

Frequently Asked Questions - Australia's Economic Accelerator (AEA) Grants

General

What is the difference between AEA grants?

There are 2 AEA grant streams, namely:

- **AEA Ignite** provides funding for projects at [Technology Readiness Level](#) (TRL) 3 to 5, and from \$50,000 to \$500,000 for up to 12 months per project.
- **AEA Innovate** provides funding for projects at TRL 5 to 7, and up to \$5 million per grant for up to 2 years.

In deciding which AEA grant stream you wish to apply for, you must take into account the current level of commercial readiness of your project, the time in which you want to complete it, and the amount of AEA funding you are seeking.

AEA Seed was the pilot for AEA Ignite, which provided funding for projects at Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 3 to 5, and from \$50,000 to \$500,000 for up to 12 months per project.

Is the nominated TRL an entry point or to be achieved upon completion of the project?

The TRL is the entry point for a project to qualify for an Ignite or Innovate grant. Applicants must confirm that the project is already at TRL 3 to 5 for Ignite, or 5 to 7 for Innovate, and would be expected to progress either within the stated TRL or to a greater TRL by the end of the project.

What types of research projects will be funded by AEA grants?

AEA grants will support the development of research translation and commercialisation activity in the following Government identified priority areas for the economy:

- value-add in resources
- value-add in agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors
- transport

- medical science
- renewables and low emissions technology
- defence capability
- enabling capabilities.

More information on these priority areas can be found on the [NRF website](#).

Within the above priorities, the first rounds will focus on projects that align with the following 6 areas:

- critical and strategic minerals processing
- sustainable fuels
- digital agriculture
- quantum
- artificial intelligence (ai)
- advanced manufacturing.

More information on the focus areas can be found in the AEA Investment Plan 2024-2025 on the [AEA website](#).

Health and medical science are not specifically in any focus area. If my project is medical and manufacturing, can it apply under advanced manufacturing?

Applicants can submit under any priority area if they can demonstrate how the project aligns within the submitted priority area. Applications which illustrate they fall within the 6 focus areas will be prioritised.

How many rounds will be open per year for Ignite and Innovate? Does the department have anticipated dates for when these future rounds will run – i.e., will these rounds be announced in advance?

In 2024, it is expected that AEA Ignite will open 2 grant rounds and 1 grant round for AEA Innovate. All grant round opening dates will be published in advance on the AEA website. Potential applicants can find the latest AEA program updates through the AEA website (www.aea.gov.au).

Is the intention of the AEA to support university research to transition onto a maturation and commercialisation track?

AEA has been designed to help promote and enhance collaboration between universities and Australian businesses by providing funding to bridge the gap between research with strong potential impact and commercial output. It is not intended to replace the existing relationships universities have that help mature industry's own innovations and commercial IP.

Lead entrepreneurs

I am not an Australian citizen. Can I apply for an AEA grant?

Grants are awarded to universities rather than individuals. Australian citizenship is not a requirement to be a named participant in an AEA application.

To be eligible as a named participant in an AEA grant application, you must fulfil the eligibility requirements of a lead, collaborating, or partner entrepreneur, as listed in the AEA [Ignite](#) and [Innovate](#) Program Guidelines.

Does the lead entrepreneur always need to be a researcher at a university or could it be a commercial/industry entrepreneur looking to work with university researchers to commercialise IP or capabilities?

The lead entrepreneur must be a researcher at a lead organisation (university).

Is there a limit on the number of AEA proposals and projects per named participant?

Named participants (lead entrepreneur, partner entrepreneur or collaborating entrepreneur) involved in a project must have the capacity to undertake each project in which they are involved. It is the responsibility of the lead organisation to determine if in applying for, or holding, a project under the Program Guidelines will affect an individual named participant's ability to carry out their duties under an AEA grant, should their proposal be successful.

The Program Delegate has the discretion to not provide grant funding to the lead organisation if an assessment is made that the named participants specified in the project will be unable to carry out their duties as specified in the application.

Applying for grants

How do I submit my proposal?

Proposals are submitted through the Australian Research Council's [Research Management System](#) (RMS). RMS registration is required to gain access to the proposal form and to submit an AEA Grant. You will need to apply for a lead organisation role in the RMS system to be able to submit a proposal.

Is there a limit on the number of AEA proposals per university?

There is no limit to the number of proposals per university.

Can I submit 2 applications for the same project within a round?

Lead organisations are encouraged to only submit one proposal per project for each round of AEA.

How do I get technical support with the application form in RMS?

RMS is managed by the ARC. For general technical support for the RMS system, applicants should refer to the ARC Website – [Research Management System \(RMS\) Information](#) and on the RGS Website – [General Information about RMS or through](#)

RMS Support Desk Phone: 02 6287 6789

RMS Support Desk Email: RMSSupport@arc.gov.au

Queries relating to the AEA only should be directed to the Department of Education at accelerator@education.gov.au.

How does the department identify and manage risk at the application stage?

Every application will undergo an administrative check to identify potential security risks or concerns, especially in relation to potential implications for Australia's national interests. The administrative check is a risk mitigation strategy to ensure that applications meet the objectives of the AEA.

An adverse administrative check will be referred to an appropriate authority for guidance. It will not preclude an eligible application that has provided all mandatory requirements from progressing through to the merits assessment.

The process was developed using publicly available policy frameworks from across Government including:

- [The University Foreign Interference Taskforce \(UFIT\) Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector 2019](#)
- [Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(Sanctions regime\)](#)
- [The Foreign Arrangement Scheme](#)
- [Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme](#)
- [Defence Export Controls](#)
- [Critical Minerals Strategy 2023-2030](#), and
- [List of Critical Technologies in the National Interest](#).

Partnership arrangements

Can I collaborate with other universities on an AEA project?

Yes, collaboration is welcomed, and proposals can include more than one university. Proposals that include multiple universities must nominate one lead organisation.

Will I be eligible for an AEA grant if my project involves international collaboration?

Yes.

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administrative check is a risk mitigation strategy to ensure that applications meet the objectives of the AEA.

Does CSIRO count as an industry partner?

Yes. However, the contributions (cash or in-kind) from any government agency named as an industry partner would not count towards partner organisation contributions.

Does an industry partner need to be a 'commercial organisation'?

Yes, the industry partner must be an Australian business entity.

For AEA Ignite, you do not have to have an industry partner but projects with industry partners are likely to have stronger applications.

For AEA Innovate, you must have an industry partner ('partner organisation'). Partner organisations do not have to commit to the full duration of the grant period and can define their role to a fixed period related to a defined milestone.

Is the co-contribution intended to be cash, in-kind or a combination?

Co-contributions can be cash, in-kind, or a combination of cash and in-kind. The contribution is a minimum of 10% for Ignite and a minimum of 50% for Innovate.

If I am successful for an AEA grant, do industry partners or partner organisations need to be signatories of the funding agreement?

The department will only award funding to successful lead organisations under each project's AEA Conditions of Grant.

The AEA Conditions of Grant document is a mechanism for the Australian Government Minister for Education (or their delegate) to unilaterally impose conditions on a grant that the Commonwealth is providing under Part 2-3 of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA). As the Minister or their delegate imposes such conditions unilaterally, neither successful lead organisations nor their partners are required to sign the Conditions of Grant.

Are collaborating organisations included in the proposal required to make any certifications to the lead organisation?

Yes, all participants will be required to certify that their organisation will contribute the cash and/or in-kind contributions outlined in the AEA proposal and that they have met the appropriate clearances and other statutory requirements, prior to project commencement.

It is important for lead organisations to ensure they have collected written evidence from their collaborating organisations providing the details of the contributions they are providing towards AEA project, prior to submitting their AEA proposal. The lead organisation may determine the format for written evidence and must retain the information and provide it to the department if/when requested.

To provide the certification on the AEA application form, all collaborating organisations named in a proposal must ensure they have obtained the relevant internal approvals to contribute the resources pledged to the lead organisation for the AEA project.

Can the Intellectual Property (IP) of a project be split between the lead organisation and partner organisation?

The lead organisation and their project partners must negotiate arrangements and procedures for using and handling all IP created through the project, in a manner that maximises the benefits to Australia. Further information on IP arrangements can be found at section 2.8 of the AEA [Ignite](#) and [Innovate](#) Program Guidelines.

Ignite Grants

What can Ignite funding be used for?

All AEA funding must be used for eligible forms of expenditure as outlined in the [AEA Ignite Program Guidelines](#) and as approved in a Conditions of Grant for any approved project. Specific details on eligible and ineligible expenditure can be found in Section 3 of the guidelines.

As per the Program Guidelines, all funding for successful applicants is provided to the lead organisation. It is up to the lead organisation to ensure these funds are transferred and allocated correctly to collaborating and partner organisations.

What other funding opportunities are available for projects that successfully complete an AEA Ignite project?

After completing AEA Ignite, lead organisations can apply for AEA Innovate (proof-of-scale) grants and/or engage with the CSIRO's Main Sequence Ventures program or seek other sources of funding.

Who is eligible to apply for AEA Ignite grants?

Australian universities (listed at Tables A and B in the [Higher Education Support Act 2003](#)) and bodies corporate (listed in the 'University College' provider category listed in the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*) can apply for AEA Ignite grants. Universities are encouraged to partner with other institutions, industry, and businesses as part of their proposal.

Further information on the eligibility criteria can be found within Section 2 of the Program Guidelines.

What TRL is required for a proposal for AEA Ignite funding?

AEA Ignite proposals should be at proof-of-concept stage (TRL 3, 4 or 5). While we understand that not all projects will progress to a higher TRL by completion, proposals must demonstrate advancement within a TRL during the project period.

What is the weighting for First Nations, female and researchers from diverse backgrounds?

Section 6.1.4 of the AEA Ignite grant guidelines provides information on the weighting system.

After assessment and benchmarking of applications, additional points will be awarded to projects that meet a minimum score of 70 and maximum of 80:

- Regionally headquartered universities 5 points
 - Central Queensland University
 - Charles Darwin University
 - Charles Sturt University
 - Federation University
 - James Cook University
 - University of New England
 - Southern Cross University
 - University of Southern Queensland
 - University of Tasmania.
- Other universities partnering with the above universities 5 points
- Female identified lead entrepreneurs 5 points
- First Nations identified lead entrepreneurs 5 points

Additional points will be capped at 10 per application.

Am I still eligible for an AEA Ignite grant if I was unsuccessful for an AEA Seed grant?

Yes. Applicants who were unsuccessful in the AEA Seed pilot can submit an application for AEA Ignite. Unsuccessful applicants in AEA Seed pilot grant rounds are encouraged to reflect on feedback received.

Applicants who submit multiple applications that fail to acknowledge feedback, focus solely on the generation of knowledge without due consideration and incorporation of a research translation pathway or are outside the Government identified priority areas and/or 6 focus areas are unlikely to perform strongly in the round.

I am a recipient of an AEA Seed grant, can I apply for AEA Ignite?

Yes, you can apply for AEA Ignite. Each grant application is assessed on its merit. In the first instance, you are strongly encouraged to discuss your research commercialisation proposal with an AEA priority manager and seek guidance on which grant would be most suitable for your research proposal.

If you have already received an AEA Seed grant and intend to apply for AEA Ignite, the following considerations should be demonstrated in your application:

1. Your project must be of exceptional nature/quality.
2. You must ensure that you are able to meet the obligations and requirements of your new Ignite project while also ensuring that you can still meet the obligations and requirements of your current Seed project.
3. If your new project is using the same or very similar technology as your Seed project, your new Ignite project must show exceptional progress to a higher TRL.

Applicants should be aware that the total funding awarded to an AEA Seed grant will be deducted from the AEA Ignite grant if awarded. For example: if \$200,000 was awarded through an AEA Seed grant, the project can apply for further funding through AEA Ignite, either at a higher TRL or with demonstrated progress within the original TRL. As the total funds cannot exceed \$500,000 per project, the project would only be eligible for a maximum of \$300,000 through AEA Ignite.

Can I apply for an AEA Ignite grant without the support of a partner organisation?

Yes, you can submit a proposal for AEA Ignite without the support of a commercial partner. However, projects must demonstrate some level of industry engagement and understanding. Projects with relevant and substantive industry engagement and/or investors are likely to be more competitive.

Can an Ignite project be developing IP that originates from a (commercial) startup partner?

AEA Ignite applications can lead to an improvement over the existing IP. However, the intent of the program is to build the IP holdings within the Australian university sector. The AEA expects that lead organisations will negotiate mutually beneficial IP arrangements with the chosen industry partner.

Is there an EOI for Ignite?

The AEA Ignite grant does not involve an EOI process.

What is the pitch?

The pitch provides an opportunity for potential Ignite or Innovate applicants to receive early-stage feedback from AEA priority managers on their projects.

How will grant funding be paid during the course of the project?

The Minister for Education, or their Delegate, holds the authority to determine grant amounts, payments and payment milestones for successful projects.

Typically, AEA Ignite grant funding will be paid in the following stages:

- For projects up to \$200,000:
 - 70% of the grant is paid on the execution of the Conditions of Grant
 - 20% is paid upon acceptance of the progress report
 - 10% is paid on submission of the final report.
- For projects over \$200,000:
 - 80% of the grant is paid on the execution of the Conditions of Grant
 - 10% is paid upon acceptance of the progress report
 - 10% is paid on submission of the final report

Innovate Grants

Who will be eligible to apply for AEA Innovate grants?

Proposals must satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in part 2 of the [AEA Innovate program guidelines](#).

Do I need to have a minimum cash and/or in-kind support in my proposal to be eligible for an AEA Innovate grant?

The lead organisation, collaborating organisation and the partner organisations must collectively commit to at least match (in cash and/or in kind) the funding granted by AEA Innovate.

There is an emphasis on AEA Innovate grant applications demonstrating a formal partnership and co-investment from an industry partner through cash contributions, in-kind contribution, or both.

Do I need to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) before applying for AEA Innovate grants? And is the EOI compulsory?

AEA Innovate program guidelines stipulate a short EOI must be submitted. This first stage in the application process is submitted in RMS. Priority managers will review the submitted EOIs and assess them against the 5 EOI selection criteria, as outlined in section 4.1 of the AEA Innovate Program Administrative Guidelines. A priority manager will then provide feedback on your EOI. Following the EOI stage, you will then be invited to submit a full application via RMS.

Will I receive feedback on my EOI phase before I complete an application?

Yes, AEA priority managers will consider EOIs and provide feedback to applicants on where there may be opportunities for improvement. This is an applicant's final opportunity to receive feedback before lodging an application. Priority managers will not provide advice on application development after the EOI stage.

What is the EOI deadline prior to Innovate opening?

Innovate applications will open 3 weeks after EOIs close, to allow time for applicants to receive and incorporate feedback before finalising applications.

Can successful AEA Seed and Ignite projects apply for AEA Innovate funding? Will they be required to submit an EOI?

Yes, successful AEA Seed and Ignite projects can apply for AEA Innovate and will be required to submit an EOI and full application when applying for AEA Innovate funding.

Do projects need to complete the AEA Seed or AEA Ignite before progressing to AEA Innovate?

No, projects do not need to receive AEA Seed or AEA Ignite funding to be eligible for AEA Innovate.

Is there a minimum time commitment expected from the lead entrepreneur for Innovate funding?

There is no specific minimum FTE requirement for Innovate lead entrepreneurs. However, program assessors will take into consideration whether lead entrepreneurs are dedicating enough time to the project to ensure success.

What is the likely overall timeframe for decisions on Innovate grants?

There will be a 6-week period for EOIs to be submitted.

Full applications will open 3 weeks after the close of EOIs for a period of 6 weeks. We would anticipate announcing the outcomes of funding rounds approximately 6 months after applications close.

What will the Project Management Plan entail for Innovate grants?

A separate and detailed Project Management Plan (PMP) must be submitted as part of the full application. The PMP must include a more detailed budget (including co-investment and other committed resources), roles and responsibilities of each participating organisation and key personnel. The PMP must clearly illustrate an activity implementation timeline (schedule) including key project milestones. The PMP must also include a detailed risk management plan that identifies any potential issues and how these potential issues will be mitigated.

A PMP template can be found on the [AEA website](#) as well as in RMS.

Selection process

How will successful projects be selected?

The AEA Executive Director and priority managers will assess proposals against selection criteria published in the AEA Ignite and Innovate program guidelines.

For Ignite, the AEA Executive Director and the AEA Priority Managers will recommend projects to the Program Delegate. The department will award funding to successful lead organisations (grantees) through Conditions of Grant.

For Innovate, the AEA Executive Director and the AEA priority managers will recommend projects to the AEA Advisory Board for their consideration prior to providing their recommendations to the Program Delegate. The department will award funding to successful lead organisations (grantees) through Conditions of Grant.

When will I know the outcome of my grant proposal?

Successful grants will be published on the [AEA website](#) and the department will advise all applicants of the outcome of their grant proposals.

The lead organisation will receive notification of the outcomes of the funding rounds.

If my grant is successful, can I negotiate a delayed start date?

Successful projects are expected to commence no later than 6 weeks after the approval of, and conditions being imposed on, the grant through a Conditions of Grant.

Projects that have a delayed start date of more than 6 weeks must contact the department as this may impact funding available to be fully awarded.

How will the conflicts of interest of assessors be managed?

Conflicts of interest for assessors will be managed in accordance with the relevant legislative framework including:

- *Public Service Act 1999*
- *Public Service Regulations 1999*
- *Crimes Act 1914*
- *Criminal Code Act 1995*
- *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*
- *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018.*

Can changes be made to a successful project proposal?

Changes to a successful project's Conditions of Grant can be made through a variation request, however these requests are subject to delegate approval and might delay the payments for your project. This includes changes to project personnel, partners and timelines but does not extend to changes to the project outcomes or objectives.

Variations to the term of the project, refining the scope to improve the outcome, changes in personnel or commercial partner will be examined by the delegate to ensure the project remains fundamentally the same as the originally approved project. No increases in funding will be allowed.

Does an AEA proposal need to demonstrate that a market analysis has been undertaken to identify the target market for the project?

The selection criteria in the AEA Ignite and Innovate program guidelines requires the lead organisation to demonstrate how the commercial value of the project activity will improve and by how much. This requires your proposal to quantify how the project will make a meaningful impact or change on the market, by using market sizing to estimate demand or benefit of your project.

When responding to this criterion, it is recommended that lead organisations undertake a market analysis to demonstrate their understanding of the project's intended target market and provide relevant references from credible sources such as market research reports from online databases.

Data and Privacy Protocol for online proposals

How is applicants' personal information provided in AEA grant proposals being used and disclosed?

Personal information will be managed as set out in section 11 of the AEA Ignite and section 12 of the AEA Innovate program guidelines.

Do I need consent from a third party if I have included their personal information in the AEA project summary?

Yes, applicants should not include third-party personal information in the project summary unless the third-party individuals have consented to publication of that information.

How is information relating to a person's Indigenous status on an AEA grants proposal used?

To complete an RMS profile, participants must answer a question about their Indigenous status. If participants prefer not to answer this question they should choose 'unstated'. Information about Indigenous status will be used during the assessment process for AEA Ignite, as outlined in section 6.1.4 of the AEA Ignite Program Guidelines and may therefore be visible to other users of RMS. It will also be used as part of the department's evaluation of the program.

Priority Managers and Expert Advisors

Who are the AEA priority managers? What is their role in the AEA?

AEA priority managers are scientific and industry specialists who provide technical and specialist research commercialisation advice and support.

Their role in the AEA is to help university researchers, industry partners and investors connect and identify partnership opportunities. Through the pitch and the EOI, they can provide advice on Ignite and Innovate applications and the application process.

Find out more about the [AEA priority managers](#).

Will the contact details of the Priority Managers be made available for consultation?

Priority managers can be reached through your university research office or through accelerator@education.gov.au