FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

National Intelligence Community (NIC) Research Program

National Intelligence Explore Award (NIEA) for funding commencing in 2027

Version 1 – Last Update: 28 October 2026

All participants should read the *Grant Guidelines for the National Intelligence Explore Award (NIEA) for funding commencing in 2027* (Grant Guidelines) available on GrantConnect and SmartyGrants (online grant application portal) as they contain important information for Research Office staff and individuals preparing applications.

Individuals should direct all queries to their Administering Organisation's Research Office (or equivalent). If further information regarding the NIEA is required, your Research Office should email NICRP@oni.gov.au.

Please ensure that your application is eligible in accordance with the NIEA Grant Guidelines.

This Frequently Asked Questions document will be updated as required.

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1 NIC Research Program updated grant: National Intelligence Explore Award (NIEA)

1.1 Are the NIPG and NIDG Grant programs still current and available?

No. The *National Intelligence Explore Award* (NIEA) replaces the *National Intelligence Discovery Grants* (NIDG) and the *National Intelligence Postdoctoral Grants* (NIPG) for NIC Research Program Round 7 (for funding commencing in 2027).

1.2 What are the key changes in the new NIEA?

- The NIEA is awarded to the Lead Chief Investigator (CI) who must be an Early-Mid Career Researcher (EMCR) that is less than 10 years since the award of their earliest PhD (including allowable career interruptions).
- The Lead CI must partner with at least one other CI.
- All CIs must be Australian citizens or New Zealand Special Category Visa holders (*previously Australian permanent residents were allowed*).
- If awarded, the NIEA must engage a PhD candidate who must be an Australian citizens, Australian Permanent Resident or New Zealand Special Category Visa holder.
- Partner Investigators (PIs) must be Australian, United Kingdom, Canadian, United States, New Zealand, Australian Permanent Residents or New Zealand Special Category Visa holders (*new addition of FVEYs citizens allowable for PIs*).
- Award is for up to $750K over 3 years.

2 Differences from ARC grant programs

2.1 Is the NIEA Program funded by the ARC?

No. The NIEA Program is funded by the *Office of National Intelligence* (ONI). It is not using any Australian Research Council (ARC) funding.

2.2 The ARC Policies only reference the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) and ARC funding, do they really apply?

Compliance with ARC Policies is detailed in the *NIEA Grant Guidelines* and the *NIEA Grant Agreement*.

2.3 Do NIEA applications or awarded grants count towards NCGP grant eligibility limits?

No. The NIEA Program applications and grants do not impact NCGP application or grant eligibility limits.

3 EOI Submission

3.1 Matters to note before completing the EOI form

An EOI must be prepared and submitted through SmartyGrants as a succinct but comprehensive summary of the proposed research. The EOI must contain all the information necessary for an assessment of the EOI without the need for further written or oral explanation, or reference to additional documentation including the internet. All details in the EOI must be current at the time of submission.

More information about SmartyGrants is available at - Applicant Help Site.

3.2 Can the Lead CI change roles from the EOI to full application?

No. The Lead CI named in the EOI application must remain the Lead CI in the full application. You will need to ensure that the Lead CI has the capacity to undertake the project as per the Grant Guidelines.

3.3 Should I include details of the project team in the project description of my EOI application?

The EOI one-page project description should provide details about the proposed project and how it will significantly advance the science, social science, engineering and technology area and be assessed with respect to fit to the Challenge or Research Topic selected. If successful, the full application will be assessed on academic merit.

Therefore, you do not need to provide project team details in the EOI. However, you may add information about the team in the EOI, if you believe this will help describe how the project will address a relevant Challenge or Research Topic.

3.4 Can the Lead CI be in a non-ongoing position at the time of EOI submission and bring a team together if the EOI is successful?

Yes. We do however recommend the Lead CI carefully consider the composition of their team prior to ensure project feasibility.

3.5 Will I get access to NIC data and information for my research?

No. The NIC Research Program does not provide or facilitate access to NIC data or information. The research is unclassified and data access should not rely in any part on NIC engagement.

4 Eligibility Criteria

4.1 Why do I have to provide passport or visa information for all Chief Investigators and Partner Investigators for Participant Eligibility? Where does this information go and for what purpose?

The Passport and Visa information entered enables the verification of Australian citizenship, Australian Permanent Residency or New Zealand Special Category Visa status of named participants on NIEA applications. Information will be checked with the document issuer or official record holder via third party systems for the purpose of identity and status confirmation.

4.2 My passport has or is due to expire. I am planning to apply for a new passport but for the purpose of citizenship proof will this passport suffice?

Yes. As long as the details you enter are from the one document (a current or expired passport), your details will be able to be verified. If there are any issues regarding confirmation of your citizenship the NIC Research Program will contact you.

4.3 Can someone in the process of obtaining citizenship apply?

No. All CIs must be Australian citizens or New Zealand Special Category Visa holders on the day Applications close.

4.4 When does a PhD need to be conferred by to be eligible to be the Lead CI?

If the PhD is not yet awarded, the PhD thesis must be submitted by the NIEA EOI application closing date and a letter provided from the Faculty Dean vouching for their anticipated conferral timeframe. The PhD must be conferred before 30 June 2027.

4.5 Are Australian National Intelligence Community member entities and their staff allowed to be named as participants in these grants?

No. Member entities of the Australian National Intelligence Community (NIC) (a list is available on the NIC website) and their staff are not to be named participants (Chief or Partner Investigators), and NIC member entities (agencies) are not to be listed as an Other Organisation in a NIEA application or funded grant.

4.6 Can Publicly Funded Research Agencies (PFRAs) be named as an Other Organisation in NIEA grants?

Yes. A PFRA can be named as an Other Organisation. However, there can be no flow of grant funds, either directly or indirectly, to the PFRA. The PFRA must

partner by adding value through a collaborative contribution of resources e.g. staff time, facility access, etc, into the Project.

4.7 Are letters of support from a NIC agency permitted?

No. Letters of support from an intelligence agency are not permitted to be included as part of an application.

5 Budget Requirements - Awards, Fellowships & Scholarships

5.1 What is the NIC Fellowship?

Salary up to $150,000 per year at an appropriate salary level (Level A and B only). The NIC Fellowship is provided to the Lead Chief Investigator who must be an EMCR.

The NIC Fellowship can be provided to the Lead CI in addition to other personnel salary from eligible universities or other organisations.

5.2 What is the NIC PhD Scholarship?

A stipend top-up up to $30,000 per year for one PhD candidate, to top-up a Research Training Program scholarship (or equivalent) awarded via the Sponsoring Organisation or the relevant industry sector.

5.3 Is it a requirement to engage a PhD student for the NIEA?

Yes, in the full application, the proposed PhD research project needs to be outlined and the recruitment process properly considered. The PhD candidate does not need to be identified and named at this stage.

5.4 Are 5.1 and 5.2 on top of the $750,000 funding available?

No, these are included in the funding available to the project. The NIEA has been designed to provide additional salary support to EMCRs and PhD candidates. The fellowship and scholarship must be identified in the budget.

5.5 Who can draw salary from the grant?

- Lead CI - EMCR
- PhD candidate
- Other personnel that meet the citizenship requirements

5.6 Who cannot draw a salary?

- Partner Investigators

5.7 How may university on-costs be covered by the NIEA grant funds?

You can budget grant funds for the following activities:

- NIC EMCR Fellowship on-costs up to $20,0000 per annum

- CI teaching relief up to $20,000 per annum

You cannot budget grant funds for the following activities:

- on-costs in excess of $20,000 per annum for the Lead CI;
- salaries and/or on-costs, in whole or in part for named CIs and PIs;
- other university overheads;
- indexation (*please factor this into your budget, ONI will not index grant funds annually*);
- basic facilities that should normally be funded by a Sponsoring Organisation and/or Participating Organisation (including standard refurbishment costs of a laboratory); and
- capital works and general infrastructure costs.

6 Assessment

6.1 Would it be beneficial to have multiple institutions listed on a grant application?

The number of participants or institutions involved will not be an assessable criterion. All applications are assessed based on the eligibility and the assessment criteria outlined in the Grant Guidelines to determine merit and funding decisions. Applications should include the people, organisations and commitments most suitable in combination to undertake the proposed research.

6.2 Are funding decisions made, based solely on application merit, or is the intention to fund a grant in each Intelligence Challenge area or each Research Topic?

EOI applications submitted will be shortlisted for full application if ONI and the NIC determine that the project aligns with the Research Topic or Intelligence Challenge.

All full applications will be assessed and merit ranked using the assessment criteria outlined in the Grant Guidelines.

The NIC will determine the recommended grants based on the fit with the relevant Intelligence Challenge or Research Topic, the National Intelligence Community priority research needs, Australia's national interest, including national security, applications already funded, and available funding.

7 Intelligence Challenges and Research Topics

7.1 What are the Intelligence Challenges and how do I find out more about them?

The Intelligence Challenges are priority research areas that are updated each year. Applications may address one of the Intelligence Challenges.

The Intelligence Challenges can be found on SmartyGrants. It is recommended that you review the Challenges before you start work on your EOI application.

7.2 What are the Research Topics and how do I find out more about them?

The research topics are special research priorities that have been developed by various agencies in the NIC.

The research topics can be found on GrantConnect and SmartyGrants (online application portal). New topics are released each Round (some topics may be repeated round to round).

8 Technological Readiness Level

8.1 A Technology Readiness Level (TRL) is required within the application form, do you expect proposed research to have a minimum TRL?

No. The TRL scale is used to understand the Technology Readiness Level at the commencement of the proposed research. There is no minimum or maximum TRL expectation, however, the objective of the NIEA Program is to support unclassified, fundamental research which is generally between TRL 1 and 3 at the time of project commencement.

9 Australian Sovereignty and Collaborations

9.1 Does everyone working on the Grant Project need to be an Australian Citizen?

All CIs from the grant must be an Australian citizen or hold a New Zealand Special Category Visa.

All other personnel **paid** (including PhD candidate) from the grant must be an Australian citizen, have permanent residency or hold a New Zealand Special Category Visa.

Partner Investigators (PIs) must be Australian, United Kingdom, Canadian, United States, New Zealand, Australian Permanent Residents or New Zealand Special Category Visa holders.

All named applicants must meet the citizenship eligibility requirements at the time of application submission, and if awarded, at all times throughout the grant.

Individuals working on the Project who would be named in publications or would otherwise link their association with the Government funded project must also comply with the citizenship eligibility criteria.

9.2 Other Organisations must be Australian organisations. What does 'Australian Organisation' mean for the purpose of the NIEA?

As per the glossary in the Grant Guidelines, an Australian Organisation has its headquarters in Australia, has a board with a majority of Australian citizens or Australian residents, and has an Australian Business Number (ABN).

9.3 Can the project collaborate with start-up companies?

Yes, while Grants are provided to Australian Universities, collaborative engagement with Australian start-up companies is encouraged.

9.4 Are international collaborations supported by the grant?

Yes, however any international collaboration must be contributory to the Project and justified in the application, including the project description and budget justifications. International collaborations should be reviewed by, and comply with, the Admin Organisation's Foreign Interference section.

9.5 If I am considering an international collaboration, what should I be aware of?

Researchers may freely discuss their projects however, they should be mindful of not divulging potential IP or discoveries that should be retained for the benefit of Australia. Refer to the ARC Intellectual Property Policy. NIC Research Program projects are not classified, but we suggest that proposed research be discussed with respect to University foreign interference policies and guidelines.

Please talk to your heads of department, and adhere to the policies, systems, procedures and regulations within the university. Contact your University's Security Office (counter foreign interference officer) to seek specific consideration of the proposal and advice regarding international sharing, collaboration and recruitment (e.g. project travel, potential collaborations and personnel engagement).

9.6 Should we be concerned about foreign interference?

Proposals and projects must comply with the Grant Guidelines and all relevant laws and regulations including having regard to the *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector* published on the Department of Education website.

Early engagement with your University's Security Office (counter foreign interference officer) to seek specific consideration of the proposal and advice

regarding international sharing and collaboration, in relation to project travel, potential collaborations and personnel engagement (e.g. eligibility requirements) is highly recommended.

10 Security and Outcome Publishing

10.1 As this program is funded by ONI is there a security classification requirement? Or will outcomes of the research be restricted?

Individuals are not required to apply for or hold a security clearance during the grant. The NIC Research Program and the NIEA facilitates unclassified research and therefore all research outputs may be published or made available in accordance with the ARC *Open Access Policy* available on the ARC Website.

ONI requests notification and a copy of your peer-reviewed publications as and when they are published.

11 SmartyGrants Queries

11.1 Is the EOI and full application form available in SmartyGrants and how do I find the SmartyGrants portal to apply?

EOI applications for the NIEA Grant Opportunity must be prepared and submitted through SmartyGrants.

If you are a successful EOI applicant you will be invited to submit a full application. You will be able to access the application via SmartyGrants.

More information about SmartyGrants is available at - Applicant Help Site.

12 General Queries

12.1 Where can I find the key dates for the NIEA program?

You can find the NIEA key dates at National Intelligence Community Research Program | National Intelligence Community

12.2 Can applications with a social sciences or humanities focus, or applications with a mix of STEM and non-STEM participants, be submitted for a NIEA?

Yes. Applications with a social science or humanities focus are encouraged as appropriate to tackle annual Topics and Challenges. About a third of the NIC Research Program's 100+ projects are multi-disciplinary. Applications must address an Intelligence Challenge or Research Topic and will be assessed on their merits.

12.3 Section 10.5 of the Grant Guidelines states that NIEA applications may be considered for funding via another Entity?

The intention of this clause is to enable another Sponsoring Entity (NIC agency or Commonwealth Entity, or an International Partner) to directly provide additional grant funding on an ad-hoc basis. If this were to be offered, you would be contacted by the NIC Research Program.

12.4 Compliance with Artificial Intelligence (AI) policies

A proposed project will need to comply with applicable AI policies, including:

- the Administering Organisation's AI policies
- as applicable, *Artificial Intelligence: Australia's Ethics Framework* (2019) and *Australia's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Ethics Principles.*

12.5 Can I use generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in writing my application?

ARC policies on the use of generative AI will apply when preparing your application. Please see the advice to applicants in ARC's *Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in ARC's grants programs* available on the ARC website.

13 Announcement

13.1 Who will be advised of the outcome of an application?

The Research Office and Lead CI will be advised of the outcome of the EOI application prior to the full application opening date.

The Research Office and the Lead CI will be notified the outcome of the full application.

13.2 When will the outcomes of the NIEA be announced?

ONI anticipates that successful applicants will be notified under embargo in June 2027, with public announcement in July.

13.3 Where will I find feedback about unsuccessful EOI and Full applications?

Feedback will not be provided on EOI submissions.

Feedback may be provided for unsuccessful Fully applications upon request.

13.4 Security Briefing

Each named participant of a success application must attend a security briefing hosted by ONI prior to commencing the project. This briefing will be held on-line via videoconference.

14 Post Award

14.1 If the grant is awarded, how will progress be measured?

Each project is required to complete a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Report and Activity Plan at the beginning of the project. The targets entered at this stage of the Project will be reported against in a six-monthly progress report. In addition, an end of year report providing financial acquittals, and outreach by ONI will provide ONI insight into the progress of research funded under the NIEA program.

14.2 How will ONI's outreach for the NIEA program be conducted?

ONI or NIC outreach under the NIEA program will support the program objective to, 'enhance collaboration in the research, science and technology community'. Outreach will take the form of occasional university visits, annual NIC engagement events, and ad hoc virtual engagements, e.g. to follow up on published papers.

14.3 Presenting funded research outcomes at an annual Intelligence Community event

NIEA grant recipients are required to present funded research progress/outcomes at annual National Intelligence Community (NIC) engagement events.

Applicants should include a line in each year of the budget for travel to the event (e.g. travel to Canberra) which should include accommodation for two nights and flights (depending on participants location). A registration fee is not applicable.

14.4 Reporting of publications and published materials

NIEA recipients are required to notify ONI and provide a pdf (electronic) copy as soon as practical after article, or research output, acceptance by the relevant publisher. Information regarding publications and published materials, including when publications are accepted, must also be provided in progress reports and the final report.

14.5 Additional project personnel

Additional personnel, not named in the original application, can be associated with the project after the grant is awarded. Additional personnel must be actively associated with the project, to the extent that it is likely they will be named on a publication should one arise.

Prior to commencement on the project, additional personnel must be identity confirmed and approved by the NIC Research Program.

Further details, including the required paperwork, will be provided to the Lead CI at time of grant awarding.

15 Other Options under the NIEA Grant Guidelines

15.1 What is the extension option for research translation?

An award of up to $260,000 (GST exclusive) for up to 1 year extension or spin-off translational research (TRL 3-5). The extension option is **by invitation only**. It is not required to identify extension work in the NIEA application process. Any extension work included in the application will not be considered.

15.2 What is the security nominated HDR option? How is this different from the NIC PhD Scholarship?

Option for ONI to fund a top-up grant up to $20,000 per year for a PhD candidate (maximum three years, as recommended by the NIC), to top-up a Research Training Program scholarship (or equivalent). Stipends may only be provided for students who hold NV1 security clearance. This top-up grant option is **by invitation only.**

The NIC PhD scholarship is the **requirement to engage a PhD student for the NIEA** and must be considered during the NIEA full application process – see point 5.3.