



AustLII Foundation Limited

AustLII Foundation
Response to the 2026 NCRIS Roadmap consultation survey.
19 March 2025

Additional information

How the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AustLII) addresses the NRI Principles.

NRI maximises the capability of the research and innovation system to contribute to economic outcomes, national security, social wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

In a society based on the rule of law, citizens must have the right to be able to access the law for free. Citizens are bound by the law and have private and public rights under the law, and so for the rule of law to be effective they must be able to know what the law is, and what it means. Free access to legal information is a human right. AustLII provides free access to public legal information to everyone, irrespective of their means. This supports the effective functioning of the rule of law and provides essential legal information that is necessary for all Australians.

AustLII provides essential free access to information which forms part of the Australian legal system. The legal system underpins all aspects of the Australian economy and society. Improved access to the law and increased capacity to research and understand it will impact upon: the Australian economy, the social structures and well-being of all Australians, and Australian responses to critical national and international challenges.

AustLII benefits the national economy and is important for maintaining the rule of law and the administration of justice across Australia. The comprehensive free access to online legal information that is provided is vital for the legal profession, courts and tribunals, business and industry, the education sector, and the community generally. Because of the authoritative status of primary legal information (legislation, case law, treaties, etc.), effective and efficient access to the law is essential to the operation of all aspects of the

economy and society. AustLII provides free and anonymous access via the internet to a near comprehensive collection of primary and secondary public legal information.

Research infrastructure is collaborative and planned in a way to provide a network of capabilities that serve the national interest and are aligned with government priorities.

Since 1995, researchers associated with AustLII have received over 30 major ARC grants, including 21 out of 26 applications to the collaborative LIEF scheme, in association with Chief Investigators from at least 15 different Australian universities, as well as many institutions within the legal system, including courts and tribunals, government agencies, professional bodies and industry.

AustLII maintains an extensive network with all Australian governments, courts and tribunals, the legal profession, business and industry and the higher education sector. AustLII publishes the decisions and judgments of over 200 active courts and tribunals, together with historical decisions from over 100 more. It is the only national publisher of complete legislation for all nine self-governing jurisdictions and territories. AustLII is the only source of all official treaties (bi-lateral and multi-lateral treaties back to Federation). It is the only collection containing law reform reports, royal commissions and other public inquiries, discussion papers and other materials for all states and territories and providing access to over 150 law journals and legal scholarship databases, the largest collection of free and open access journals in the subject domain of law. In 2024, it served over 20 million journal article downloads.

NRI includes people, skills and knowledge, data, processes and equipment.

AustLII revolutionised access to legal information in Australia and has influenced the adoption of the principle of free access to law internationally. The impact of AustLII and its work has been recognised and acknowledged in many forums, both as recognition of AustLII collectively, and as individual recognition of its Co-founders and Co-directors.

AustLII's Co-founders and Co-directors have received individual recognition for the importance of their contributions. AustLII's Founders [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and its Executive Director [REDACTED] have all been awarded Membership of the Order of Australia (AM) and are all admitted as Fellows of the Australian Academy of Law. [REDACTED] received the 2014 Justice Medal from the NSW Law and Justice Foundation for his "25-year commitment to making legal information available online for free through AustLII".

AustLII has received a number of achievement awards, including an annual award from the International Association of Law Librarians, and from the Australia New Zealand Internet Awards (ANZIA).

UNSW recognised AustLII as one of ten UNSW innovations that 'changed our world' stating that, "AustLII revolutionised access to justice and the rule of law by making a wealth of legal material freely available to anyone with an internet connection." (UNSW 10 Innovations that Changed our World).

In 2012 the Group of 8 and the ATN group of universities conducted a study called “Excellence in Innovation: Research impacting our nation’s future – assessing the benefits” (the EIA Report) which led to the introduction of more general measure of the impact of research in Australia. The study applied a case study approach to assessing impact. It concluded that, “there are compelling stories that need to be told of research impact arising from research at Australian universities”. It found that the use of case studies such as AustLII was an effective means of demonstrating and communicating impact and could be used as a key component in a national research impact assessment exercise and found that in some of the case studies undertaken “national impact deserved to be better recognised ... [including] “The Australian Legal Information Institute, (AustLII) UTS and UNSW” (Excellence in Research, 2012, p. 18)

NRI resources are focused to achieve maximum impact in national priority areas.

Free access to legal information is critical national research infrastructure. AustLII provides a comprehensive national collection of legal information to enable effective free and anonymous access to law for all the community. It maintains extensive data provision agreements with government, courts, educational institutions, and businesses, with jurisdictional breadth and historical depth. It provides an integrated framework of primary and secondary content, with tools and services to support the legal information and research needs of the many different communities who access its resources. Much of this content is only available on AustLII or are principally accessed via the AustLII service.

NRI is managed to deliver maximum impact as efficiently as possible. Synergies with complementary and related capabilities drive an ecosystem of support for researchers.

In 2024, AustLII received over 400 million requests from over 8.5 million distinct internet addresses. On a daily basis, AustLII responds to over 900,000 requests. The service includes more than 1,000 databases, the contents of which are interconnected by more than 150 million hypertext links.

NRI is widely accessible to researchers and industry across Australia. Barriers to access are as low as practicable.

AustLII provides free and anonymous access to anyone with access to the internet. There are no barriers to anyone. It was established in 1995 and was originally developed as an academic research resource. Beyond the discipline of Law AustLII is used extensively by many other university disciplines for both teaching and research purposes. AustLII has evolved well beyond the academy and now provides a service that is used by the entire community and serves needs well beyond those of the higher education sector. It is now the largest and most accessed provider of primary and secondary legal resources in Australia, serving the needs of education, business and the legal profession, governments and courts and the general community.

NRI enhances participation of researchers in, and provides access to, the international research system.

AustLII supports Australia's international interests helping promote and protect international rules, improve access to justice and enhance the rule of law around the world. AustLII is an acknowledged international leader of effective access to law. AustLII pioneered the concept of free access to comprehensive legal information via the Internet from 1995. AustLII jointly operates the New Zealand Legal Information Institute (NZLII) and the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute (PacLII) in cooperation with local partners and gives technical support to many other LIIs in the common law world. AustLII is the model for free access to law globally. In 2004, AustLII was a founding member of the Free Access to Law Movement (FALM) <<http://www.falm.info/>>, an international voluntary association which has as its members more than 60 organisations from around the world. FALM members provide and support free access to legal information, consistent with the principles of the Free Access to Law Movement and subscribe to the Declaration on Free Access to Law.

AustLII has also created three multinational portals - Commonwealth Legal Information Institute (CommonLII), Asian Legal Information Institute (AsianLII), World Legal Information Institute (WorldLII) - and operates them in collaboration with international LIIs and other free access providers, which makes their content jointly searchable through these portals:

NRI is respectful to Indigenous cultures and knowledges, and adopts the principles of Indigenous self-determination, leadership, impact and value, and sustainability and accountability as outlined in the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research.

AustLII, in association with the Indigenous Law Centre at UNSW, developed an Australian Indigenous Law Library, a national collection of significant primary legal resources relating to Indigenous legal issues. It includes parliamentary papers, government reports and policy documents affecting Indigenous Peoples, reports and submissions by civil society organisations, documents related to significant test cases and legal proceedings and Indigenous advocacy.

Why AustLII should receive funding from NRIS because it addresses the NRI Investment Principles as follows:

Funding for investment in NRI is in areas of national significance that can demonstrably support Australia's research and innovation system.

As explained above, the legal system underpins all aspects of research and innovation in Australia. It is a fundamental basis of the Australian economy and society.

Investment should balance the long-term nature of NRI development, together with changes in national priorities and identified gaps in the research and innovation system.

Again, the legal system persistent and influences and controls all aspect research and determines national priorities.

Investment should produce NRI that facilitates and enhances industry and international engagement.

AustLII supports free-access policies and opposes monopolistic practices in relation to legal information. Free access to legal information is necessary for the rule of law and democracy to function effectively. These interests need an advocate, because public and commercial bodies do not always support, or even recognise, free access and other public interests in legal information. AustLII works to expand the scope and quality of legal information available for free access and to advocate for good public policies in this area.

Investment cases describe the intended impact and reflect the resources and governance needed to develop and manage world-class research infrastructure capability. These include the equipment, processes, data, skills and knowledge needed to deliver maximum value.

New sources of legal information continue to be created by governments and courts, including decisions of new courts and tribunals, and additional data continues to flow into AustLII's 1,000+ existing databases, in ever-increasing volumes. More generally, the nature of what access to law means is changing and expanding, and the users of legal information expect to receive it (and are capable of using it) in more sophisticated forms. With recent improvements in data science, AustLII needs to respond to demands for new uses of its data sets (both existing and expanding). In particular, the development of Large Language Models (LLM) and associated generative AI technologies require major development work to apply these to Australian law. AustLII is ideally placed to undertake this work, as it has the most comprehensive collection of Australian legal documents. Significant benefits to Australia could follow by making Australia-specific applications of these technologies available to the whole Australian public. Governments are also exploring the concept of machine-consumable legislation, regulation, and policy, and looking at how to approach creating and delivering better, machine-consumable rules. AustLII conducts research in this space and provides a set of tools and concepts with which to build Rules as Code (RaC) applications.

Investment encourages and leverages opportunities for co-investment from states and territories, university, public and private sectors.

During the first decade of AustLII's existence, most of the funding came from competitive grants for university research infrastructure. In this way, AustLII was able to expand its collections and develop new technologies supporting the delivery of legal information. From 2008, AustLII sought to diversify its sources of funding and established the AustLII Foundation Limited as a charitable not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. The Foundation operates the AustLII service and receives donations from the Legal Profession, Business, Government, Education, and the Community.

Investment supports the development of a cohesive suite of NRI that strives to create an ecosystem of seamless services for researchers.

The complexity and scope of the service that is expected of AustLII has dramatically increased and continues to expand. At the same time the funds available to operate the service have substantially decreased. To address this disparity, the way that AustLII is funded needs to change.