Expression of Interest for AAL Funding Opportunities

## Governance and Management Arrangements

# Astronomy Australia Limited

The Astronomy National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) project is managed by Astronomy Australia Limited (AAL). AAL is a public not-for-profit company established for the purpose of liaising with the Australian astronomical community and managing investments in world-class astronomy infrastructure to enable Australia to continue performing high-impact research and developing cutting-edge technologies. AAL represents the broad Australian astronomy community, and its members comprise every institution in Australia with a significant astronomy research program.

AAL’s investment strategy is guided by the Australian Astronomy Decadal Plan 2016-2025 and its Mid Term Review, documents produced by the National Committee for Astronomy based on the reports of 11 working groups, comprising over 150 astronomers, engineers, and educators from over 30 Australian institutions. Once AAL has received funding from NCRIS, this is directed toward a variety of projects/facilities as advised by the AAL Board of Directors and its Advisory Committees.

AAL is proactive in looking for opportunities that fit in with the goals of the Decadal Plan and welcomes submissions or project funding proposals from members of the Australian astronomy community that comply with the NCRIS Eligibility Criteria listed below.

# NCRIS Eligibility Criteria

In addition to the [NCRIS criteria](https://www.education.gov.au/national-research-infrastructure/resources/national-collaborative-research-infrastructure-strategy-2021-guidelines) specified by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, AAL considers the following when deciding the allocation of NCRIS funding:

*Does the investment opportunity address a research infrastructure recommendation of the Decadal Plan?*

* **No** – AAL will not engage with the project.
* **Yes (priority recommendation)** – AAL will proactively seek funding to support the project, with due consideration of any other major funding allocations managed by other organisations.
* **Yes (tier 2 recommendation)** – AAL will use the following items as a guide when considering supporting the project:

1. The number of institutions supported by the infrastructure.
2. The number of (named) active users.
3. The unique benefit(s) from AAL involvement.
4. The risks associated with the facility.
5. Access arrangements for the wider community.
6. The Australian outputs – publications, industry collaborations, contracts and other impacts of the facility, expected due to AAL support.
7. Alignment with the Decadal Plan and with AAL’s goal to provide the best research infrastructure for Australian-based astronomers.
8. Identification of a pathway (for new projects), or progress (for existing projects), toward a strategic international partnership involving wide representation across the Australian astronomy community.
9. Identification of a pathway (for new projects) or progress (for existing projects) toward future sustainable funding that moves beyond small “seed funding” awards from AAL.
10. The level of university-level cash matching is to be included in the plan for projects at a scale where university-level funding is appropriate.
11. Demonstration that the level of funding requested, and the identified role for AAL, aligns with AAL’s vision and mission.

# AAL’s Assessment Process

AAL receives funding requests from a number of channels (or sponsors) including though government departments, research centres for excellence (e.g. LSST, eROSITA, ACAMAR) and AAL member representatives, committee members and staff members.

Following a call for proposals from AAL, proposers will complete a short Expression of Interest by completing the submissions template below, ensuring that all of the outlined considerations are adequately addressed. This should be submitted to AAL within the required timeframe. AAL will then use the following four-step process to systematically and transparently assess investment opportunities and requests for AAL support:

* **Initial triage** – an initial triage is performed to eliminate requests that very obviously fall beyond the scope of the Astronomy NCRIS program. Successful opportunities are assigned a program manager to manage their further assessment.
* **Scoping and assessment** – the assigned program manager will have quality assurance responsibility over the proposed submission and will work with the proposer to ensure that quantitative data is accurate where possible, and qualitative statements are supportable.
* **Review** – the relevant AAL technical committee is asked to review the opportunity based on the submission. The committee can choose to recommend the opportunity to the board without alteration, determine to the board that the opportunity is not appropriate for AAL to support, or recommend that the submission be revised and returned to the committee for a second review.
* **Approval** – the submission is put to the board along with the recommendation of the technical committee.

## Submission Guidelines

To be successful, a submission must adequately address the NCRIS eligibly criteria outlined above. The following submission template has been prepared to assist proposers with this. A template submission demonstrating an appropriate level of detail is given in the Appendix.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Expression of Interest – Submission Guidelines (max 2 pages)** | **Check Box** |
| Project Title |  |
| Project Proposer and Institution |  |
| Co Investigators and Institutions |  |
| Brief summary of proposed project including access requirements (to infrastructure, computing resources, specialist personnel etc.). |  |
| Expected start date and duration of project. |  |
| Estimate of seed investment required incl. high level mini budget |  |
| Does the investment opportunity address a research infrastructure recommendation  of the Decadal Plan? |  |
| The unique benefit(s) from AAL involvement (e.g. project advice, funding). |  |
| Access potential for the wider community. |  |
| The Australian outputs expected – publications, industry collaborations, contracts and other potential impacts of the project. |  |
| Alignment with the Decadal Plan and with AAL’s goal to provide the best  research infrastructure for Australian-based astronomers. |  |
| Where appropriate, identification of a pathway to a strategic international partnership involving wide representation across the Australian astronomy community. |  |
| Identification of a pathway to future sustainable funding that moves beyond  small “seed funding” awards from AAL. |  |
| The level of university-level cash matching is to be included in the plan for projects  at a scale where university-level funding is appropriate. |  |
| Demonstration that the level of funding requested, and the identified role for AAL,  aligns with AAL’s vision and mission. |  |

## Appendix: Template Submission

#### Project Title

xxx

#### Project Proposer and Institution

xxx

#### Co Investigators and Institutions

xxx

#### Brief summary of proposed project including access requirements (to infrastructure, computing resources, specialist personnel etc.).

The aim of the project is [x,y,z]. This project is dependent on the construction of [x] facility and the engagement of [y] organisation.

#### Expected start date and duration of project.

xxx

#### Estimate of seed investment required incl. high level mini budget

Estimate of seed investment required is $x over a x-month period starting ddmmyy:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Planned expenditure** | **$** | **Timing** |
| Salaries | X | X |
| Other operating costs | Y | Y |
| Capital expenditure | Z | Z |

#### 

#### Does the investment opportunity address a research infrastructure recommendation of the Decadal Plan?

Yes. The project aligns with a tier 2 recommendation of the Decadal Plan and addresses [x] of the six key science questions listed in the Decadal Plan:

* Q1) How did the first starts and galaxies transform the Universe?
* Q2) What is the nature of dark matter and dark energy?
* Q3) How do galaxies form and evolve across cosmic time?
* Q4) How do stars and planets form?
* Q5) How are elements produced by stars and recycled through galaxies?
* Q6) What is the nature of matter and gravity at extreme densities?

#### The number of (named) participants.

[x] Australian institutions form the group responsible for directing the science goals of this project. In addition, data and expertise gained from this project will be useful to researchers at the following institutions: [x], [y], [z]. The group currently comprises [x] scientists, [x] students, [x] support staff member and [x] technicians.

#### The unique benefit(s) from AAL involvement (e.g. project advice, funding).

As an organisation that represents the interests of Australian astronomy, AAL funds support both membership of/subscription to [x] and participation in the project.

#### Access potential for the wider community.

Full access is available to members. Other Australian astronomers involved in direct collaboration may also have access to certain aspects of the project including data products.

#### The Australian outputs expected – publications, industry collaborations, contracts and other potential impacts of the project.

Once the project commences there will be opportunities for other Australian astronomers to make in-kind contributions to the project, with work undertaken either by universities, or the private sector. Publication of results and findings in scientific journals is anticipated following completion of this stage of the project.

#### Alignment with the Decadal Plan and with AAL’s goal to provide the best research infrastructure for Australian-based astronomers.

The project is in clear alignment with Australia’s strategy to move towards involvement in larger scale international observatories.

#### Where appropriate, identification of a pathway to a strategic international partnership involving wide representation across the Australian astronomy community.

The project has held regular open meetings across Australia and guest speakers from beyond the group are invited to speak on topics of common interest to the broader Australian community.

*or*

The project has no intentions of growing to be a large-scale investment but does represent substantial opportunity at modest investment.

#### Identification of a pathway to future sustainable funding that moves beyond small “seed funding” awards from AAL.

The project is looking for an ongoing commitment from AAL to cover membership costs. Once this stage of the project is completed, it is anticipated that subsequent funding will be obtained from [x].

#### The level of university-level cash matching is to be included in the plan for projects at a scale where university-level funding is appropriate.

A LIEF grant has been awarded to the project. The involved Australian institutions also make cash contributions of the order of $x per year to the LIEF grant.

#### Demonstration that the level of funding requested, and the identified role for AAL, aligns with AAL’s vision and mission.

AAL's identified role is to be Australia's representative on the project, a role that aligns with its function as a national body representing the interests of Australian astronomy. The requested funding includes support for the [x] scientists to engage with the Australian astronomical community.