



Australian Government

**Community
Grants Hub**
Improving your grant experience



Australian Biological Resources Study National Taxonomy Research Grant Program

General feedback for applicants

Summary

The grant round for the Australian Biological Resources Study National Taxonomy Research Grant Program received 58 eligible applications. After assessment, 17 were selected for funding, totalling \$2,178,783.20 (GST inclusive).

It was excellent to see the interest shown by stakeholders in the program and successful applications were of a high standard.

The selected applicants provided strong, well-written responses to all the assessment criteria. The proposed activities were eligible, appropriate and effective to achieve the program outcomes and demonstrated their suitability for public funding and value for money.

The Feedback provides all organisations with easy access to information about the grant selection process and the main strength and areas for improving applications.

Program overview

The program aims to provide grants for research into taxonomy and systematics and to support the training and/or recruitment of taxonomists, which contributes towards both the department and the broader Australia's National Science Statement.

The program is the only grant program in Australia that is targeted towards the support of research into taxonomy. Grants are awarded for projects with the primary aim of undertaking research into the taxonomy of the Australian biota. Grants are to support both early and established career researchers to undertake research projects, including Postdoctoral Fellows.

Grants are also available to support tertiary students studying taxonomy, including Honours Scholarships, Masters Scholarships and PhD Scholarship Support Grants for PhD students. Non-salaried Researcher Grants are also available to allow the completion of projects by non-salaried researchers.

The program is administered by the Department of Social Services' Community Grants Hub (the Hub), on behalf of Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) under a Whole of Australian Government initiative to streamline grant processes across agencies.

Selection process

An open competitive selection process was undertaken to select a range of quality projects from a variety of organisations.

Applications were screened for eligibility and compliance against the requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines (GOG).

The Hub/DAWE undertook preliminary assessment to determine eligibility and compliance of applications.

The outcome of the preliminary assessment was provided to the Selection Advisory Panel (SAP)/assessment panel. The SAP comprised seven members with expertise and knowledge of the policy, program delivery and industry of the grant; further considered the applications and made funding recommendations to the decision maker.

To do this, the Selection Advisory Panel considered:

- how well applications scored against the assessment criteria
- the relative merit of an application compared to other applications focussed on the program outcome(s), including overall value for money
- the distribution of projects across Australia
- the range of eligible applicant types.

Final approval of projects was made by the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Sussan Ley MP.

General feedback for applicants

Successful applicants proposed activities that were eligible, appropriate and considered effective for achieving the program objectives. They demonstrated their suitability for public funding, value for money and met the requirements outlined in the GOG. Applications included strong responses to all of the assessment criteria.

The feedback is based on the information provided by the assessment team and SAP during the funding round as well as experience from other funding rounds.

Writing and providing details

Applications should clearly and concisely address the selection criteria. It is difficult to assess poorly written and verbose applications, so careful editing is advised. The use of sub-headings and dot points can also assist to improve the readability of applications.

A number of applicants did not effectively utilise the word limits in their applications, providing too much background information but not enough detail on the proposed project. Low scoring applications often lacked sufficient detail to describe:

- *need for the grant activity* – applications that provided limited or no details about the need of project activities generally did not score well. Assessors need to be able to determine from the application why the proposed activity is needed and how it will address the need. Placing the proposed research questions in a broader context of why the work is important or necessary helps assessors understand the relevance of the proposal. Higher scoring applications provided evidence to demonstrate need of the activity and explain how this would address the need.
- *project effectiveness* – applications that did not clearly determine the effectiveness of project to achieve the program outcomes did not score well. Applications that provided measured contribution to the achievements and showed how much the project will achieve the program outcomes were generally well rated by assessors. Higher scoring applications clearly articulated the project effectiveness and how this would contribute to program outcomes.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to double-check that all required attachments are provided, and that each attachment adheres to the specified limits, e.g., CVs should be no longer than four pages.

Contribution towards program outcomes

To be awarded funding, applications needed to clearly demonstrate that the project would deliver the program objectives.

In general, many unsuccessful applications did not sufficiently demonstrate how their project would contribute to program outcomes, with some projects seeming to have limited relevance to the program. In particular, in order to improve a project's relevance with the program, applicants should consider:

- checking the GOG to ensure that the proposed project is a good fit for the program
- ensuring that the application clearly demonstrates how the proposed project meets the program outcomes and links project activities to the project outcomes
- justifying the methods approach and clearly articulating the outputs of the project.



Capacity to deliver

Unsuccessful applicants commonly did not strongly demonstrate that they have the capacity to successfully deliver the project. To rank highly, applicants should:

- demonstrate their ability to manage Commonwealth and/or state government grant funding responsibly and effectively
- include a strong focus on the capability to engage relevant expertise, including any technical expertise, required to achieve positive outcomes for all stakeholders
- clearly articulate how they will measure outputs, outcomes and progress towards achieving the objectives of the grant opportunity.

Criteria specific feedback

Criterion 1 – Relevance of the project to ABRS and taxonomic science

Component	Example
Addressing ABRS Research Priorities	Provide specific links with proposed research outputs and outcomes against the ABRS Research Priorities, as it shows that applicants have understood how their projects fit within the priorities. Examples of how project outputs and outcomes will contribute to those priorities is also encouraged, as it displays deeper understanding of how the research is placed in a broader context in the field of taxonomy and systematics.
Benefiting ABRS resources and products	Providing examples of how the proposed research will benefit ABRS resources and products demonstrates an understanding of what ABRS is and does. Note that the Atlas of Living Australia IS NOT a product of the ABRS. Applicants that showed a clear understanding of how their work will link in with ABRS priorities and products generally scored higher than those which only provided limited detail, or no understanding of ABRS resources.
Adequately contributing the taxonomy and/or systematics research	Projects with a strong, clear focus on taxonomic and/or systematics ranked higher than those which did not. Applications that ranked lower included research foci on molecular biology (with limited demonstrable links to systematics), ecology or similar fields where the taxonomic and/or systematics components of the project was minimal.
Science of good quality	Evidence of solid outputs to benefit the field of taxonomy and/or systematics were highly regarded. The overall size of the expected contributions was considered against the amount of funding requested. Projects with budgets in line with their expected outputs were well-regarded.



Criterion 2 – Feasibility of proposed research project

Component	Example
Budget appropriate and represent good value	For fixed-budget projects, assessors looked for evidence of value for money in the kinds of resources sought. For variable-budget projects (research grants, early career researcher grants and non-salaried researcher grants), highly ranked projects were those that requested a budget that was proportional to their expected outputs and outcomes.
Project outcomes adequately addressed	Articulation of detailed outputs (e.g., explaining in which each component of the overall project will be submitted for publication), rather than vague statements (e.g., results will be published in peer-reviewed journals) showed that the applicants had given sufficient thought to the design and communications outcomes for the project.
Methods and activity appropriate for project success	Methods were scrutinised carefully to evaluate whether they were appropriate for achieving the aims and outputs listed in the project. The complement of personnel on a project was considered as part of this process to determine if the required expertise for conducting the methods and experiments was contained within the investigator team.
Realistic timeframe	Projects that presented realistic timeframes for their outputs were regarded more highly than those which appeared to overreach in their predicted outputs for the time and resources available.



Criterion 3 – Capacity of researchers and/or institutions to deliver (research, early career research and postdoctoral research grants only)

Component	Example
Appropriate experience of investigators	Projects should include enough personnel to complete the research efficiently. Assessors sought to understand the expertise of the team proposed against conducting methods/experiments and achieving the predicted outputs.
Track record	Good evidence of ability to, or potential for, achieving the outcomes of the research project is critical for a project to be ranked highly. Assessors examine the CV and publications outputs of investigators to determine if the personnel listed have the capability to deliver the outputs and outcomes of the project. For early career researchers and postdoctoral researchers, track records are assessed relative to opportunity, and the support of the joint investigators and other personnel attached to the project to provide guidance and support is considered.



Criterion 3 – Capacity of researchers and/or institutions to deliver (honours, masters, PhD, non-salaried researcher grants only)

Component	Example
Student or researcher with sufficient experience/expertise	Students are assessed based on their track record, and whether they display the capability to perform at the level of study requested for funding. A key aspect of this capability is the expertise of the supervisor(s), who will direct and mentor the student. Track record and evidence of success in the field of the supervisor(s) is considered in judging whether the project outcomes are likely to be achieved. Non-salaried researchers are assessed on their track record relative to opportunity, and whether that demonstrates they have the ability to conduct the proposed project.
Appropriate access to institutional resources	There should be sufficient evidence from the application to show that the entire project is able to be completed. Access to appropriate lab and/or field facilities must be explained, and the provision of equipment, materials and associated costs must be considered.