



Frequently asked questions

Trailblazer Universities Program

Eligibility

Can other institutions apply for the Trailblazer Universities Program?

This is only open to eligible Australian universities (Table A and B). Universities are encouraged to partner with other institutions including research organisations and businesses as part of their proposal.

Can I work with another university to develop a Trailblazer Universities Program proposal?

Applications can include more than one university. For EOIs with multiple universities, applicants must nominate one lead university. Each university can only submit one EOI as the lead applicant.

I want to lead more than one National Manufacturing Priority. How many proposals do I need?

A university can submit only one EOI as the lead applicant. (Note: this does not allow a university to submit different EOIs as the lead applicant against multiple priority areas). There is no limit on the number of Trailblazer Universities Program proposals in which a university can participate as a partner.

Are the program guidelines reflected in legislation?

Final program guidelines will be reflected in legislative guidelines, subject to amendment to the *Other Grants Guidelines (Research) 2017*. Applicants will only be eligible to receive a grant if they satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in the *Other Grants Guidelines (Research) 2017*. Program guidelines as articulated on the website may be updated to ensure consistency with the Other Grants Guidelines.

How are regional universities defined for the purposes of the Trailblazer Universities Program?

Regional universities are defined as a university with their main campus located in a regional or remote area as defined by the [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) classification](#).

Regional universities include:

1. Charles Darwin University
2. James Cook University
3. CQUniversity
4. University of Southern Queensland
5. Southern Cross University
6. University of New England
7. Charles Sturt University
8. Federation University of Australia
9. University of Tasmania
10. Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

Partnerships

What do the Program Guidelines mean by “establishing a new separate business unit?”

In regard to establishing a separate business unit, it is important that applicants have formal governance and management structures to oversee the administration of this investment, including Intellectual Property and industrial arrangements.

There is a significant degree of flexibility with the business unit aspect, and applicants are encouraged to develop structures that work for them and their business partners. The only requirements, as stipulated in the eligibility criteria, is that business units are

- industry co-led with a governing board including representatives of end users and an independent chair with industry experience in the relevant National Manufacturing Priority area.
- local leadership empowered to oversee management of innovative IP and industrial relations arrangements that promote a high-performance culture and support the focus on commercial outcomes.

Can established consortium/partnerships apply to Trailblazer Universities Program?

Universities are encouraged to leverage existing partnerships to develop a creative and ambitious proposal for the Trailblazer Universities Program. The lead applicant for a proposal must be a university and still meet the eligibility criteria (IP, industrial arrangements, business unit and matched funding requirements) outlined in the program guidelines.

How important is the proximity between the university and business partners?

While co-location between universities and business partners is a relevant consideration if it supports the ambition of the proposal, it is not a requirement of the program.

What kind of industry/business partnership or commitment do I need?

Does my partnership need to be recognised as an incorporated entity?

Applicants are required to enter a legally binding arrangement with third-party/ies, which can support and guarantee the funding committed to the proposal. The way in which this proposal is structured is at the discretion of the lead university and its partners. There is no requirement for the proposal to be recognised as an incorporated entity. Evidence of arrangements will only need to be provided for stage-two of the application process.

Funding

How much funding can my university apply for?

Lead universities can bid for funding of up to \$50 million each, to be allocated across four years from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2026.

What can the funding be used for?

Funding can be used to support R&D projects, staff, equipment, and opportunities to increase collaboration with industry, enhance the commercialisation capability of research staff and drive the job-ready skills of the future, through alignment of courses with industry need. University overheads such as payment for researcher salaries, equipment, materials can be covered by grant funding to the extent that they contribute to the outcomes of the proposal.

Do Government-funded and Commonwealth-owned corporations qualify as industry partners and can they provide matched funding?

The Trailblazer Universities Program is designed to drive more research-industry collaboration, with industry partnerships one of the selection criteria. Partnerships with Government-funded research agencies and Commonwealth-owned corporations will be an advantage over those bids that do not include such partnerships, however government funding from other schemes will not count as matched funding. Similarly, while collaboration and contributions from State Governments would be an advantage, State Government funding would not count as a matched funding.

What level of matched funding is required by universities and third parties?

It is expected that both universities and industry partners provide matched funding to the amount requested in the proposal, but it is not a combined amount from both parties. Applications will be assessed in relation to the overall ambition of individual proposals, and therefore no minimum or maximum thresholds for matched funding have been set.

Does matched funding need to be in-kind or cash contributions?

Applications will be assessed in relation to the overall ambition of individual proposals, including the level of new collaborations or investments into National Manufacturing Priority-related R&D. For this reason, the type and levels of 'new' cash or in-kind contributions/demonstrated project expenditure has not been prescribed and there is no minimum threshold for the level of cash contributions.

In the application process, where do I provide evidence of matched funding? What counts as evidence?

Evidence for matched funding, including letters of support are only required for stage-two of the application process. Further guidance will be provided at the business case stage of the application process to shortlisted applicants.

Do existing arrangements with a third-party count towards matched funding requirements?

Existing arrangements between universities and industry partners can count towards the matched funding requirement, as long as the funding/in-kind contribution has not yet been provided.

Where does the \$242 million in funding for the Trailblazer Universities Program come from?

The Trailblazer Universities Program contributes to Outcome 2 of the Department's Portfolio Budget Statement 2021-22: Promote growth in economic productivity and social wellbeing through access to quality higher education, international education, and international quality research. Under the program, the Australian Government will provide \$242.7 million in administered funding through the Trailblazer Universities Program competitive grants process.

Application process

What is the submission process timeline?

Expressions of interest for the Trailblazer Universities Program close **9.00am AEDT Monday 17 January 2022**. Shortlisted applicants are expected to be announced in late **January 2022**. Shortlisted candidates will be required to submit a business case by **12.00pm AEDT 15 March 2022**.

Can applications overlap with applications for the Modern Manufacturing initiative?

There is no formal interplay between the MMI applications and the Trailblazer Universities Program. Applicants may submit proposals currently being considered for MMI funding for consideration in the Trailblazer Universities Program EOI process. The onus would be on the applicant to demonstrate how the Trailblazer Universities Program proposal meets the program's eligibility criteria and leverages additional funding to drive research commercialisation capability in the chosen priority area. Shortlisted applications would be required to detail any additional funding received, and how that would support the objectives of their Trailblazer University proposal.

How will the Trailblazer Universities Program align against the National Manufacturing Priorities? Will multiple grants be awarded against one NMP?

All applications will be assessed on their merits with a view to supporting those applications with the strongest case for funding. The breadth of research capability in a National Manufacturing Priority area will be one of several factors that form the assessment.

Our Trailblazer Universities proposal focuses on more than one of the National Manufacturing Priorities. Is it still eligible?

Proposals for the Trailblazer Universities Program are focused on key areas to stimulate investment, focus, and drive commercialisation in targeted areas. While there are some synergies across the NMPs (such as Space and Defence) you must be able to clearly demonstrate how your university will drive commercialisation outcomes in your chosen area.

The Department acknowledges this may vary slightly depending on the proposal. Evidence of partnership and co-funding will only be required as part of the second phase (business case) of the application process.

How much detail is required for the Expression of Interest?

The EOI will be assessed against three primary criteria; commercialisation readiness, research capability to support NMPs, and industry alignment.

Applicants must demonstrate their expected spending and indicate matched funding in the EOI by presenting no more than a single-page budget outlining indicative costs for the proposal, including indicative levels of university and industry co-contribution.

Evidence of specific arrangements including partnerships, budget arrangements and establishment of a business unit is not required until the second stage of the application process.

● **Do words in figures, pictures, tables and/or graphs count towards the world limit?**

Visuals including diagrams, images and figures are welcome in the EOI application. Words included these diagrams, images and figures will count towards the word limit for each section of the EOI. There will be opportunity for successfully shortlisted applicants to provide additional information in stage two of the application process.

Intellectual Property

● **Publication of the HERC IP Framework has been delayed, will the Trailblazer University Program still be subject to the Framework?**

The Trailblazer Universities Program is still subject to the HERC IP Framework. The Department has delayed the rollout of the HERC IP Framework until March 2022, following further development and stakeholder consultations on the draft agreements in the first quarter of 2022.

If a Trailblazer University Program application involved an existing industry partner, would that industry partner have to commit to engaging in the HERC IP Framework or would they be exempt?

Obligations regarding engaging the HERC IP Framework and its standardised agreements only apply to the university. Universities will be required to offer or make industry partners aware of the standardised template, depending on the nature of the agreement. Commitment to innovative IP practices by all parties will be considered as part of the selection process, however industry partners will continue to be free to use their own preferred agreement where they do not wish to use a standardised template.

For applications that extend existing partnerships, what is the expectation around IP/IR arrangements?

Where existing partnerships are utilised for purposes of the application, the application would need to address how the partnership arrangements respond to eligibility criteria outlined in the program guidelines. IP arrangements would have to be consistent as that proposed for the HERC IP Framework, as outlined above.

Selection process

Who is selecting universities?

The assessment of the EOI and business case will be undertaken by representatives from government, industry, innovation, and higher education sectors. The panel will be chaired by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the Department).

How are Trailblazer Universities selected?

Proposals for the Trailblazer Universities Program will be selected against three primary criteria in the two-stage process, as outlined below:

1. Commercialisation readiness
2. Commitment to a chosen National Manufacturing Priority
3. Industry alignment.

Further information on each of these criteria is outlined in the [program guidelines](#).

Further information

If you have any questions on the Trailblazer Universities Program, please do not hesitate to contact the Department at urcs@dese.gov.au.