

Articulating National Interest in Grant Applications

The Australian Research Council (ARC) is working to improve transparency and accountability in demonstrating the national interest of research grants it funds. To support researchers seeking to articulate the potential national interest of their research application, the ARC has published this guidance on addressing the National Interest Test (NIT).

What is NIT and How is it Assessed?

The NIT statement is a requirement in all ARC application forms for funding within the National Competitive Grants Program. It was first introduced, following the Minister's announcement in 2018, for the 2020 Discovery Projects round and has been included in all subsequent schemes.

The NIT is a standalone statement assessed by the ARC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) prior to recommendation to the Minister. The purpose of the NIT is to demonstrate the societal benefits (economic, commercial, environmental, social and/or cultural) of the proposed research beyond the academic community. The audience of the NIT is the general public - a different audience than the Application Project Summary, whose audience is the applicant's peers. **The NIT statement itself should explain the whole project to a general audience. It needs to be a single cohesive statement, and anyone should be able to understand it.**

The NIT assessment is undertaken by the ARC CEO, separately to the peer assessment process. The NIT statements are a critical part of the funding recommendations to the Minister. This is in addition to the processes that consider due diligence, eligibility, and peer review assessment of applications.

The Minister makes the final funding decision.

What changes have been made to the NIT?

The application forms include specific considerations to clearly identify the information sought on how the proposed project would benefit Australia beyond the academic community. The considerations are:

1. What is the project about? Describe the project in 1-2 sentences.
2. What are the expected outcomes of the project? What gap is it addressing?
3. How will the research benefit Australia (economically, socially, environmentally, commercially or culturally)? How might the research be used?
4. What translation and adoption pathway(s) might be used to achieve the outcome? For example, are there conditions that would need to be in place for the outcome to occur? If so, briefly describe them.

Applicants should address these four considerations as a single cohesive statement. Applicants should take particular care in addressing each element concisely - the statement must be between **100 to 150 words** and must be understood by a member of the general public.

Applicants should avoid technical explanations or jargon that would not be understood by a member of the public without background in the area. It should be written in plain English and be suitable for publication in popular publications and media. Evidence-based outcomes directly related to the proposed research should be clearly articulated. Sharing a draft NIT statement with colleagues in a different discipline or sector may assist an applicant to ensure the project's benefits are clearly understood.

Attached to this document are some good examples of NIT statements, and some examples of statement text which does not meet the intent of the NIT.

Who can I talk to about the NIT?

The ARC provides responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on [GrantConnect](#). Other changes to the ARC grant guidelines and common questions are also updated in those FAQs. ECU Research Services will arrange review of your NIT statement by our Brand and Marketing area.

Examples of well written NIT statements

<p>Example 1 –</p> <p>Australia is today a top sugar exporter, but Australian South Sea Islanders, whose ancestors were imported by early sugar producers to cultivate the crop, remain largely alienated from academic retellings of the industry’s history. Uniting Australian scholars, prominent international slavery research centres, and the Australian South Sea Islander community, this project will explore the story of Australia’s early sugar industry through the people, investments, ideas of labour migration, and cultural norms that linked it to sugar production in the Atlantic. Creating an online, searchable database of Pacific Labour voyages, and an archive of Pacific Literature, it will build new, global understanding of Australia’s place in the history of sugar and aid Pacific Islander community initiatives.</p>	<p>Example 2 –</p> <p>Successful local food and small-scale manufacturing industries are essential to Australia’s COVID-19 recovery. This project will provide existing and emerging businesses, policymakers, and local and regional governments with robust data about the strategies required to assist existing operators to remain competitive, and to support the development of new businesses. This new knowledge will be especially beneficial for those Australian states and regions where a comparative lack of large industry and predominance of small-to-medium enterprises means that a refocusing on local production is crucial for economic growth. It will save money, time (individuals, business and government) and other resources by enabling more targeted initiatives based on the actual needs of, and markets for, Australian small-scale producers. With compelling stories of local making a key pillar of regional tourism efforts, it will also provide new knowledge about the role of the local turn in revitalising regional tourism.</p>
<p>Example 3 –</p> <p>Australia’s water crises stem from the complex interdependence of hydrological cycles complicated by intense conflict and competition of water use among stakeholders. To date, stakeholder engagement practices have failed to foster sustainable water management and use, and have led to clientelism and the marginalisation of groups such as indigenous communities.</p> <p>This project will offer government agencies and river basin authorities a tool for designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating stakeholder engagement in river basin governance by assessing the structure of stakeholder engagement networks and explicitly linking them to both stakeholders’ values of water and their water uses at catchments. Application of the tool will lead to more inclusive, equal, and adaptive water governance, and in the long run, greater socio-economic and environmental benefits from increasingly scarce water.</p>	<p>Example 4 –</p> <p>There is a clear lack of understanding about how animals regulate how much they eat and drink. Understanding how and why animals (including humans) eat and drink as much as they do is of major relevance to Australia's national interest, because excessive consumption of food and drink has major detrimental effects on several key fields at a commercial, social, cultural and environmental level. By understanding the mechanisms that determine how animals regulate how much food and liquids they have consumed, we have the potential to selectively target the mechanisms that underlie appetite and thirst sensations. This could occur by developing new drugs, with the pharmaceutical industry, or via non-pharmaceutical techniques. Therefore, the new information obtained will likely lead to significantly improved economic, commercial, environmental and social benefits to the Australian community. This project will provide essential new insights about how a major sensory nerve pathway controls appetite and thirst sensations in animals. The proposal relies on new methodologies that only exist in our laboratory.</p>

General examples of extracts from NIT statements that do not meet the ARC requirements

Common pitfalls in articulating national interest include focusing only on benefits to academia, making sweeping remarks about broad benefits that do not appear directly related to the project, using language that is not clear to the general public. Some examples below:

1. This project will generate significant new academic knowledge. Results will be published in high quality journals and other academic outputs, leading to good research citations. Innovative methods from the project will be disseminated to other Australian researchers in the discipline. The CI will ensure that any value of the project is identified and commercially exploited for the partner organisation. The project will generate a good quality academic workforce.

Project findings will enhance Australia's reputation for scientific research. The research will generate knowledge to develop commercial products that will have major economic benefit for Australia, and generate important intellectual property for academics. It will lead to further research endeavours that will generate significant benefits to the Australian community.

2. The project will harness Australia's strong research capacity in the relatively new field of engineering. The outcomes – the scientific foundation for new generation of materials – are expected to give our partner, a significant market edge in the expanding global market for high-tech solutions.
3. The emerging team-members will receive intensive industry–university cross-training in a unique combination of disciplines, providing valuable skillsets for Australia's hi-tech sector, universities, and government.
4. Results will be published in high quality journals, discussed at national conferences, and presented at our annual research retreat.
5. Novel findings will be considered for patenting or licensing and through the CI's network will generate a commercial value.
6. As a team, we are experienced in research and the creation of new knowledge. Our track records demonstrate the potential for success in this project and the economic value to Australia.

For further information, see the ARC's [Articulating National Interest in grant applications](#) webpage.

Contact

For further assistance: Please contact your school Research Administration Officer (RAO) or Coordinator Research Administration: Email: research-preaward@ecu.edu.au

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