



Australian Government

NCRIS

National Research
Infrastructure for Australia

National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy

Programme Guidelines

2015–16

May 2015



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1 Introduction

The Australian Government has provided \$150 million, which will be available in 2015-16, to support the continued operation of eligible projects currently funded under the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS). This will ensure the continued operations of the NCRIS network while a review of research infrastructure is undertaken

This funding builds on funding for NCRIS projects of \$80 million in 2013-14 and \$100 million in 2014-15.

The 2014 National Commission of Audit recommended:

...a more strategic, whole of government approach to the funding of research and development, including by committing to ongoing funding for critical research infrastructure in Australia, informed by a reassessment of existing research infrastructure provision and requirements.

A review is taking place and it will report to Government late in May 2015 to inform long-term planning and investment in research infrastructure.

2 Key Dates

TIMEFRAME	ACTIVITY
Determined by Minister	Guidelines issued by Minister and eligible projects informed of outcomes
20 days after release of guidelines	Lead agents complete consultations with stakeholders on proposed business plan and budget and provide to Department
20 days after business plans provided to Department	Funding agreements provided to eligible projects
Prior to end of the 2015 financial year	100% of project funding agreements varied or executed

3 Definitions

The following definitions are to be used in conjunction with the terms that appear in the Programme Guidelines. Terms may be capitalised or non-capitalised.

TERM	DEFINITION
Department	The Australian Government Department of Education and Training
Funding Agreement	An agreement made between the Commonwealth, as represented by the Department, and a Lead Agent, to undertake a set of activities over a prescribed period for a prescribed amount of funds.
Lead Agent	The non-Department party to a Funding Agreement.
National Collaborative Research Infrastructure	This term, and any variants, refers to Projects that incorporate all the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• is available to researchers outside the Project and Project Partners with minimal barriers to access• has a primary focus on delivering the project outputs to the Australian research community

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> operates research infrastructure (including data infrastructure) on a collaborative, national, non-exclusive basis.
NCRIS	National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy
NCRIS 2013	This term refers to the \$180 million of NCRIS funding provided for projects in 2013-14 (\$80 million) and 2014-15 (\$100 million)
NCRIS 2015	This term refers to the \$150 million of NCRIS funding for projects to be provided for 2015-16
Programme	Synonym for NCRIS 2015
Programme Guidelines	The NCRIS 2015 Programme Guidelines (this document)

4 NCRIS 2015 funding

4.1 Intent of NCRIS 2015

The intent of NCRIS 2015 is to ensure the facilities currently supported under NCRIS 2013 remain operational until 30 June 2016 and allow them to position themselves for the period beyond 30 June 2016.

4.2 Scope of NCRIS 2015

The scope of NCRIS 2015 includes:

- the provision of funds to enable the operation and maintenance of existing national, collaborative research infrastructure operated under NCRIS 2013, from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016
- membership fee obligations for existing NCRIS funded government-to-government agreements
- research infrastructure evaluation, review and planning activities, including governance arrangements, to meet programme and research infrastructure review needs
- other research infrastructure projects offering open, merit-based access to research infrastructure approved by the Minister for Education and Training.

4.3 Objectives of NCRIS 2015

The objective of NCRIS 2015 is to deliver high quality research and innovation outcomes, to improve national well-being and enable Australian researchers to address key national and global challenges through the ongoing operations of a national collaborative research infrastructure network.

4.4 Use of NCRIS 2015 funds

The use of NCRIS 2015 funds is limited to the following:

- operational activities for eligible research infrastructure, including the provision of technical personnel to operate the infrastructure
- maintenance of eligible research infrastructure, which may include routine replacement of equipment and plant at the end of its useful life
- management, governance and administration activities required to ensure NCRIS 2015 projects are undertaken in an efficient, effective and accessible manner
- increased engagement with industry and other end users of research and international engagement
- collection and/or analysis of information and data to measure the efficiency, effectiveness and outreach of projects or the programme

- review and planning activities at the programme and system level, including the provision of expert advice, the operation of advisory structures and the undertaking of project, programme and system level reviews
- preparatory activities required to undertake future capital extension or major replacement activities, including pilot projects and design activities
- project wind-up, if any project is identified for defunding outside the NCRIS 2015 funding period.

NCRIS 2015 funds **may not** be used for lead agent administrative activities that are not directly applicable to the operation of the project, unless the lead agent's primary role is the management of an NCRIS project. Specifically, this includes on costs such as information technology, human resources, accounting, legal overhead, depreciation or other routine expenses for universities or publicly funded research agencies.

4.5 Scope of projects

The Department may, at its discretion, decide the scope of activities to be undertaken by a project. This may include any funding not allocated to projects in accordance with Section 6. This decision will be made by the programme delegate.

5 Eligibility

5.1 Eligibility criteria

To be eligible to receive funding under NCRIS 2015, a project must satisfy one of the following three criteria:

- Funding has been received under NCRIS 2013 and an NCRIS 2013 funding agreement is in place with the Department at the date of approval of these guidelines.
- The project will fund Australia's associate membership to the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in 2015 (see 5.1.1).
- The project has been approved for funding by the Minister for Education and Training on the basis of its contribution to the Australian research system by providing open, merit-based access to quality research infrastructure.

5.1.1 European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) Associate Membership

On 6 November 2013 the Australian Government signed a government-to-government agreement to extend Australia's Associate Membership to the European Molecular Biology Laboratory. Funding for the 2015 membership fee will be provided from the NCRIS 2015 funding allocation through the EMBL Australia consortium. This funding allocation will take the place of any funding the EMBL Australia project may be allocated in Section 6.2.

5.2 Assessment of eligibility

All eligible projects will be informed of their eligibility by the Department. Assessment of eligibility will be undertaken by the Department immediately following the release of these guidelines.

Projects should not submit any information in relation to eligibility for NCRIS 2015 funds.

6 Funding allocation process

6.1 Use of funding allocation model

Funding under NCRIS 2015 will be determined using a funding allocation formula. The process to finalise funding amounts includes:

1. Allocation of funding to Australia's 2015 EMBL Associate Membership Fee, to be determined on 1 July 2015¹.
 - a. This allocation does not create any obligation on the Australian Government in relation to later year funding for any EMBL Associate Membership fee through the NCRIS programme.
2. Calculation of indicative funding amounts using a formula (see Section 6.2). Projects advised.
3. Consultation by Lead Agents with relevant stakeholders to develop proposed 2015-16 business plan by Lead Agents. A template for the business plan is provided at Attachment B.
4. Agreement between the Department and Lead Agent on the 2015-16 business plan.
5. Final funding amount to each project agreed and formally approved by Department.
6. NCRIS 2013 funding agreements varied as required, and, subsequently, project implementation and management.

6.2 Indicative funding allocation model

The intent of the NCRIS 2015 funding allocation model is to provide projects with the funding necessary to continue the operation of research infrastructure from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. The allocation of funding is based on three core principles:

1. For the period 1 July 2015 – 30 June 2016, in line with the operational funding principle established in the NCRIS 2013 funding programme and based on OECD guidance^[1], each project will receive approximately 10 percent of their establishment cost as its operational budget;
2. To smooth any adjustment at the project level,
 - a. the minimum amount any project will receive is the indexed value of the average of the annual Australian Government funding it received under the Collaborative Research Infrastructure Scheme (CRIS) and the NCRIS 2013 funding allocation, and
 - b. the maximum increase any project will receive is 150% of the average of the annual Australian Government funding it received under the Collaborative Research Infrastructure Scheme (CRIS) and the NCRIS 2013 funding allocation;
3. The maintenance of a contingency provision to allow for any necessary, urgent or high priority allocations.

The formula to determine the indicative funding allocation for each project is:

$$\text{Project NCRIS 2015 funding} = \text{Project establishment cost} \times \text{Annual CPI} \times \text{Allocation share}$$

Where project establishment cost is defined as the total funding the project has received from the Australian Government under NCRIS 2006 and the Super Science Initiative. Consistent with the NCRIS 2013 formula, NCRIS 2006 funding will be weighted by a factor of 1.5.

¹ A maximum of €2.603 million will be allocated to this purpose, calculated in Australian dollars on 1 July 2015.

^[1] Establishing Large International Research Infrastructures: Issues and Options (2010) OECD-GSF.
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/22/47027330.pdf>

The allocation share will be capped at 10% but may be reduced to ensure the total spend does not exceed the available funds.

6.3 Determining funding under allocation model

6.3.1 Consultation

Once an indicative funding allocation has been calculated, the Lead Agent for each eligible project will be:

- informed by the Department of the project's indicative funding allocation
- informed by the Department of matters to be addressed arising from project evaluations conducted in 2014
- required to consult with project partners and its user community as to how to best utilise the funding
- required to develop and propose to the Department a 2015-16 business plan that sets out how the funding would be utilised in line with these Programme Guidelines. A template for the business plan is provided at Attachment B.

6.4 Provision of funding

Funds will be provided to Lead Agents against agreed milestones set out in a funding agreement between the Department and the Lead Agent. Milestones can be expected to include:

- Provision of a business plan
- A mid-term report against the business plan
- Participation in the annual NCRIS survey
- Provision of final report against the business plan.

6.5 Publishing the outcomes of the funding allocation model

In line with the Commonwealth Grants Guidelines, the Department will publish a complete list of final funding amounts under NCRIS 2015 on its website at www.education.gov.au.

6.6 Minister

The NCRIS programme is administered by the Minister for Education and Training. The Minister is responsible for:

- determining the objectives of the NCRIS programme
- approving the eligibility criteria for the NCRIS programme
- approving the funding allocation mechanism for the NCRIS programme
- issuing programme guidelines.

6.7 Department

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training will:

- provide advice to the Minister
- deal fairly with Lead Agents and their nominated representatives
- conduct the development, implementation and administration of NCRIS 2015, including application of the eligibility criteria, determining initial allocations and final funding allocations
- undertake project or programme-level evaluations
- approve funding amounts and payments

- negotiate, monitor and manage funding agreements for funded projects
- support the review of research infrastructure.

6.8 Lead Agents

Lead Agents are the organisations that the Department has executed a funding agreement with for a specific project. Lead Agents and their nominated representatives will:

- deal fairly with the Department and its stakeholders
- be responsible for the delivery of the project
- consult with relevant stakeholders, particularly governance and management partners and project participants and subcontractors
- deal fairly with governance and management partners and project participants and subcontractors.

7 Funding Arrangements

7.1 Conditions of Funding

Funding is provided in accordance with and subject to the requirements outlined in the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act)* and its associated regulations.

In addition to the project outcomes the following are some key conditions that may be included in the agreements:

- Funding must be spent within agreed timeframes set out in the funding or project agreements.
- Research infrastructure funded through this programme must be operated in a national, collaborative manner consistent with the NCRIS Principles at Attachment A.
- Projects must have an access and pricing policy for the research infrastructure funded under this programme.
- Funding can only be expended on operational and maintenance costs as detailed in section 4.4 of the programme guidelines.
- All Commonwealth monies must be placed in a high interest bearing account where feasible and interest earned must be both expended on the project and reported to the Department.
- The distribution of financial benefits arising from the projects will be clearly documented.
- Funding recipients will be required to participate in project level evaluations and report at regular intervals.
- The grant must be spent in accordance with the conditions of the funding agreement.
- Any unexpended funds including interest accrued on grant monies at the end of the project are to be returned to the Commonwealth.

The list above is indicative only and is not intended to be exhaustive. In finalising the terms of the funding agreement, the funding agreement takes precedence if it is inconsistent with these Guidelines.

7.2 Performance Reporting

7.2.1 Programme level reporting

Projects receiving funding will be required to report against performance indicators for the NCRIS programme stipulated by the Department. These indicators may include, but are not limited to:

- effectiveness of financial, administrative and governance arrangements
- infrastructure usage and other output measures
- impacts of all types, including outreach, industry and international engagement and where appropriate commercial outcomes.

A template for programme level reporting is provided at Attachment C.

7.2.2 Project level reporting

Monitoring and reporting requirements will be specified in the funding agreement.

Grant recipients will be required to provide a mid-year progress report and a final report on the conduct of the project as specified in the funding agreement. Grant recipients are required to take a risk-management based approach to project management and at other times advise the programme delegate if they are experiencing significant issues.

Reports will, among other things, detail project outcomes, short and long-term benefits/gains (quantitative and qualitative) and overall financial performance. This will support any evaluation of the overall benefits delivered by the project and in turn the programme. The Department may select institutions or funded projects for site visits and/or programme audits.

7.3 Variations to funding agreements

Requests to vary the funding agreement (for example, extensions to a project's timeframe or changes in scope) must be made to the programme delegate in writing specified in the relevant agreement. Approval of variations to a funding agreement is at the discretion of the programme delegate. All variations to agreements would be by written agreement of the parties.

7.4 Goods and Services Tax (GST)

The total funding payable to the funding recipient by the Commonwealth does not generally include an amount to cover GST. Applicants are advised to consider the likely implications of the *A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999* (GST Act) on the funding provided by the Commonwealth.

Applicants are encouraged to seek their own advice on the treatment of funding under the agreement.

Where GST is payable, the Commonwealth will increase the funds payable to the funding recipient by the amount of GST that is payable for the purposes of the GST Act. For example, if payment due at a particular milestone is \$1.0 million and GST is payable on this amount, then the Commonwealth will increase the payment amount provided to the funding recipient to \$1.1 million.

8 Additional Information

8.1 Freedom of Information

All documents in the possession of the Department of Education and Training with regard to NCRIS are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 ("FOI Act"). Additional information can be found at:

<https://education.gov.au/freedom-information-0>

8.2 The *Privacy Act 1988*

The Department is bound in administering the NCRIS 2015 programme by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988*. Schedule 1 of the Privacy Act contains the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) which prescribe the rules for handling personal information. Additional information can be found at:

<https://www.education.gov.au/condensed-privacy-policy>

8.3 Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest arises where a person makes a decision or exercises a power in a way that may be, or may be perceived to be, influenced by either material personal interest (financial or non-financial) or material personal associations.

Department and Agency staff are bound by the Department's Conflict of Interest and Insider Trading policy available at www.education.gov.au.

Notified conflicts of interest will be recorded by the Department. For funding recipients with a noted conflict of interest, the conflict of interest will be managed through the negotiation of the Funding Agreement.

8.4 Review of decisions and external review

In the first instance, if an applicant is dissatisfied with the way their funding allocation was dealt with, they should set out their concerns in writing and send them to:

Group Manager
Research and Strategy Group
Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601

If, subsequent to consideration by the Group Manager, Research and Strategy Group, an applicant is dissatisfied with the way their application was dealt with by the Department, they can approach the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office for external review of the administrative actions of the Department.

Applicants may be able to seek judicial review of decisions under the *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977* or the common law, and should seek their own advice in relation to this.

8.5 Web-based reporting of grants

Within 14 days of execution of a Funding Agreement with the Commonwealth, the Department will report details regarding the award of each grant on its website, as per the requirements of *Finance Circular 2013/02: Grants - Reporting Requirements*.

8.6 Further Information

Information on NCRIS and other research infrastructure funding programs is available on the Department's website - <http://education.gov.au/national-collaborative-research-infrastructure>

8.7 Attachments

8.7.1 ATTACHMENT A: NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY PRINCIPLES

The key principles underpinning NCRIS are that:

- Australia's investment in research infrastructure should be planned and developed with the aim of maximising the contributions of the R&D system to economic development, national security, social wellbeing and environmental sustainability
- infrastructure resources should be focussed in areas where Australia is, or has the potential to be, world-class (in both discovery and application driven research) and provide international leadership
- major infrastructure should be developed on a collaborative, national, nonexclusive basis. Infrastructure funded through NCRIS should serve the research and innovation system broadly, not just the host/funded institutions. Funding and eligibility rules should encourage collaboration and coinvestment. It should not be the function of NCRIS to support institutional level (or even small-scale collaborative) infrastructure
- access is a critical issue in the drive to optimise Australia's research infrastructure. In terms of NCRIS funding there should be as few barriers as possible to accessing major infrastructure for those undertaking meritorious research
- due regard be given to the whole-of-life costs of major infrastructure, with funding available for operational costs where appropriate
- the Strategy should seek to enable the fuller participation of Australian researchers in the international research system
- enable Government initiatives which seek to maximise opportunities for industry engagement and commercialisation of research.

8.7.2 ATTACHMENT B: TEMPLATE FOR 2015-16 ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN

The purpose of the Annual Business Plan is to provide a succinct summary of the activities for the period 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. It is expected that the business plan will be no more than five pages.

Each annual business plan must include:

- (i) An outline of governance and management arrangements
- (ii) Descriptions of each of the project's major components
- (iii) A minimum of one target performance measure and associated achievement level for each project component
- (iv) A summary of expected expenses for each major component:
 - operation, management and governance costs
 - salaries and on-costs for technical staff
 - infrastructure maintenance
 - utilities
 - rent
 - consumables
 - international
 - industry engagement and outreach
 - other
- (v) An overall accounting for the total funding provided under NCRIS showing the amounts to be used for major components and the amounts allocated to smaller projects.

In any confidential information is provided, it is to be clearly identified as such and presented in a separate attachment.

DECLARATION

I confirm that the information in this report is true and correct to the best of my knowledge following due investigation.

..... / /2015
Signed

.....
Name

.....
Position

8.7.3 ATTACHMENT C: TEMPLATE FOR NCRIS PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE DATA REPORTS

The purpose of this template is to enable the aggregation of data from individual NCRIS projects to demonstrate the performance of the NCRIS programme.

Please provide the following information, where relevant:

Effectiveness of financial, administrative and governance arrangements

- Co-investment data, including amount and source
- Philanthropic donations
- Number and nature of any qualified audit findings
- List of all collaborative delivery arrangements
- Number and nature of external consultative mechanisms
- Project employment breakdown by employment category and geographical location
- Number of governance body meetings

Infrastructure usage and other output measures

- User numbers
- Breakdown of user numbers by host and other institutions
- User institution summary
- Utilisation rates
- Unmet demand measures and levels

Impacts of all types, including outreach, industry and international engagement, and, where appropriate, commercial outcomes

- Number and types of publications
- List of outreach activities by key audience
- List of all industry engagement activities
- List of all international engagement activities
- Number and types of commercial outcomes
- List of contributions to the achievement of Australian Government policy objectives

DECLARATION

I confirm that the information in this report is true and correct to the best of my knowledge following due investigation.

..... / /2015
Signed

..... Name
Position