



**Australian Government**

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**Department of Innovation  
Industry, Science and Research**

**Collaborative Research Networks**

**PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

**July 2010**

**For funding commencing in 2011**

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# Collaborative Research Networks Program Guidelines July 2010

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## 1. Introduction and Overview

- 1.1 The Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) Program is a research-specific fund intended to effect structural adjustment in the research and research training aspects of Australia's higher education system.
- 1.2 The CRN program was established in the 2009 Budget to the value of \$114.1 million over six years from 2010-11. The initial round will provide up to \$51 million from January 2011 until mid 2013. Subsequent rounds will be invited as required.
- 1.3 The CRN program is designed to encourage less research-intensive smaller and regional higher education institutions to develop their research capacity and adapt to a research system driven more strongly by performance outcomes by teaming up with other institutions in areas of common interest.
- 1.4 The CRN program is intended to complement other aspects of the Government's agenda for reform of the Australian higher education and innovation systems, such as *Sustainable Excellence in Universities* and *Joint Research Engagement*. However, it does not form part of the research block grants arrangements and is not covered by the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA).
- 1.5 The CRN program is complementary to the Structural Adjustment Fund, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), in that both will help higher education institutions consider and, where necessary, revise their missions and develop new strategies to achieve those missions in response to the Government's reform agenda.
- 1.6 Both the Collaborative Research Networks program and the Structural Adjustment Fund will support institutions to make the structural changes necessary to refocus activities and missions, improve long term sustainability, and enhance the quality of higher education outcomes, including research.
- 1.7 Unlike the Structural Adjustment Fund, which does not have funding available for projects directed solely at strengthening university research activities, the CRN is research-specific.
- 1.8 CRN will be administered by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR or the department).
- 1.9 CRN funding will be paid through the department's grant payment system, and funding awarded under this program is not eligible for inclusion as research income in the annual Higher Education Research Data Collection.

- 1.10 These guidelines set out the eligibility requirements, application process, evaluation criteria and selection mechanism for the CRN program. Applicants should read these guidelines and any related documents carefully before completing any expression of interest or a full application for CRN funding.
- 1.11 Amendments or clarification to these guidelines may be made by the department at any time before the closing dates for applications and will be published on the CRN program webpage at [www.innovation.gov.au](http://www.innovation.gov.au).

## **2. Program Objectives and Outcomes**

- 2.1 The Collaborative Research Networks program forms part of the Australian Government's agenda for reform of the nation's higher education and innovation systems.
- 2.2 The CRN program will contribute to the Government's goal of increased collaboration and has specific objectives. The program will:
- help less research-intensive smaller and regional institutions adapt to a research system driven more strongly by performance outcomes;
  - facilitate collaboration between less research-intensive institutions and other institutions with established research strengths;
  - encourage less research-intensive institutions to focus their research activities in areas of existing or emerging strength;
  - help address the challenges associated with undertaking research in regional institutions;
  - improve the level of collaboration between different parts of the innovation system, and, in particular, between universities; and
  - meet local and regional priorities.
- 2.3 Long-term expected outcomes are:
- the sustainability of partnerships or collaboration between institutions;
  - the contribution of projects towards realising institutional missions or goals;
  - increased research capacity, including increasing the number of research groups performing at world class levels; and
  - the contribution of projects to national research and innovation priorities.
- 2.4 An immediate expected outcome of the CRN program is a measurable increase in the level of research collaborative activities between universities. This could be reflected by (but is not limited to):
- an increase in joint research publications;
  - an increase in joint applications for Australian Competitive Grants and other competitive grants;
  - an increase in joint supervision of Higher Degree by Research Students;
  - an increase in the number of 'research active' or 'research only' staff;
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- an increase in the number of academic staff with Higher Degrees by Research;
  - improved efficiency in research administration resulting from the use of shared facilities and resources; or
  - other measures showing increased collaboration or improved efficiency, to be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.5 The CRN program is intended to be flexible. Projects may involve existing or emerging areas of research capability, and should include a rationale for relevance to participating institutions' strategic directions. Projects need not be limited to specific fields of research and may have more than one element with different partner institutions for each element.
- 2.6 The reporting requirements and key performance indicators for CRN projects will vary between projects. They will be specified by the institutions involved and agreed with the department before a funding agreement is concluded. The reporting requirements will focus on the achievement of some or all of the outcomes above. While it is intended that the reporting requirements for CRN projects will not be onerous, they may require participating institutions to provide supporting data in addition to that submitted as part of the DIISR and DEEWR annual data collections.
- 2.7 The Collaborative Research Networks program contributes to Outcome 2 of the Innovation Portfolio Budget Statements 2010-11:
- The generation, utilisation and awareness of science and research knowledge through investment in research, research training and infrastructure, science communication, skill development and collaboration with industry, universities and research institutes domestically and internationally.*
- 2.8 Specifically, CRN supports *Program 2.2: Science and Research Capacity*, through
- promoting a strong culture of collaboration and networking across and between universities, research institutes and industry.*
- 2.9 The key deliverables under Program 2.2 are:
- *support and funding for science, research and collaborative projects;*
  - *consultation and collaboration with research community;*
  - *support for international collaborative research projects and relationships;*  
*and*
  - *support for increased awareness of science and research in the community.*
- 2.10 The key performance indicators under Program 2.2 are:
- *increase numbers of research groups performing at world-class levels (as defined by Excellence in Research Australia);*
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- *increase number of participants in activities promoting science-based careers;*
- *increase access to research infrastructure to facilitate and support collaborative research activities; and*
- *increase number of projects reporting strengthened international collaborative relationships and research outcomes.*

2.11 These deliverables and performance indicators will be taken into consideration when assessing CRN proposals and applications.

### **3. Eligibility**

3.1 Less research-intensive smaller and regional institutions listed in Tables A and B of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) as defined below will be eligible to apply for funding through this program.

3.2 Specifically, the program will be open to institutions listed in Table A and B of HESA which:

- (i) have an average Australian Competitive Grant (ACG) income over 2007 and 2008 of less than \$2.5 million,

OR

- (ii) have an average ACG income over 2007 and 2008 of less than \$12 million AND are based 100km or more from a state capital city.

3.3 Based on these eligibility criteria, sixteen institutions will be eligible to apply for CRN funding:

Australian Catholic University  
University of Ballarat  
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education  
Bond University  
University of Canberra  
Central Queensland University  
Charles Darwin University  
Charles Sturt University  
Edith Cowan University  
Melbourne College of Divinity  
University of New England  
University of Notre Dame Australia  
Southern Cross University  
University of Southern Queensland  
University of the Sunshine Coast  
Victoria University

- 3.4 Any higher education provider listed in Table A or B of HESA can participate as partners in CRN projects (including eligible institutions), but the institution which lodges the application (the **lead institution**) must be an eligible institution as defined in these guidelines.
- 3.5 Private sector partners, international institutions and publicly funded research agencies (such as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) can also be partners in CRN projects, but the main focus of any project funded under the program must be a collaboration between two or more Australian higher education providers as listed in HESA.

#### 4. Funding and Use

- 4.1 The Collaborative Research Networks program will provide approximately \$20 million in 2011 and 2012 respectively, and \$10 million in the first half of 2013.
- 4.2 CRN funding is available for any purpose which supports research capacity building. This could include, but is not limited to:
- staff engaged specifically for or in CRN projects – salaries for the proportion of their time spent on CRN activities;
  - teaching relief for academic staff engaged specifically for or in CRN projects – salaries for the proportion of their time spent on CRN activities;
  - fellowships for CRN project activities;
  - staff and student exchanges;
  - joint supervision or staff development arrangements;
  - shared research infrastructure;
  - access to major Australian research facilities; or
  - costs associated with establishing and strengthening collaborations.
- 4.3 The CRN program will not duplicate funding for research, including infrastructure, already funded by the Commonwealth or which is likely to be funded from other Commonwealth funding sources. The department reserves the right to determine if a CRN project duplicates or is likely to duplicate research being funded by another Commonwealth source.
- 4.4 There is no set duration for CRN projects, but program funding will be provided for a maximum of three years from 2011. CRN proposals must describe expected outcomes both within and beyond the lifetime of the program.
- 4.5 Funding will be provided to lead institutions, but may involve transfer of some program funding from the lead institution to the partner institutions. The funding and other governance arrangements for CRN must be reflected in a partnership agreement or other agreement between the participating institutions.
- 4.6 Funding will be provided to the lead institution under a **funding agreement** with DIISR. The agreement will be separate from but made within the
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framework of the compact between the institution and the Commonwealth. The funding agreements will include key performance indicators and milestones appropriate to each project. The details of funding agreements, including the payment schedule, will be negotiated with successful lead institutions.

- 4.7 CRN funding can also be used to meet the costs of establishing collaborations. Facilitation payments – including payments to partner institutions – can be claimed where it can be demonstrated that this will add value to the collaboration; for example, where costs are involved in negotiating and organising the collaborative relationship. Facilitation costs should be included in project budgets where relevant. Facilitation payments will be made under the funding agreement.
- 4.8 Under most circumstances CRN funding will be paid in instalments on the completion of the milestones set out in the funding agreement.
- 4.9 CRN funding may be provided to projects which address priorities identified from time to time by the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. The same eligibility, selection and assessment criteria will apply for these projects as for others.
- 4.10 CRN funding will be provided exclusive of GST.

## 5. Application Process

- 5.1 Application for CRN funding will involve a three step process:

<i>Step One: Eligible institutions will be invited to submit an expression of interest (EoI).</i>
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- 5.2 Expressions of interest must include:

- a description of the project, which may have more than one element. The project description should include the proposed partners, the proposed objectives and the expected outcomes or benefits arising from the project (for all participants);
- a short statement explaining how the proposed project supports the missions of the participating institutions, with a focus on how it will improve the research capacity of the lead institution and the benefits it will provide to the partner institution(s);
- a short description of how the project meets the program objectives and selection criteria (see 6.2 below);
- an indicative budget, showing the amount of funding sought, an approximate breakdown of main expenditure, and an indication of the resources (cash and in-kind) to be contributed by each participant;
- an indication of why the project should be supported through the CRN program, rather than by funding from other sources;

- where appropriate, a description of possible project development costs (amount and purpose), which could be the subject of facilitation payments (see 4.7);
  - a draft timeline; and
  - a statement of support from each of the proposed partners, endorsed by the Vice-Chancellor or equivalent.
- 5.3 Each eligible institution can submit only **one** EoI as the lead institution.
- 5.4 There is no limit on the number of CRN projects in which a university can participate as a partner.
- 5.5 The department may also call for expressions of interest for CRN projects which address specific priorities identified by the Minister.

*Step Two: EoIs will be discussed with the lead institutions and proposed partners.*

- 5.6 CRN proposals must be aligned with the missions and strategic goals of the participating institutions and with the Government's wider reform agenda for higher education.
- 5.7 The collaborative relationships developed through CRN should be sustainable beyond the life of the program, and offer potential long-term benefits.
- 5.8 The department will discuss the strategic alignment and expected benefits of the CRN project with the lead institution (and, as appropriate, partner institutions), normally as part of compact discussions.
- 5.9 EoIs submitted in response to priorities set by the Minister will be discussed outside the compact process.
- 5.10 Discussion of CRN proposals may lead to amendments to the scope, outcomes, amount of funding or any other aspect of the proposed project. Any amendments would be made only with the consent of all the participants.

*Step Three: Lead institutions which submit an EoI assessed as suitable by the department will be invited to develop a more detailed application for funding.*

- 5.11 The detailed application must include:
- a description of the project (which may have more than one element), as finalised after discussions;
  - a short statement explaining how the proposed project supports the missions of the participating institutions, with a focus on how it will improve the research capacity of the lead institution and the benefits it will provide to the partner institution(s);
  - a description of how the project meets the program objectives and selection criteria (see 6.2 below);

- a detailed budget, including, where appropriate, any claim for facilitation payments (see 4.7);
  - information on the resources which would be committed to the project, including funding (from all sources), staff or students, and infrastructure;
  - a detailed timeline, including milestones;
  - the expected outcomes and benefits that could arise from the project and key performance indicators;
  - a business plan setting out governance arrangements (including partnership or other agreements covering the CRN project) and a risk management plan; and
  - a signed commitment from each of the participating institutions, endorsed by the Vice-Chancellor or equivalent.
- 5.12 Final applications for CRN funding must be submitted by the lead institution by no later than four weeks after Step 2.
- 5.13 EoIs and final applications should be submitted to the department as PDF documents, sent to the CRN mailbox: [CRN@innovation.gov.au](mailto:CRN@innovation.gov.au)
- 5.14 Late submissions of either EoIs or final applications will be considered only in exceptional circumstances beyond the lead institution's control.
- 5.15 A lead institution which must, as a result of such circumstances, submit a late application should provide the earliest possible notification to the department, in writing, of its intention to do so, along with evidence in support of its claim of exceptional circumstances. The department may seek further information from the lead institution on the circumstances leading to the late application.
- 5.16 The department will accept late applications only if there is sufficient time to adequately assess such applications. The department's decision with respect to the consideration of late applications will be final. The lead institution will be informed in writing of the department's decision. No other correspondence in relation to the decision will be entered into.
- 5.17 The department, at its discretion, may seek additional information, or allow applicants to remedy minor errors, but will not accept responsibility for any misunderstanding arising from the failure by an applicant to comply with the requirements set out in these guidelines, or arising from any ambiguity, discrepancy, inconsistency, error or omission contained in the application.

## **6. Selection Process**

- 6.1 CRN projects will be selected via a competitive process. Detailed applications will be assessed by a panel made up of DIISR officers, a representative of DEEWR, and an independent external advisor. Advice may be sought from discipline experts from the ARC or NHMRC as required.

- 6.2 Detailed applications will be assessed against the following selection criteria:
- how well the project meets the **program objectives**;
  - how well the project supports the mission and strategic direction of the participating institutions;
  - the expected outcomes and benefits in terms of research capacity-building;
  - the capacity of the participating institutions, particularly the lead institution, to deliver the proposed outcomes;
  - the support, both cash and in-kind, to be provided by the participating institutions;
  - whether the proposed collaboration will be sustainable over the long term;
  - the extent to which the project supports the Government's wider strategic and structural reform objectives for the higher education and innovation systems;
  - value for money; and
  - overall promotion of quality research.
- 6.3 No weighting will be applied to the selection criteria.
- 6.4 The department will make recommendations to the Minister on which CRN proposals should receive funding.
- 6.5 Successful projects will be announced by the Minister. The lead institution will be notified in writing prior to any announcement.

## **7. Administration of Funding**

- 7.1 The lead institution for each successful CRN project will enter into a funding agreement with the Commonwealth through the department. The executed funding agreement defines the obligations of both the lead institution and the Commonwealth.
- 7.2 The funding agreement will include:
- the project partners;
  - total funding for the project;
  - agreed performance indicators and outcomes for the project;
  - agreed milestones and associated payments; and
  - the reporting requirements, including the frequency of and information required in reports.
- 7.3 At a minimum, the lead university for each CRN project will be required to submit an annual report on the project, setting out:
- expenditure to date;
  - progress towards the achievement of milestones and project outcomes as specified in the funding agreement; and

- any significant obstacles or challenges.
- 7.4 Reporting requirements are likely to vary between projects, but will include progress and final reports setting out:
- expenditure to date;
  - progress towards the achievement of milestones and project outcomes as specified in the funding agreement;
  - other outcomes which can be directly attributed to the collaboration;
  - any significant obstacles or challenges;
  - information on how the collaboration will be supported in future (including institutional and other funding); and
  - an audited financial statement for all project funds.
- 7.5 The department may elect to terminate CRN funding should the project fail to meet key milestones or deliver key objectives as specified in the funding agreement.
- 7.6 Universities' compacts will include reference to any CRN project(s) in which they are participating.
- 7.7 The funding agreement will require that the lead institution must not make any substantial changes to the activities, timeline or budget of a CRN project without the prior written approval of the Commonwealth.
- 7.8 Generally, such changes will require a variation to the funding agreement. Requests to vary the funding agreement must be made in writing and addressed to the Program Delegate specified in the funding agreement.
- 7.9 Approval of variations to the funding agreement is at the discretion of the Minister or the Minister's delegate. All variations to the funding agreement will be by written agreement of the parties. The Commonwealth is not obliged to agree to any particular variation requested.
- 7.10 Failure to obtain the approval of the Commonwealth prior to making a substantial change is a breach by the lead institution of the terms of the funding agreement and may affect the payment of Commonwealth funding.

## **8. Program Evaluation**

- 8.1 The department will undertake an evaluation of the Collaborative Research Networks program in 2013.
- 8.2 The evaluation will examine the effectiveness of the program in delivering the outcomes specified in Section 2, above.

- 8.3 The purpose of the evaluation is to provide evidence of the benefits delivered broadly through the CRN program. This includes benefits to the Australian innovation system; to local and regional communities, businesses and industries; and to the nation as a whole.
- 8.4 The evaluation will include consideration of CRN funding agreements, project reports and project-specific outputs, as well as other relevant information.
- 8.5 CRN funding recipients are required to collect and maintain information relevant to the evaluation of the program, including information on:
- the achievement of agreed milestones;
  - the research, teaching and learning, commercial, industrial and knowledge transfer outputs of CRN projects, including intellectual property; and
  - the economic, environmental and/or social benefits of CRN projects.

## **9. Roles and Responsibilities**

### ***9.1 The role of the Minister***

- 9.1.1 The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research has overall responsibility for the CRN program and makes decisions including:
- which proposals will be funded;
  - the level of funding offered;
  - the conditions of any funding offer;
  - changes to the level of funding; and
  - the termination of agreements.

- 9.1.2 The Minister may appoint a Program Delegate and authorise the Program Delegate to carry out certain functions.

### ***9.2 The role of the Program Delegate***

- 9.2.1 The Program Delegate in the department will carry out such functions as empowered by the Minister, or otherwise duly authorised, in respect of the CRN program.

### ***9.3 The role of the department***

- 9.3.1 The department is responsible for administering the CRN program and carrying out functions authorised by the Minister.
- 9.3.2 The department will:
- determine the information to be provided in applications, and the form in which applications must be submitted;

- undertake the assessment and merit ranking of applications for CRN funding;
- provide advice to the Program Delegate on which projects should receive funding under the program;
- enter into funding agreements on behalf of the Commonwealth with successful applicants; and
- administer and exercise delegated powers under the funding agreement.

## **10. Other Matters**

### ***10.1 Conflict of Interest***

10.1.1 Policies and procedures for handling conflicts of interest will be addressed in the funding agreements.

### ***10.2 Confidentiality***

10.2.1 In general, the information contained in CRN expressions of interest or applications will reflect publicly available information about the lead institution's strategic direction and research capabilities.

10.2.2 However, under some circumstances such information may be subject to commercial-in-confidence or other considerations. Where this is the case the lead institution must notify the department in writing, at the earliest viable point in the application process, the information that should be treated as confidential, and provide the reasons for the request.

10.2.3 The Australian Government gives no undertaking to keep confidential any information contained in an expression of interest or application or otherwise provided by a funding recipient unless such notification is provided.

10.2.4 The Australian Government reserves the right to accept or refuse a request to treat the information as confidential.

10.2.5 The Australian Government will use the Department of Finance and Deregulation's Financial Management Guidance No. 3 on confidentiality to determine whether to accept a claim for confidentiality.

### ***10.3 Freedom of Information***

10.3.1 The department is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* ('the FOI Act'). The object of the FOI Act is to make available information about the operations of departments, to create a general right of access to information in the possession of Ministers, departments and public authorities and also to create a right for people to amend records containing personal information that is incomplete, incorrect or misleading.

- 10.3.2 Anyone can make an FOI request. An applicant is not obligated to state a reason for their request, nor can the department ask for a reason.
- 10.3.3 All documents held by the department are subject to FOI, however, in some cases exemptions may apply.
- 10.3.4 A valid request is one which is in writing, provides enough information about a requested document to enable its identification, specifies an address in Australia, be sent by post or delivered to the department.
- 10.3.5 All requests should be made directly to the FOI Coordinator:  
[foi@innovation.gov.au](mailto:foi@innovation.gov.au).

#### **10.4 Privacy**

- 10.4.1 The department is bound by the Information Privacy Principles in the *Privacy Act 1988*. The department uses personal information only for the purposes in which it was provided, or for purposes which are directly related to one of the department's functions or activities.
- 10.4.2 The department does not give this information to other agencies, organisations or anyone else unless:
- the individual has consented;
  - the individual would reasonably expect, or has been told, that information of that kind is usually passed to those individuals, bodies or agencies;
  - it is required or authorised by law;
  - it will prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to somebody's life or health; or
  - it is reasonably necessary for the enforcement of the criminal law or of a law imposing a pecuniary penalty, or for the protection of public revenue.
- 10.4.3 The department takes all reasonable measures to ensure that personal information collected by us is accurate, up to date and complete. These measures include updating and maintaining personal information when we are advised by individuals that information has changed.
- 10.4.4 The department also takes all reasonable steps to ensure that the personal information it holds is protected against loss, unauthorised access, use, modification or disclosure and other misuse.
- 10.4.5 Any individual may contact the department to obtain information about how to request access to or changes to the information the department holds about them.
- 10.4.6 Access may be given unless we consider that there is a sound reason under the Privacy Act, the Freedom of Information Act or other relevant law to withhold the information.

10.4.7 All requests for personal information should be made to the Privacy Officer:  
[privacy@innovation.gov.au](mailto:privacy@innovation.gov.au)

Or in writing to:

Privacy Officer  
Corporate Strategy Branch  
Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
GPO Box 9839  
Canberra ACT 2601

### ***10.5 Complaints and Review of Decisions***

10.5.1 Questions or complaints concerning the CRN program will be addressed in accordance with the department's Service Charter. More information on the Service Charter can be found on the department's web site.

10.5.2 Questions or complaints concerning the CRN program assessment and/or decisions must be directed to the CRN program Manager in the first instance at:

Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) Program Manager  
Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
GPO Box 9839  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Email: [CRN@innovation.gov.au](mailto:CRN@innovation.gov.au)

10.5.3 If the question or complaint is not satisfactorily resolved by the CRN program Manager, the matter can be taken to the:

Head of Division  
Research Division  
Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
GPO Box 9839  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Email: [CRN@innovation.gov.au](mailto:CRN@innovation.gov.au)

10.5.4 Unresolved issues can be lodged as a complaint with the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has offices in all states and territories. Contact details can be found on the Ombudsman's website at:  
[www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

## **11. Contact information**

11.1 Questions, feedback or comment on the CRN program is welcome and can be submitted by email to [CRN@innovation.gov.au](mailto:CRN@innovation.gov.au)