

Any substantive use of generative AI—including in research design, data collection or analysis, coding, writing, or the production of images and other outputs—must be transparently disclosed, identifying the tool used and how it was used.

Generative AI must be used consistently with applicable research ethics, privacy, confidentiality, data-security, copyright, and research-integrity requirements. Routine tools used only for spelling, grammar, or basic editing do not require disclosure.

Generative AI tools cannot be listed as authors or treated as responsible for research design, conduct, analysis, or outputs.

3. Assessment and selection

3.1 Eligibility and application process

Eligible applications will be assessed by a panel comprising external reviewers with relevant methodological, sector, or student equity expertise. The panel will assess applications against the published criteria and make recommendations to ACSES. ACSES may seek clarification or negotiate project scope, deliverables, timing, or funding before a funding agreement is executed.

The Expert Advisory Panel's assessment will inform, but will not determine, the final funding decision. ACSES reserves the right not to fund a proposal, or to fund fewer than three projects, where proposals do not sufficiently meet the requirements of the Program.

All applicants are expected to be notified of the outcome by **23 March 2027**. Successful proposals will remain subject to negotiation and execution of a funding agreement and contract.

3.2 Assessment criteria

Applicants must address each of the assessment criteria, follow the Guidelines for Proposals (see: Section 4 below), and complete the Research Impact Grants Program 2027–28 *Proposal Template* as part of the preparation of their submissions.

Assessment criteria

Criterion	Detail
Project overview and sector impact	a. The significance of the research to higher education equity policy and practice. b. Alignment with the Program's research priorities and relevant priority equity groups. c. The clarity of the project's purpose, scope and contribution to an identified evidence gap. d. The potential for project outputs to be adopted, transferred or scaled across the sector.
Methodology and technical approach	a. The quality, rigour, and suitability of the proposed methodology, including the capacity of any quasi-experimental design to support credible conclusions about impact. Suitable

Criterion	Detail
	quasi-experimental designs will be viewed favourably. b. Data quality, governance, privacy, security, and reproducibility. c. Clarity about technical dependencies, limitations, and risks. d. The feasibility of the proposed approach and timeframe, including clear and achievable milestones.
Team experience and expertise	a. Relevant technical, equity, project management, and engagement expertise. b. The suitability of the skills, experience, roles, and time commitments of each team member. c. Contribution of partners to successful delivery.
Research translation and impact	a. The clarity and credibility of the pathway from research findings to changes in policy or practice. b. Identification of intended users and beneficiaries and plans to engage them. c. The quality, practicality, and accessibility of proposed knowledge-translation outputs and activities. d. The potential for findings and outputs to be adopted, adapted, or scaled. e. Plans to monitor or demonstrate research uptake, influence, and impact.
Project quality assurance and value for money (10%)	a. The effectiveness of the proposed project management, governance, quality assurance, and risk management. b. The team's capacity to deliver high-quality research within the proposed timeframe. c. The reasonableness and justification of the proposed budget relative to the project scope and quality.

4. Guidelines for proposals

4.1 Proposal format requirements

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

4.1.1 Accessibility

ACSES is committed to continuous improvement in all published work—including accessibility. We 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".

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.

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 assessment 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. ACSES encourages proposal writers to utilise strengths-based framing and language in describing their projects, rather than deficit discourse and narratives.

4.2.1 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.

4.3 Completing the *Proposal Template*

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

4.3.1 Cover page

- **Proposal title:** A project title.
- **2027–28 research impact area:** Select one option only.
- **Organisation details:** Please provide details for the lead institution. This must be a Table A Provider university who 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.
- **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?**

4.3.2 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. (Max. 160 words).
- **Equity (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 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 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, and how it relates to the research priorities identified in the research priorities (Section 2.1) above. This section should reference the extant literature (contemporary evidence- and research-based) informing the project and identify clearly the gaps in research and/or practice that the project proposes to address. Applicants should also outline a clear and credible pathway from research to action, identifying the intended users of the findings, how the research could inform policy or practice, and the change it is intended to support. (One page).

4.3.3 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. (Max. 150 words).
- **Methodology**: Describe in broad terms the methodologies proposed for the research. Projects that propose a quasi-experimental design will be prioritised. Projects are encouraged to make use of extant data sources wherever possible. (Two pages).
- **Use of generative AI**: Indicate whether generative AI is expected to be used during the project. If so, identify the tool or type of tool, the project stages in which it may be used, its intended purpose, and how the project team will maintain human oversight and responsibility for the resulting work. If generative AI will not be used, please state this. (Max. 150 words).
- **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, dissemination, and knowledge-translation plan:** Describe the proposed products and outputs from the project and explain how they will support the translation of findings into higher education equity policy or practice. All projects must submit a final report and at least one practical and accessible output designed for the intended users of the research. This may include policy guidance, a practice framework, an implementation resource, an evaluation tool, an institutional action plan, a presentation, or another output agreed with ACSES. Applicants should identify the intended audiences, how they will be engaged, and how the findings and outputs could be adopted or implemented. (One page).

4.3.4 Section 5: Research experience and expertise

This section should state how this team is qualified and well-positioned to carry out the proposed research project in relation to the requirements of the ACSES Research Impact Grants Program. The ability of the project team to collaborate should also be addressed. (Max. 300 words).

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

4.3.5 Section 6: Funding request

Proposals should complete the budget table provided and indicate 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 salary (and on-costs) and FTE or 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 salary (and on-costs) and FTE or 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 professional copy-editing costs. Please include these costs in your budget as the final report must be professionally copy-edited prior to submission to ACSES.
- **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. As a guide only, appropriate rates of compensation for community consultation are:
    - Students: $50/hr
    - Community members: $50 per hour for consultation, or $70 per hour where participants undertake an advisory, co-design, or specialist role
    - First Nations Elders: $325 per half day or $650 per full day, or another rate agreed with the individual or relevant community.
- **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 fieldwork or dissemination activities such as conferences should be specified.
- **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.

In-kind contributions: In-kind contributions can be demonstrated 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 that clearly state their ABN and 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.

4.3.6 Section 7: Funding justification

This section should provide a detailed justification for every budget line item, explaining how the cost was calculated and why it is necessary to deliver the project. General or unexplained estimates will not be accepted.

The justification must include, where applicable:

- **Personnel costs:** Identify each team member or position, their project role, specific responsibilities, expected time commitment, salary or payment rate, on-costs, and the method used to calculate the amount requested.
- **Team workshares:** State the percentage or proportion of the project work to be undertaken by each lead researcher and other team member, including any personnel whose contribution is funded in kind.
- **Travel costs:** Specify who will travel, the purpose and destination, anticipated number of trips and travellers, and the estimated costs of transport, accommodation, and other necessary travel expenses.

- **Data collection and consultation:** Explain the number and type of activities proposed and itemise participant compensation, transcription, venue, accessibility, and other associated costs.
- **Other project costs:** Itemise and justify expenditure on data, software, equipment, specialist services, dissemination, knowledge translation, and other project activities.
- **In-kind contributions:** Identify the contribution, its source, and estimated value, and explain how it will support delivery of the project.

Calculations should be transparent and show the relevant quantities, rates, and assumptions. For example, personnel costs should show the applicable rate and anticipated hours or fraction of appointment, while consultation costs should show the number of participants, payment per participant, and number of activities. Applicants should not combine materially different expenses into an unexplained lump sum.

The amounts presented in the funding justification must correspond with the figures entered in the project budget. (One page).

4.3.7 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).

4.3.8 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).

4.3.9 Section 10: References

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

4.3.10 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) 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 has declared First Nations Australian status (see Appendix D) and confirmation is required, they must provide evidence of their First Nations Australian identity.

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 or the ACSES Advisory Board
    2) organisations or individuals who are the subject of the proposed research, including proposed host universities, current employers, or related community groups.