SESU Expressions of Interest

Application guidelines

ACU
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Before you apply

Before you start your application, check you are eligible to apply and ensure this opportunity matches with the current needs and capacity of your organisation.

Eligibility and application streams

The SESU invites applications from organisations working for the social good, whether faith-based or secular, particularly those working with communities experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation. We work with partners to provide expertise in areas that are central to the ACU's mission and ethos as a Catholic university.

Organisations that have a majority of their trade dedicated to the common and social good are eligible to apply. Applications are welcome from domestic or international organisations, for research within Australia and/or international locations. In line with ACU's Vision 2033 there is a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

RESEARCH THEMES

We ask organisations to submit an EOI related to the SESU's research themes. These themes are embedded in ACU's mission and aligned with Vision 2033. Organisations may submit an EOI unrelated to the themes, but please note that there may not be the opportunity to activate projects that are not aligned to the SESU's research themes in every application round.

APPLICATION STREAMS

Applications fall under one of two categories: organisation-specific projects or sector-wide projects. Both type of projects can include more than one partner organisation (a joint application); all sector-wide projects must be joint applications. When completing your EOI, the form will prompt you to include details of all proposed partner organisations, along with letters of support. Details of the scope and purpose of the different application streams are provided on our website.

You are welcome to submit more than one EOI to this round in one or both streams. Previously unsuccessful applications to SESU will not be accepted without major revision.

Funding

While the application process is competitive, we are not a grant provider. We offer research partnerships to community organisations so we can work together to activate research for the benefit of communities experiencing disadvantage or marginalisation. We make financial and in-kind contributions to the research projects, and expect our partners to do the same.

Organisations are asked to specify in the EOI form the level of financial contribution they can make to their project. Your organisation's funds will be fed directly into the project, to grow it beyond what could be achieved with ACU's funds alone.

Where a financial contribution is not possible, greater in-kind contributions from your organisation can be negotiated with the SESU. You will be asked for details of this in your application.

Timeframe

If your project is selected, the first step will be to plan and co-design the research with you over a few months. After that, SESU projects typically take 18 months to complete for Australian-based research. International projects typically require up to 24 months to accommodate additional layers of governmental and/or research ethics approvals.

We can provide advice to you about how to appropriately scale your research idea, and break down your organisation's research goals into manageable phases appropriate to the scale of a SESU project. Even though the research is short-term, SESU projects have the potential to provide a foundation to a longer-term relationship between ACU and community organisations.

Final considerations

Here are some final steps you can take to assess whether this opportunity is a good fit for your organisation at this point in time:

- Discuss your organisation's research needs with colleagues and/or others in your sector, and how they align with your current priorities and aspirations.
- What new knowledge do you need to further your organisation's aims?
- What capacity do you have to contribute to a research project over the next 12-24 months?
- And do you have the current capacity to meet the deadline for submission of the EOI?
- Familiarise yourself with ACU's mission and values. Are they a good fit with the work your organisation does (and vice versa)? Learn about the purpose of the SESU and the types of projects we have undertaken. Would a partnership with SESU, including collaboration with ACU academics, have the potential to meet your organisation's research needs?
- SESU prioritises projects that fit under one of our research themes. Think of how your organisation's work and the proposed area of research relate to these, and nominate the one that best expresses this.
- Review the principles that will be applied to your EOI by our Advisory Group (see "Assessment process and criteria" below). Keep these on hand as you prepare your EOI to guide the preparation of your proposal.

If you have any questions at this point, please reach out to SESU to discuss your proposal.

The most competitive applications will be from organisations that do not have funds readily available to conduct full research projects on their own and have a majority of their trade dedicated to the common and social good.

Assessment process and criteria

Research themes

As noted above, the SESU asks applicants to nominate which of its research themes the proposed project aligns with. EOIs that don't fit with one of these themes will still be considered, but there may not be the resources available in every round to support such projects.

THEME 1: ADDRESSING ISSUES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN A CHANGING WORLD

Social injustices can emerge in a variety of contexts, often the result of global or regional changes, such as geopolitical developments, war, persecution, mass migration, globalisation, climate change and natural disasters, pandemics, and global or regional crises.

Inspired by ACU's vision which seeks to build an ethical future and foster thriving communities, we are seeking research proposals that focus on addressing the social injustices caused by such global or regional changes.

We are happy to receive proposals that explore a social justice issue at any of the following levels – international*, national, state-based, or local.

**In-line with Vision 2033 there is a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region.*

THEME 2: IMPROVING THE WELLBEING OF COMMUNITIES

Projects in this category seek to focus on improving the access, opportunity and wellbeing of community members. Consistent with the principles of Catholic Social Thought (CST), there is a particular focus on groups who experience systemic barriers to full participation in society yet also bring with them many gifts and assets.

Inspired by ACU's vision which seeks to foster thriving communities and enable individuals to flourish and achieve a sense of wellbeing, we are happy to receive proposals that address or seek to improve the access, opportunity and wellbeing of community members or groups. Projects in this category should seek to take a strengths or assets-based approach to community development.

THEME 3: EXPLORING CATHOLIC IDENTITY AND ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICE

Projects in this category interrogate Catholic identity, with Catholic organisations committed to examining the expression of their Catholic mission, ethos and traditions across their organisational practices. Applications that correlate with the social justice work of Catholic organisation/s are especially encouraged in this category.

As a Catholic university, ACU embraces the Catholic intellectual tradition and facilitates a deep understanding of our Catholic ethos. Our academic culture, including our research, is informed by our Catholic identity. As such, we are happy to receive projects that support other organisations to explore the expression of their Catholicism.

Projects in this category may focus on one or several organisations and may choose to examine Catholic identity at either international, national, state-based, or local levels.

You can find details of the previous projects that fall under each of our themes here.

Advisory Group process

All submissions will be assessed by the SESU Advisory Group, which will be guided by the following criteria:

1. Does the project align with the ACU Mission to advance the dignity of the human person and the common good, and/or align with the University's ethos as a Catholic university?
2. Does the proposed project suggest the potential to have measurable impact?
3. Does the project have currency and propose to add value to the issue and/or to the organisation/sector?
4. Is the application clear about the project's context, proposed objectives and outcomes and timeline?
5. Do the proposed financial and/or in-kind contributions appear to add value to the project?

As part of ensuring the viability of the partnership and safeguarding the wellbeing of ACU staff, partner organisations and the communities which we serve, the SESU conducts a due diligence process. As part of this process, we may contact you to provide evidence of appropriate insurance, financial solvency, and information on organisational practice and policy.

The safety, wellbeing and dignity of children and vulnerable adults is of utmost priority in our research activities. All children and vulnerable adults who interact with university members have the right to feel safe and be safe. In line with our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of all children and vulnerable adults we may ask you for evidence of policy and procedures relating to the safeguarding of children and/or vulnerable adults.

Application process

All applications must be submitted via the EOI online form, which can be accessed here.

The form is divided into the following sections:

1. APPLICATION CONTACT

This will be the person who we liaise with about the EOI. This does not commit them to any ongoing role with the project.

2. ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

This section includes short questions about your organisation's identity, whether you have an internal ethics process, and your existing relationships with ACU.

3. ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This is the longest section of the EOI, offering you the space to explain the objectives, context, benefits and proposed outcomes and outputs of the research. It also asks about any data collection/evaluation processes your organisation already has in place and an indicative timeframe for the project. You are asked which SESU research theme your project aligns with. If there is potential overlap, please focus on your nominated theme, but feel free to note which of the other themes the project relates to.

It is not necessary to provide extensive detail on the research design in your EOI as the project planning stage will involve successful applicants working with ACU's academic staff to develop a detailed project plan. We do not see the information you provide on your EOI as set in stone; it is a starting point from which to understand your research needs and plan your project with you, if successful. This may involve alterations to the scope of the project.

A question is included on whether the research will engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or communities. We are committed to the highest standards of ethical research, through promotion of the values outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023. In undertaking research relating to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is important researchers collaborate with First Nations communities to ensure the project will be of value to them, they support the research, and they are included in the research design.

If your research relates to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, the form asks whether you (or your named partner organisation/s) are Aboriginal- or Torres Strait Islander-controlled organisation/s. If not, we will ask you to record the existing relationships your organisation/s already have with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. This is because if your application is successful, we would like to collaborate with some or all of these communities to design your project.

4. COLLABORATION

In keeping with the SESU's guiding spirit of collaboration, you are asked for details of your organisation's capacity to contribute to the project as well as any gaps in your research capacity that ACU researchers can fill. This will help us match you with the best team. The form also asks about any other organisations you want to collaborate with on this project. Partnership with at least one other organisation is mandatory for any EOIs submitted to our sector project stream.

You are asked to outline the contributions you will make to the project. This includes nominating a project lead from your organisation as well as other in-kind or financial contributions that you will make. It's important that you understand that ACU will not remunerate your organisation for any in-kind contributions that are made.

Some of the in-kind contributions you could consider including are:

- Collation of existing service data
- Administrative support to contact research participants
- Provision of facilities to conduct interviews or focus groups
- Stakeholder groups to test research findings with
- Assistance with writing and/or reviewing the final project outputs.

5. PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

If you have nominated partner organisations for this project, you are asked to provide brief letters of support from them with your application. Each letter of support must indicate the partner's willingness to be involved in the proposed research project and be on the partner organisation's letterhead.

Further guidance

You will find links to resources on the SESU website that can help you formulate a strong research proposal.
Feel free to reach out to SESU staff too with any questions: sesu@acu.edu.au

Project planning for successful applications

SESU projects are collaborative – we intend the projects be a true partnership from beginning to end to support the growth of our community partners' research capacities and to co-create positive outcomes for the communities the research is intended to benefit.

You will be expected to both plan and deliver the project with our academic researchers, attend regular project meetings, and make other in-kind contributions. This ensures the research benefits from the strengths, experiences and expertise of both ACU and your organisation. All these stages are supported by SESU's staff, who provide administrative and project management expertise to ensure the success of our projects.

Project team

The project team will consist of your project lead/s, ACU academics, and SESU staff. Following the Advisory Group recommendations for support, an EOI round is opened for ACU's academic researchers to nominate themselves to join one of the successful projects. The Advisory Group considers the experience, expertise and capacity of the researchers before determining the make-up of project teams. Ensuring we have matched the right expertise to your project is our priority and we will work with you and any new team members to ensure they understand your project needs.

Project planning

Once the project team is finalised, ACU researchers and SESU staff will work with partners to develop a project plan, timeline and budget. The project plan acts as a road map for the project. It captures the project objectives, the research questions that will be answered, the methodology underpinning the project, anticipated outcomes and outputs, risk management plans, and the project's timeline.

The plan is developed through collaboration and conversation between partners and researchers. Unlike consultancy relationships where the organisation requesting the work has little involvement in the project's design or delivery, SESU works closely with partners to co-design and deliver the project.

A budget will be developed by the SESU team, following conversations about any financial and in-kind contributions that your organisation will make to the project.

Partnership agreement

Once the project plan, timeline and budget are in place, ACU will finalise and sign a partnership agreement with you, which sets out the legal obligations of all parties involved. It is important to ensure that your organisation and any named partners are aware of and willing to do so if your application is successful. The agreement is drawn up by ACU but your organisation will have the opportunity to review it and talk through any questions you have.

Research ethics approval

Before many projects can proceed, ethics approval from ACU (and sometimes other organisations) is required for the research. Research ethics refers to ethical conduct in research, including the protection of research participants. Universities are required to seek ethics approval for research that involves interactions with human participants or their data. For international projects, additional permissions may be required. The project team will work on this together, with support from SESU staff.

Learn more.

Project outputs

In delivering research, we will co-create outputs that tell the story of your project. We understand that you'll want the research findings of your project to be told in ways that are meaningful and appropriate to your organisation and the communities the research is intended to benefit. SESU projects generally produce a report, but the final shape of outputs will depend on the type of project and the specific needs of your organisation and the communities you work with.

Project outputs or deliverables consist of two key components: words and pictures. Great imagery will lift the story of our shared project off the page. You can start planning to create and collect photography or other imagery as soon as you are notified your application is successful. SESU staff will work with you and guide you through this process.

Further information

SESU runs an information session for prospective partners at the during our application round. Details of this and how to register can be found here. If you have any questions about your application or want to discuss whether a SESU project is a good fit for your organisation's needs, please contact us at: sesu@acu.edu.au

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP UNIT (SESU)

E: sesu@acu.edu.au
W: acu.edu.au/sesu

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