Applied Research Grant Program Guidelines

1 October 2025

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Introduction

The Clean Energy Skills National Centre of Excellence (CESNCE) is Australia's first TAFE-led national hub dedicated to clean energy training. A joint initiative of the State and Commonwealth governments, the object of the CESNCE is to encourage, foster, promote and facilitate the development of Western Australia's (WA) training systems to provide for the clean energy workforce. This initiative enables WA to meet its obligations under national arrangements related to clean energy workforce development.

Guidelines

The CESNCE Applied Research Grant Guidelines (Guidelines) outline the application process, and the following should be noted:

- The Department of Training and Workforce Development (the Department) is responsible for administering the CESNCE and its grants on behalf of the State.

- The Department administers a standard form of Terms and Conditions that are incorporated into individual Grant Agreements (Agreement).

- These Guidelines should be read in conjunction with any funding announcements or updates from the State.

- These Guidelines and any discussions with CESNCE staff are for informational purposes only and do not constitute advice.

- These Guidelines may be varied or revoked at any time.

Financial Assistance

Successful applicant to the CESNCE's Applied Research Grant will be eligible for financial assistance in the form of a grant, per section 9(2)(e) of the *Vocational Education and Training Act 1996*, subject to an Agreement.

Grant Agreement

The amount of financial assistance made available to a successful applicant will be based on the submitted application and proportionate an assessment of value for money.

Grants of up to $350,000 per application may be awarded. The CESNCE reserves the right to consider applications exceeding this amount. A total of $1,500,000 has been allocated for this funding round.

Successful applications will be governed by an Agreement, including key milestones. The maximum term of the Agreement is 24 months.

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The Clean Energy Skills National Centre of Excellence is a joint initiative between the Australian and Western Australian governments under the National Skills Agreement.

Funding

Funding will only be provided for costs deemed eligible by CESNCE. Ineligible costs will not be funded unless explicitly agreed to and included in the Agreement. Notification of a successful application does not imply acceptance of all declared costs.

Eligible Costs

The following costs are generally be considered eligible:

- New capital or asset expenditure necessary for project delivery;

- Salaries and wages for staff directly involved in the project;

- Expenditure incurred after the project commencement date and aligned with these Guidelines; and

- Costs paid to related entities of the applicant or project partners;

Ineligible Costs

The following will generally be considered ineligible unless otherwise agreed by the CESNCE and contracted under the Agreement, noting the list is not exhaustive:

- In-kind contributions;

- Expenditure incurred prior to the project commencement date;

- Statutory fees, charges and costs related to regulatory or development approvals;

- Ongoing business operational costs;

- Staffing costs not directly related to project implementation;

- Costs not incurred in the responsible delivery of the project.

CESNCE Applied Research Grant

Applied Research

For the purposes of this grant, Applied Research is defined as:

> *An original investigation undertaken to generate new knowledge with a defined, practical purpose.*

Applicants must address one or more of the following targeted problem statements through the development and evaluation of programs, prototypes, or conceptual models ready for piloting or testing.

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1. **Remote and Distributed learning**

   WA's unique population and industry distribution, combined with challenges attracting skilled workers and vocational educators presents opportunities for enhancing the equitable access of the regionally based community to training and work opportunities in the clean energy transition.

   Applications may explore, but are not limited to:

   1. Training solutions leveraging remote control technologies and associated pedagogies from other sectors;
   2. Adoption and adaptation of global best practices in remote monitoring, real-time interaction, digital learning platforms, digital twins, and immersive technologies for trade training; and/or
   3. Scalable, distributed, and digitally supported models incorporating simulated practical and experiential learning at the trade level.

2. **First nations – Learning on Country**

   It is essential that Aboriginal communities benefit from the clean energy investment pipeline. Research should support the development of digitally enabled, distributed vocational training models that allow Aboriginal peoples to access clean energy skills training close to home.

   Applications must demonstrate genuine engagement and partnership with Aboriginal communities in both the design and execution of the research.

   Applications may explore, but are not limited to:

   1. Embedding cultural safety and meaningful community engagement in training program design and delivery;

   2. Designing bi-cultural competency frameworks and pedagogies; and/or

   3. Delivering training in-community and/or on Country, with appropriate language translation and cultural context.

3. **Artificial Intelligence (AI) supported delivery and assessment**

   This category invites research into the use of Agentic AI to support lecturers in delivering training to a geographically dispersed, trade-focused learner base. Projects should align with learner-centred, adaptive approaches and comply with Standards for RTOs.

   Applications may address, but are not limited to:

   1) Enabling observation and assessment of practical tasks through AI-driven tools

   2) Adjusting learning sequences dynamically based on learner performance analytics

   3) Providing real-time, evidence-based feedback and guidance to learners

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4) Simulating working conditions that adapt in real-time to learner actions and predictive insights

5) Dynamically determining learner requirements to create a more inclusive and accessible learning environment

6) Assist lecturers in monitor a multi-location group working at different cadence levels and with diverse learning needs.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for consideration, all documentation must be submitted in English. Applicants must:

1) Be a WA TAFE College;

2) Partnership with one or more of the following:

- o An industry partner operating within the sector relevant to the applied research;

- o An Aboriginal community-controlled or Aboriginal-owned entity (mandatory for Category 2: First Nations – Learning on Country);

- o A Registered Training Organisation (RTO); and/or

- o An Australian university.

3) Address one or more of the Applied Research Problem Statements; and

4) Commit to adhering to the Australian Code for the *Responsible Conduct of Research 2018* and subsidiary documents, in addition to all ethical requirements of their institution.

Key considerations for applicants include:

- The TAFE College, as the primary applicant, must meet all eligibility criteria to be considered for shortlisting.

- Evidence of a formal arrangement between the TAFE and its partner(s) is required. This may include a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) outlining engagement details and financial or non-financial contributions.

- Multiple applications may be submitted, provided each relates to a distinct and separate project.

- The maximum term for the Agreement and funding provision is 24 months from the date of execution.

- Funding offers are conditional upon execution of an Agreement within three months of the grant award notification. Failure to do so may result in withdrawal of the funding offer.

Review Criteria

Applications will be assessed against the review criteria to evaluate:

- The significance of the project to Western Australia;

- The potential economic impact of the State's financial contribution;

- The alignment with CESNCE objectives and targeted problem statements;

- The strength and relevance of partnerships;

- The feasibility and scalability of the proposed solution;

- The demonstrated commitment to ethical research conduct.

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Assessment Criteria	Performance Description	Assessment Score	Application Score
Application quality and relevance to the objectives and expected outcomes of the CESNCE Funding Initiative (50%)	The **research application**: • is **very relevant** to the objective call; • is **highly feasible** and likely to achieve the desired outcomes; • has objectives that are **clear, logical, and well-developed** that advances the application of knowledge; • is **excellent** in design; • has **comprehensive** strategies for performance; measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed; • will provide **high-quality** evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the Funding Initiative; • is **very likely** to be translated into, or inform changes in, policy, curriculum design or training delivery.	< = 10	41 - 50%
	The **research application**: • is **relevant** to the objectives; • is **likely to be feasible;** • has objectives that are **clear** and **logical** that advances knowledge; • raises a **few minor concerns** with respect to the study design; • has **clear** strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed; • will provide **some high-quality** evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the Funding Initiative; • will likely be translated into, or inform changes in, policy, curriculum design or	< = 8	35 - 40%

	training delivery; • may result in influential publications.		
	The **research application**: • is **somewhat relevant** to the call; • raises **some concerns** regarding feasibility; • has objectives that are **clear** that advance knowledge; • raises **some concerns** regarding the study design; • has **some** strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed; • will provide **some evidence** that addresses the expected outcomes of the Funding Initiative; • is **not likely to be competitive** with similar research applications • may be translated into, or inform changes in, policy, curriculum design or training delivery; • may result in **some** strong or influential publications.	< = 6	25 - 30%
	The **research application**: • is **not particularly relevant** to the objective; • raises **several concerns** regarding feasibility; • is **somewhat unclear** in its objectives and potential to advance knowledge; • raises **several concerns** regarding the study design; • has **superficial** consideration of strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed; • may provide **limited** evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the Funding Initiative;	< = 4	15 - 20%

	- is **unlikely** to be translated into, or inform changes in, policy, curriculum design or training delivery; - may result in some **modestly** influential publications.		
	The **research application**: - contains a research plan that **does not seem to be feasible** and is **unlikely** to be successfully completed; - is **very unclear** in its objectives, and unlikely to advance knowledge; - contains a study design that is **not adequate;** - has **no** shared budget, **no** evidence of shared resources, **no** consideration of how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed; - is **not relevant** to the call; - is **not competitive** nationally or internationally; - is **very unlikely** to provide evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the Funding Initiative; - has **no potential** to be translated into changes in or inform policy, curriculum design or training delivery; - is **very unlikely** to result in influential publications.	< = 2	0 - 10%
Record of achievement of the project team in areas/disciplines relevant to the application (20%)	The **project team:** - has a track record that is **highly relevant** to the proposed research in depth and breadth; - has **all** the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes; - is **well networked** with domestic and/or international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	< = 10	18 - 20%
	The **project team:**	< = 8	14 - 16%

	• has a track record that is **very relevant** to the proposed research in depth and breadth; • has **most of** the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes; • is **networked** with domestic and/or international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.		
	The **project team:** • has a track record that is **consistent** with the proposed research in depth and breadth; • has **some** of the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes; • is **somewhat networked** with domestic and/or international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	< = 6	10 - 12%
	The **project team:** • has a **limited** track record in the field of the proposed research; • has **minimal** skills and expertise required to achieve the expected outcomes; • is **marginally networked** with domestic/and or international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	< = 4	6 - 8%
	The **project team:** • does **not have a relevant** track record in the field of the proposed research; • is **deficient in most** of the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes; • is **not networked** with domestic and/or international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	< = 2	0 - 4%
Critical stakeholder (e.g. TAFE, RTO, university,	The research application details **excellent,** relevant stakeholder involvement in: • its design	< = 10	13.5 - 15%

industry and/or community as required) activities embedded in the application (15%)	• the proposed research activities • communicating the outcomes to the participants.		
	The research application details **very good,** relevant stakeholder involvement in: • its design • the proposed research activities • communicating the outcomes to the participants.	< = 8	10.5 - 12%
	The research application details **a good level** of relevant stakeholder involvement in: • its design • the proposed research activities • communicating the outcomes to the participants.	< = 6	7.5 - 9%
	The research application details **unsatisfactory level** of relevant stakeholder involvement in: • its design • the proposed research activities • communicating the outcomes to the participants.	< = 4	4.5 - 6%
	The research application details **no** relevant stakeholder involvement in: • its design • the proposed research activities • communicating the outcomes to the participants.	< = 2	0 - 3%
Relevance and research impact for TAFEs, RTOs universities and industry (15%)	The research application: • is **very relevant** to the call objectives • is **excellent** in demonstrating how the research and potential outcomes meet the diverse needs of TAFEs, RTOs, universities, industry and the community with consideration of all relevant needs	< = 10	13.5 - 15%

	- will lead to **considerable** and **effective** gains across a broad range of groups - has potential outcomes that will have a **high impact** on improving understanding, service delivery or policy.		
	The research application: - is **relevant** to the call objectives - is **very good in demonstrating** how the research and potential outcomes meet the diverse needs of TAFEs, RTOs, universities, industry and the community with consideration of many relevant needs - will lead to **effective** gains across a broad range of groups - has potential outcomes that **will have an impact** on improving understanding, service delivery or policy.	< = 8	10.5 - 12%
	The research application: - is **somewhat relevant** to the call objectives - is **good in demonstrating** how the research and potential outcomes meet the diverse needs of TAFEs, RTOs, universities, industry and the community with consideration of some relevant needs - **may** lead to effective gains across a broad range of groups - has potential outcomes that **may have an impact** on improving understanding, services delivery or policy.	< = 6	7.5 - 9%
	The research application: - is **not adequately relevant** to the call objectives - is **deficient** in demonstrating how the research and potential outcomes meet the diverse needs of TAFEs, RTOs, universities, industry and the community with consideration to relevant needs - is **unlikely** to lead to any gains across a broad range of groups - has potential outcomes that are **unlikely to have an impact** on improving	< = 4	4.5 - 6%

	understanding, services delivery or policy.		
	The research application: • is **not relevant** to the call objectives • **does not** demonstrate how the research and potential outcomes meet the diverse needs of TAFEs, RTOs, universities, industry and the community with consideration of relevant needs • **will not** lead to any gains across a broad range of groups • has potential outcomes that **will not have an impact** on improving understanding, services delivery or policy.	< = 2	0 - 3%

Application Process

A single-stage process applies to this grant opportunity.

The application is the applicant's opportunity to demonstrate alignment with the CESNCE Problem Statements and the strategic interests of the Centre. Submissions must meet the eligibility criteria to be considered for funding. However, applications that do not meet all review criteria may still be considered if they demonstrate potential for high value returns to the State.

Applicants are required to acknowledge the key terms and conditions of the Agreement at the time of submission.

Notification of Outcomes
- Outcomes will be communicated via email to the designated contact listed in the application.
- Grant awards are conditional upon the signing of an Agreement between CESNCE, and the WA TAFE College associated with the application.
- All decisions throughout the process are at the sole discretion of the Department.

Further Information and Conditions

Media

All media enquiries or public announcements relating to the Applied Research Grant (the Grant) are coordinated and managed by the Department's Media team. Where possible, all media and communications about investments will be undertaken jointly with successful applicants.

Recipients must:

- Seek and obtain Departmental approval before making public statements or engaging with media regarding the grant;
- Provide the Department with at least 20 business days' notice of any proposed media event;
- Submit any proposed media or public statements to the Department for prior approval, and make any reasonable amendments requested.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Successful applicants will be required to cooperate with an evaluation that is undertaken during and/or after completion of the investment. Successful applicants will also be required to submit progress and completion reports, assess the progress of

the investment against milestones, outputs and outcomes, and provide evidence of completion.

Successful applicants may be required to contribute information on outcomes, including longer-term impacts beyond completion, for use in program evaluation reviews and marketing or media materials. It is the responsibility of successful applicants to put in place adequate collection arrangements to capture appropriate data relating to outputs and outcomes.

These arrangements will assist the State to undertake a robust evaluation of the Grant.

Freedom of Information, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

Applicants must treat all dealings with the State (including the Department) as confidential, except where disclosure is:

- Required by law;
- Made to advisors under an obligation of confidence;
- Permitted by the Department.

The State reserves the right to publicly disclose:

- Applicant names;
- General information about funded projects;
- Details of financial assistance and anticipated economic outcomes.

The Department is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1992* (WA), which provides a general right of access to records held by State agencies.
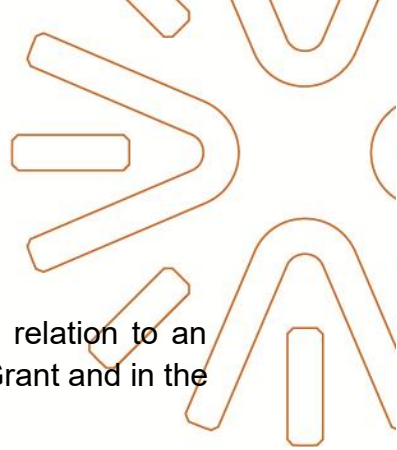
Information about financial assistance may be tabled in the WA Parliament, including:

- Recipient name;
- Amount of assistance;
- Project name and description.

Applicants should clearly identify any commercial-in-confidence material, noting that the following will be published for all successful applicants:

- Investment name;
- Primary applicant's name;
- Amount of assistance;
- Total grant amount;
- Brief project description.

The CESNCE may discuss applications with third parties if necessary for assessment purposes. Applicants should be aware that disclosure outside of State agencies may occur if required or authorised by law.

Privacy Statement

Information provided by applicants or collected by the Department in relation to an applicant or their application may be used in the administration of the Grant and in the assessment of their application.

The Department will store personal information collected in this Process, supporting documentation and any Grant administration, monitoring and evaluation activities in compliance with its obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles.

Intellectual Property

Any intellectual property rights that may exist in the application will remain the property of the applicant or the rightful owner of those intellectual property rights.

Any part of the application considered to contain any intellectual property rights should be clearly identified by the applicant. The applicant grants to the Department (and will ensure that relevant third parties grant) a permanent, non-exclusive, irrevocable licence to use, communicate and reproduce the intellectual property in the application for the purpose of administering the CESNCE excluding commercial use.

No Legal Relationship

These Guidelines, the submission of an application, and any communications between the applicant and the State does not create any legal relationship, an offer to enter any contract, or a process contract or any contract-like obligation between the applicant and the State.

Neither these Guidelines nor any other document shall create or give rise to any legal or equitable rights or obligations; such rights or obligations shall only come into being if and when a legally binding Agreement is formally executed between the applicant and the State.

Reservation of Rights

These Grant guidelines are approved under section 13 of the *Vocational Education and Training Act 1996*. The Department (inclusive of the State) reserves the right at its absolute discretion to administer the Grant in such manner as it sees fit and may:

- change the scope, structure, purpose, processes, procedures, terms of participation in and timing of the Process including any aspect of these Guidelines such as the eligibility and review criteria

- request additional information or clarification from any applicant or conduct due diligence as outlined in these Guidelines

- consider any information from its own and other sources (including State agencies or advisors)

- accept or reject any application, having regard to these Guidelines or any other matter which the State considers relevant, including limitations on the funds available under the Grant

- exercise a right, discretion, perform any act or omit to perform any act under these Guidelines

- terminate the participation of any applicant in the Process

- at its absolute discretion, exclude the relevant application from the assessment process at any time, if the applicant has made any false or misleading statements

- exclude an application from consideration where the Department believes it has been compiled using information improperly or unlawfully obtained from the department

- terminate or not proceed with the Grant in the manner outlined in these Guidelines, or at all.

Exclusion of Liability

Applicants are wholly responsible for their own costs and expenses whatsoever incurred in preparing their application and in any way associated with developing, preparing and submitting the application (irrespective of whether the application proceeds or is accepted or rejected).

Without limiting the above, the applicant releases the Department (including the State) from all liability in respect of the Process. The Department is not liable for any loss, expense, cost or damage incurred by the applicant in any way including, but not limited to:

- the preparation or submission of the application

- any exercise, or performance of, or failure of the Department to exercise or perform any rights, obligations, or duties under these Guidelines

- otherwise in connection with these Guidelines or the Process.

Ready to Apply?

If you are ready to apply:

1. Read this Guidelines document.

2. Read the Bilateral Implementation Plan and the National Skills Agreement

3. Look at the supplementary information, including the terms of the Agreement, on the CESNCE website.

4. Develop and submit your application through the steps listed on the wa.gov.au website.

If necessary, the CESNCE Grants and Programs team can be contacted at cesnce.grants@dtwd.wa.gov.au.

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